THE BROADCAST PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS LARS NYRE

Abstract

It was a loss for Western democracies that wireless transmission technologies, which were discovered and invented from around 1900, became *broadcasting* and not something more democratic. Transmission acquired a centralised structure, an expert-oriented journalistic ethics, and a relatively passive domestic culture of reception. This was good, but not good enough. In strictly technical terms, the new transmission technologies could have been constructed as a participatory public platform. Transmission could have become an everyday realisation of John Dewey's democratic vision, but it ended up as one-way media in the spirit of Walter Lippmann. Much has happened in radio and television since then; there has been a slow and determined increase in audience activity and user-generated content from the 1990s, and television has been rejuvenated with reality TV and talent shows, and other things. However, transmission still does not support participatory communication to the extent that it could technically have done. This article critiques the Western broadcast media industry and its scholars for being too complacent about radical change in a participatory direction. By appealing to the political energies of the "Lippmann-Dewey debate," the article pits the dominant paradigm of broadcasting against a participatory communication ethics that has not yet had a chance to prove itself technologically and socially. It deals with three interrelated problems of the broadcast public: (1) an elitist rationale for the construction of a one-way technological infrastructure, (2) a lack of social equality between professionals and amateurs, and (3) a commercial rhetoric of the media empowered citizen. If these three problems were solved or at least countered more robustly by a *participatory communication ethics*, the live transmission of sounds and images might finally realise their public potential.

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Two-way Radio: A Historical Impasse

An interesting alternative to the idea of broadcasting can be found in *The Public and its Problems* (1927), where Dewey formulates a communication ethics that could clearly have been constructed as an electronic medium different from the emerging radio. Dewey argues that the citizen is required to be acutely aware of his social surroundings, and must be prepared to speak up in public about what improves and impedes the life of his community. Life in a democratic public requires people to act in ways that will maintain its success, and be of benefit for its continued existence, Dewey insists. The public therefore has to consist of large numbers of citizens who argue for, and act in ways that will presumably have good consequences for their community. At the time of Dewey's writing, radio was one of the most obvious technical opportunities for experiments with this kind of public communication.

And this is where Walter Lippmann enters the scene. During the First World War Lippmann lost faith in the "omnicompetent" citizen capable of making reasoned judgments on public issues when presented with a case. Instead, he came to believe that the public is a "pseudo-environment" constructed by propaganda, manipulation and stereotypes (Lippmann 1922/1997, 16). The free press is an important positive force in this environment with its reporting and trustworthy news, and Lippmann believed that a machinery of public knowledge should be created through "intelligence bureaus" staffed by objective experts (Steel 1997, xiv). Experts will check the facts, make the phone calls and find new sources, and one should not ask too much of the average man (Steel 1997, xv). *Public Opinion* helped decision-makers to rationalise and describe a centralised public system for radio, and developments in America and Europe were in line with its expert regime. Gripsrud (2009, 8) confirms that there is "quite a strong tradition more or less in accordance with Lippmann's view." Michael Schudson (2008) claims that Carey "invented" Lippmann as an anti-democrat, and portraits the latter as an upstanding political theorist dedicated to representative democracy and an expert regime of the people for the people.

Returning to the historical impasse of two-way radio, it must be noted that Dewey himself had by 1927 put radio on the list of centralised means of communication. Its communicative function is to "divert attention from political interests," he writes (1991, 139). Interpreting commercial American radio as part of a propaganda machinery, Dewey criticises the conditions of the present just as harshly as Lippmann. "The essential need," Dewey says, "is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public" (1991, 208). According to Dewey, the best form of communication for democratic purposes is *live speech* (1991, 218), and it is therefore quite strange that he did not more clearly advocate voice transmission as a democratic tool. Dewey's requirements for democratic speaking were more or less perfectly contained in the raw, pre-institutionalised medium of transmission, but this technological set-up did not emerge in European or in American publics.

A formulation of a concrete technological set-up was made by Berthold Brecht in Weimar Germany. As part of his socialist optimism Brecht was also quite medium-optimistic, and in 1932 he wrote the article "The Radio as a Communica-

tions Apparatus." His manifesto can be read as a practical application of Dewey's participatory ethics in the live transmission medium.

