

Carmen Chirea-Ungureanu* and Andra Seceleanu*, Romania

Politics, Mass Media and Public in Romania

ABSTRACT

„ . . . To take apart the system of illusions and deception which functions to prevent understanding of contemporary reality [is] not a task that requires extraordinary skill or understanding. It requires the kind of normal skepticism and willingness to apply one's analytical skills that almost all people have and that they can exercise.”

—Noam Chomsky
The Chomsky Reader

In theory, at least, the Romanian mass media can make the political system more ‘transparent’ in three respects: mass media can help people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold government officials accountable. In practice, however, its effects are often quite different. In the age of mass media, democratic governments and politicians may find it useful to simulate the political virtues of transparency through rhetorical and media manipulation. This simulated transparency does not serve the underlying political values that motivate the metaphor of transparency. Instead, it is a transparency that obscures and obfuscates, that frustrates accountability and hides important information in a mass of manufactured political realities. It is a form of transparency that is not transparent at all.

All of the Romanian broadcast media, and most of the print media as well, are owned primarily by wealthy individuals. Direct ties to the biggest of big businesses are almost unbelievably extensive and, we believe, these ties cannot help but seriously bias and compromise news coverage. Moreover, the media empires are, first and foremost, profit-making corporations that conduct themselves like other corporations when it comes to corrupting Romanian politics. That is, the parent corporations of many make so-called “campaign contributions” and also act against the public interest in other ways. As big winners in the corruption game, they show no signs of serious interest in political reform. Our essay concerns the mass media’s contributions to the political values of openness and democratic accountability that go by the name of ‘transparency.’

I. When the Eastern Europe is coming up

The challenges of Eastern Europe, after the fall of the communist regime, are very distinctive. The state, as the single investor, is obliged to play a problematical role, a quite negative one at the beginning of the post-communist transition. That is why the immediate steps for the politics within the entire “block” include, firstly, the loosening of the state depending infrastructures, without no preliminary rigorous analysis of the long-term implications of such dimensions. The first impulse, the obvious one, was that to “give up with the state” now and forever (because the state was similar with the “communist party”). As a matter of fact, in Southern -Eastern Europe, bigger countries –such as Romania – try- having great difficulties during the entire process – to implement new politics of decentralization. But the idea is more successful in smaller countries, such as Slovenia, Croatia, and Bulgaria (at least at the level of the local decentralization, if not regional).

Talking about privatization, various legislative initiatives try to diverge and to consolidate the private sources of funding so to encourage privatization.

The first lesson, which was to be learned, was that, in order to step over the thinking frames built during the communist period, it was needed to reinvent the citizenship society, to regain the trust, and the circumstance to accept the co-existence of various opinions within a community. The second problem was tied with the re-defining of the sense of liability within the community: where should they stop complaining and where they should start the constructive critics, and what values should protect and promote the civilian actors? Third, there was the question related to the non-governmental sector's authority towards the public authorities and the legislative. In order to recognize this authority, firstly there had to be understood the role, function and compels of the public authorities and of the legislators, giving up the childish idea that democracy and anarchy are one and the same thing, and understanding the fact that a democratic existence implies order and respect for the existing institutions. It can be said that for the post-communist civilian society in transition, the restoration of the destroyed links and the re-invention of the social dynamic of liberty, as a pre-condition for democracy, was the main problem. Or, these can and should be built just from down to up, by action of the cultural groups (operators, artists, intellectuals), before the time they get to the decisional levels.

But in the specific context of the South- East Europe, this role of re-conversion was much more harder to be put into practice because the region had to fight against a war, to demolish a state (ex-Yugoslavia), and there was also the difficult emergency of the post-totalitarian societies (such as in Romania and Albania).

The new mission for the legislators and the public authorities to re-adjust their bureaucratic role was facilitated by the active presence of the occidental institutional mentors (such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, various occidental public institutions, cultural diplomatic agencies, etc.). The problem, in case of the public authority, was how to integrate the values that their positions assume to promote, how to action at difference on the administrative level (the administrative challenge), and how to draw and implement the new politics within the old institutional infrastructures. That is why, on the institutional cultural level, the new values were translated into issues related to the realization of some functional transformation (the managerial challenge), new ways of long-terms planning, or pure administrative organizational reforms.

