


**Media and Modernity:  
The Future of Journalism in a Post Cold War & Postmodern World**

by

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## Media and Modernity: The Future of Journalism in a Post Cold War & Postmodern World

American journalism is in crisis. As a social institution, an industry, and a profession, journalism is being challenged. In the society at large, journalists find themselves the center of a growing number of political and social controversies. Media critics from the right and the left cite mounting evidence that news coverage creates or aggravates a growing list of social and political ills within the U.S. and abroad. Domestic problems attributed at least in part to media include urban decay with its symptoms of violence, poverty and homelessness; racial and ethnic discrimination; political cynicism, alienation, negative politics and gridlock in government. Internationally, journalists are blamed for exacerbating ethnic rivalries and impeding the work of foreign governments and international organizations. Attacks against the press are coming from across the political spectrum. Some are based on factual evidence but many are speculative. Journalists dismiss most of these attacks as partisan or misguided but recently some industry leaders have themselves begun to question why news coverage documenting societal ills fails to inspire or guide constructive social reform (Batten, 1993).

Even if the news industry were not faced with external criticism, it would be hard pressed. The rapid development of powerful communications technologies enables news content to be gathered, edited and distributed in radically new ways. Media industries continue to restructure with troubling trends toward globalization and cross-media ownership by huge corporations (Bagdikian, 1990). It is quite likely that some forms of media such as mass circulation, urban newspapers will be radically altered to accommodate advertiser demands, news consumer preferences, and competition from newer media (Hallin, 1992). Most of these changes are being dictated by market forces with relatively little concern for their social consequences. Some industry analysts predict that big, urban newspapers will disappear over the next two decades. Already readership of these newspapers is in decline; with the biggest drop-off among young people. Advertisers are forced to seek other media to reach this important market. There is growing competition from suburban newspapers and alternative newspapers. People rely increasingly on broadcast news.

The prospects for broadcast news are also problematic. Global alliances among major broadcast news organizations have become commonplace. Even major international events are covered by only a handful of news agencies. Recent innovations in broadcast news such as live reporting via satellite links or round-the-clock coverage of major events like wars, disasters or celebrity murder cases have sustained audience interest in broadcast news but also made it more difficult to maintain news reporting standards. News magazine programs have proliferated; offering highly dramatized and personalized coverage of trivial topics (Hallin, 1992; *Newsweek*, April 11, 1994). Broadcast news will survive the current changes going on in the industry but it is not clear how well it will serve viewer needs or society.

As if these challenges were insufficient, the news industry must cope with the loss of one of its longest running and most powerful stories--the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the sudden end of the global Communist threat have posed serious difficulties for journalists (Pease, 1993). Cold War geopolitics provided a constant and dramatic theme for coverage of international and many domestic news stories (Hallin, 1992). This story line made it relatively easy for journalists to establish the relevancy for many different types of stories. Many foreign and domestic political events could be linked in some way to the superpower struggle for global domination. In the aftermath of the Cold War there are very few broad themes that can be used to

structure international coverage. None of these themes has the same level of audience appeal. For example, three commonly used themes over the past two years have been regional warfare, famine, and human rights. But most Americans have only a limited interest in these themes and this interest may well have been exhausted by coverage of events in Somalia and Bosnia. Thoughtful journalists recognize that it is important to keep Americans informed about international events but they are hard pressed to find ways of overcoming apathy.

The end of the Cold War has also dramatically altered the professional role of international journalists. Prior to the collapse of the USSR, international journalists were front-line observers who played an important role in keeping people informed about the global struggle. In covering regional conflicts from the Korean war, through the Vietnam war, and the war in Afghanistan, journalists braved hostile fire to bring out news about conflicts in which the U.S. had a direct interest. Their actions were often respected and admired. War correspondents went on to highly successful careers. Today, coverage of conflict in places like Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda can be just as dangerous but is less likely to bring professional rewards. Journalists who risk their lives to provide coverage often find that their stories are never printed or broadcast. Long stories are reduced to brief bulletins. News editors judge audience interest to be insufficient to warrant more coverage.

Just how bad are the crises confronting journalism? Is the messenger being blamed for delivering bad news (as many journalists believe) or should news media bear more responsibility for some of the serious problems that beset our social order? Can journalism as an institution, an industry, and a profession be transformed so that its social role becomes more constructive while it seeks to assure its survival as a form of mediated communication? This paper will address these questions but won't answer them fully. Instead, it will argue for the need to develop a macroscopic perspective on public culture that could eventually answer such questions. It will also argue that the problems of journalism and the social order stem from very fundamental, worldwide, political and cultural transformations. While existing news coverage doesn't typically create social or political problems, it does little to address them or ameliorate them. In some cases, it can act as a catalyst that exacerbates problems and makes them more difficult to manage.

The first section of the chapter reviews academic research on news media. Research supports the view that media frequently impede other social institutions and threaten their viability. It also concludes that news media do not effectively inform the public about the political and social world (Gunter, 1987; Graber, 1984). Despite vast improvements in both the quantity and accessibility of news coverage, knowledge levels in many important areas have not increased (Robinson and Davis, 1990). Misconceptions about politics and social institutions abound. By some measures, average citizens today are no better informed about national, regional or local politics than were their parents or grandparents.

The second section of the chapter offers an historical overview of the rise of modern social orders and of journalism. The origins of journalism in the 18th and 19th centuries is traced and linked to the appearance of other modern social institutions. Journalism is founded on modernist values and utilizes a bureaucratic form of social organization (Hallin, 1992). Its influence expanded as modernist culture became dominant. To some extent, it served as a catalyst for the rise of modernity. Overtime, a symbiotic relationship developed between news media and other modernist social institutions; especially the nation state, capitalist institutions, and social welfare bureaucracies. Many of the problems that academic critics attribute to news coverage can be traced to a serious breakdown in this symbiotic relationship.

The third section summarizes postmodernist views concerning the decline of modernity. It also outlines an innovative, macroscopic perspective on public culture and politics that is based on Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. This framework provides a basis for understanding why news media no longer play the social role that was so essential to the emergence of modernist social orders. Though once an important agent of modernity, journalistic scrutiny of modern social institutions now often impedes them. As institutions struggle to maintain order, journalists chronicle failures in dramatic detail (Ettema and Glasser, 1994). Their stories offer no insight into viable alternatives and tend to alienate rather than activate readers. In the fourth section, three views on reforming journalism are summarized and discussed. These reform efforts recognize specific limitations in current journalistic values and practices. They propose very different types of reforms. The final section of the chapter asks whether postmodern forms of journalism can or should be created. Can professional values and news production practices that are so strongly grounded in modernist culture be changed? Most journalists have yet to accept the need to reform their practices or rethink their values. The role of journalism in a postmodern era will be difficult to define.

