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Reappraising Journalism's Normative Foundations

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Abstract

The claim that journalism provides important nourishment for democratic life is remarkably resilient, despite criticisms emanating from a range of perspectives which highlight just how problematic this claim is. The central argument of this chapter is that the key normative claim of journalism, that being journalism's centrality to proper functioning democracy, is in need of significant re-consideration and reappraisal. In arguing for this, I suggest that we need to think more creatively about the very nature of democracy and democratic agency before we can hope to 're-think' journalism.

Introduction

To literally 'rethink journalism', requires a commitment to critically re-engage with some of the central ideas about the role and function of journalism today and what they pertain to. Much current debate about journalism's role has revolved around its significance to politics and, in particular, to those democratic processes that require transparency, accountability and which provide critical feedback to those in positions of power. As journalism is experiencing significant structural and social transformations, given the ways in which the economic environment is impacting on journalism's practices and products, it is worth considering these central normative positions afresh. In doing so I argue that in responding to the task of rethinking journalism, one must confront some of the key normative claims that have underpinned journalism historically and which continue to feed into our contemporary understanding of the purpose and role of journalism today. I suggest for the purposes of theory building that confronting journalism's normative foundations, particularly within the context of its purported democratic significance is a necessary, though not sufficient step in the right direction towards critically rethinking journalism.

To be sure, the ideas that fuel contemporary thinking about journalism emerged from particular historical contexts and contingent values. Despite significant social and political crises, particularly during the twentieth century when journalism

sustained autocratic, totalitarian, fascist and other less than democratic systems, we still accept that journalism fuels democracy. Indeed amidst the complexities of our contemporary political world it may be that we are simply asking too much of journalism in the present, given the dramatic historical shifts and political transformations that have occurred since the burgeoning public sphere of the 17th and 18th centuries from which its normative core has been shaped. It is this sense of a growing lack of fit between the contemporary political context and those founding ideals of an informed and lively public sphere that is the motivating concern for this essay. However, rather than attempting to rethink journalism normatively from a virtual *tabula rasa*, I suggest that we look to the realms of political and democratic theory as a necessary precursor to any reformulation of journalism's normative core. The reason for this is that it was in the realm of ideas, most significantly political ideas involving debate and deliberation of an ever-expanding political community, where the normative expectations we have of journalism today were shaped. As such, in developing this argument I will focus my attention on the deliberative aspect of journalism's normative core and its central role in nourishing democracy, as this element is one of its most enduring and resilient elements. In stressing the centrality of the deliberative component of journalism's democratic functioning, I emphasise the rich historical legacy of journalism that has contributed to our contemporary expectations about what journalism should be today. From this I go on to examine the ways in which journalism is largely seen to be failing in its democratic mandate from different ends of the political spectrum. This is seen either in terms its relative inability to engage and stimulate a deliberative civic sphere; or because of the constraints placed upon it by so-called over-regulation and market interference. Finally I offer two very different theoretical analyses of democracy and particularly democratic deliberation that provide a useful counterpoint to the contemporary discussion about democracy and which I'd suggest provide an innovative addition to the enterprise that motivates this volume.

Journalism, deliberation and the Political Sphere

The basis of my argument stems from an understanding of the key elements that underpin journalism's claims to a specifically democratic function – to hold power to account and to provide a voice for the public within the broader civil and public

sphere. My focus on journalism's democratic role is not to dismiss nor undervalue the range of other sources that have contributed to the development of journalism as I have pointed out elsewhere (Steel, 2009); but it is arguably journalism's service to the political and specifically liberal democratic polities that is the most resonant and robust of journalism's core claims today. Ironically it is these very features, or rather normative ideals that seem increasingly out of kilter with the contemporary world. I am of course talking here about the model of a deliberative rational public sphere facilitated in its democratic goals by diverse and representative media of which journalism is a key component. Such a deliberative ideal can be traced in the United States to the founding fathers' commitment to representative government and the Madisonian compulsion to protect free speech and freedom of the press so as to breathe life into the public. This ideal was articulated by Dewey in *The Public and its Problems* (1927), The Hutchins Commission (1947) and more recently by scholars such as Sunstein (1995), Dryzek, J (2002) and Haas (2007) who have all stated the significance of a deliberative democratic environment nourished by vibrant and representative forms of journalism (Steel, 2012). Within the European context of course we have the legacy of Habermas (1989) and his conception of the democratic public sphere that became corrupted by capitalism's propensity towards the atomisation and fragmentation of the very essence of the public. The present neoliberal era such as it is, seems more than ever to have limited the possibilities of a dynamic, rich and deliberative rational public sphere despite the rapid technological transformations in the communications ecology.

