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'New' Media, 'Old' Theories

Does the (National) Public Melt into the Air
of Global Governance?

■ *Slavko Splichal*

ABSTRACT

■ Since its earliest conceptualizations, publicity was believed to contribute significantly to the democratic social order; it normatively legitimized the press and other media as constitutive of the public and public opinion. Yet all the 'old' mass media rooted in the property rights of their owners failed to enhance and complement the corporate freedom of the press with technologically-feasible actions towards equalizing citizens' opportunities to participate in public debates. The most recent technological advances in communication do not seem to resolve this age-old controversy. Rather, an attempt is needed to change the media in the way that would allow of publicity in its original three-dimensional design: personal right to communicate in public, surveillance of the public over government (governance), and mediation between the state and civil society. ■

Key Words globalization, governance, new media, publicity, public opinion, public sphere

Introduction

In the last two decades, globalization has transformed social relations profoundly, loosened their confinement to territorial boundaries, and weakened the links between territory and collective destiny. Globalization that brought about global interactive communication networks may be seen as

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an opportunity for the construction of a new kind of public sphere(s) that would 'compete' with traditional (national) public spheres but also help materialize the principle of deliberative publicness and the personal right to communicate that national public spheres largely fall short of. With the new interactive virtual spaces it has created, the Internet, in particular, substantially increased the feasibility of citizens' participation in public discourse beyond national boundaries. However, does the internationalization of public debates as 'currents of opinion' beyond national borders that establish 'simultaneous conviction or passion and ... awareness of sharing at the same time an idea or a wish with a great number of other men' (Tarde, 1901: 9) lead to public opinion that transcends nation-states, a 'global public opinion'?

To be sure, the global advance of information and communication technologies makes – at least from the technological point of view – access to communication means much easier than any technological solution in the past. A large number of web communities, which enable people who share common interests and activities to communicate and share information, have been formed both locally and globally. On the surface, it seems that we are witnessing new-age phenomena, which could resolve the age-old problems of democratic deficit. Yet it is questionable if web communities significantly enhance democracy because, similarly to traditional public factions, they hardly transcend group particularisms based on racial, gender, age, or ideological, religious, professional, and other identities and interests.

A true democratization of communication should not only enable citizens to be 'free (media) consumers' but primarily to actively create and exchange messages from interpersonal to mass communication, in order to realize their interests and meet their needs in collaboration with others. It should eliminate major sources of distorted communication and external sources of inequalities, such as class and ownership privileges, gender and racial discrimination, age grade exclusion, and political or professional elitism. This implies not only an increase in the number of active participants in the communication processes, but also expansion of social bases of communication by inclusion of formerly excluded or socially, economically, or politically deprived individuals and groups (Splichal, 2008b: 26).

The development of computer-mediated communication (CMC) does not endorse such expectations. The democratic merit of CMC is mostly limited to the overturn of suppression and censorship of mass media and public opinion by authoritarian regimes, as for example the recent case of the 'Twitter revolution' in Moldova (2009)¹ and more recent struggles against authoritarian government in Iran suggest. However, it is used no less effectively by anti-democratic movements, as the use of Twitter in the

preparation of the detention of the Honduran President Zelaya in June 2009 indicates. In some cases, it may have helped mend fragmented cultural and political interests, but it may have deepened fragmentation as well. The explosion of millions of more or less specialized websites, forums, blogs, chat rooms, and networks of friends across the world do not lead to an inter- or supra-national public (sphere) but more likely to 'the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences [emblemizing the "old media"] into a huge number of isolated issue publics' (Habermas, 2006: 423n).

New 'fascinating' technological achievements and fashionable modes of communication in many respects do not resolve 'old' conceptual issues of communication and media theories. The fact that it attracts outsized attention may be considered an expression of need and desire for 'new modes' of communication to resolve the failures of 'old ones' in creating a more democratic society. Unfortunately, all 'new' communication technologies developed through centuries reveal that new modes of communication, which potentially expand human powers to learn and to exchange ideas and experiences, are also easily misused. This should encourage us to reconsider why still so much attention and hope is placed on technological achievements, as if they alone could reform the political and social environment in which they are embedded, rather than the other way around.

