

# PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND ITS PROBLEMS

## A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

HEIKKI HEIKKILÄ  
RISTO KUNELIUS

*It has no bodily form, but it is powerful; by some reckonings it is the ultimate power, being the source of sovereignty. It is a place, but you can't walk into it, and it is a group of people — a vast group of people — but they never meet. The place and people are familiar figures, but although you know them well, you have never seen them and you never will, even though you are one of them.*

John Hartley  
*The Politics of Pictures*, 1992

Heikki Heikkilä and Risto Kunelius are research fellows at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Tampere, PO Box 607, FIN-33101 Tampere.

### Introduction

The "public" is a notion with which you always end up in trouble. Yet, it is one of the key notions in theories of democracy in general and in journalism in particular. It is in fact, as James Carey (1987, 5) argues, the god term of journalism. "Insofar as journalism is grounded, it is grounded in the public. Insofar as journalism has a client, the client is the public." Thus, to call an idea or a movement "public journalism" should then sound tautological, if not schizophrenic, because to be public is what journalism should be all about.

However, being "public" cannot be taken for granted, so called "public journalists" — a loose movement of journalists, academics and non-profit civic organisations based in the US. — claim. They argue that journalism has contributed to some major problems in American society and it should do its share to remedy those problems. This task begins with rethinking the notion "public" and its relationship to journalism. Due to its rooting in a "new" and different strands of theories of democracy public journalism avoids being "just another reform movement" within journalism. Unlike some previous movements like "new journalism," "investigative journalism" or "precision journalism" public journalism chal-

lenges not just the techniques of journalism but also the professional attitudes of journalism.

Public journalism emerges from the intersection of four contemporary trends experienced within (American) society. These developments can briefly be described as four widening gaps effecting the "publicness" of journalism. First, there is a gulf between **politics and citizens** (cf. Hallin 1991; Gitlin 1991; Dionne 1991; Glasser and Ettema 1993): from the citizens' perspective politics seems to have lost its relevance to their everyday lives. Second, citizens are divided amongst themselves **socially and culturally**: differences in identities anchored in race, religion, income, place to live, education, mediascapes etc. aggravate a sense of community from emerging and thus intensifying an escape from public orientation. Third, there is a gap dividing **journalism and its audience**. Journalism has become a high ranking profession, a "palace" of its own beside the palace of political elite (Mancini 1993). Due to this aura professional journalism acts according to its own conventions and submits itself to criticism merely by its own standards. The fourth gap lies between social theory and social practices in general, and **journalism research and journalists** in particular. Scholars and practitioners seems to find a common ground quite rarely, which makes an idea of "give-and-take -relationship" almost unattainable. In order to remedy this public journalism claims to be also about "public scholarship" (Rosen 1994; 1995).

Our intention in this paper is not to review argumentation and accomplishments of public journalism in detail (cf. Rosen 1991, 1994, 1996; Merritt 1995; Charity 1995). Instead, we wish to discuss theories underlying public journalism. A task, which public journalists have not been able to capitalise as yet. We argue that theoretical discussion may not only contribute to academic interests, but it may also disclose problems and new avenues for doing public journalism.

There are a number of thinkers influential to public journalism. However, two of them are of particular interest to us here. John Dewey is perhaps the major source of inspiration for public journalism (see Rosen 1994, 366). Another — slightly less explicitly praised, but still influential — theorist for public journalism is Hannah Arendt. In this paper our reading of Dewey and Arendt is submitted to the cause of public journalism.

Dewey and Arendt share some fundamental features as social theorists, but at the same time there are points of tension between them. Public journalism can be theoretically neither understood nor advanced by reducing its practices into one theory, thinker, historical era etc. Instead, in this article we discuss the contributions of Dewey and Arendt in order to clarify some of the problems of public journalism. Theoretical work should develop a theory that informs public journalism as well as is informed by it. We argue that reading Dewey and Arendt provides us a fruitful starting point in this.

In the following we focus first on the notion of "**public**," i.e. on the question "what is (a) public?" Here we explicitly favour Dewey. Second, we discuss what kind of **action** is "public" and what is the relation between journalism and action, i.e. "what is done in the public?" In here the major contribution is derived from Arendt. Third, we elaborate some problems initiated by former concepts through notion **storytelling**, i.e. we discuss "what said about public action in public?" This section tries to point out some shortcomings of both theorists. Finally, theoretical problematisation is used to articulate a few practical problems of public journalism.