### I. Contemporary Research on the Social Role of Journalism

A common theme can be found in much of the academic research that has been done on news media over the past two decades. Researchers have concluded that news media are increasingly intrusive and disruptive. Media are found to make it more difficult for existing social institutions to operate effectively. News coverage is even more disruptive of social movements (Gitlin, 1980). Surveillance of social institutions may be creating more problems than it solves. Various interpretations are offered for this phenomenon. In general, academic researchers reject the views of partisan critics who argue that media elites are biased against particular political ideologies. They are skeptical that journalists are party to an elite conspiracy to systematically subvert certain groups in order to preserve elite privilege and power. They also view with skepticism charges coming from government bureaucracies and large corporations that journalists are only looking for sensational stories to sell newspapers and advance careers.

Academic critics most often trace the problems of news media to well-intentioned, long-standing media practices that have unanticipated, negative consequences. Practices developed in earlier eras are seen as increasingly problematic due to the introduction of new communications technology, competitive pressures from other media, or changes in the way people use news. Journalists have been reluctant to change their practices; in many cases viewing them as essential to the ethical practice of their profession. Research has examined the production of various types of news coverage. Problems have been identified and recommendations for reforming news production practices have been offered (Galtung and Vincent, 1992; Robinson and Levy, 1986). Below, some of the most relevant research is highlighted.

#### A. Threats to Democratic Politics

During the 1980s, a growing number of political scientists concluded that news coverage of politics was becoming increasingly problematic (Bennett, 1988; Edelman, 1988; Patterson, 1980; Davis, 1990). Scholars raised serious questions about the interrelationship between contemporary news media and political institutions. They asked why media do so poorly at informing the public or motivating political participation despite spectacular technological advances and the creation of multi-billion dollar communications industries (Bennett, 1988). Edelman (1988) argued that media have packaged politics as a spectacle for mass audiences. By overdramatizing events, focusing coverage on individual politicians, and trivializing many aspects

of political culture, media create an attractive commodity for news consumers but also discourage individual involvement in politics and foster political alienation.

Patterson (1980) considers evidence that national political campaign coverage strongly influences how campaigns unfold and end. He finds that coverage is frequently intrusive and disruptive. For example, coverage can influence the selection of candidates during the primaries (the winnowing effect). It can also distract attention away from substantive issues and direct it toward minor scandals or questions about a candidate's personality (ie. trustworthiness, toughness, warmth). Patterson concludes that news about the "horse-race" too often dominates coverage; focusing undue attention on poll results and campaign strategy.

A political consulting industry has developed (Sabato, 1981) to plot strategies to influence news coverage. Campaigns have become a battleground in which consultants seek to take advantage of news production practices while journalists strive to avoid being manipulated. Pseudoevents are staged for TV cameras. Politicians spend more time plotting media strategy and less time dealing with substantive issues. Consultants utilize negative advertising. They encourage negative news coverage by releasing potentially damaging information about opponents. These negative campaigns may undermine public perceptions of politics and the political system.

Entman (1991) depicts what he regards as a deepening crisis in our political system. Evidence from surveys and voter turnout indicates that political alienation is rising and all forms of political participation are declining. He argues that the blame for this should be shared equally by politicians, journalists, and the public:

The media feed a spiral of demagoguery, diminished rationality in policymaking, heightened tendency toward symbolic reassurance and nostalgic evasion of concrete choices, and ultimately misrepresentation of the public. Not only is this unintentional; the conscious goal of the national press is precisely the opposite, to make government accountable. Nor is it fair to blame officials for managing the news. The alternative is for politicians to ignore the clear incentives that media practices present, as the Carter administration often did, with woeful impacts on its ability to lead. In this sense, the media force presidents to engage in news management, even as journalists depend reluctantly but heavily on images the administration manufactures (Entman, 1991, pg. 128).

Entman advocates a variety of reforms including significant changes in news production practices. But he is not optimistic about the possibilities for change:

Journalists could act unilaterally to improve supply [of news], as critics have often urged. They could craft stories to "make really interesting," and render news more comprehensible. New organizations could show more creativity in defining and conveying news, without spending more money. But they do not... (Entman, 1991, pg. 130). For example, CBS engaged in searing self-criticism of its horse race-oriented, symbol-saturated campaign coverage of 1976, only to find itself following the same basic course in 1980 and 1984. The network could not tear itself away from the stunning visuals, and the horse-race analysis... (Entman, 1991, pg. 133)

Why has it proved so difficult for journalists to implement practical reforms? Entman argues that the big news organizations are too concerned about preserving their profits and their

competitive position in a rapidly changing marketplace. News industry leaders have few incentives to make reforms that could jeopardize their profits and might not be effective. Politicians have learned how to manage news coverage under the existing rules and don't want rules changed. News consumers are not demanding changes. But without change, it is likely that both the credibility of news media and of politics will continue to erode. Sales of newspapers and voting will continue to decline.

#### B. News Media, Social Change, and Social Order

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, sociologists produced a series of studies that examined news production practices and assessed their social implications. These studies were based on differing theoretical frameworks and research methods. Yet their overall conclusions were quite similar. Each identified and criticized news production practices that were found to be problematic. Researchers observed that journalists were unreflective as they went about their work. Deadline pressures and competition to get stories left them little time to think about what they were doing. In general, their work was found to be severely constrained by long-standing production practices and bureaucratic procedures. Despite claiming to serve the public, most journalists had little direct contact with the public and few means of systematically assessing the effectiveness of the services they were providing (Gans, 1979).

Tuchman (1978) conducted a case study of news coverage of the women's movement. This movement first achieved national prominence with a rally at which bras were purportedly burned (in supposed imitation of the burning of draft cards by antiwar protesters). She maintains that, though brandished, bras were never actually burned. This news report served to unfairly brand the women's movement as both irrational and radical, unworthy of serious consideration. Instead of assisting the women's movement and enabling it to contribute to the larger society, these stories and those which followed hindered it. In her view, this example was typical of the way that journalists covered movements. No effort was made to understand or report the ideas or perspectives of movement activists. Journalists assigned to do coverage often had little background knowledge about movement ideology or objectives.

Gitlin (1980) also found that news coverage was potentially disruptive to innovative social movements. He found that movement coverage generally focused on unusual personalities or dramatic events such as demonstrations. Movement ideologies and day-to-day activities were ignored. Coverage spawned and perpetuated widespread public misconceptions about movements and these misconceptions had many negative repercussions for movements. Public hostility was aroused while at the same time new members were attracted to movements. But these new recruits had little understanding of their purposes or principles. They were drawn to movements for the wrong reasons. Gitlin conducted a case study of the Students for Democratic Society movement in the late 1960's and details how this movement was fundamentally disrupted by news coverage.