'Publicity' as the basis of democratic citizenship is a case in point. Since its earliest conceptualizations, publicity was believed to contribute significantly to the democratic social order. The principle of publicity normatively 'legitimized' the press as constitutive of the public and public opinion. Similar hopes were later placed on radio and television. Yet all these media rooted in the property rights of their owners failed to enhance and complement the corporate freedom of the press with technologically-feasible actions toward equalizing citizens' opportunities to participate in public debates. They failed to accomplish the Kantian quest for citizens' public use of reason and the Benthamite quest for public control over government as historical cornerstones in theorizing publicness. The most recent technological advances in communication do not seem to resolve this age-old controversy.

Public sphere in the age of global governance

The contemporary quest for transnationalization of the public sphere is an obvious reaction to the development of the complex, interconnected but at the same time diversified and hierarchically stratified world that we live in. Local, national, regional, and global issues, policies, and actions affect our

lives individually and collectively, but there is a lack of mechanisms to enable citizens' reflection and effective action beyond the national frame. Call for reconsideration of key conceptual elements of public sphere and public opinion in the age of globalization reflects efforts to 'invent' such mechanisms.

The normative requirement of the public sphere to be both a forum of citizens' deliberation generating public opinion as well as a medium of mobilizing public opinion as a legitimate political force makes it necessary that a public sphere and a sovereign power correlate with each other, either locally or nationally, or transnationally. Whereas in conventional conceptualizations of public opinion, the state and the public acted as clearly defined antagonists in the national public sphere (e.g. in Bentham's theory of public opinion), contemporary conceptualizations of transnational public spheres lack both a clearly defined (transnational) public and its transitional 'addressee' that would perform regulatory functions in the global context, as the state does within the national frame. This is not primarily a theoretical but rather a practical issue. Cases such as the recent meltdown of the Arctic icecap and the global financial collapse have disclosed a painful absence of transnational regulatory 'addressees' of public opinion which would be capable of taking efficient regulatory actions.

Historically, the creation of a democratic system was also closely associated with national affiliation. As Balibar (2003) argues, *demos*, the collective subject of representation, decision-making, and rights (the political community, or citizenry) was inseparably linked to *ethnos*, the imagined community of membership and affiliation (the nation). Globalization has not only changed the relation between them, but removed entirely the *ethnos*, the 'natural' foundation and framework of democratic processes. Thus, as Balibar (2003: 9) suggests, we not only need to reconceptualize the relation between *ethnos* and *demos* but even to reinvent *ethnos*.

Globalization affects the public and the public sphere in a similar way as the relationship between *demos* and *ethnos*. These democratic phenomena developed in an age-old process within the ethnic boundaries of 'Westphalian' sovereign powers (with no democratic legitimacy at first). By depriving the (national) public of its 'natural' addressee, the nation-state, transnationalization also seems to dissolve the public itself. At the same time, transnational 'alternates' of the national public and public sphere are more like counterfactual ideals than political reality. The traditionally conceptualized public as, in principle, a national phenomenon, cannot generate *legitimate* public opinion in a transnational environment (Fraser, 2007). Nor can national public spheres today render public opinion sufficiently *efficacious* to constrain the dominant power- and decision-making actors, due to the declining sovereignty of nation-states.

The states of the 21st century definitely lost the exclusive power of effectively protecting public interest by regulating actions of individuals and groups. Relations between the dominant actors and antagonists in the public sphere are significantly changing. Traditionally (nation-)states were indeed able to regulate the direct and indirect consequences of transactions to which people not actively involved were exposed, but today they are far from being exclusive regulators of those transactions. Nevertheless, while they have lost this exclusive regulatory 'privilege' nationally and transnationally, at least some of them also acquired a new one: today decisions made by states have implications not only for their own citizens but also for 'foreigners' – who can hardly act as 'the public' in relation to a foreign state. While formerly there was a symmetrical relationship between national public(s) and the nation-state, which was held responsible to, and by them, in the post-national constellation, the state and public sphere have become much more vaguely associated.