## What is a "Public" Anyway?

It is not a coincidence that Dewey's most explicit contribution to the question of "publicness" is entitled *The Public and Its Problems* (hereafter referred to as *PP*). The term "problems" has a double meaning — often overlooked — in Dewey's argument. The first meaning is clear enough: the "public" as an organ of democratic life is in trouble. The second meaning is more implicit but even more fundamental: it is the emergence and recognition of problems — obstacles of everyday life — that constitute "the public" as a social formation. "Publics" are born when problems appear. Thus, to "solve" the problems with coolness and disinterestedness of Walter Lippmann's "experts" would, for Dewey, mean saying goodbye to the public in the genuine and meaningful sense of the word. This is why, for Dewey, Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922/1963) with its detached "experts" was "the greatest indictment of democracy yet written" (e.g., Carey 1987, 7).

This double-talk about the problems of the public distinguishes Dewey from many others as philosopher of communication and particularly of journalism. He is exceptionally sensitive to the deep paradox underlying the development of modern societies and their public life. He argues that the new, fast and complex modes of interaction between people not only create problems for the "public" but also offer a model for a new kind of theory about society. These two aspects — the origin of the public and the current (early 20th century) historical conditions of the public — constitute the framework in which also the current debates about public journalism take place.

**1. The origin of the public.** For Dewey, the public emerges when people's action have consequences beyond the persons immediately involved in the action. It is the "distant effects" of people's interaction that call the public into being. (*PP*, 12-13) To discuss the weather with a friend is private, but a conversation between the president and prime minister about the budget deficit is public, however "secret" and "private" it might be. This is — as far as we know — an original way of defining the "public," and on the contrary to what Carey (1991, 38-39) writes, it is not "unusually abstract." By connecting the genesis of the "public" to indirect consequences, Dewey brings in the "problems" as a constitutive element of the public. For from the point of view of the "others" (those indirectly affected) your action can become a problem. And when it does, your action begins to articulate them as a public having an interest to your action. This is an exceptionally concrete description of the forces that continuously (re)create publics.

The public in Dewey's theory is an **actual** phenomenon. It is a relationship, something made real by its actualisations. Dewey consistently writes about the "public," not about the "public sphere" or about the public "realm." For Dewey, the public seems to be essentially constituted by the presence, action and interest of the "others."

For Arendt, the question of "origin" of the public is totally different. For her the "public realm" is a historical fact that has been fading as the demarcation line between the public and the private became blurred (esp. Arendt 1958, 50-72, hereafter *HC*). The genuine public realm was, for Arendt, a site of appearance; a place in which men can act freely and to distinguish themselves from others, to pursue public recognition, glory or even immortality. Unlike for Dewey, for Arendt, the origin of the public is primarily a historical question. While lamenting the loss of the ideal, however, she suggests that re-establishing the initial conditions would make it possible for the public realm to actualise once again.

For Arendt, the public realm is a site in which (primarily) individuals can actualise themselves, whereas for Dewey, the "public" itself is an actualisation. At first sight, this difference seems to be propound. However, it may be reconciled by "re-interpreting" Arendt's notion of action (chapter 3). Another discrepancy is more decisive: the relationship between the public and private. For Dewey, the origin of the "public" is in everyday life, whereas for Arendt it is in free action (that can be free only as distinguished from the private). At this point we prefer Dewey, because he manages to widen the usage of the concept, whereas Arendt's rigid definition of the public restricts it almost to a distant echo from the past.

**2. The historical conditions of the public.** The deeply paradoxical nature of Dewey's view on the public reveals itself when the historical problem of the public is discussed. In a modern society the public emerges when:

*... indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behaviour call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling these consequences (PP, 126).*

This is the historical context of speaking about the public: the intensity and volume of interaction enormously strengthens the original impulse of the public. But there is another side to the coin:

*(...) the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, have formed such immense and consolidated unions in actions on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself. (PP, 126).*

Thus, on the one hand, the public as a social formation controlling the indirect consequences of ever more complex interaction is needed more than ever. On the other hand, the very same development that intensifies this need has made its emergence more and more difficult: the public cannot recognise itself, the issues discussed in "the public sphere" do not become public, they are not circulated among people, they do not become parts of their everyday life. Thus, the knowledge people get from say, the news remains "second hand" knowledge, that is a "thing" that Dewey elsewhere refers to as "mere words": that is pure sense stimuli, lacking in any meaning (Dewey 1916/1966, 188).<sup>1</sup>

The historical problem of the public underlines Dewey's idea about the public as an actualised social formation. For Dewey, to allow interests to penetrate the notion of the public is not to contaminate it, but to point to its genuine foundations. This, however, does not mean that Dewey would reduce the public interest into private interests. The point is that the interests that constitute the participatory impulse are defined as problems **in the actualisations of the public**.