Both Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) concluded that news coverage routinely reinforces the status quo and impedes the rise of new social movements. Practices designed to assure objectivity and balance result in stories that contrast authoritative, reasoned views of social elites with the bizarre, contradictory ideas of movement representatives. Though their professional values dictate that journalists provide balanced, accurate and objective coverage of events, including those involving movements, Tuchman found that existing production practices are ineffective in achieving this. She found a serious gap between these values and the reporting practices used to cover movements. Most reporters adopted various "strategic rituals" to guide production of stories about social movements. For example, they ritualistically constructed "balanced" stories in which opposing views were contrasted. Tuchman argues that these rituals

can actually undermine movements. "Balanced stories" about minority groups frequently contain statements from social or political elites that subtly or blatantly denigrate groups, their ideas, and their actions. The opinions of little known group leaders are contrasted with the official pronouncements from well known, credible individuals. Little effort is made to contextualize new groups in terms of their broader goals or their culture. The ideologies of social groups are considered to be far too abstract and arcane to be of interest to average readers. Instead, news reports tend to focus on dramatic actions of isolated, often deviant group members. Stories are personalized to highlight the actions or bizarre statements these colorful, if atypical, group members (Bennett and Edelman, 1985).

Tuchman (1978) recognizes that movement members can be problematic news sources. Reporters often have difficulty understanding and relating to them. They come to their reporting assignment with stereotypical expectations about movements and they inevitably observe what they expect to see. Often, there are cultural differences that make it impossible for journalists to objectively evaluate what is going on during meetings or other movement activities. Journalists have standardized narratives for constructing movement stories. These narratives tend to feature elite sources who discount the value of movements (Bennett and Edelman, 1985).

Gans (1979) also found that most news coverage was guided by implicit values that journalists rarely understood or questioned. Most believed their reporting was "value-free" and met their standard of objectivity. While many of their implicit values were apparently benign, some had negative consequences. Based on an extensive content analysis and observation of newsrooms, Gans concluded that news coverage of all forms of social disorder, ranging from natural disasters to political violence, was centered on elite efforts to restore order. Elite sources were prominently featured in early coverage and their actions were presented without comment. This coverage often failed to place such events into broader social or political context even when the events were predictable and coverage could be planned in advance (see also Vincent, et. al, 1989). Gans concluded that journalists tend to most effectively present the perspective of the upper-middle-class professional strata and to defend this class against social strata above it and below it (Gans, 1979, p. 284). Like Tuchman and Gitlin, Gans found journalists to be strongly committed to existing production practices. Most perceived little leeway for making changes (Gans, 1979, pg. 288-290).

## II. News and Modernity

The limitations and constraints found in contemporary news media can best be understood by tracing the origin of these media and probing their cultural context. Habermas (1979) explains how print media emerged as one element of the bourgeois public sphere in 18th century Europe. This public sphere was grounded in an innovative form of culture, one that transcended local, everyday life cultures. This culture defined innovative public roles and public places (Sennett, 1974). It emerged to fill a power vacuum created as the dominant forces in medieval society (the Church, the Monarchy, and the landed aristocracy) were challenged by the Protestant Reformation and the growing power of an urban middle class.

The intellectual grounding for the public sphere was initially provided by Renaissance, humanist intellectuals who drew on classical notions of public culture such as the Greek conception of the polis. By the middle of the eighteenth century, certain key elements of the public sphere had become institutionalized; especially in large cities. These institutions were elaborated over the next two centuries. Newspapers were among the first institutions to be developed in the public sphere. They played a critical role in extending the scope of the public sphere through time and space. From their inception, newspapers had a symbiotic relationship

with other institutions in the public sphere, most notably business and government. As the power of allied institutions expanded, so did the influence of newspapers. A classic example of this involved the development of department stores and display advertising late in the 19th century. Department stores require the high levels of consumer traffic that can be generated by advertising. Display advertising quickly became a major source of revenue for newspapers.

The public sphere had important strengths and major limitations as a new form of social organization. Rejection of medieval culture unleashed both constructive and disruptive social change. Within the public sphere, it was possible to experiment with new forms of social structure and to develop new ideologies on which to base these structures. From the beginning, there was optimism that a definitive ideology would be created as rational, conscientious individuals met in public places to debate ideas and reach consensus. Eventually, this process would enable an ideal social order to be constructed. This faith that Reason would ensure progress toward a better future was forcefully articulated during the Enlightenment (Ferrarotti, 1985) and came to characterize the modern era.

Successive modernist ideologies, including various forms of totalitarianism, embraced this myth of progress. The myth was used to legitimize both humane and destructive actions. Modernist ideologies emerged that were essentially hegemonic. They claimed to provide definitive explanations of human existence and ideal plans for imposing order on society. Each proclaimed that Civilization had reached its zenith with its particular form of modernity. All other belief systems were rejected as primitive, irrational, and traditional. Around the world, advocates of modernist ideologies suppressed indigenous cultures and justified the use of coercion to spread their beliefs.

Thus, a fundamental irony can be found at the heart of modernism. A public sphere created as an open space in which to escape the constraints of medieval culture ultimately nurtured a series of hegemonic ideologies. In time, the public sphere itself eroded; gradually supplanted by the powerful, highly bureaucratized and centralized social institutions that now structure the modern world. Habermas describes this as a "structural transformation" (Habermas, 1989) and in his work he has sought to specify how a valid public sphere might be restored (Habermas, 1979).

Foucault (1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1980) also provides a detailed analysis of how this transformation took place. In case after case, he finds that modernist ideologies legitimized creation of specific social institutions (mental institutions, prisons) as a means of imposing useful or necessary forms of social order. The ideologies defined normality and then required that deviations from it be disciplined or punished. Foucault argues that all later forms of modernist ideology have an inherent will to power, a desire to dominate and control both the social and physical world. This desire to control is inevitably destructive because it accepts no limits. Modernist ideologies prioritize those forms of knowledge that facilitate centralized control and dismiss other forms of knowledge as traditional, irrational, or too abstract. Scientific knowledge is the dominant standard because it provides the means to effectively control the physical world (Aronowitz, 1988).

#### A. The Rise of Libertarianism

The history of journalism can be interpreted in light of this analysis of the emergence of modernism. Printers were among the staunchest advocates for the formation of the public sphere in the 17th century. They strongly embraced a worldview that became the first modernist ideology -- libertarianism (Altschull, 1990). Libertarians rejected what they regarded as the arbitrary, unnatural constraints imposed by medieval culture. Human beings were free agents; "naturally" endowed with a conscience and the capacity to develop reason. Once freed from medieval culture,

people would naturally come together in public and use reason to create an ideal social order. This libertarian perspective has been enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. These documents proclaim the natural right of individuals to revolt against unjust monarchs and establish government that will serve their interests.