The nascent global civil sphere has none of the institutions that, in a fully functioning democracy, allow public opinion to produce civil power and thus regulate the state, such as independent courts, party competition, and elections. Yet this nascent global civil sphere does have access to institutions of a more communicative kind. (Alexander, 2006: 523)

This stimulates the ideas of the development of a transnational public sphere despite the scarcity of global political institutions.

Processes of transnationalization go together with the dispersal of authority in all directions, which is the core idea in the concept of 'governance'. While transnationalization and globalization denote the extension of social space, governance refers to the expansion of regulation beyond government. It indicates that the separation of classical liberal government from civil society is vanishing, and new modes of regulation are emerging which include non-state actors, such as NGOs, labour unions, community groups and local authorities, as well as private companies and trade associations.

Broadly conceived, the idea of governance explores the erosion of traditional bases of (political) power and changing boundary between state and civil society. It denotes the transformation of the classical model of government in an increasingly interdependent world and reflects fundamental changes in the decision-making process. In contrast to government, governance refers to both state *and* non-state forms of making *and* influencing decisions that significantly affect population in a particular locality or the entire world community. At the same time, the idea of governance blurs the boundaries of the traditional dichotomy,

‘the state–civil society’, or in the more recent trichotomy, ‘the state–economy–civil society’.

The disappearance of a clear separation between the state and civil society – in both theory and practice – may severely hinder democratic processes. In contrast to the classical liberal separation of state and civil society, which has been mainly threatened by the authoritarian state because of its surveillance over the private sphere, the danger to democracy by contemporary permeation of state and civil society is a much more complex issue. It is based on the fusion of public and non-public bodies both nationally and transnationally, and the fragmentation of authority, so that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to know who decides what, and how it is decided. The lack of representation, public deliberation and public accountability, and the absence of transnational or global *demos* and public(s) as sources of democratic legitimacy for governing give rise to democratically deficient global ‘governance without government’ as a mere ‘steering without democracy’.

The idea of a shift from government to governance captures many of the processes that have been considered fundamental to the formation of the public for a long time. Dewey defined the public as consisting of all those affected by the indirect consequences of specific ‘transactions’ in which they could not directly participate, to such an extent that they consider it necessary to take some action in order to care for their interests ‘by methods intended to regulate the conjoint actions of individuals and groups’ (Dewey [1927]1991: 35). The concept of global governance treats governance as ‘the public’ in the Deweyan sense – as a network of individuals and groups discursively engaged in global issues that seriously affect a significant part of the population, in order to find a solution and/or influence a decision, which may be even based on argumentative rationality.² Globalization generates transnational networks of (potential) stakeholders in governance affected by various developments that cross divisions of language, ethnicity, religion and nationality.

Possibly, new forms of governance have been developed at local, national, and transnational levels also because of the growing democratic deficit – the failure of traditional decision-makers and political representatives to offer new ways of democratic problem-solving in the changing economic and political environment. In that sense, global governance implies new actors or networks that could overcome the democratic deficit. However, in the practical processes of governance dominated by neo-liberal hegemony, the democratic participation of citizens that is essential for ‘the public’ is largely left out or, at best, marginalized.

The inclusion of non-state actors in (global) governance who act primarily in a non-hierarchical environment does not necessarily increase the communicative and decision-making power of citizens. On the contrary, democratic participation of citizens is de-privileged or even restrained in the processes of 'denationalization' of decision-making, in which decision-making powers of national political institutions are transferred to those operating in the transnational environment, which lacks a fully developed transnational political community. An even more harmful hindrance to citizen participation is represented by 'depoliticization', in which the responsibilities of political institutions are delegated to politically independent regulatory agencies or private or semi-private organizations, and issues previously subject to formal political scrutiny by more or less representative political bodies are relegated to a market-driven regulation. As a result, global governance rests on very limited consent of those affected by the consequences of transactions in which they cannot participate.