> *Radio is one sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. On this principle the radio should step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers* (Brecht 1932/2001, 23).

This is a cry for action more than a technical specification. It would have been difficult to construct true symmetry of participation on the air, both because of accumulated noise levels and the difficulty of organising a timely hook-up for large numbers of participants. It would also have been challenging to produce content without constant political controversy. Nevertheless, *two-way live speech* was technically possible, and the transmission medium could in practice have followed another technological trajectory, resembling telephony, except that the speech would be heard in various public settings. After some decades there would have been cameras, microphones and low-power transmitters in every living room, and millions of signal streams would have been criss-crossing the air, connecting and hooking up in various ways that would probably have resembled the present day internet.

This scenario was suppressed by the burgeoning professions of the broadcast institution in the crucial 1920s and 1930s. Gripsrud (2010, 6) confirms that "Broadcasting media arrived at a time when political and economic power and resources were concentrated and centralised more than ever before." In the mid-1930s Goebbels' propaganda system colonised public life in Germany and the Dewey/Brecht ideal remained just a dream. Democratic spirits like Rudolf Arnheim analysed the narrative and aesthetic possibilities of radio at great length (Arnheim 1936/1986), and the BBC was run in a paternalistic ideology of "uplift," where it was soon impossible for journalists and editors to put their wills behind a more amateur-oriented setup of the medium. Winston's (1998) notion of "the law of the suppression of radical potential" comes to mind. After World War II million-viewer public service and commercial broadcasters consolidated television as an apparatus of distribution, and the Dewey/Brecht platform for transmission appeared increasingly ludicrous. With the rise of hi-fi audio, multicamera video production and advanced production values no ordinary person could create content for broadcast media. The standards were raised above people's heads, and a centralised colossuses of communication emerged. By 2011 broadcast media are so embedded in asymmetrical communication values that it is too late for it to change into a participatory set-up.

Participatory Communication Ethics

What would the alternative be? John Durham Peters (1999, 19) sums up Dewey's ethics with the slogan "communication is participation in a common world." If the main purpose of communication is to allow people to participate in a common world, it follows that delegation of communication to an expert regime will only weaken the level of participation, and it is therefore not an option.

Dewey was driven to formulate his participatory communication ethics out of concern for the public in the USA in the 1920s. He wanted the alternative to be practical, and realisable in American and other societies in his own time. It should make use of a new technological set-up, an alternative social organisation, and it should proceed by interpreting the expert knowledge in different ways than what the centralised forces of the public would do.

Dewey's argument is strikingly different from Lippmann's, except that they both formulate a communication ethics of a quite formal sort: a set of norms about how to communicate. A famous example in our field is the rational discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas, which prescribes that public discourse should be motivated by a concern for truthfulness, sincerity and acknowledgement of the better argument (Wuthnow 1984).

Dewey's basic definition of the public is bound by the face-to-face level of communication, and his playing field is that of the home, the various religious congregations, the common green, the city square and the congress/parliament.

> *If it is found that the consequences of conversation extend beyond the two directly concerned, that they affect the welfare of many others, the act acquires a public capacity, whether the conversation be carried out by a king and his prime minister or by Cataline and a fellow conspirator or by merchants planning to monopolize a market* (Dewey 1991, 13).

In modern societies the number of conversations that have an influence beyond those directly concerned is so large, and the interests crossing each other are so many, that the extent of the public really coincides with that of the state, Dewey says. The public encapsulates that which is commonly known about the state and that which must be commonly known about the state in order for it to function democratically. He explains that "the state is the organisation of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members" (Dewey 1991, 33).

Already there is a problem. Because the bodies of the state will be filled with representatives who are in effect experts and elites in society, Dewey stresses how important it is that public arenas are open to the population in general, and are filled with the activities of ordinary citizens (Dewey 1991, 207-208). Dewey stresses that every citizen has the right to express herself in public. Sometimes it is even a duty to speak up, for example if you discover abuse of power among the representatives of the state. Dewey expects citizens to behave like the watchdogs of the press, but without the institutional character that the "fourth estate" has acquired. They can be watchdogs of all kinds of disparate and incommensurate interests.