But how should people come together to create an ideal society? Who should be allowed to participate and what is the appropriate arena for their actions? What types of actions should be permitted? What should be the role of mass media in supporting these actions? These questions were central to public debate as it unfolded early in the modern era. Various public arenas were created that differed greatly in terms of access, participants, and the role of media. Often only men who owned property were allowed to participate. These men elected individuals to represent them in small governing bodies. Relatively small groups of men organized political parties and these parties published newspapers that primarily circulated to members.

Though libertarianism achieved considerable acceptance, it is difficult to judge the role it played in guiding the transition from the medieval to the modern era. It provided a means of rationalizing and legitimizing various changes but may not have inspired many of these changes. Libertarian ideas formed as a reaction against medieval social institutions. Freedom from the constraints imposed by these institutions was demanded. But libertarianism provides no guidance concerning the formation of new institutions. As time passed, it became obvious that the central assumptions of libertarianism were faulty. Once freed from the constraints of medieval culture, people quickly created, not one, but many competing forms of social order. They developed diverse strategies for cultivating and applying reason. Protestant religious sects spread rapidly once the constraints imposed by Catholicism were removed. Politics became a very divisive and often violent activity. Experiments with innovative political arenas proved especially problematic. Many different local, regional, and national governing bodies were created; all with varying degrees of legitimacy and power. Throughout the modern era, there have been serious outbreaks of social unrest-- peasant uprisings, revolutions, and civil wars. The effort to use human reason to create the ideal social order proved to be much more elusive than the early libertarians envisioned. Progress was often sought with military force rather than through reasoned, public debate. Ultimately, various modernist ideologies became dominant but their ability to impose order was often quite unrelated to their grounding in a public sphere.

#### **B. The Rise of News Media**

As modernism unfolded, the role played by media underwent significant transformations. Early newspapers were small and served specific communities of readers. For example, during the 18th century, newspapers typically served groups of businessmen or the members of specific political parties. Newspaper printers and editors were personally acquainted with their readers. Most of the journalistic ideals of public service and social responsibility originated in this era at a time when the connections between journalists and their readers was quite direct. Journalists could be easily held accountable by readers. Party newspapers printed essays on political theory and opinions about political events. Timely coverage of specific events was only one feature.

By the end of the 19th century, a new type of newspaper had developed in most large cities. It catered to mass audiences by offering them attractively packaged content designed to serve a variety of personal needs for entertainment and information. Public service functions were minimized. Other mass media industries followed using new technologies but relying on similar strategies for packaging and marketing content. Communication became a commodity that could be manufactured, distributed and sold much like any other consumer product. This enabled

large-scale media industries to be created but it essentially transformed the role played by media in the public sphere.

### C. The Struggle to Professionalize Journalism

From the point of view of media practitioners, there has been a gradual and largely successful effort to professionalize their industry over the last century (Schudson, 1978). It is through professionalization that journalists claim to retain a commitment to libertarian ideals of public service despite the constraints imposed by an increasingly competitive communication marketplace. Early in this century, professionalization was encouraged by powerful publishers like Hearst, Pulitzer, and Luce. One motive was their desire to improve the low regard that most people had of journalists. Models of professionalization pioneered by doctors and lawyers were consciously imitated. Journalism trade groups and unions were reorganized as professional associations with codes of ethics and declarations of social responsibility. Most devised ways of monitoring the actions of members and engaging in self-censorship. Schools of journalism were established at many universities to provide systematic training in both production skills and social responsibility.

But journalism deviated from the models set by medicine and law. Journalists rejected efforts to license news practitioners; claiming that this would inevitably lead to government control. Their resistance was ironic since it was muckraking journalists who staunchly supported Progressivist efforts to license doctors and lawyers. Journalists also refused to limit hiring to persons who had specialized training in journalism. This too was seen as a potential infringement on press freedom. They argued that press freedom meant that anyone should be able to declare themselves a journalist and publish a newspaper. Publishers of papers had to be free to hire anyone. Finally, journalists fought establishment of government agencies or public press councils that would provide an institutionalized means of resolving complaints against newspapers. When the Twentieth Century Fund sponsored the establishment of a national press council, major newspapers like the New York Times refused to cooperate. After a long trial period, the effort was abandoned.

### D. Emergence of the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press

Central to any profession is its philosophy and related code of ethics. Most modern professions have well developed philosophies. Their codes of ethics have evolved from abstract lists of ideal values into detailed descriptions of specific practices that are recognized as either ethical or unethical. Journalism falls short of standards set by other professions. Today, journalists continue to espouse libertarian notions even though many of these ideas have become irrelevant or misleading in a social world dominated by bureaucracies. They seem unable or unwilling to recognize that media industries have evolved to become a social institution that collaborates with other institutions to structure the modern world. Many paradoxes can be found in what journalists write about their professional role. They proudly assert their status as a "fifth estate of government" but at the same time profess to be humble messengers who bear no responsibility for the consequences of merely reporting the truth about societal events.

Efforts to formalize journalism philosophy in the U.S. resulted in development of the "social responsibility theory of the press." This theory was systematically articulated in the late 1940s by the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press (McIntyre, 1987). It was popularized by Theodore Peterson in an influential textbook published at the height of the Cold War (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1956). Alschull argues that Peterson framed social responsibility theory as simply an updating of libertarian thinking:

Peterson wrote that he and the Hutchins Commission had a more modern view of the nature of man than existed under pure libertarianism. Social responsibility doctrine, he said, did not deny the libertarian view that man is a rational creature. But, in the spirit of pragmatism, it was, he said, a more skeptical doctrine. "man is viewed not so much as irrational as lethargic," he said. "He is capable of using his reason, but he is loath to do so. Consequently, he is easy prey for demagogues, advertising pitchmen, and others who would manipulate him for their selfish ends." The investigative work of the press, however, might steer rational, lethargic Americans to recognition of what their leaders were actually doing. This view was very much in keeping with libertarian doctrine... (1990, pg. 285)

Social responsibility theory is used by journalists to justify institutional autonomy and legitimize many questionable news production practices. Newspapers can only be responsible to society if they are completely autonomous with no accountability to any other social institution. The demand for autonomy is combined with a demand that journalists be allowed to engage in surveillance of all other social institutions so that they can be held accountable to the public. These demands for autonomy and the right to engage in surveillance are defended as essential in order to fulfill their social responsibility. For the press to perform its various libertarian functions, it can't be hindered by constraints imposed by other institutions. It must be free to serve the public even if its actions on behalf of the public prove to be intrusive and disruptive.