Attempting to re-engage with the normative foundations of journalism's democratic functions requires a brief summary of their claims. The overarching principle here is that within a representative liberal democratic polities the public must have access to the processes of government in order for this same government to have legitimacy. To borrow from Jeremy Bentham, journalism provides 'security against misrule' by ensuring that elected representatives in government are exercising their power in the interests of the people that they represent and not in their own narrow self-interests. Journalism then provides a check on power and it is this element of journalism's rational core that has remained a constant feature since the birth of democratic institutions in Europe and North America in the late 18th and 19th centuries (Copeland, 2006). However, transparency is not a sufficient condition of democratic

government and journalism's democratic credentials require that it perform another equally important function, that of it also serving as a proxy for the public, scrutinising government *and* holding it to account on behalf of the wider community. As Dahlgren (2009) has suggested 'journalism lays claim to accurate and impartial renderings of a reality that exists independently of its telling' and 'serves as an integrative force and as a common form for debate' (p. 41). He continues 'even if journalism in the real world has never operated quite in this way, this paradigmatic model of how it should be has guided our understanding and expectations of it' (p. 41). The claims of impartiality and holding power to account are particularly problematic, as this is where journalism is often seen as failing. At best it is selective in shining light on 'bad government', at worst it colludes with the very powers that it purportedly holds to account.

Whilst there is insufficient space here for delving into debates about ownership, influence and journalistic autonomy, it is necessary for the purposes of this argument to look more closely at this idea that government should be held to account by journalism and that journalists should somehow facilitate or represent forms of public response to the actions of their political representatives. Holding government to account involves journalists, on behalf of the public, having the ability to both scrutinise the practices and performance of government and the power to censure those in power. The *principle* of freedom of the press then provides the moral framework for journalists to censure government on behalf of the public without fear of sanction. Yet it is this expectation that journalism represents the interests of the People in the political realm that generally exposes its weaknesses. In other words, though journalism might at certain moments expose corruption and highlight wrongdoing of those in public office, thereby facilitating the legitimation of its political power, its ability to reflect and represent the interests of the public has long been open to question.

Historically the relationship between journalism and the public has revolved around the so-called Lippmann - Dewey debate and variations of this polemic have remained constant throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first (Schudson, 2008). The main questions it generates are: should the public have the journalism that it wants - sensational, trashy, entertaining yet exposing public officials

if they step out of line; or, should journalism aspire to do more than entertain and fill the coffers of the multinational owners and conglomerates? Shouldn't journalism be more than about making money and protecting vested interests and be motivated by a desire to represent the diversity of public opinion? Indeed shouldn't journalism engage the public and stimulate a more rational democratic civic space as envisaged by so many? From the Hutchins Commission in the United States in the mid-twentieth century through to the various Royal Commissions, Calcutt Reports and the Leveson Inquiry in the UK (Steel, 2012), this polemic which argues that journalism either gives the public what they want or serves the democratic, deliberative aspects of public life has been prominent. It has specifically been the debate about journalism's role in stimulating and cultivating a more inclusive democratic culture that has arguably been core to some of the more critical analyses of journalism (Muhlmann, 2010; Curran & Seaton, 2010; Keane, 1991). Yet this deliberative ideal has also been the most problematic for those wishing to reform the corroding influences on an idealised version of journalism as it *should* be. Though the seeds of this deliberative component are varied, we only need to look at two examples from opposing ends of the political spectrum, to see just how powerful and influential such a focus on the importance of public deliberation has been. Indeed it is within these contributions that the limitations of our current normative expectations might be exposed as much of our understanding of public deliberation and its rational power stems from these two sets of ideas. The two thinkers that I'd like to highlight are John Stuart Mill and Jurgen Habermas.