On the public society level, the cultural networks and the projects developed on partnership have possibly represented the main source of learning and understanding the democratic values. However, this level was more important than the previous one, for the re-launching of the democratic dynamics, as it was intended to function also as a doer of social capital – the “link” which can get together the institutions. This challenge drew attention to not only the new values, but also to the interaction, within a larger cultural context, between memory and modernity, the old and the new, the ideological culture and the culture liberated of ideology, along with the way that all of these should be transmitted through the individual and collective cultural action. The problem, which was coming out from the need of competency on several levels, was acute. Meanwhile, before talking about competency, it was necessary to develop the strategic vision, and the values should be re-defined.

II. Mass-Media Political Effects

In the theory of democracy classical sense, mass media's role is to expand and broaden the information about public problems, including the political ones, to inform the citizens correctly and in time, and the latter ones, on turn, will influence the decisional process at the society's level.

The “interchange” pattern of the press- political parties ‘relationship, built on the constant interaction between both institutions, and, especially, on the reciprocal institutional implication, made the politicians to capture the attention of the informational instruments, and the journalists to gain informational supports or preferential conditions in order to obtain data relating to the political organizations.

The constant reference at the public opinion and its “authoritarian” using became patterns of modeling the decisional processes, and the elected representatives are under the ruler and the menacing of the modifying of the electoral structures, which brought them the power. Saying so, the political democratization has increased the influence and the power of the informational instruments. Public opinion and winning its adherence are the only reason for politics, when mass media, as the unique, rapid, efficient and permissive instrument of communication, has become a determinant and self-sufficient factor.

The mass media plays a crucial role in forming and reflecting public opinion: it communicates the world to individuals, and it reproduces modern society's self-image. Critiques in the early-to-mid twentieth century suggested that the media destroys the individual's capacity to act autonomously. Later empirical studies, however, suggest a more complex interaction between the media and society, with individuals actively interpreting and evaluating the media and the information it provides. In the twenty-first century, with the rise of the Internet, the two-way relationship between mass media and public opinion is beginning to change, with the advent of new technologies such as blogging.

Today political transparency is virtually impossible without some form of mass media coverage. However, mass media can frustrate the values of political transparency even while appearing to serve those values. When politicians and political operatives attempt to simulate transparency and appropriate the rhetoric of openness and accountability, the mass media does not always counteract the simulation. Indeed, it may actually tend to proliferate it.

People often oppose transparency to secrecy. However, governments and politicians can manipulate the presentation and revelation of information to achieve the same basic goals as a policy of secrecy and obfuscation. There are two basic strategies: divert audience attention, and supplement politics with new realities that crowd out and eventually displace other political realities and political issues. In this way political transparency can be defeated by what appear to be its own mechanisms: proliferating information, holding political officials accountable, and uncovering things that are secrets¹.

The mass media has become the essential instrument for forming the public opinion: more than 80% of Romanian population uses at least one source, of three of them, for his/her information.

III. Political Journalism in the New Media Climate; Its Relationship with the Political World

Nowadays, the electors regard mass media political communication as the most direct and influent way to have access to the politicians and to the political organizations. Knowledge of the rules and routine of journalism, together with the local political environment, can offer to the political news consumer the possibility to see the political phenomenon reflected in mass media from a qualified point of view.

The new mass media climate is different in a qualitative and quantitative perspective from the traditional press, in the way it functioned till the end of the ‘80s, considering the

¹ Baudrillard, Jean 1994: *Simulacra and Simulation*. Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press

occidental informational world. The manifestations of the new mass media climate do not represent, at any rate, a modern version for the classical press, because it proposes a revolutionary media system, ubiquitous, interdependent and extremely influent for the entire population of the world.

The more influent the new mass media political role is the more provoking it is for the media consumer; the latter turns from a simple spectator into an actor implied in the life of the city.