#### E. Emergence of News Production Practices

All too often the news production practices legitimized by social responsibility theory do little more than increase the power and serve the short-term interests of journalists at the expense of other social institutions. They are rationalized as necessary even when they create obvious problems. Definitions of news evolved pragmatically with no consistent ideological perspective (Altschull, 1990) but that doesn't mean that these definitions were "objective". It was easier to sell newspapers to large audiences if no identifiable ideology was explicitly advocated. But news has always conveyed implicit ideologies, typically those that were predominant within major social institutions. In this way, newspapers joined with these institutions to shape the social order. For example, during the 19th century:

There was little room in the country's newspapers for those who engaged in mere talk. From the beginning, it was men of action who were the chief figures in the pages of the American press. What they did was more significant to the editors than their points of view. It was the event that was the staple... As technology changed the face of the press, as the early penny press was succeeded by the yellow press and the muckraking press, editors remained fascinated by men of action, seemingly spellbound by the allure of doers, of movers and shakers... The interests of the communities of businessmen and Protestant churchmen lay in the acquisition of wealth and power, not in the development of art, music, and literature. The intellectual impulse was not dedicated to contemplation...but rather to the invention of machines that would aid in the production process, machines that meant greater consumption of goods by the public, in other words applied research with clearly practical results (Altschull, 1990, pp. 200-201).

Print media consistently supported the rise of industrial Capitalism and centralized bureaucracy. They were champions of science and technology. This was not surprising since the industry itself evolved by adopting bureaucratic structures and new technology. It was led by Capitalist entrepreneurs who made immense fortunes selling news.

Since the turn of the century there have been numerous reformulations of the notions used to legitimize journalistic practices. Again and again controversial journalistic practices were justified as necessary if journalists were to provide the public with the information it had the right to know. During the muckraking era, journalists proclaimed themselves as "watchdogs" who served the public by exposing corrupt businessmen or politicians. Unnoticed was the fact that muckraking newspapers used this type of coverage to gain a foothold in highly competitive markets. Once they became successful, their muckraking became more subdued. One myth of the news industry is that muckraking helped to motivate much constructive social change during the Progressivist era. A recent study points out that this era was characterized by high voter apathy (Leonard, 1986). If muckraking produced social change, it was not through the ballot box. Ettema and Glasser (1994) argue that the ironic storytelling that is central to muckraking will tend to alienate voters since it undermines trust in existing social institutions while providing no explicit alternative.

#### F. Adoption of Scientific Standards

Pressures to justify new as a legitimate, useful form of knowledge led journalists to try to emulate scientific techniques for knowledge production (Shiller, 1981). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the natural sciences had developed the most widely accepted means of producing knowledge and developing theory--the method of empirical research. Using these methods, physical scientists claimed to create definitive explanations for many different phenomena. More importantly, these theories could be used to control the physical world in very useful ways. Science had become an important source of power (Aronowitz, 1988).

The news production rituals described by Tuchman (1978) can be understood as partially successful efforts to imitate the research methods of the physical sciences. The heavy emphasis on creating factual, highly descriptive accounts of events emulates empirical data collection and analysis by scientists. Scientists seek to guard against bias by developing systematic data collection methods. They also use standardized methods of data analysis. Reporting strategies that balance information from competing sources are an attempt to emulate these methods. In science, theory construction is separated from data collection. In the same way, journalists separate newsgathering from the task of analyzing the facts and putting them into perspective. News reports are supposed to be "raw data". It is only on the editorial pages or in feature articles that journalists analyze this data and offer viewpoints.

Journalists adapted the proven methods of science to justify the production practices they used to create accounts of events. In doing this, they espoused methodological notions about objectivity that paralleled early thinking in the social sciences; especially arguments put forward by logical positivists and functionalists. The social world is regarded as an empirical reality that can best be understood and controlled through direct observation of events. News stories seek to report the facts about those events. But the constraints of the news business prevent any systematic application of scientific methods. Observations have to be done quickly, using crude, improvised methods. Facts are presented using story formulas; simple narrative structures that allow facts to be presented in a way that is easily understood by and appealing to mass audiences. Dull lists of facts organized by abstract theory are shunned. In this work, there is no time and no incentive to construct elaborate theories or to make repeated, systematic observations.

Thus, journalism evolved as a form of scientism in which knowledge production is heavily influenced by the marketplace and in which any effort to systematically construct theory is suppressed or segregated to poorly read editorial pages. Observations are most likely to be made if they can be packaged into stories that attract large audiences. Events that can't be observed are

given less priority. Packaging is done with little regard for the misconceptions that are conveyed since journalists maintain that their story formulas are neutral. If misconceptions arise, that is because people have made mistakes in comprehending what was meant. Journalists make a fetish of factual accuracy for story details but quite willing to remain oblivious of the misconceptions that arise when these details are reported using stereotypic story formulas (Bennett and Edelman, 1985). If the details are right, it doesn't matter if the overall framing of the story is stereotypical and misleading. Editorial pages do little to correct such misperceptions and may even perpetuate them. On a day to day basis, editorials offer hastily constructed, highly speculative ways of making sense of what journalists report in their stories. Often, editorials rationalize and legitimize the attention that journalists are giving to various events.

### III. The End of Modernity

There are increasing signs that the hegemony of modernity has been broken with important implications for journalism. These signs include a resurgence in traditional cultures that have been long suppressed (ie. fundamentalist religions, demands for rights for indigenous peoples); new social movements based on cultural demands such as the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement and feminism; and social movements devoted to placing strict limits on exploitation of the physical environment (ie. the green movement, animal rights movement). The use of state coercion to colonize other cultures and impose the constraints of modern culture has become more limited and less successful. The largely peaceful and nonviolent revolutions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were dramatic evidence that older coercion techniques are losing their effectiveness.

Postmodern theorists offer a variety of explanations for these changes. According to Giddens (1991), modernity has entered a new era characterized by high levels of reflexivity throughout modern social orders. There is a growing consciousness of both opportunities and constraints at all levels from social institutions to organizations, movements, groups, and individuals. Science is no longer trusted as an objective source of definitive knowledge. Technology is no longer seen as providing easy solutions to complex problems. The powerful, highly bureaucratized institutions that structure modern social orders are recognized as having many serious limitations. Efforts to overcome these limitations are being made at all levels of society. Significant reform efforts are underway within institutions. Social movements seek to transform existing institutions or offer alternatives to them.

The ability of modern institutions to maintain social order is being severely challenged. Rising crime rates, urban violence, gangs, and widespread drug usage can all be interpreted as symptoms of a decline in the ability of modern social institutions to maintain social order. An increasing number of groups and movements are demanding the right to cultivate forms of culture that deviate strongly from the values and norms of modernity. When modern institutions faced similar problems in the past, new methods of coercion were developed to subvert these efforts and enforce order. Today, institutions appear to be struggling to maintain even minimal levels of social order. The population of prisons is expanding. Treatment programs for every type of social deviancy from drug addiction to child abuse have become commonplace. Increasingly, psychologists and counselors are called upon to assist people in adapting to the constraints of modern existence (Giddens, 1991).