(Dis)continuities in (theories of) public opinion

Despite immense technological and social (primarily economic) changes in the period of globalization, many 'old' assumptions about the public, public opinion, and public sphere remain valid, and many 'old' contradictions unresolved. The often criticized (implicit) assumption that the public (sphere) 'belongs' to the nation-state is not an exception.

A 'nationalistic' understanding of public opinion and the public sphere prevailed throughout history because both phenomena were dominated by the pursuit of national 'public' interests eventually supported by state force. Or rather, due to empirical circumstances, this question never attracted much theoretical concern. Nevertheless, the international dimension was not entirely a blind spot in theorizing the public and public opinion, as Nancy Fraser (2007: 14) believes, by suggesting that almost all participants in the publicity debate in critical theory 'correlated public spheres with territorial states [and] assumed the Westphalian framing of political space'.

On the contrary, since Bentham – who emphasized that all functions of the Public Opinion Tribunal might be exercised by 'every person, elector, inhabitant, or foreigner', and considered 'admission of strangers to the sittings in the assembly' one of the key conditions of the public workings of the parliament – the public was not seen as existing exclusively under the safeguard of a nation-state. Tarde argued that 'international public opinion ... has always existed, even before the press' (1901: 44) and that the newspaper,

finished the age-old work that conversation began, that correspondence extended, but that always remained in a state of a sparse and scattered outline – the fusion of personal opinions into local opinions, and this into national and *world* opinion, the grandiose unification of the Public Spirit. (Tarde 1901: 83)

According to Tönnies, public opinion is ‘in principle boundless’ (1922: 135). The earliest publics in the Middle Ages were typically ‘transnational’ (or transregional, i.e. traversing the pre-Westphalian administrative units), which was largely enabled by Latin as the *lingua franca* among intellectuals and actually imposed by the scarcity of literate individuals. A clear example presented by Tönnies were theologians who represented an international, educated public with internal differences in opinion. Like religion, *zeitgeist* is an exemplary form of public opinion that transcends national borders and is international by its very nature. Tönnies discussed explicitly opinion formation by the international public, and even public opinion representing ‘the entire civilised humanity’. His conceptualization of public opinion as a complex form of *social will* comparable but opposite to *religion* also clearly indicates that it transcends territorial space.

However, the expansion of the public beyond the nation-state and *ethnos* is no more a problem than its site and size in general. Public opinion has always been no more a ‘national’ than ‘regional’ and ‘local’ phenomenon. For Tönnies, ‘the collective (*Gesamtheit*) which we imagine as the subject of public opinion’ is an ‘imagined assembly’ which does not necessarily match the state (Tönnies 1922: 135). Tarde saw each society ‘psychologically divided into publics’ as ‘purely spiritual collectivities’ and an ‘extension’ of any type of social group; thus the public ‘can be extended indefinitely’ (Tarde, 1901: 9, 18). The volatility of the public and public opinion is clearly reflected in the ‘mass–public’ dialectic discussed by Tarde, Park, Blumer and Mills, and in different ‘aggregate states’ of public opinion defined by Tönnies.

In her recent plea for problematization of the public sphere theory, Fraser raises the question of ‘whether and how public spheres today could conceivably perform the democratic political functions with which they have been associated historically’ (Fraser, 2007: 19). The reason for her concern is that,

public spheres are increasingly transnational or postnational with respect to each of the constitutive elements of public opinion ... The ‘who’ of communication ... is often now a collection of dispersed interlocutors, who

do not constitute a *demos*. The 'what' of communication ... stretches across vast reaches of the globe, in a transnational community of risk, which is not however reflected in concomitantly expansive solidarities and identities. The 'where' of communication ... is now deterritorialized cyberspace. The 'how' of communication ... encompasses a vast translanguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures. Finally, the addressee of communication ... is now an amorphous mix of public and private transnational powers that is neither easily identifiable nor rendered accountable. (Fraser, 2007: 19)

I agree that the changes in the post-national constellation do not yet provide a legitimate and effective form of transnational public opinion governance. This does not imply, however, that the 'Westphalian' type of public opinion is outdated. On the contrary, as long as the transnational public does not come into existence, the only hope is to (re)create public opinion governance within national boundaries.