This is an undeniably utopian solution, but also a very challenging one. The counter-argument to Dewey tends to stress that "private" persons are ultimately egoistic beings and this is something that Dewey ignores. However, it can be argued that this sort of criticism stems from a rather Hobbesian view of citizenship. For Dewey, Hobbes is not a place to start with, but it is a place where we may end up, unless "public" is understood differently. His fundamental point is that people are an open potential and they become what they become in the interaction they are allowed to take part in. Without a genuine possibility for "public" interaction people become "private" in the Hobbesian meaning of the word.

This is a particularly interesting theoretically, because it suggests that the ideas that see the public sphere as a guard against the "despotic state" are in fact formulated in a discourse defined by the view of Hobbesian state. It is in that strand of social theory that people are seen egoistic by their very nature. It is from this very same discourse that the idea to "purify" public communication stems from. In that sense, to criticise Dewey (e.g., Keane 1995, 19) from wanting a "unified" public sphere is a fallacy. It is criticism of Dewey's theory and the "problems" of the public in the first and explicit sense of the word. But it tends to overlook that underlying this formulation of the historical problems is a different definition of the "public." Contrary to Keane and others it may be argued that Dewey's definition of the public might help us to get rid of the distinction between everyday life and publicness. It is also a definition that might turn out to be very useful in keeping the notion of "public" from "emptying it of empirical content" (ibid.).

For Arendt, the problem is the rise of the "social" that blurs the distinction between the public and the private. Resulting from this citizens have been forced to members of a "family" whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nationwide administration of housekeeping (*HC*, 28). In society — which is for Arendt a synonym for social — citizens are supposed only to behave and to be "normal" according to rules set by society. Arendt sees clearly (as most European thinkers do) the paralysing aspect of "society" as a machinery. Against this she aligns to a degree with the tradition that defined the public as a safeguard against the state. However, Arendt pays a rather high price for this. She almost becomes a **gatekeeper** of the public realm, and in order to keep it "pure" from the "social" she almost ends up keeping it pure from any relevant meaning for people to participate. After all, our everyday life is often made of close relationships to the "gigantic nation-wide administration of housekeeping." Although Arendt's rigid distinction between the public and the private is impossible to apply in our times, there is a fruitful aspect in Arendt's attack against "normality." By safeguarding public life she wants to maintain the possibility for distinct human perspectives.

To summarise "what is a public," then, the "public" of public journalists is Dewey's public. The movement attempts to do exactly what Dewey saw missing: engage people in their own problems. But just as Dewey is a wonderful source of inspiration in this sense, a closer look at his theory also suggests that his two basic ideas (the origin and the historical conditions of the public) are in an almost unbearable tension with each other: For, logically speaking, Dewey's explanation of the origin of the public formations would mean public more articulate and intense than ever (cf. Schudson 1995, Chapter 10). But instead of blooming, the public is in "eclipse." Some of public journalism's problems reflect this very same dilemma: it is trying to keep up something that it is simultaneously leaning onto.

In public journalism's search to invigorate the communities in which journalism becomes meaningful Arendt's warnings against conformism are important. They underline the dangers inherent in Dewey's implicit conformism — or perhaps we should say in the conformist interpretations of Dewey — both in the field of theory as well as in considering practical question of public journalism. Still, we argue that Arendt's real contribution to public journalism only starts after this. Even though Arendt's concept of the public may not be very applicable, her thinking on action i.e. what is done in the public, is more insightful. So, suppose the public really is a social formation in Dewey's sense — what do public people do, then?