These challenges to modernity raise serious questions about the long-term viability of modern social orders. A growing number of postmodern theorists predict the collapse of modernity and speculate about the possible emergence of alternative forms of social order. Giddens (1990; 1991) argues that modernity will not disappear quickly though he does concede

that a significant transformation may be underway. He (Giddens, 1984) has provided an insightful analysis of modern social institutions and the mechanisms they use to impose order. He argues that much of their power is ultimately based on their ability to place many different types of constraints on the reflexivity exercised by individuals. These constraints are most effective when individuals impose them on themselves (ie. though commitment to an ideology) and are least effective when coercion must be threatened. Social order begins to breakdown when individuals, groups or movements become aware of limitations that have been placed on reflexivity by modern institutions. This often leads to rejection of the ideologies and rituals used to cultivate and legitimize institutional practices. The social world structured by institutions ceases to have meaning. As individuals, groups, or movements, people begin to seek other, more meaningful forms of culture.

#### A. Toward a Nonmodern Public Culture

Elsewhere, Jim Jasinski and I (1990) have argued that it is useful to reconceptualize public culture and differentiate it from modernism and the set of social institutions that are the agents of modernity. Even if these institutions were to collapse, there need be no permanent threat to public culture per se. The opposite could be true. As centralized, bureaucratized social institutions lose their ability to structure contemporary existence, they could be replaced by innovative institutions grounded in new forms of public culture. But this will only happen if we can clearly differentiate public culture from modernity and recognize that emergence of modern institutions served in many ways to subvert rather than advance public culture. New social movements, utilizing powerful new communications technologies, might provide a more practical means of creating and cultivating new forms of public culture (Davis and Jasinski, 1993).

One fundamental principle of modernity is that public institutions are necessary in order to guarantee certain "natural" rights to individuals; such as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But as these institutions have expanded their influence in a legitimate effort to guarantee certain rights, they inevitably infringed on other rights. For example, our legal system has had to construct a complicated hierarchy of various rights so that judges and juries can try to decide whose rights have priority in various situations. Instead of prioritizing the "natural" rights of individuals, innovative public institutions could guarantee cultural rights to communities and at the same time foster specific cultural responsibilities; including cultural tolerance. Communities could be encouraged to develop forms of culture that enhance the quality of individual lives and enable individuals to develop and utilize cognitive and physical abilities.

The primary objective of public culture and its institutions should be to structure an overarching social order in democratic, culturally pluralistic nation states. Public culture institutions should enhance efforts to create more humane forms of culture within communities. They should mediate conflicts that are inevitable when cultural pluralism is permitted. Ideally these institutions should anticipate and alleviate cultural conflict before it escalates by fostering cultural understanding and respect.

Modern social institutions don't provide a means of negotiating cultural differences on a routine basis. For example, news media routinely chronicle the daily strife between cultural groups but offer no means of mediating it. By documenting dramatic acts of violence, they can inadvertently encourage more violence. There are no news story formulas that can be used to systematically increase understanding and tolerance of other cultures.

There will be many barriers to creating nonmodern forms of public culture and institutionalizing them. One fundamental barrier is the widespread assumption fostered by modern ideologies that modern institutions already effectively cultivate an ideal form of public culture. As

the power of these institutions erodes, leaders of modern institutions raise fears that public culture per se is being threatened. For example, some journalists question whether democracy can survive if mass circulation newspapers disappear. As the power of modern institutions erodes, opportunities for creating alternative institutions should occur. Already, in many cities, a wide variety of alternative newspapers, are thriving. These newspapers may presage the transformation of journalism rather than its demise.

#### IV. Three Visions of the Future of Journalism

Is there a future for journalism in postmodern social orders? Or is journalism one of several social institutions that will disappear as modernity erodes or can it be transformed? In the last half century news publishers and broadcasters built enormously influential and highly profitable businesses. Now these profits margins are becoming harder to maintain. Their influence is being questioned. News industry credibility is falling. Competition from innovative media is increasing. But from an historical perspective, these problems are relatively minor in comparison to the philosophical and ethical issues that face the profession. The historical mission of journalism is in jeopardy. What will be its social role if postmodern trends continue and the dominance of large-scale social institutions is successfully challenged by groups and movements demanding cultural rights and reforms? Will journalists alter their news production practices so that coverage of new social movements is framed in a less pejorative and demeaning fashion? Will they stop framing top bureaucrats as the only legitimate agents of public culture while at the same time assailing these bureaucrats as inept or corrupt? Will news be redefined to include presentations of culture that enhance understanding?

There are some efforts underway to reconceptualize journalism and to adapt it to a postmodern world. Below, three of these projects are described and discussed. Each recognizes serious limitations in the present mission of journalism but they offer very different ways of addressing these limitations.

##### A. Public Journalism

A small number of journalists, academics, and newspaper executives have recently begun to advocate a perspective that they refer to as public journalism (Rosen, 1993; Rosen, 1991; Batten, 1993). They recommend that newspapers return to their roots by reestablishing relationships with local communities. The impetus for this effort comes from a recognition that communities are eroding and that this ultimately has negative consequences for newspapers as businesses. James Batten, chairman and CEO of Knight-Ridder, Inc., has stated:

So for us, journalism was --and still is-- a noble calling, to illuminate the issues of the day, to be the providers of information that is the lifeblood of democracy.

But now there is widespread evidence that key connections in this relationship have broken down. Maybe we always were a little idealistic in our images of an educated, alert citizenry, poised to respond to the problems we brought into the spotlight. But...we're seeing a clear uncoupling in our communities of information on the one hand and effective response to information on the other (1993, pg. 3).

Batten reviews several efforts by newspapers to implement public journalism notions. The largest and most successful example he describes was conducted by the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer in Georgia. It began as a series of news reports outlining public concerns about wages, roads, race relations, and low quality political leadership. When there was no response to these articles by the public or by leaders, the newspaper's editor, Jack Swift, used his staff to

organize town meetings and stage backyard barbecues with the goal of provoking public discussion. As a result, social groups and task forces were formed to address problems under a rubric promoted by the newspaper, "United Beyond 2000." The publisher of the paper concluded that the experiment offered conclusive proof that "a newspaper can go beyond its customary role to exert positive influence in the community, as the same time protecting the integrity of the newsroom." Batten describes similar efforts in Wichita, Akron, Charlotte and Detroit.

When Batten advocated public journalism to an audience of practicing journalists assembled by the American Press Institute, his ideas provoked support and skepticism. A Cleveland editor complained that elected and appointed leaders were too timid to respond to the public feedback his newspaper tried to provide. Despite concerted effort, leaders refused to deal with issues raised by journalists. A Memphis editor noted that becoming directly involved in community issues jeopardized the watchdog role of newspapers. How could they objectively cover the groups formed to bring about the changes they advocated? A Washington D.C. editor expressed concern that newspapers would be seen as too paternalistic since they had no legitimate claim to represent the community.