The ethical starting point for Dewey is that public communication must have the shared interests of the members of the state in focus. He calls this the *community-building* quality of communication, and he describes the citizen's gravitation towards it like this:

> *Whenever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realisation of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just – because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community* (Dewey 1991, 149).

Dewey states that it is a moral responsibility to create and sustain just activities. In the best case everyone in a group benefits from reinforcing each other's efforts instead of counteracting them. In Dewey's perspective the attempt at reinforcing the good reasons for being together is a prerequisite for democratic behaviour. However, most societies will have social conflicts about identity, status and power, and these will in effect make it impossible to succeed with community-generation on a large scale. But Dewey knew very well that antagonistic behaviour will always be a part of communication. For him the fundamental community-building characteristics are the rituals of argumentation, discussion and disagreement.

> *To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values* (Dewey 1991, 154).

Dewey describes the motivation for political activity in the broadest sense, and does not stress rationality as much as he stresses beliefs and desires. To be human implies reflexive consciousness about goals and values, and this Dewey calls intelligence. He uses the term in a moral and not psychologist way. Intelligence is "conduct in which the individual thinks and judges for himself, considers whether a purpose is good or right, decides and chooses, and does not accept the standards of his group without reflection" (Dewey 1908/1960, x).

Clearly, Dewey formulates an action program for the "omni-competent citizen," who Lippmann had stopped believing in years before. As a member of the public you have a role in maintaining and revising the norms that the representatives in congress and parliament should act from. But this revision process cannot be expert-driven, since ordinary people are not equipped or trained to reveal wrongdoings in the same way as a journalist working for *Sixty Minutes* on CBS, or making programs with the production quality of *Mad Men* on HBO.

Local communication is weighted heavily in Dewey's political philosophy. The relationship of proximity that all humans have with others is not a simple fact about human existence; it is the locus of a moral and political responsibility that is far from simple. As suggested in relation to radio, the best form of communication for this purpose is *live speech*." The winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech" (Dewey 1991, 218). It is by speaking with others about matters of vital import that the individual learns to be a distinctive and intelligent member of the public.

Dewey is an optimist. He believes that the Dewey/Brecht device can actually be constructed, or rather, that progressive education and intelligent interaction with the technological environment will allow the omni-competent citizen to eventually rise. Michael Schudson (2008) considers this a charming but ultimately impotent "utopian yearning," and in practical fact he is right. Even though Dewey was future-oriented and patient, his vision has not materialised as a medium in the ninety years since he formulated it, and it is still a utopian yearning.

Problem No. 1: One-way Technological Apparatus

The biggest issue in the Lippmann-Dewey debate is whether the one-way set-up that defines broadcasting is good or bad. Lippmannians promote its centralised,

expert-driven programming because of some convincing virtues, chief among them high-quality content (information, education and entertainment), universal access to programmes and fair representation of social, religious and political groups.

Broadcasting allows freedom of mind in the form of "diverse responses to a uniform event," Peters states (1999, 53). He argues that Jesus' parable of the sower is the founding metaphor of broadcasting. The sower "sends messages whose interpretative cues are hidden or missing, to be provided by those who have ears to hear" (1999, 53). The sower doesn't know in advance who will be receptive "leaving the crucial matter of choice and interpretation to the hearer, not the master" (55). Egalitarian access to TV has a democratising effect, states Katz (2009, 15), and Gripsrud (2010, 7) agrees: "Broadcasting produced the cultural conditions for a civic culture, i.e. semiotic and emotional conditions for citizens' active, informed participation in democratic processes." Jauert and Lowe (2005) consider the "Enlightenment Mission" of traditional broadcasting to be of great public value also in the future.

Their zest for public service is partly motivated by social histories like Douglas (1991), where wonderfully detailed and colourful histories emerge, dealing with the social and aesthetic dimension of production, institution, reception and technology, and they more or less inadvertently paint a picture of a well-meaning, middle class meritocracy of Western democracies. Journalists like H. V. Kaltenborn and Walter Cronkite are imbued with iconic stature in the annals of American broadcasting, and each country has its own gallery of radio and television personalities.