To focus on a discussion of democratic deliberation by highlighting the work of John Stuart Mill might seem a strange choice. Especially given that he was not convinced that all members of society, at that juncture in history, had the intellectual capacity to understand and embrace the complexities of Victorian political life. As such Mill is not someone who might be signalled as the most obvious proponent of the sort of democratic values that underpin some of journalism's more salient deliberative ideals today. However Mill certainly saw the power of deliberation as an essential requirement for any mature society to progress. Mill's treatment of the role of the press is crucial as it signifies how debate and discussion within a broader public sphere facilitated social and political progress within advanced liberal democratic societies (Wishy, 1959). Contained within his so-called 'truth argument' and its

contextualisation in *On Liberty* (1859), Mill envisages a public space in which individuals are protected against infringements against their autonomy from the state and, importantly, from each other. *On Liberty* therefore sets up the context in which the deliberative power of an unfettered press provides the space within which the public can express their concerns and opinions freely as a component of their individual autonomy. Furthermore Mill's so called 'truth argument' (Schauer, 1982; Haworth, 1998) emphasises just how important the 'liberty of thought and expression' are in sustaining a progressive and dynamic society. Despite the fact that Mill was seen by his contemporaries as more of a radical than a liberal (Reese, 1985), it is Mill's contribution to contemporary liberalism and democratic theory that is worth emphasising as it is via his understanding of individual autonomy and of the safeguards required to protect the individual from both the state and the incursions of wider public opinion on individuals, that we appreciate the separation of public and private spheres within which an enlightened deliberative public would thrive. *On Liberty* is significant because the limits required to protect individual freedom, also serve the wider public good as these provide scope for a public deliberative space through which rational discourse and progressive politics can thrive. Journalism's contribution to this public space, as in the early 19th century era of the unstamped radical press, as Hollis (1970) and Chalaby (1998) have pointed out, would be varied and representative of a wide variety of interests and constituencies within society.

In a similar vein, Habermas (1989) idealises a rational discursive realm in which open and representative democratic discourse enriches a political sphere where citizens consult, debate and deliberate on matters of social significance and importance. For Mill it was the lack of education amongst the majority of the population and the stifling effects of public opinion that damaged the deliberative capacity of the people and thereby rendered them largely unable to engage with the political process. For Habermas, it is the corrupting influence of capital and the priorities of self-interest that has polluted the deliberative context that is required for genuine democratic citizen engagement and participation. If it ever genuinely existed, journalism's era of public representation was, as Chalaby (1998) has pointed out, eventually eroded by the development of the industrial press and the imperatives of profit. Rather than embodying public facing values, journalism became commodified and any inclusive, representative and democratic core was diminished. Thus the

'invention of journalism' heralded a simultaneous dilution of the public's deliberative capacity. Though never fully realised, this ideal of a deliberative active citizen engagement in matters of politics and public affairs continues to be seen as an important element of democratic life and one which requires journalism to play a significant role (Dahlgren, 2009). Both of the thinkers above, though at difficult ends of the ideological spectrum, envisage a deliberative space for members of society which is stimulated by journalism and which furnishes democracy with an engaged and lively citizenry.

Broken Journalism and the degraded public sphere

Thus far in this chapter I have sketched out some of the features that contribute to journalism's normative heart by emphasising one of the key values of deliberation. In this section I would like to develop my argument and assert that it is because of an uncritical acceptance of these cherished norms and core values, that leaves journalism requiring such a fundamental reconsideration. In this respect my argument resonates with those who suggest that we 'de-couple' journalism and democracy altogether (see Josephi, 2013; Nerone, 2013; Zelizer, 2013) as the linkage between the two concepts has become stale and in need of reappraisal. Indeed in Zelizer's view, democracy needs to be "retired" from the equation altogether (Zelizer, 2013). To put it another way, the expectations that we have placed upon journalism to deliver the deliberative democratic nirvana that social and political theorists have promised us for generations, are at the root of the problem of journalism today.