Batten's views and the reaction they provoked tell a great deal about how journalists experience the constraints that prevent them from addressing serious social problems. They have many resources to chronicle problems but have a very limited ability to do anything about them. They worry about and wonder why their conscientious effort to alert the public is being ignored. Intervention would require that they go beyond the boundaries of the limited role they imposed on themselves when they defined their role and adopted various news production practices in this century.

It will not be easy to implement public journalism reforms and the consequences of these reforms is difficult to predict. The resistance of community leaders and of reluctant staffers must be overcome. Broader public participation must be inspired, given a venue, and offered direction. There is the strong likelihood that if newspaper led reforms are too radical they will meet resistance, not just from politicians, but from leaders in all of the large-scale social institutions responsible for maintaining order in modern communities. For every successful effort to bring about constructive change, there are likely to be several controversial failures that further erode the standing of newspapers in the eyes of institutional leaders. It is also unlikely that major newspapers will join forces with social movements to lead reforms. Journalists remain deeply suspicious of movements and skeptical of their ability to bring about practical changes. Movement leaders have learned that they can't trust journalists to understand their activities and objectives.

The public journalism perspective is yet another in a long series of efforts to restore the libertarian vision within the news industry. Public journalism notions are not especially innovative. Similar ideas were articulated by members of the Hutchins Commission on Press Freedom in 1949 (McIntyre, 1987) when they advocated that journalists take direct responsibility for fostering cultural diversity in Great Communities. Journalists were urged to serve these communities by providing an open forum for all types of pluralistic groups. Commission members saw this as the best way of resisting trends toward totalitarianism and cultural homogeneity. Their recommendations were largely disregarded in the postwar years. Mass circulation, monopoly newspapers found few reasons to cover pluralistic groups. Cultural diversity was the stuff of weekend feature articles not routine news coverage. Political coverage centered around leaders of major political parties and the heads of government agencies; not grassroots political organizations or social movements. After systematically ignoring pluralistic groups for half a century, public journalist advocates are beginning to recognize that coverage of these groups may serve a useful

purpose even if it doesn't immediately improve profits. But it will be difficult to remedy decades of neglect.

### B. Communitarian Journalism

In a recent book, Christians, Ferre and Fackler (1993) advocate "communitarian ethics" for journalists. They trace the history of journalism and argue for a return to communitarian values inherent in early libertarianism. They believe these values were lost through a misguided overemphasis on individualism during the Enlightenment era and later periods. Individual rights were given too much priority in relation to the common good. They call on journalists to take responsibility for leading efforts at civic transformation that restores priority to communal values:

This *telos* of communitarian journalism has distinctive features: justice, covenant, and empowerment. Authentic social orders are marked by justice; communities are delightful only when justice reigns. Covenant bonds rather than contractual arrangements make genuine community possible. In contrast to the negative freedom of classical liberalism, normative communities empower citizens for social transformation. Therefore, that narrative form commonly called news ought to facilitate justice, covenant, and empowerment in order that civic transformation become a characteristic feature of strongly democratic nations (pg. 91).

This communitarian perspective articulates a cogent alternative to social responsibility theory. It recognizes many of the failings of modern journalistic practice and offers practical advice based on an explicit philosophy that the authors refer to as normative pluralism. A primary assumption of this philosophy is that if a genuine dialogue can be created among persons holding different worldviews, "some agreements will emerge that form a common good (pg. 189)." This dialogue would take place in a renewed public sphere in which journalists play a central role.

Communitarianism is currently enjoying some renewed interest, sparked by the realization that some social problems may stem from an overemphasis on individualism and individual rights. The strength of this perspective lies in its recognition that cultures are created by communities. If we are to replace modern culture as it erodes, we will need to do so as communities not as individuals. To prevent inevitable conflict over culture, these communities need public spaces in which to negotiate their differences. Current formulas for news, with their focus on dramatic actions by prominent individuals, don't define culture construction as news. Christians, et. al. are correct in asserting that a public forum is necessary if trends toward cultural diversity continue. They may be a bit overly optimistic about the willingness and ability of the news industry to take on this task. In a chapter on organizational culture, they recognize that newspapers won't change their social role until they change their own internal, bureaucratic culture. But can they do this and remain viable, profitable enterprises? How many publishers will choose to give up bottomline profits in favor of pursuing abstract notions about empowering individuals for social transformation?

### C. Emancipatory Journalism

A third vision of the future of journalism has been articulated by Hemant Shah (1994) in a paper synthesizing theory and research on development journalism. For more than 30 years, journalists in Third World nations have struggled to reconcile the Western free press model with a perceived need to nurture political and economic development. An informal global movement formed as these journalists exchanged ideas and assessed their experiences. These efforts were continually frustrated and criticized by local elites who wanted to control press coverage. They were also viewed with suspicion and actively discouraged by many Western journalists who

questioned the wisdom of about linking journalism to development efforts. In their view, journalists report about development but don't do anything to encourage it.

Shah argues that postmodern critiques of modernization could inspire a revitalization and transformation of the development journalism movement leading to what he terms "emancipatory journalism." He describes several practical goals for emancipatory journalism which include reconstruction of cultural identities shattered by modernization processes and critique of current institutions, social relations, styles of participation, forms of knowledge so that new formulations can emerge. The overall goal is to promote humane development that differs radically from the Western paradigm for development. He argues that journalists can achieve this goal by aligning themselves with new social movements that share the same objectives. He reviews examples of emancipatory journalism and concludes that with some notable exceptions, the most fertile ground is provided by localized alternative media.

Shah's perspective is useful because he examines efforts to develop a new form of journalism in nations where modern social institutions have not become dominant. In many of these countries, efforts to establish modern institutions were continually frustrated by struggles with indigenous cultures. For decades, journalists in these nations were caught in the middle of an often violent struggle between leaders of western-style, centralized, social institutions and leaders of indigenous cultures. Journalists became involved as partisans on both sides of this confrontation. While the Cold War raged, aid from the East and the West fueled these disputes; preventing either side from gaining dominance. Now the possibility exists to experiment with innovative forms of journalism that facilitate humane development. Some journalists have close ties to grassroots organizations that were developed during the years of confrontation.

Shah argues that emancipatory journalism should help people establish local control over immediate social conditions. It should serve to free people from the centralized authority of modern social institutions and provide an alternative basis for creating social order. Shah believes that this will happen if journalists become participants in new social movements that can guide humane development. The first goal of these movements should be to bridge cultures and negotiate an end to conflicts between indigenous cultures.

The task of bridging cultures and mediating conflicts will be very difficult in many parts of the world. Most indigenous cultures are quite ambivalent about cultural diversity. They often claim to provide the only meaningful and valid way of life. Conflicts between persons practicing different cultures are widespread and appear to be deepening. In some regions, such as Africa, Northern Ireland, and the former Yugoslavia, conflicts have gone on for centuries. In these places, conflict has been institutionalized. Western modernization efforts exploited these conflicts as part of a strategy for gaining dominance over indigenous peoples. Once in control, colonial regimes suppressed these conflicts but did little to end them. Emancipatory journalists face a daunting task.