Broadcasting obviously has great cultural standing. But while this quality is valuable for the education and uplift of citizens it is at the same time fundamentally elitist, since professionals control almost all aspects of the communicative relationship. Broadcast media constitute the largest public arenas in modern states; both in terms of the number of audience members and the size of the geographical coverage area. It is no wonder that such attention is felt to require thorough preparation, natural talent and professional expertise. One would have to imagine a less imposing public in order to imagine less professional producers of content.

The technological set-up of broadcasting has in practice, if not in theory, denied the citizens the right to express themselves in the broadcast public. There is a good practical explanation for this. The listeners could not stay in direct contact with the broadcasters and hence it was no wonder that the editorial content was created without their contribution. However, if the medium had been two-way there would have been continuous contact and less need for pre-contributed content by experts. The production values of "mature broadcasting" (Ellis 2000) might never have come about. Another significant feature of broadcasting is that service providers could not register who are listening to the programs. The anonymity of the listener was a side effect of the broadcasting infrastructure, but it became one of the medium's greatest assets, vacating personal responsibility for communication among millions of people, and freeing them from autocratic control measures that would otherwise have appeared. The internet and mobile phone all have advanced tracking and registration features, and this is a high price to pay for a more symmetrical platform for public life.

Broadcasting's established technological asymmetry is rigorously defended also in the 21st century. It is remarkable that the foremost digital initiatives taken

by the industry are one-way solutions like DAB radio and digitalised television for terrestrial or satellite tuners. These are clearly the least interactive of all digital platforms (Nyre and Ala-Fossi 2008). It means that there will for the foreseeable future still be two separate platforms; the centralised production platform and the individual, distributed reception platform. This is clearly not innovation towards democratic access to the means of production.

The problem is that people cannot do anything about this inequality of expression, because it is technologically determined. The structures are so big and so well-sedimented that individuals and pressure groups cannot hope to change anything about them. The preference for professional production and audience reception is built into the system. Albert Borgmann explains how a system often produces this kind of powerlessness for users. He argues that large-scale, 20th century electronic technologies basically consist of two elements: the concealed machinery and the fore-grounded commodity (Borgmann 1984). In central heating systems the concealed machinery is the radiator, the tubes, the circulating water and the power source, while the fore-grounded commodity is simply the warmth that is generated. He calls the combination of machinery and commodity a "device."

In the use of modern devices there is a tendency for users to be ignorant of the machinery. For example most users of central heating will be almost completely ignorant of how the machinery produces this comfortable experience. Broadcasting is based on electronic technologies, and their machinery is more thoroughly black boxed than older mechanical technologies, while admittedly less black boxed than digital technologies. The citizen's opportunity to understand how communication works is reduced with each new layer of complexity that is added, for example with multi-channel sound editing and multi-camera shooting in the context of broadcasting.

Broadcast media do not encourage interrogative behaviour among their users. On the contrary what is fore-grounded in television is perceptual ease, or in the critical language of Borgmann: comfort and light weight attention. The simplicity of function "is just the mark of how wide the gap has become between the function accessible to everyone and the machinery known by nearly no one" (Borgmann 1984, 47). This is true for television, since for decades the only thing the audience could do was changing channels and regulating the loudness.

Problem No. 2: Lack of Social Equality

In the broadcast public there are two very different forms of communicative behaviour, associated with the production and reception environments, respectively. There is a significant social and economic difference between these two groups. Journalists, camera crews, celebrities and administrators all have an interest in editorialising as a way of earning their living. Lay users do not have the same vested interest, and might benefit from an organisation that was social instead of editorial. School children and their parents watch and listen in domestic settings, and broadcasting does not have any immediate implication for their income and self-esteem (of course it doesn't). They would have more to gain and more to loose if they were participating in a community-building public.

There is a deep-seated difference between the conception of the user among Lippmannians and Deweyans. Carey (1989) interestingly reads the two thinkers

in terms of eye versus ear. While Lippmann favours the statistical aggregation of printed facts, Dewey favours the closer and more emotional sounds of speech and song. Arguing against Lippmann's position, Carey writes that "we associate knowledge with vision to emphasize that we are spectators rather than participants in the language game through which knowledge is made or produced" (1989, 82). Lippmann views the citizen as a "second-order spectator" a spectator of spectators like the press, science and literature, and here he is in the most acute conflict with Dewey, according to Carey (1989, 82).