## Action Speaks No Louder Than Words

If one thinks that the lack of resonance between journalism and everyday life inhibits citizens to act as a public, the cure will be to strengthen this connection (the third gap experienced by public journalism). Thus, Dewey sets out the goal for public journalism. But there is a paradox embedded in his organic definition of the public and the desired publicness of everyday life: perfect journalism should be in intimate terms with people's everyday life. But in achieving this it necessarily loses its potential to work across the divisions and gaps that separate people in the cultural localities (the second gap).<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, if public journalism is to reach across the diversity of culture — ways of living and talking about the world — it needs to elaborate the aspects of public conduct that is not reducible to the various constituencies of people that it is talking to. For the theorisation of this aspect of journalism, Arendt and her notion action prove to be interesting guides.

Action means, for Arendt, taking initiative through speech. This means that speech is not only a means of actualising oneself, but it also means causing consequences beyond one's personal life (Arendt 1961/1987, 153; *HC*, 177-178). In fact, these two aspects are inseparable. Another important quality of action is its unpredictability. Action is unpredictable, because it is free and it is free, because it is futile i.e. action cannot be governed either by motives or the ends of the actor. The consequences of action remain unknown for the actor. Thus, action is also the most dangerous of human abilities (Arendt 1961/1987, 63). Out of this conceptualisation of action three ideas appear particularly challenging for public journalism: ontological motivation for action, "public happiness" and web of relationships created in action.

**1. Ontological motivation.** Ontologically, action is a means to make oneself and some aspects of the world visible. Action thus actualises that we live in a common world, but as distinct personalities. From the perspective of Dewey's "public" action may give rise to a recognition of common problems that are required for publics to emerge. In fact, it can be argued that a disclosure of a problem always necessitates action.

However, action not only uncovers existing problems, but also creates new ones. These both sides of action resonate well with Dewey's analysis of the origin and historical conditions of the public. On the one hand, action creates problems, and problems are needed for publics to emerge. On the other hand, too many problems mean trouble. A public cannot recognise the relevant problems anymore. In other words, Arendt's notion of action provides another explanation why public life is in eclipse.

Whether one reads Arendt either in her own terms or situated in a more Deweyan framework of publics, her stress on the importance of ontological aspect of action provides an useful lesson. Without the public and the possibility for public action, a unique part of what human beings are, cannot be realised. Arendt's notion of public happiness captures this aspect particularly well.

**2. Public happiness.** Arendt argues that action is not motivated by duty, but by public happiness. This means that having a share in public business constitutes a feeling of public happiness that citizens could acquire nowhere else (Arendt 1963/1990, 127). This extends the participatory impulse beyond those who seek fame, glory and immortality, say politicians. However, because we are not used to think in terms of

public happiness, this enjoyment often goes unnoticed. Arendt claims that this is because the idea of public happiness has been eclipsed in modern thinking. One source of error was documented in the American declaration of independence, in which the idea of public happiness was mutilated. Instead of stressing a pursuit for **public** happiness, Jefferson — unlike in his previous letters — dropped "public" altogether and blurred the distinction between private and public. Arendt argues that as an effect of this the public became overshadowed by the private, which was reflected tremendously to American ideology and way of life.

Arendt's recognition of the pleasure of public action is an important insight, because it allows us to think of one possible human resource with which the Deweyan paradox of the eclipsed public might be overcome. When Dewey dreams of the "Great Community" and people participating in it, his problem is that he fails to point out how it could come about. He sees the eclipse of the public in the erosion of local communities (the medium of the public, as he says) and puts his trust to attachment embedded in communities.

Dewey suggests that public participation is dependent on attachment, which can only be nourished in constant relationships and in serious matters (*PP*, 139-141). Contrast to attachments there are modern **affections** that may undermine attachment. Now, it is easy to see why people in their local communities might derive some pleasure from local public participation, but the true challenges of modern "Great Community" is how the **mediated public participation** in massive scale could retain — or discover to begin with — this crucial motivation of public action. Arendt might not be able to provide an answer here, but her unquestionable merit is to point a certain ingredient of public action that the more "mundane" definitions of publicness are not able see. Public action, she argues is an enjoyment **in itself**.

**3. A web of relationships.** One consequence of action is not unpredictable. That is, action always creates webs of relationships. Partly these relationships remain merely existential, but some of them are constantly produced in action. The latter can be, for Arendt, a source of power. This kind of power can be used for creating new realities or to open new horizons to the common world. Power, is, for Arendt, collective, but bound to its actualisations. That is, power is unstable because it is based on authorisation of a group of citizens. As soon as this authorisation ceases, power disappears (Arendt 1969/1970).