#### V. Practicing Journalism in a Postmodern World

The decline of modernity will continue to create problems for journalists. There is little that they can do or should do to prevent the social transformation that is underway. This doesn't mean that there is no social role for the news industry. Journalism is a very powerful modern social institution. The actions of journalists will do much to determine whether a peaceful, orderly transition is made toward a postmodern future both domestically and abroad. Without conscientious and responsible action on their part, conflict between cultural groups is likely to escalate. Modern institutions could collapse before alternate ways of imposing social order can be developed.

Postmodern journalism should have two central objectives:

- 1) Journalists should become directly involved in the public arena; providing support for development of innovative public culture institutions. Consistent and constructive support should be given to new social movements as they seek to construct public culture. Pluralistic groups should be provided with a forum to present their culture and maintain links to other groups.
- 2) Journalists should provide both constructive support for and criticism of modern social institutions. The watchdog role should be balanced by an effort to provide constructive support for modern social institutions. Often this can be done by systematically providing information to the public so that the actions of institutions are understood. Highly dramatized, overly personalized accounts of institutional activities should be avoided. News coverage should reflect greater understanding of the problems faced by these institutions and their limitations in dealing with these problems.

Neither of these objectives is inconsistent with the libertarian values or social responsibility theory that underlie current professional standards in the news industry. These objectives are inherent in each of the journalism reform projects that were discussed above. But if these objectives are taken seriously, they would result in a profound transformation of the news industry.

#### A. Participation in the Public Arena

The public, communitarian, and emancipatory journalism reform projects envision a need for journalists to become directly involved in the effort to develop public culture. Public journalism advocates call for newspapers to create new forums, from town hall meetings to backyard barbecues, where diverse groups can meet to share common concerns and plan community improvements. Journalists become involved as moderators of these meetings. They help to set agendas and then use their newspapers to report discussions and urge that ideas be implemented. Ideally, they create a public arena that unites movements in an effort to develop public culture and bring about constructive changes. Communitarian reformers also see the need for newspapers to tell stories and provide information that serves needs and strengthens (empowers) pluralistic groups (Christians, et. al., pp. 98-108). News should embrace "the merits of multiracialism" and challenge "the public to thrive on cultural diversity (Christians, et. al., p. 104)." According to Shah, emancipatory journalists should participate in groups or movements that establish local control over social conditions. They should work in these movements to bring about useful changes that are consistent with indigenous culture. News coverage of movement activities would assist the movement in achieving its goals.

Thus, in each of these reform efforts, the role of the journalist is transformed in a very crucial way. There is a common recognition in all three proposals that journalists should become much more directly involved in the public arena, even to the point of shaping the arena, rather than remain bystanders who chronicle worsening problems with ironic stories of failed hope (Ettema and Glasser, 1994). Responsibility to society is defined as entailing the responsibility to be of direct service to specific groups not just selling them information that journalists think they need to know. Journalists are to go beyond processing facts into attractive stories read by mass audiences of isolated individuals and work with groups or movements to identify their needs for specific types of information. Once they learn these needs, they can change news production practices; developing definitions of news and narrative structures that enable them to serve these needs.

### B. Constructive Coverage of Modern Social Institutions

News coverage of modern social institutions is overtly quite critical of modern institutions and yet implicitly quite supportive. Journalists define themselves as adversaries and guardians of the public interest whose job it is to report inefficiency and corruption in every type of modern institution. Investigative news stories structured by ironic narratives are highly valued within the industry (Ettema and Glasser, 1994). These reports inevitably raise serious questions about the effectiveness of these institutions and the persons who lead them. Errors made by public officials are documented but not extenuating circumstances. These don't fit within the storyline of ironic narratives (Ettema and Glasser, 1994). As a result, public confidence in public institutions is eroding along with political participation.

Ironic investigative stories are balanced in a curious way by the continuing flow of news reports of social disorder in which institutional leaders are presented as authoritative sources. Whenever disruption to the social order takes place, institutional leaders are depended upon to explain events and reassert control. Not surprisingly, these leaders have come to exploit these opportunities. In yet another irony occasioned by ironic storytelling, officials feel compelled to rebuild their public image during crises in order to offset intensive scrutiny of their routine actions. And so we are treated to news videos of Presidents visiting disaster scenes, police chiefs leading SWAT teams into drug busts, and press conferences where Cabinet members declare war on crime, accidents, and floods.

Is constructive coverage of modern social institutions possible? Can an alternative be found to overly dramatized, ironic accounts of official malfeasance and romantic tales of heroic leaders staving off disaster? Postmodern journalists will need to find new narratives to structure their reports. They will need to depend less on creating dramatic accounts that appeal to mass audiences and instead write stories that can be sold because they serve the needs of individuals and groups. They will need to invest more time in trying to understand the strengths and limitations of modern social institutions so that they can provide audiences with balanced and complete reports of how big bureaucracies operate.

### C. The Future of the News Industry

Many postmodern theorists argue that as time passes we will depend less on bureaucracy as a means of organizing social life and depend more on culture created by diverse communities. If this view proves valid, the news industry as we now know it should fade away and be replaced by alternative, community based media. The business of packaging quantities of information and selling it to audiences will become less and less profitable as people come to rely on community media. Community media will have at their disposal the enormous resources of the much touted information superhighway. They will be able to use these resources to create innovative "packages" of information that are tailored to specific communities. The role played by future journalists may be similar to the one played by printers in the 18th century. The profits earned by printing content were often less important to these printers than the success of the movements and groups that they served. Their personal success was closely bound up with their community and its culture.

Contemporary journalists will find much in this vision of their industry that is repulsive. They will be reluctant to abandon the professional role that they have carved out over the past century. This role has many advantages for them. They are able to operate independently of any community and scrutinize other bureaucracies that structure the social order. They are free to create dramatic stories that can be sold to mass audiences. They can claim to be the best qualified information professionals in an age of information. They control the "brand names" in the

information industry and have the ability to package news with the stamp of authority that people associate with the New York Times or CBS News. They are unlikely to embrace a perspective that prioritizes community service since this will force them to abandon the autonomy they have come to prize and may well jeopardize the profits they have come to expect.

The media workers of the future may not refer to themselves as journalists and they may not conceptualize what they create as news. The very notion that information and ideas should be formatted as a commodity that can be packaged and sold to mass audiences may be abandoned by these workers. The news industry could give way to people working inside communities who utilize new communication technologies to serve those communities. Today, our public culture is produced in a marketplace of ideas where journalists package and sell a commodity to mass audiences. In the future, public culture could be produced in a very different type of arena -- one in which communities are prioritized and their cultures are celebrated. The marketplace of ideas could give way to a festival of culture.

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