Media theorists often analyse the high quality cultural products of professional broadcasting without contemplating the ethical implications of this mode of production. Roger Silverstone (1994, 83) evocatively says that television "draws the members of the household into a world of public and shared meanings as well as providing some of the raw material for the forging of their own private, domestic culture." Paddy Scannell says that broadcasting addresses "anyone as someone;" meaning that programmes facilitate an intimate sense of involvement for each individual by herself, while extending exactly the same invitation to everyone (Scannell 2000). These descriptions are sensitive, but they do not address the domination of broadcasters over all the "any ones." It is not a problem that audience members are positioned as relatively passive recipients of messages, it is just one ontological characteristic among others. Viewers can have many shared positive experiences of broadcasting, watching favourite soap operas together and discussing the episode afterwards, but they lack the opportunity to express themselves in the same medium on the same terms as the professionals. They cannot formulate their own judgments about public issues, in the broadcast public. They are "living someone else's story" (Morrison and Krugman 2001), or with a much older term they are engaging in "para-social behaviour" (Horton and Wohl 1956/1979).

As I am arguing in this article, this can be interpreted as a lack of editorial and social equality in the broadcast paradigm. It exists at all levels of the medium, not just in the technological set-up, but also in the social organisation of production and reception. At heart the social control of the professionals is secured through the aptly named control room. Almost everything is planned, pre-recorded and edited before it is put on air, and these advanced processes are crucial to the audiovisual impact of broadcasting. There has been a mentality of complete aesthetic and journalistic professionalism from the very beginning. Broadcasters have a problem in relation to a participatory communication ethics for the simple reason that they have too much control over their own and other people's public behaviour.

You might protest that there is a long tradition for interactivity in radio and television, and phone-in programs, song requests, talent shows and other formats have always engaged members of the public in the programs (Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Also public access television and community radio are based on grassroots editorial units established in small towns and among various interest groups. But although one could suspect a "democratisation" taking place in program formats with the rise of interactive television, increased participation has not led to institutions losing economic power, or power of definition in public life (Gentikow 2010). Rather, broadcasters are developing new ways to shape, direct and profit from interactive output. Maasø et al (2007) argue that the creation of brand loyalty is the primary reason why broadcasters invest in participatory formats. This has little or nothing to do with a participatory communication ethics.

The values of the broadcast paradigm are being built into the backbone of the revised, more participatory version of broadcasting. This is not a radical reconstruction in the direction of a Dewey/Brecht device, it is a prolongation of the old regime by new means. The ordinary user is still in the weakest position, and with it the lack of social equality is prevailing. Erving Goffman (1981) distinguishes between three degrees of enunciation of a message. Imagine a BBC news bulletin from Afghanistan. In juridical and economical terms it is ultimately the eighty year old institution "The BBC" which speaks, and this is the address of the institution behind the manuscript. During the airing of the show the news anchor reads out his own manuscript, with a news priority that he has himself influenced, and is in this case the *author* of the manuscript. A translator will read the English language version of a Pashtuni interviewee's statement, and is as such a mere *animator* of the manuscript. In the context of participation, the audience members' message is always included in the institution's address, and they cannot be more than animators or occasionally authors of what is ultimately the station's own message.

Behavioural control is secured by semi-automated functions in interfaces that audiences have to relate to in order to get on air. A show like Pop Idol allows tens of thousands of audience members to vote for or against the contestants by the use of SMS. This is a new form of multi-platform programming that combines texting, web browsing and broadcasting, described by for example Enli (2005), Frau-Meigs (2006) and Kjus (2009). In these cases audiences only interact with technical functions, and do not occupy a visible and audible role in broadcasting. Diverse discussions, competitions and opinion polls can be arranged in this way, and there is a moderate allowance of dialogic communication in that texters can respond to each others' messages by submitting a new one. However, this form of audience participation is based on a very narrow window of opportunity, without allowance for follow-ups or contact between the texters, and typically everybody remains anonymous throughout. It would be absurd to analyse this kind of programming as affording omni-competence for the on-air speakers, even though they are actually participating. A crucial aspect of communication is delegated to technology in the form of a prescription: "do this, do that, behave this way, don't go that way, you may do so, allowed to go there" (Latour 1992, 157). Certain habits of editorial treatment of participation are irreversibly built into the broadcast system