Even though it is difficult to grasp how authorisation is first received and then lost in a given situation, it is possible to assess the idea theoretically. It would lead us to suggest that action creates more action and power creates more power as the web of relationships expands. One could ask, if this is not exactly what Dewey writes about the connection between indirect consequences and problems calling the public into being. One could also suggest — as Rosen (1991, 275) does — that action may expand the possibilities for others act. Arendt's own formulation is here rather vague. She stresses the interdependence between actor and other citizens. The actor needs help from others for without help his/her action would remain futile and probably even unnoticed. On the other hand, other citizens are dependent upon the actor for [gaining] an occasion to act themselves (*HC*, 189).

Theoretically speaking, this may be accurate, but as Dewey points out the ever more complex and unstable webs of relationship can also turn into a form of incompetence. Once again, we face the problem of the modern public. For Arendt any new

web of relationship is a source of power and this "newness" is what matters, whereas for Dewey only a relationship to existing living communities is worth promoting (cf. Dewey 1938).

Arendt argues that situations for action and generation of power are always unique. If journalism were to follow Arendt's claim, it would have to adopt an extraordinary task. Journalism would be able to contribute to action at its best by acting itself. This is, of course, a problematic position for journalism, because news journalism is supposed not to make stands or to get involved in processes, but merely to "tell the facts." This leads us to a question of representation in both meanings of the word. Would a more active journalism represent the public better or would it undermine its own "representability"? The question seems to lead to a paradox. If journalism were to act, it would have to compromise its ability to represent the public as a whole. This is because consequences of action are never the same for all citizens and due to this incongruence the actor inevitably benefits ones and harms others. Conversely, if journalism were to attain "a highest possible rate of representability," its potential for action would be reduced.

Discussing the action that keeps the public going points to three important things. First, supposing public action is everywhere (if we adopt the Deweyan definition of the public), the ontological aspect of action stresses that publics only emerge through action. In addition, the ontological aspect of action questions the easy utopias of merely letting interaction develop into the natural direction allowed by a given community. Second, the "public happiness" of action points to an aspect of public life that cannot be reduced to the Deweyan definition, thus the notion of public happiness might also serve to overcome the paradox of Dewey's public. Third, offering the notion of power as a framework for public action, Arendt opens up the question of representation. Since in public no action speaks for itself (all action is, in fact, speech), action is also inevitably represented. The question of **representation** is our last theme of discussion.

## Storytelling: What Is Said about Public Action in Public?

One of the ways in which public journalism has tried to negotiate the treacherous terrain of representation has been merely to **facilitate** public discussion. This means that public journalism wishes to tell stories of citizens' action, but not to become an actor itself. Public journalists often emphasise that they do not have an agenda of their own, but that they attempt to locate the citizens' agenda. The only issue in the public journalism's own agenda — according to this interpretation — is to promote public discussions and enliven public life. One practical application of this is public journalism's way of telling "success stories" about public actions of ordinary people. This presumably emphasises people's experiences of public happiness.

This seemingly unproblematic role for public journalism as a champion of public life as such contains two major problems. (1) Emphasis on storytelling usually fails to see the significance of [discourses] of telling and the **methodology** of discovering the "citizens" agenda." (2) The distinction between storytelling and action in journalism is a fake one, because action is always represented and because speaking (storytelling) is always action in itself.

**1. Discourses.** Public journalism tends to overlook the lessons of discourse theory partly because both Dewey and Arendt are rather insensitive to the question. It is also evident that the debates about discourses have been often initiated by those who have



stressed the **differences** in social experiences rather than trying to see what is common. Hence, in its attempt to counter this trend in "real world" (i.e., the second gap mentioned in the introduction) public journalism theorists have also overlooked these contributions. This might serve as an partly valid implicit critique of the theoretical politics of a particular strand of social theory, but it also overlooks important knowledge about the challenges that public journalism sets for itself.