But what *is* the problem of journalism? If we look to attempts to reform journalism into something that would enable it to become more representative, deliberative and democratic we immediately see the problem. Journalism simply does not stimulate an informed and active participatory culture. It does not represent all society's constituent parts. It is precisely journalism's failure to deliver an informed, engaged and active participatory democratic public sphere that is generally understood to be at the root of journalism's problems and maybe even partly responsible for problems of political dissatisfaction and disengagement more broadly (Hay, 2007). Problems that are emphasised by journalism's cosy relationship to the same political authority that it ideally should be far more distanced from. If we look at the controversies surrounding the various attempts to reform journalism along more

democratic, deliberative and representative lines, then we see the scale of the problems confront the task of truly rethinking journalism. The aim of making our media more democratically accountable and journalists more responsible to the public is laudable and one that I have much sympathy with. The Leveson Inquiry report (2012) in particular highlighted not only the unethical depths to which some journalists have gone to in attempting to secure an exclusive story, but also the intimate and uncritical relationship that journalism can and does have with political and economic power. It also exposed a raw nerve in relation to how journalism might be reformed. The problem of 'fixing' broken journalism brings with it the issue that has plagued it from its earliest inception: that being in order to remain independent and serve the public in scrutinising government, it should be detached from government and free from the constraints of regulation. Whilst the debate about the pros and cons of the Leveson recommendations for press reform continue, I suggest that those who aspire to reform journalism in a way that makes it more accountable, representative and deliberative, generally subscribe to the very same normative ideals as those who they are arguing against. This, as I will suggest below when highlighting the work of Dean (2009), makes progression unlikely.

Those wishing to reform journalism and encourage it to become more deliberative and democratically responsible of course provide important critical spaces and pressure points that highlight where and how the commercial imperatives of media organisations stifle democratic deliberation and representation. Organisations such as the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and the Media Reform Coalition gain intellectual substance from a long tradition of important critical scholarship into media systems, structures and processes and their impact on democratic life. Yet in their aspirations to 'reform' media and journalism, in particular to make it more *accountable*, *representative* and *diverse*, such groups draw from essentially the same normative well as their adversaries, rather than imagining new bases for rethinking journalism, they tend to re-tread familiar ground. Likewise, the staunch neo-liberal 'Fourth Estatists', proprietors such as Rupert Murdoch, editors such as Paul Dacre as well as advocacy organisations such as the 'Freespeech Network' protest against 'attacks' on freedom of the press via so-called state regulation or media monopolisation. The on-going debate about media regulation highlights the opposing ideological positions of the debate, yet both positions

essentially draw from the same intellectual sources that feed the familiar normative claims about what journalism should do as I've highlighted above. Such positions however are dependent upon a decrepit conception of political culture and democratic participation which sees journalism as a facilitator of democratic politics and guardian against tyranny, but can't deliver either because of the priorities of profit, or because of an over regulatory media environment. My own position falls well within the tradition of critical media scholarship, however, in continuing to draw from this traditional normative basis, we are missing the opportunity to move the debate on in more meaningful ways.

Within critical journalism studies we see various areas of scholarship that look to examine journalism in ways that directly or indirectly re-affirm these normative foundations. Whether scholars are discussing media systems and political influence or the broader political economy of journalism and the media more generally, they generally do so from a familiar normative standpoint. The implicit and explicit normative claims that are made in areas of journalism studies scholarship that analyse media systems and structures in ways that emphasise, or more critically expose their inefficiencies and limitations with regard journalism's 'proper functioning', tend to stress journalism's relative inability to fulfil its democratic deliberative obligations, given the range of structural impediments it has to cope with, be they an over-dependence on advertising; lack of editorial independence from owners; political influence or the various 'filters' and production practices news goes through before it is consumed (McChesney, 2004; Herman and Chomsky, 2008; Klaehn, 2005; Szántó, 2007) tends to prioritise, at least implicitly, a specific normative aspiration about journalism's core values (see also Berry and Theobald, 2006). As noted, this is generally drawn from a rich intellectual heritage which, as I have stated, prioritises a deliberative ideal. Greater media plurality, accountability and enhanced media representation are articulated in order to challenge, or at least highlight, the commercial imperatives of large media corporations and stress the 'democratic deficit' that contemporary business models of journalism promote (Phillips and Witschge, 2012).