I do not find convincing the idea that critical theory can normatively unravel the 'suspension' of transnationalization of the public sphere by leaning against the pioneering communication and propaganda theories of the mid-1900s. It is quite remarkable that Fraser's plea for a *new* critical theory is based on the changes of 'constitutive elements of public opinion', which are simply a recycled version of the 60-year-old Lasswell's formula 'Who? Says What? In What Channel? To Whom? With What Effect?' (Lasswell, 1948: 37), used as 'a convenient way to describe an act of communication' and, particularly, propaganda, which is 'to editorialize or to select the content of channels of communication for the purpose of influencing attitudes on controversial issues' (Lasswell, 1950: 284).

These 'elements' have been constantly changed throughout history, mainly to suit the dominant interests, and we can surely expect them to change in the future, for better or for worse. If transnationalization is claimed to represent a radical departure from past developments, it cannot, at the same time, be claimed to be conceptualized in terms of changes in old 'elements'. A number of 'old' theories of public opinion and public sphere have addressed critical issues of public opinion (theory) in its broader social, political, economic, cultural, and political contexts. They clearly suggest that new modes of communication cannot totally transform our generic ability and need to communicate, central to which is the capacity to communicate face to face (Splichal, 2008b: 24).

Tönnies, for example, identified six main limits to the 'reception of public opinion': (1) the language one speaks; (2) the political arena in which the topic of a speech is meaningful or relevant; (3) the education of listeners or readers who can understand and deliberate on what they hear;

(4) the power of the intellectual and moral voice; (5) the reputation and charisma of speakers and the number of already existing followers; and (6) 'external ways and means of dissemination, such as the way a book is distributed, the power of capital, and the connections and activities of a publisher; but especially the type and size of the reading public of a periodical' (Tönnies 1922: 135–6). The last point comes close to what C.W. Mills specified as four fundamental (operational) conditions of mediated political communication in the public sphere to facilitate deliberative legitimization processes in complex societies. Following Park and Blumer, Mills defined 'the public' in contrast to 'mass':

In a *public*, as we may understand the term, (1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against – if necessary – the prevailing system of authority. And (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is thus more or less autonomous in its operations. (Mills [1956]2000: 303–4)

New communication technologies can help to 'solve' less than half of the problems as defined by Mills, and even much less in terms of Tönnies' limits to the publicness of public opinion. New CMC modes make possible that '(1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them', and that '(2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately...to answer back any opinion expressed in public'. Immediately perhaps, but not also effectively (who will visit and read my reply on the website? who is my addressee?), which was the second part of Mills' claim. On the other hand, new technologies have no significant impact on two subsequent dimensions differentiating between the mass and the public: whether (3) an opinion formed in discussion could be materialized in an effective action or else the realization of opinion in action is controlled by authorities; and (4) whether the public is autonomous in its operations from authoritative institutions?

Using Tönnies' taxonomy of 'limits to the publicness of public opinion' makes the sum of contributions of CMC to the publicness of public opinion even more meagre: five out of six 'limits' were not significantly affected, with the only exception of 'external ways and means of dissemination'. The relative weight of this specific 'limit', which alone includes modes of communication, and its complexity increased significantly during the last two or three decades but this does not much change the efficacy of CMC in building a strong public (sphere) either nationally or

internationally. Analysts of the transnational public sphere are eager to claim that contemporary modes of communication are radically new, unprecedented in older modes of communication, but Tönnies' and Mills' analyses show that – even if the claim is accurate – their impact on the constitution of the public (sphere) relative to 'external' social, political and economic factors, is almost insignificant. The distinctive feature of the public media that they can transform particularistic interests into a common interest by confronting the rulers and the ruled, or mediating between them, is missing in the Internet not because of its technological character but because of its social use(s).