It is difficult to see what Dewey really thought about the concept of discourse. On the one hand, he is a pragmatist and sees clearly the intimate connection between practical situations and the use of language (cf. Dewey 1925, 166-207). This aspect of pragmatism has, of course, been developed into sophisticated theories about language and social power (cf. Burke 1935/1954, 1938/1984). On the other hand, Dewey's view on discourses (the interconnectedness of language and social power) is problematic, because of the fundamental role he assigns for communication in restoring the evils of the modern world. For him, signs and symbols are a means for sharing experience (*PP*, 142, 218), for "merging in a whole" (Dewey 1925, 184). In stressing the consensus-orientedness of communication Dewey (1916/1966, 5) echoes the optimistic aspect of pragmatist communication theory (cf. Mead 1935/1972; Park 1939/1953) in which communication is seen as the paradigmatic mechanism of understanding. Furthermore, Dewey — in his emphasis of the actual and the potential openness of future — seems to ignore aspects of power or ideology in language for instance in talking about them as "fossils of some past society" (Dewey 1929, 86).

By ruling out routine forms of communication Dewey (*PP*, 18; Dewey 1925, 194) in a way solves his own theoretical dilemma, but proves to be difficult guide for such an institutionalised practice as journalism. For Dewey, the idea about "public routines" (cf. Rosen 1995) would seem to be a contradiction in terms. For discourse theory all institutionalised routines are loaded with power and problems of representation.

Arendt is alike insensitive to discourses, because speech and action are by definition free for all. Therefore, all material underpinnings in speech are almost entirely alien to her. Interests that loom behind domination and inequality are of no importance for Arendt, because economic benefits or pursuing power for its own sake should not even enter the public realm. One should also remember here Arendt's reluctance to approve the labour movement (*HC*, 212-220). The exclusion of material interests does not mean that citizens would act in public with no interests at all. Their action would, however, be directed by more noble goals like honour, glory, love, equality or other motives like fear, distrust and hatred (Arendt 1961/1987, 153-155).

It is obvious that too strong emphasis on critical discourse analysis might paralyse the pursuit for reforms in journalism. Nevertheless, the unproblematic attitude towards a "structuralist" strand in journalism and communication theory has hampered public journalists to see some restrictions they are setting for themselves. This unawareness makes one ask, whose community, whose values and whose discourses public journalism projects are actually producing in the name of the public?

A common pattern in public journalism projects seems a "respect for majority." Citizens' agenda is often produced with surveys rather than through an unregulated exchange of thoughts. This methodology "naturally" creates respect for majorities and besides that surveys themselves are, of course, parts of an ideological vehicle (cf. Glasser and Salmon 1995).

Polls as a point of departure means that it is most likely "the average John Smiths"

that are to be represented in journalism, which means that public journalism projects often remain merely as extensions of parliamentary democracy; the same one, which they see faltering (first gap mentioned in the introduction). There is a theoretical problem underlying here. Articulated in Arendt's wording the targets of polls are not acting citizens, but **behaving** citizens. This can be said also so that polls treat respondents as independent of each other and interaction between them. The other option would be to treat them as deliberating citizens as members of some community that only approaches the opinion formation. Contrary to this pollsters tend to think that citizens have an opinion of all the issues of the world and that their opinions match with variables set in questionnaire. Yet, public journalism projects often explicitly claim to be at odds with this assumption (cf. Harwood Group 1994). The persistence to work with polls reflects the assumptions of the very journalism that public journalism should be challenging. It is the vision of the press representing the people, and doing it in a scientific, neutral and objective manner. One is tempted to argue that it is precisely this sort of journalism that has created the gaps between politics, people and journalism.

**2. Action-storytelling.** Another problem subsequent to facilitation-storytelling-position concerns the separation between storytelling and action. Action is usually denied from journalism for it stands for merely "telling the facts." It is clear that public journalism means a departure from detachment and objectivity appreciated by conventional journalism. Yet, public journalists claim not to adhere to proactivity or advocatism for they do not want to get too much involved. Not only in theory, but also in tangible situations, separation between action and storytelling is difficult to draw. One telling case deals with so called "Cokely-affair" concerning mayoral politics and race relations in Chicago (Ettema 1990). The incident was launched when two newspapers were passed information about an aide to the mayor having made anti-Semitic remarks to black nationalist audiences. The papers set something in motion by publicising the speech that violated public ethics. This caused consequences — an administrative crisis in the city and a broad cultural negotiation among city's black and Jewish population — that were augmented, but not governed by journalism. Two newspapers were not innocent bystanders to the process, but actors among others. Thus, once journalism becomes an actor, it may not be able to jump off.