It is not solely in analysing journalism's structures that we find this narrative, as scholarship on the practice of journalism and those who 'do' journalism is also

significant. Work on journalism's role perceptions of course builds on the work of Donsbach (1993; 2010) and focuses on the lived experiences, perceptions and motivations of those working within journalism. The research highlights the ways in which journalists articulate and experience their work and the role, whether ideal or otherwise, that they play. This research is particularly valuable as it provides an insight into just how powerful and resonant the normative ideals of journalism are and the ways in which they are internalised by news workers (Eldridge II, 2014). Within such work we see expressions of (idealised) normative claims of journalism and its purported democratic functioning, within a reflective framework which highlights the contradictions and tendencies within the production of news and amongst news-workers themselves. In contrast to the aforementioned more structural analyses, this work tends to draw on the lived experiences of those practicing to explore issues of identity and democratic functioning from the perspective of journalists and media workers themselves (Deuze, 2007, 2005; Shapiro, 2010). Though offering a valuable insight into the workings and changing dynamics of 'journalism' in different contexts, and providing accounts of the power of the established normative narrative, I suggest that this work suffers in much the same way as that which details the problematic structures or political economy of media in that it has the tendency to implicitly claim or at least draw attention to the idea that democratic culture is something that requires rehabilitation *and* that the media and journalism practice in particular, are important sites for such rehabilitation.

This journalistic *praxis* is gauged in relation to what I would argue are a degraded set of democratic ideals and aspirations as they are no longer fit for purpose. However, in mining the lived experiences of journalism with a view to exposing the contradictions and tensions of the world that journalists inhabit, we have not interrogated with sufficient vigour, the purportedly self-evident democratic values and contexts in which the journalists themselves are positioned and grapple with on a day-to-day basis. Such work tends to be divorced from a rigorous engagement with important concepts and debates such as the nature and character of political deliberation (for example), the substance of political culture, or indeed the character of democracy itself.

The crux of my argument therefore tallies with the sentiment expressed by Strömbäck (2005) when he concludes by stating that

“only by specifying what kind of democracy we are referring to when using the term, and by specifying its normative implications for media and journalism, that we can fully understand how media and journalism affect democracy” (Strömbäck, 2005: 343).

However, where I differ from Strömbäck is that I advocate developing new ideas about democracy from which new normative bases for journalism might spring. While helpful in signalling how different models of democracy – procedural, competitive, participatory and deliberative - might require journalism’s normative bases to reflect these differences and be developed into a standard, his analysis fail to move us into new realms of politics.

Alternative Normativity

It is all very well criticising the normative claims, implicit or otherwise, that are made in the name of journalism, but what alternatives do I offer to counter the malaise that I have attempted to signal? Ironically, I suggest that we mine the very same realms of thought and inquiry that proved so fruitful in the establishment of our earlier visions of journalism. I am not, however, suggesting that we return directly to the ideals of Madison, Mill and Dewey to re-imagine conceptions of engagement and political participation, but rather we look to their legacy within political theory and begin to rethink the nature of public deliberation and citizen engagement itself.