From the very beginning, experts has shown the new mass media great potential so as to educate, to ease the public discourse, and to directly interact with the citizens. The new media climate has easily created a mass audience, by taking information using the electronic support where on earth (sites, internet, televisions, radios, mobile telephony), and their instantaneous dissemination on the multimedia channels.

IV. How Do Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency?

The very metaphor of transparency suggests a medium through which we view things. We want the medium to be transparent to vision so that we can accurately view what is on the other side. In the case of transparency of participation or accountability, we want to make the medium ‘transparent’ to political will so that what is on the other side of the medium will respond efficaciously to assertions of political will.

This metaphor assumes:

- (1) That the medium is conceptually separate from the object on the other side; and
- (2) That the process of seeing through the medium does not substantially alter the nature of the object viewed.

Both of these assumptions turn out to be false when the medium is television and the object to be viewed is governance. The medium is not conceptually distinct from the operations of governance because governance occurs through using the medium. Moreover, seeing things through the medium of television substantially alters the object being viewed. Indeed, television creates its own political reality: a televised politics and a public sphere of discourse organized around media coverage of politics. This sphere of discourse is self-reflexive and self-reproducing – television coverage of politics is part of politics, and hence media discourse about politics continually supplements and alters the politics that it purports to portray.

How do mass media simulate and subvert political transparency? The basic idea is simple. Sometimes the most effective strategy for hiding something may be to leave it out in the open, and merely alter the context in which people view it. Instead of hiding facts, one should instead seek to change background realities.

These tactics are most useful against a weaker, smaller opponent with less information processing and filtering resources. They are designed to demoralize the other side, raise the costs of litigation, and divert time and energy from the most important substantive questions in the lawsuit. In this way one can use the discovery process – which is, after all, designed to achieve a certain kind of informational transparency – to undermine the values of transparency. One can use the form of transparency to achieve substantial obscurity.

This example demonstrates the two basic strategies for simulating transparency: diversion of attention and supplementation of reality. The goal is to consume the opponent’s time and attention. Equally important, one tries to shift the ground of battle to issues of information management and technical questions of procedure. In short, one creates a new practical legal reality for the opponent. This new reality competes with and displaces the

substantive issues that originally motivated the lawsuit. In other words, the skillfully played discovery battle creates new objects of contention: it produces ever-new things to be concerned about, to become angry about, and to fight about.

In the public arena, simulation of transparency also uses diversion and supplementation. But although the public is trying to obtain information, it is not in the same position as a litigant. Politicians and the mass media do not necessarily regard the public as an adversary. Rather politicians seek to shape and benefit from public opinion, and mass media seek to entertain the public and maintain public attention and influence. Nevertheless, in achieving these ends politicians and the media, both collectively and agonistically, divert audience attention and supplement politics with new political realities.

Without mass media, openness and accountability are impossible in contemporary democracies. Nevertheless, mass media can hinder political transparency as well as help it. Politicians and political operatives can simulate the political virtues of transparency through rhetorical and media manipulation. Television tends to convert coverage of law and politics into forms of entertainment for mass consumption, and television serves as fertile ground for a self-proliferating culture of scandal. Given the limited time available for broadcast and the limited attention of audiences, stories about political strategy, political infighting, political scandal and the private lives of politicians tend to crowd out less entertaining stories about substantive policy questions. Political life begins to conform increasingly to the image of politics portrayed on television. Through a quasi-Darwinian process, media events, scandals, and other forms of politics-as-entertainment eventually dominate and weed out other forms of political information and public discussion, transforming the very meaning of public discourse. In this way the goals of political transparency can be defeated by what appear to be its central mechanisms: proliferating information, holding political officials accountable for their actions, and uncovering secrets.