The transhistorical and transnational nexus: principle of publicity

These all seem to be relevant issues in the contemporary debates on the transnationalization of the public sphere and public opinion but they do not address the question of 'what becomes of its [public opinion's] *critical* function of checking domination and democratizing governance?' (Fraser, 2007: 19). In fact, they do not address the defining principle of the public sphere, the principle of publicity, which defines the true nature of public opinion governance. Although it is difficult to imagine how the nature of publicity could have been changed radically without new modes of communication, the main cause of its transformation does not lie in technological innovations but rather in (the dominant) social relations. Carl Bücher realized long ago in his discussion of the industrialization of the press that 'the active, leading elements ... are outside of the press rather than in the press'; its quality thus depends on 'the very complicated conditions of competition in the publication market' (Bücher, [1893]1901: 242). The most important and contestable 'external element' was, in Bücher's view, the economic interest in profit-making that transformed newspapers from cultural to commercial organizations. He emphasized the great complexity of the newspaper as a primarily cultural phenomenon that emerged out of political interests in national unification, economic interests in information from remote places, and demands for new social and economic relations (Splichal, 2008a).

What Bücher called 'a fundamental transformation of the essence of the newspaper', i.e. its commoditization, was a manifestation of the radical change in the nature of publicity in the second half of the 19th century. The principle of publicity was originally conceived of as a critical impulse against injustice based on the secrecy of state actions, and as an enlightening momentum substantiating the 'region of human liberty' and making

private citizens equal in the public use of reason. In contrast to earlier and vague conceptualizations of public opinion, the concept of *critique* was central to the idea of publicity at that period as it was to the ideas of Enlightenment, in general.

Kant (1784) advocated free public discussion as a means of citizens to develop and express their autonomous rationality – in contrast to the existing censorship of the time. In defence of the public use of reason, he insisted that – since the sovereign power is legitimized by representation of the general will – the sovereign would lose the basis of his legitimacy, if alienated from the only source of knowledge he needs to make right decisions: critical voices expressed by citizens. Eventually, this may also cause distrust and hate against the sovereign power.

[T]he *right* must be conceded to the citizen ... that he shall be able to *make his opinion publicly known* regarding what appears to him to be a wrong committed against the commonwealth by the enactments and administration of the sovereign ... Hence *the liberty of the press (die Freiheit der Feder)* is the sole *palladium* of the rights of the people. (Kant, [1793]1914: 40; emphasis added)

Freedom of the press was ‘freedom of pen’ (*Feder*) for Kant – not freedom of the publisher or newspaper, but freedom of the citizen to publish with the aid of the press. The right to publish cannot be a ‘real right’ of an external object but only a ‘personal right’, which is not determined by the ownership of things. Kant clearly distinguished between the property right and the right of public use of reason, and even subordinated the real right of the publisher, who owns the production means, to the personal right of the author.

Like Kant’s universal principle of publicity mediating between politics and morals in public law and his conceptualization of the ‘public use of reason,’ Bentham’s ideas of surveillance by publicity are fundamental to any normative discussion of the public sphere. His ideas on publicity represent the intellectual foundation of the ‘watchdog’ concept of the press as an essential part of control over government. Bentham conceptualized the rule of publicity as the foundation of people’s sovereignty and public opinion, as ‘the fittest law for securing the public confidence’ and a necessary precondition ‘for putting the tribunal of the public in a condition for forming an enlightened judgment’ (Bentham [1791]1994: 590). He saw publicity as the ‘central characteristic and indispensable instrument’ of the Public Opinion Tribunal (Bentham [1822]1990: 28), and the press an ‘instrument of publicity and public instruction’.