The impossible distinction between storytelling and action, and journalism's role as an active storyteller, can be illustrated by reading Arendt further. It also helps us to once further problematise public happiness and the pleasure of public action. As noted above Arendt (1961/1987, 151-153) claims that action is guided by more or less universal principles such as honour, glory, love, equality. Freedom, then is actualised in making the best of these principles true. After stressing the freedom of action, she turns to Machiavelli's notion of *virtu* in order to clarify how "freedom as inherent in action" can be illustrated. She points out to the connection between virtues and virtuosity. This, then, leads to a distinction between performative arts and arts actualised in objects.

Arendt uses this distinction to underline the peculiarity of politics and public life. Politics is like performative arts, it calls for further action to stay alive, whereas creative art is characterised by the independent existence of the work. Creator of, say, a painting or a story may well be free and active while creating his work, but that "creative process is not displayed in public and not destined to appear in the world." Thus, elements of freedom remain hidden. In performative arts, however, this is different.

Artists (just like politicians) need an audience to show their virtuosity, a "publicly organised space for their work" (Arendt 1961/1987, 154). If we follow Arendt's thinking here, we can perhaps capture something of the self-sufficiency of public happiness. It is in the action that this happiness exists, but from its products the pleasure is gone.

Thus, theoretically, public journalism's attempt to motivate people into more public life would have to mean that people would be **active** in the process of producing journalism. This is a monumental challenge to journalism compared to doing polls in order to represent people's agenda (which by definition, might serve in producing public happiness to the journalists, but not for the people).

Since practically it will never be possible to have all the people participating in the actual happiness of producing public journalism, challenges open of how to create such journalistic forms that would be of more "public" nature. Thus, how to write stories (e.g., fabrications, in Arendt's wording) that would enable the people actualise themselves as a public. In looking for such forms, public journalism should not categorically turn away from the forms of journalism that are made popular by the people. For arguably, the "pleasures" of popular culture and "enjoyment" of participating in the public are not completely alien to each other. Thus, although Dewey (*PP*, 141) categorically rejects the affective forms of interaction as invalid in restoring the public, contemporary research and theoretisations allow us to question this rejection.

For at this point, Dewey in a way fails his own idea. He severely criticises earlier thinkers by saying that you cannot understand the modern society with old forms of thought. And then he sets standards to the quality of public life, standards that are based on forms of life that he himself has declared gone. This denial of the political and public importance of different forms of interaction is in the end a choice. In principle, Dewey could have taken seriously the new forms and topics of public interaction he calls affections. He could have for instance looked for politics the alliances created by the affects (cf. Grossberg 1995), or he could have seen the various new forms of "movies, radio and cheap reading matter" (*PP*, 139) as articulations of different kinds of popular discrimination and politics of pleasure (cf. Fiske 1989; 1993), or he could have taken the "public" as a historically evolving phenomenon (cf. Keane 1995). Many theories and investigations of popular culture emphasise its "multiaccentuality" (Volosinov 1990) or its "polyphonic" nature (Bakhtin 1984). It would be easy, for instance, to explain the success of radio (not only in public journalism projects) by suggesting that it allows more accents into texts than traditional print journalism.

All this points to one particular idea. In order to retain the performative dimension in it, journalism should remain somehow [incomplete] in its products. Thus, reading journalism would necessarily call for active interpretation, reflection etc. Thus, the audience (the consumers of products) would be turned into members of a variety of publics (active interpreters) enjoying their public roles. This is not to say that public journalism should look like the popular tabloids. But neither should it retain from considering the lessons of the popularity of certain forms of communication. Ideally this kind of aesthetics of the news would create pleasure that serves "to bring out the values of the life one lives" as G. H. Mead points out (Glasser 1980; 1982).

## Conclusion

The fundamental achievement in the contemporary movement of public journalism is that it has brought into relevant and practical debates of the 1990's an old — and

once abandoned — notion of the public. In a sense, this notion and the corresponding ideas of communication it draws from, are indeed part of a long tradition. However, in public journalism this tradition has radically moved from academic practices into a practical field of journalism.