In fact, the metaphor of transparency encompasses three separate political virtues, which often work together but are analytically distinct. The first kind of transparency is informational transparency: knowledge about government actors and decisions and access to government information. Requiring public statements of the reasons for government action can further informational transparency, or requiring disclosure of information the government has collected. A second type of transparency is participatory transparency: the ability to participate in political decisions either through fair representation or direct participation. A third kind of transparency is accountability transparency: the ability to hold government officials accountable – either to the legal system or to public opinion – when they violate the law or when they act in ways that adversely affect people's interests. This accountability can be direct accountability (for example, the ability to sue), indirect accountability (holding officials accountability to one's agents or elected representatives) or accountability to some other body that acts in the public interest, like a court of law.

V. The special role of television

One can well understand why politicians would want to divert attention from information that is detrimental to their interests. But why would the mass media have an interest in simulating transparency? Indeed, the media's interests are quite different than those of politicians. Nevertheless the media's collective efforts also subvert the political values of transparency, even – and perhaps especially – when media and politicians view each other as adversaries.

Many different kinds of mass media can simulate transparency. But the dominant medium of political communication in our age – and hence the dominant medium of political

transparency – is television. To understand how television simulates transparency, we must understand how television shapes what we see through it. When we use television to understand politics, we see things in the way that television allows them to be seen. At the same time, television creates new forms of political reality that exist because they are seen on television.

Television tends to emphasize entertainment value. It subjects culture to a Darwinian process: The less entertaining is weeded out, the more entertaining survives to be broadcast. Hence coverage of public events, politics, and even law must eventually conform to the requirements of ‘good television,’ that is, the kind of television that grabs and keeps viewers’ attention by absorbing and entertaining them.

Television encourages coverage that focuses on the personal celebrity of participants and on the sporting elements of political conflict (Fallows, 1996; Postman, 1985). Over time, television coverage of politics tends to focus less on substantive policy issues than on the techniques of securing political advantage and political viability (Fallows, 1996; Bennett, 1996). The question of ‘who’s winning’ and how are they achieving this victory tends to dominate television coverage. In one sense stories about backstage political manoeuvring and spin control offer a kind of transparency, because they purport to give viewers an ‘inside’ account of the strategic considerations of politicians and public officials. But in another sense they divert attention from substantive policy debates. Given the limited time available for broadcast and the limited attention of audiences, ‘inside’ stories about strategy and jockeying for political advantage tend to crowd out stories about substantive policy questions.

Moreover, because politicians understand how important mass media have become to retaining power and influencing citizens, television helps create a new reality populated by spin-doctor, pollsters, pundits, and media consultants. Thus eventually political life begins to conform more closely to the image of politics that television portrays it to be. Television portrays a world of image manipulation and spin control largely devoid of substantive debate or reasoned analysis. Because television is so central to successful mass politics, it eventually helps produce the very elements that it portrays. We might call this a self-fulfilling representation.

Television coverage of law has analogous effects. Television converts law into a form of entertainment suitable for consumption by lay audiences (Postman, 1985). Television has created a world of law-related shows and legal commentators whose basic goal is to describe law in ways that are comprehensible to television audiences and that can hold their attention. This means, among other things, that law must become entertaining (Balkin, 1992). Certain features of law – the thrust and parry of contention in lawsuits and criminal trials – seem tailor made for television coverage. But the image of law that television portrays reshapes the adversary system in television’s image. Law-as-entertainment seems to bring the legal system closer to the public, but it actually substitutes a transformed product – televised law. Public imagination about law used to be nourished by television dramas and made-for-TV movies; now it is increasingly shaped by television coverage of legal events themselves, which are served up as popular entertainment and displayed through the lens of television commentary (Balkin, 1992).

In a very short time the Internet has become an important medium of political communication that rivals television. The Internet is not yet televisual; it employs mostly text and still pictures. Even so, the Internet has shaped and enhanced the effects of television in three ways. First, the Internet has helped to shorten the news cycle of reporting, in part because stories can be constantly updated on the Internet with relative ease. A shorter news cycle tends to promote more continuous television coverage of news events, especially on cable networks. Second, because the Internet makes mass distribution of information relatively inexpensive, it helps proliferate new kinds of information from new sources –

including gossip and second-hand reports – that television can pick up and disseminate, assuming that the information passes muster under existing standards of television journalism. Third, for similar reasons, the Internet makes possible new journalistic sources that compete with television coverage, and new journalistic practices that may occasionally affect the form and content of television coverage and the standards of television journalists. Hence, the Internet can help exacerbate television's tendency to emphasize celebrity, inside strategy and gossip, and television's conversion of law and politics into forms of entertainment, even though the Internet is not yet a fully televisual medium.