One example might be the work of political theorist Jeffrey Green who, in his book *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an age of spectatorship* (2010) challenges the essentially deliberative foundations of our contemporary political culture, arguing instead for more realistic expectations of what we understand political participation to be. Green criticises the largely deliberative or 'vocal' claims that are made about political engagement and participation noting that such deliberation rarely involves the wider public and is instead largely confined to an elite few. Green fundamentally questions the notion of genuine democratic participation and engagement as emerging from a discursive or deliberative base as envisioned by

political theorists and media scholars alike. Returning to John Stuart Mill, Green notes that the author of *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* had far too much faith in the power of journalism in particular in bridging the gap between government and representation. Mill was essentially ‘hyperidealistic’ (p. 96) in that thinking the then

modern technologies of public opinion formation (journalism) were sufficient to return to the People the very legislative power that representative government - with its division between active and passive citizens – otherwise appeared to have sacrificed. (Green, 2010, 96)

Green develops the idea of a ‘plebiscitary’ form of democratic participation and engagement that does not prioritise speech and dialogue over other forms of ‘engagement’. Green instead emphasizes the power of the public gaze, the act of looking and the politicians’ never ending public exposure as providing a realistic and sustainable form of political participation and legitimacy. Drawing on the work of Max Weber, Green suggests that Weber’s conception of

[T]he People’s gaze, in effect, creates a stage – and the stage was a device whereby leaders would be both elevated (empowered to speak in the name of the People or at least directly to the People) yet constrained by the very condition of publicity. (Green, 2010, 156)

Echoing some of the disciplinary functions of the Panopticon (see Ball, 1994; Petley, 2013), politicians on the public stage are both empowered and rendered subject to the People’s gaze as they ‘are compelled to appear in public under conditions they do not [always] control’ (p. 207). It is under these conditions of significant and constant scrutiny, removed from politicians’ ultimate control that Green calls the politics of candour. It is here then that Green develops the idea of a ‘plebiscitary’ democracy where the power of the people is vested not in their contribution to the discursive realm of politics, which Green asserts, is generally confined to an elite few, but in the People’s power to force political leaders to appear in public under the conditions of candour.

Though critics might charge Green with positing an essentially passive electorate, Green is aware that for the most part, most of us do not have much influence of the decisions that govern our lives. Yet of course, Green is aware that

when the People is invoked, as it is after all by journalists and within popular culture, it is identified with the electorate that votes on election day and responds to opinion polls – a usage that is triply alienating vis-à-vis the everyday citizen insofar as it refers to the extraordinary and rare moment of election rather than the everyday, *silent* experience of politics; assumes that the citizen is part of the majority that wins elections rather than the minority that loses; and presupposes that the citizen identify with substantive opinions and decisions, even though on most particular issues citizens do not possess clear or stable preferences. (Green, 2010, 209, emphasis in the original)

The extended quote above emphasises Green's understanding of the objective reality that under the conditions of liberal democracy, the People at large cannot hope to exercise their deliberative power in a way that secures their particular interests and objectives. Rather, political power resides more broadly in the capacity of the People, all of them, not a select few, to ensure that under the conditions of candour, 'popular sovereignty ought to be reserved for – and revitalized through – the eyes of the People' (p. 210).

As we have seen, democratic deliberation is one of the cornerstones of journalism's rationale, at least as envisioned by many who wish to reform and revive journalism's democratic spirit. Yet Green's book is an important contribution to the debate about journalism's normative foundations as it challenges the very same idealised deliberative model of democracy that is so engrained within our democratic and journalistic culture; a model of democracy that is clearly far from realisation. What Green offers instead is a form of political pragmatism that builds on the reality of liberal democratic constitutional arrangements and the People's relationship to and with these arrangements. For journalism studies, the normative expectation that deliberation is superior to 'merely' observing is severely challenged by Green's thoughtful analysis as he pays attention to our capacity to make political decisions based on the visibility of our political representatives. His analysis does not therefore

place the heavy burden of deliberative politics on the public and likewise possibly offers a more pragmatic basis for, and expression of, political engagement.