The station's editorial sociability is also enforced more informally in the norms and rules of different programmes, some of which have been aired for decades. All the guests and listeners know from before what should be said and done, and inappropriate behaviour will be sanctioned by the other participants. The participants share the situation of speaking live with the hosts and other participants, and the sanctions on behaviour are social only. These indirect restrictions on behaviour are used quite brutally in the genre of phone-in programmes on radio. For example in a quiz show about soccer the caller may be given five questions that must be answered in forty seconds, and if the caller tries to talk about anything except the quiz she will immediately be cut off (Nyre 2008, 86-87). The listener is expected to know how to go along with the mood of the program, its slogans and lingo. Callers are screened and coached to conform to the show's speaking style before getting on air. This is a play of genre conventions and does not tell us much about the talent and personality of the caller. It has nothing to do with Dewey's participation

ethics. The strict formatting of talk radio programmes rarely allow callers freedom to play out their own rhetorical strategies in their own time. As suggested, callers are not allowed to speak to each other on air, and they are typically not allowed to answer back the opinions of others. In sum formatted participation presents the individual with a *flattened character*. The caller is basically one item among all the others needed to make an attractive and enjoyable programme.

The problem is that the broadcast paradigm doesn't need participation by ordinary people in order to function according to its own ideals, and therefore it is not considered problematic that participation has acquired a mainly entertaining and therapeutic function. Carpentier (2009) argues that participation in its raw form is not enough. His focus group-informants said that they want participation to be packaged in exceptional aesthetics and a good, socially relevant narrative. Otherwise they wouldn't care about it, is the implication. From a Deweyan perspective this old-style professionalism towards the new interactivity is problematic. These editorial norms construct an audience participant that is almost without obligations or responsibility for consequences, and they will not sustain the public in being just, as Dewey (1991, 149) requires. The formats almost inevitably objectify the listener, or more precisely, they objectify the dialogue he listens to and takes part in. By objectifying dialogue "one attacks the other's freedom. One makes the other into a fact, a thing in one's world. In this way one can dominate the other" (Skjervheim 1996, 75). There is an editorially constructed social inequality between the parties involved, and seen in light of a participatory ethics the audience-oriented programs are a somewhat humiliating practice for everyone involved.

Problem No. 3: Rhetoric of the Media-empowered Citizen

The problem to be addressed does not pertain to the broadcast media as such, but to widespread ways of thinking about what it means to be an electronic media user in our time. I am in particular thinking of the stereotypes in newspapers, radio and television, social media and the internet in general. This corresponds to what (Chatman 1993) calls the "implied reader," a position that is written into the text in order to invite real people to take it up during their reception and interpretation of the text. Public service ideals don't have enough force to present a strong implied position for its home-bound, willing-to-learn citizen. Instead of these citizens gathering as a family there is now an overwhelmingly commercial position for the citizen, where he comes across as a self-made, individualistic communicator. This user doesn't really care about the Lippmannian ideal of information, education and entertainment, because he knows he can get whatever he wants for himself.

The individualist rhetoric is strengthened with the great variety of social media that have grown up alongside the traditional media, for example Facebook, You-Tube and Twitter. Social media are largely filled with contributions from users, and there is often little or no point in talking about an editorial unit or a broadcaster in the traditional sense. The "empowered user" is celebrated in advertisements for electronic appliances like the iPhone and iPad, and she is hotly debated in newspapers, actuality programmes and political talk shows. Empowerment implies that citizens can write and publish anything they want at any time, and also that they all have a potential public arena and potential influence on their peers and the larger society. It also implies that audience members are highly sophisticated

in their appreciation of media materials, whether it is from newspapers, TV, the movies or the internet itself, and they know the narrative palette so well that they can always make themselves understood in this complex public. It seems that audience members are always able to add another layer of complexity to their media literacy. PR for the "empowered user" is a natural corollary of a marketplace where any kind of user-generated content generates income for the service providers and media outlets alike. Strictly speaking there is no purpose to social media, there are only empty intentions to be filled in by the user. The individualist rhetoric hinders the rise of more political, group driven public. It is an ideological construct that happens to fit the current interests of large-scale media businesses just fine.