More than 100 years before the concept of the 'public sphere' had been coined, Marx expressed the very same idea with the concept of the 'third element', which 'the rulers and the ruled alike ... are in need of'. He was the first to realize that the press is more than just an instrument of surveillance and an organ of public opinion – an autonomous sphere. He conceptualized the press in the sense of a *public sphere* mediating between the state and civil society, in which the state and civil society could meet on equal terms, emancipated from their authoritative officiality and private interests:

In the realm of the press, rulers and ruled alike can criticise their principles and demands, yet no longer in a relation of subordination, but on terms of equality as *citizens of the state*; no longer as *individuals*, but as *intellectual forces*, as exponents of reason. The 'free press' is the product of public opinion and, at the same time, also produces public opinion; it can transform a particular interest to a common interest. (Marx, [1843]1974: 189–90)

Marx considered the press '*political* without being official, hence not based on bureaucratic premises, an element which is of a *civil* nature without being directly bound up with private interests and their pressing need' ([1843]1974: 189).

Much later, Tönnies argued – relying on Emil Löbl's book *Kultur und Presse* (1903) – that public opinion was often mistakenly identified with one of its 'organs,' the press. Neither could public opinion be reduced to its instrument, the press, nor could the press substitute the other two of Marx's 'elements' in the public sphere, the state and civil society. As Tönnies suggested, public opinion is the product of two factors: 'one is the original, living idea, the other, however, the 'amplifying multiplier', represented regularly, although not only, by the press, since public opinion can develop and rise to power by using other 'means of distribution and amplification'.

In Tönnies' time, this critical-mediative dimension of publicity was already waning rapidly, most clearly in the new (empirical) concepts of 'public relations' and 'public opinion' (as 'measured' in polls). At present, reconceptualization of publicity is clearly reflected in the fact that the very word 'publicity', which used to refer to *reasoned debates*, has been overshadowed by 'the activity of making certain that someone or something attracts a lot of interest or attention from many people' (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*) or by 'a type of public relations in the form of a news item or story which conveys information about a product, service, or idea in the media', or simply 'information or advertising to get attention for something', as advertisers conceive of it (www.encyclo.co.uk/define/publicity).

Public opinion has been degraded to ‘the sum of all relevant individual opinions, as a cut through ... opinion expressions of citizens inquired by ballot or opinion polls’ (Bauer, 1965: 121).

Was this conceptual and practical regression in publicness (‘refeudalization of publicness’, as once termed by Habermas) *caused* by the changes in communication modes and media? We certainly cannot hold such a delusive explanation as true. Why should we then believe that ‘defeudalization’ of publicness could be created by new modes of communication alone?

What is needed more than a new interpretation of the (transnational) public sphere and public opinion, is an attempt to change them in the way that would allow of publicity in its original ‘three-dimensional design’: personal right to communicate in public, surveillance of the public over government (governance), and mediation between the state and civil society.

Notes

1. Aided by social networking website tools such as Twitter, LiveJournal and Facebook, demonstrators in Moldova (a former Soviet republic) organized mass protests against the (allegedly forged) parliamentary election results in April of 2009. Paradoxically, it seems that most participants in the ‘micro-blogging’ and ‘old media’ reporters were actually more interested in the use of Twitter to organize demonstrations, the ‘Twitter revolution,’ than in the actual political events, but also that the role and efficacy of Twitter and other ‘new media’ has been heavily overstated.
2. Hooghe and Marks define ‘task-specific jurisdictions’ as a specific type of multi-level governance, as having been,

set up to *solve particular policy problems*, such as managing a common pool resource, setting a technical standard, managing an urban service, or shipping hazardous waste. The constituencies of [these] jurisdictions are *individuals who share some geographical or functional space and who have a common need for collective decision making* – e.g. as irrigation farmers, public service users, parents, exporters, homeowners, or software producers. These are not communities of fate; *membership is voluntary, and one can be a member of several such groups.* (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 240; emphasis added)

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