Another challenge to the security of our normative conventions within journalism, albeit from a much more radical perspective, emerges through the work of Jodi Dean (2010). Dean analyses how various public challenges to power, for example the worldwide protests against the Iraq war in 2003, the anti globalisation movements etc., are essentially articulated from within an ethical and technological framework that at the same time as providing space for critique, also limits its capacity for effective change. Dean's work attempts to rehabilitate a Marxian analysis which grapples with the complexities of contemporary capitalism in ways that offer new opportunities for understanding the very basis of democratic culture and critical politics. More specifically Dean's analysis of 'communicative capitalism' orientates us towards thinking about how neo-liberalism in particular has co-opted much of the moral capital from the Left and incorporated it into its own manifestations of power and authority. She suggests that:

communicative capitalism designates the strange merging of democracy and capitalism in which contemporary subjects are produced and trapped. It does so by highlighting the way networked communications bring the two together. The values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications, and interconnections of global telecommunications. (Dean, 2009, p. 22)

Drawing on Zizek and Mouffe, she demonstrates that the communicative and deliberative opportunities provided by our new communication environment, are ultimately subsumed into the politics and culture of neo-liberal individualism in ways that block out the social context and our connection to the wider social world. In doing so, within this neo-liberal media context, opportunities to move outside or beyond our current predicaments are limited. Journalism and the new deliberative opportunities afforded by new media therefore reflect and reinforce the narrowing of our interpretative horizons. Similarly to Green, Dean takes aim at the ideals of deliberative democracy and suggests that deliberation is essentially a process that

ignores the fact that political decisions have to be made and that solving problems that deliberated decisions give rise to, tend to be ‘solved’ by more deliberation. As such, democratic deliberation, as formulated by theorists such as Gutmann and Thompson (1996 & 2004) is self-justifying as a process as the ‘problems it might encounter are best solved through more deliberation’ (Dean, 2009, p. 91). When decisions are made, usually at the expense of one set of ideals and perspectives, the problem is resolved by more and more deliberation and negotiation. The point that Dean is making is that democratic deliberation is in itself a process of delaying decisions or deferring responsibility from an equal plane of influence. This is simply not the case as politics requires that decisions be made thereby making alternative possibilities or outcomes not possible, until of course the consensus-based process of deliberation is revived once again. Ultimately, theorists who place too much weight on the democratic power of deliberation fail to see its limitations as a tool of political decision making - a function of politics. For those of us concerned with how Dean’s analysis of deliberation might contribute to normative foundations of journalism’s democratic functioning, the outlook may seem grim, as it suggests we are condemned to stasis, seemingly unable to step outside of neo-liberalism’s force. Yet Dean’s analysis is progressive as it helps us understand how the corrosive capacity of neo-liberalism has usurped the very language and tools that are fundamental to challenging the status quo. For scholars and journalists looking to build new normative horizons, Dean’s work is a fruitful starting point as it alerts us to existing barriers and the ‘entrapment of psychotic politics’ that cannot seem to transcend the present condition (2009, p. 18). As she concludes, we may ‘have an ethical sense. But we lack a coherent politics, primarily because we remain attached to our present values’ (2009, 175).

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter should be clear: it has been to assert that rather than focussing on an expectation that journalism should stimulate an essentially deliberative ideal in its nourishing of democracy, journalism studies scholars in particular might do well to leave aside some of these more cherished notions of journalism’s normative heart and dare to go beyond some of the core assumptions central to our contemporary understanding of what journalism should do. In doing so

I have argued that for journalists and scholars of journalism, new perspectives on democracy and democratic agency might refresh our notions of what journalism might do in a time when the changes affecting journalism are so pronounced. It may not be that the link between democracy and journalism needs to be ‘retired’ as Zelizer (2013) suggests, rather it may be that the limitations of journalism should be seen in the context of the limitations of present democracy itself. As someone who has, in previous work, sought to re-articulate and re-state claims about journalism's democratic obligations and the essence of its democratic heart, I write this chapter as critical of myself as of others. In highlighting alternative sources of intellectual creativity by citing the contributions of Dean and Green as just two examples, I have attempted to prompt scholars of journalism to begin to step back and to reassess some of these core ideals, in much the same way that Green and Dean, albeit from very different political perspectives, have sought to do in relation to democracy and participation. These two very different analyses of democracy, political agency and culture are examples of work from political theory which do not shy away from asking difficult questions about the nature of democratic life, political participation and particularly the ideals of democratic deliberation. I suggest that we, as scholars of journalism studies, would do well to do the same.

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