The consumer obviously has to purchase new media equipment quite frequently. PR and advertising has it that new media technologies will enable us to master our domestic and/or work-related surroundings more effectively, accurately and safely than we would with the old equipment. The new appliance always has greater efficiency, larger storage capacity, higher quality and easier access than those currently dominating the market. This rhetoric of technological empowerment is meant to make people perceive themselves as continuously strengthened individuals who are in ever-better control of their lives. You signal to yourself that you are free from trusting the social institutions and the media, and it signals to others that you have the money, equipment and intellectual resources to do what you like, travel where you like, enjoy what you like in the world. This mentality is perfectly illustrated by those who approve of the L'Oreal advertisement where the American actor Andie McDowell says "Because you're worth it!" The image of gain without responsibility flies in the face of Dewey's communication ethics.

It is important to consider that the propositions of advertisers, PR companies and the broadcasting stations may be purposefully unrealistic. In the article "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution" (1970/1989), James Carey and John Quirk argue that there is an idealising rhetoric embedded in the very fabric of electronic communication, and they call it "the rhetoric of the electrical sublime." This is, they say, an ethos "that identifies electricity and electrical power, electronics and cybernetics, computers and information with a new birth of community, decentralisation, ecological balance, and social harmony" (Carey and Quirk 1989, 114). In their view technological life includes a clever ideological and commercial staging of roles for people to believe in, where the various appliances are seen as necessary for succeeding in ones life-involvements. Carey and Quirk refer to this as an ethos that goes like this: "Everyman a prophet with his own machine to keep him in control" (Carey and Quirk 1989, 117).

The exaggerations of the marketplace are important in relation to Dewey's communication ethics. A democratic public cannot rely on images of omni-competent citizens, it must rely on effective intelligence among its members. The hardships and difficulties of real democratic participation are forgotten because of the successful staging of a media- empowered citizen in advertising and commercial programming. What happens is that the ideals of empowerment are associated with communication behaviour that in essence includes the same procedures as before (profitable), and this allows everybody to not push for maximally democratic procedures. Although the assignment of democratic value to new technologies may reflect an honest desire for communication to be improved, the rhetoric does not in itself make this value operational.

An added problem is that the Lippmannian scholar does not really want to be normative. He tries to be value-neutral in relation to all the economic and political interests that are involved in the international broadcasting business, and he aids the representative decision-making process by delivering expert analyses of the status of a market, a company, a program format or an audience segment. In this way scholarship becomes apologetic, and instead of vigorously investigating the available options for good communication, it administers the joint interests of the media industry, whether it is represented by the BBC, the DAB consortium, or the global television industry. The status quo of American and European media business thereby appears perpetually normal and desirable, and the media-empowered individualist grows to maturity without thinking that anything could be wrong with his communication apparatus.

A Foregone Conclusion

I have argued that the lack of democratic participation in the broadcast public of the 2010s is as severe as when Lippmann and Dewey pointed it out during the heyday of film and newspaper propaganda in the 1920s. The enduring nature of this problem indicates that it will be difficult to create participatory transmission also in the future. Maybe broadcasting will never be overtaken by a more democratic audiovisual platform?

The most solid reason for believing so is that the broadcast industry will be hesitant to explore truly symmetric redirections of their programming, whether it is in the TV studio, on the Internet, through mobile phone interfaces or other platforms. It would have been a suicide mission. The media professionals have hierarchical positions that they will not allow to be threatened by democratic experimentation. Calls for greater participation from the general public will therefore be restaged in idealised versions rather than being realised in full. Dewey's communication ethics is simply not in the interest of broadcasters because it would cost a lot of money, and it would empower users indiscriminately with great risk to the established procedures of programming.

Brian Winston's "law of suppression of radical potential" accurately sums up the consequence of the forces I have been analysing in this article: *little or no change*. "Constraints operate to slow the rate of diffusion so that the social fabric in general can absorb the new machine and essential formations such as business entities and other institutions can be protected and preserved" (Winston 1998, 9). Along the way good potentials are peeled off, and the public is left with poorer participation than it needs in order to function democratically. Broadcasting no longer has radical potential, and the future of transmission lies on the internet and the mobile phone.

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