Above we have tried to point some theoretical underpinnings within public journalism that deserve more attention not only for theory's sake, but also in order to elaborate practical avenues for public journalism. First, Dewey's original, but exceptionally concrete definition of the public is essential for rethinking the proper role of the press and its relationship to citizens. In addition, the special attention to problems as constituencies of the public is valuable. Problems are the fuel of meaningful public life. Pointing out problems is an act of calling a public into existence, articulating it. Thus, in order to make public life more viable and more relevant to citizens, journalism has to look for problems. This suggests a new role for journalists. The topics, agendas, vocabularies etc. of journalism have to be redefined and tuned in citizens' topics, agendas and vocabularies. Furthermore, a closer orientation to the public asks to reassess where the proper role of journalism stems from. It is plausible to think that in the times of information super highways and the Internet, the significance of journalists may not be derived from criteria like recency or plausibility. Public, as defined by Dewey, would suggest that this significance is related to relevance defined from the public's point of view. Articulation of this relevance is the added value that public journalism is all about.

Connecting journalism to the concept of public in a Deweyan sense, however, leads to a paradox: how to address and articulate problems in a multiperspective world in a way that would enable us to experience them as **common**. The problem of Dewey is thus more or less transferred into public journalism.

In elaborating Deweyan strand of public journalism Arendt may turn out helpful. Arendt claims that emergence of publics always necessitates action, and journalism cannot remain indifferent to this. The emphasis on action also suggests that journalism cannot rely on the assumption that a participatory impulse of the public would automatically emerge from some moral qualities within a community. Arendt suggests that we should see public happiness as a value in itself. However, "success stories" often presented in public journalism are an insufficient means to augment this idea.

The question "what can be said about public action in public" sums up the problems that related most closely to tasks of journalism. Here we suggest that public journalism should not ignore the importance of journalistic forms and the forces underlying them. The development of new forms should somehow be related to theoretical basis of public journalism. Here especially "public happiness" might appear fruitful.

More generally, it should be noted that public journalism has many other relevant contexts extending our theoretical framework presented here. As a movement public journalism is connected to a declining trend of "general" forms of serious and commercial journalism, as well as to the growing disillusionment of people in the profession. As phenomenon in a broader social context it is one of the reactions against the sense of loss of "common projects" which in turn is related to the (growing) economic inequalities of Western societies. It is this broader social context that can be seen as the source of many of "problems" that public journalism projects have tried to address. Whether you talk about the alienation of voters or about the crimes in your

neighbourhood, these problems largely remain outside the realm of journalism. Hence, journalism in itself will not be a cure, however **public** it would become.

But the main point in public journalism is to make a choice whether you want to be a part of the problem or its solution. For public journalism, being a part of the solution means taking a new attitude towards people in the hope that this (along with other new civic practices) will give people new opportunities to actualise themselves as human being oriented also to public life. If such an orientation would grow, it would — in the very long haul — prepare a ground for curing some of the broader ills of social life as well.

All this may be euphemistic self-deception, of course. Instead of capturing old ideas that have a capacity to engage imagination (Carey 1995, 366) we might as well abandon community-based ideas of publicness that underscore — or at least imply — face-to-face interaction, co-presence and dialogue and create new theories of publicness (cf. Thompson 1995). However, even though the new revival of pragmatism and all the fashionable talk about "sense of community" may be partly illusory, "things of the past," they also capture some real aspects of our current experiences. In this sense at least, they cannot be abandoned.

We have followed Dewey in his most fundamental and useful insight: problems are the fuel of meaningful public life. Pointing out problems is an act of calling a public into existence, articulating it. This might call into being a very small "public" disagreeing on our theoretical reflections. But for public journalism, such publicness is urgent and important. A review of some practical projects and discussion about public journalism one is left with a feeling that some of the potentials and contradictions — within the theory and between theory and practice — have not been thought through, at least not in public. Our moderate hope is somehow to contribute to the movement by opening some theoretical questions.

## Notes:

1. Cf. Dewey (1916/1966, 187-188): "... the degree in which what is communicated cannot be organised into the existing experience of the learner, it becomes mere words: that is pure sense-stimuli, lacking in meaning." This is a reformulation of Peirce's famous maxim: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole or our conception of the objects" (Peirce 1966, 181).

2. The paradox illustrates Dewey's lack of sensitivity in terms of discourses. In practical terms, the way contemporary professional journalism is tied to the professional culture of politics (see Rosen 1995b, Charity 1995) might serve as an example of such "intimacy" with a particular sub- or top culture.

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