VI. Media events

Media events are familiar methods of manipulating political transparency. Politicians stage events are specifically designed to be covered by the mass media. Media events show politicians engaged in the business of governing or carefully deliberating over public policy issues. Another class of media event shows the politician with his or her family, participating in casual activities, or in a seemingly unguarded and intimate moment.

Media events that involve displays of governance are designed to look governmental, and media events involving displays of personal affect are designed to look spontaneous. Romanian politics has employed media events for many years. The Administration developed them to a high art form.

Media events perform a *jujitsu* move on the political values of transparency. The goal of political transparency is to help people watch over the operations of government and the behavior of government officials. The point of the media event is to encourage watching. The media event is a form of political exhibitionism that simulates effective governance and personal candor.

By demanding our attention, and the attention of the news media, media events appear to offer us substantive information although what they actually offer is largely political image and showmanship. Moreover, by commanding media attention, media events trade on a fundamental difficulty facing all forms of political transparency. This is the problem of audience scarcity.

Most individuals have only limited time and attention to devote to public issues. Political values of transparency do not demand that citizens spend all of their time on public subjects. Rather, they make information available to individuals so that they can use it if they so choose. But when there is too much information, filtering necessarily occurs. This filtering occurs both in terms of what media decide to cover and what individuals decide to watch. Media companies must pick and choose among hundreds of possible subjects to discuss. Individuals must choose among thousands of hours of potential coverage of public events.

The need for filtering enhances the power of media events. By flooding the media with ready made press releases and staged pageants that function as 'good television,' politicians provide media with easily edited programming that can be strung together in televised sequences. Providing media with 'good television' allows politicians to capture more and more of the media's coverage. This diverts media attention from information that might actually be more useful to the political goals of participation, information, and accountability.

For these reasons media events can affect the behavior of news organizations that are fully aware of their simulated character. Well-planned media events can displace other forms of reporting that take greater time and effort to produce. By thrusting entertainment in our face, politicians effectively keep us from watching other things. And because politicians, and especially presidents, increasingly govern through media events, news organizations feel an

obligation to cover them. Media events, in short, both divert political attention and supplement political reality.

VII. The Public and the Private

Many people have noted and decried the mass media's increasing intrusion into the private lives of public figures. Although coverage of entertainers' and sports figures' private lives has been common for many years, the phenomenon has clearly invaded political life as well.

Media coverage of the private lives of public figures is actually a form of informational transparency, although not necessarily one that serves democratic values. Increasingly the mass media have endeavored to make the private lives of public figures transparent to the ordinary viewer. For many people this evolution of journalistic standards is a travesty, because it diverts attention from 'public' issues. But as noted before, increasing intrusion into private lives does not merely divert attention – it also helps create and supplement public discourse; it fosters new political realities that cannot easily be avoided. . Repeated focus on the 'private' eventually alters the boundaries between public and private; it changes the nature of what is appropriately withheld from public scrutiny. Revelations of the previously 'private' also alter the meaning of 'public discourse' or 'public issues.' The very pervasiveness and availability of information (or rumors) about the private lives of public officials reinforces the idea that such private behavior is not wholly private – that it raises public issues about which the public should be concerned.

Journalists, in turn, have adapted the rhetoric of political transparency to defend their emerging investigative practices, to rationalize greater sexual frankness in reporting of news stories, and to justify their sense of greater entitlement to investigate and report on the private lives of public officials, including their infidelities, their sexual orientations, and their sexual habits.

Many journalists defend their evolving practices using language that sounds very much like a defense of political transparency: The public, they argue, has a right to know. Moreover, although some revelations may ultimately prove immaterial to political issues, journalists should place all potentially relevant information before the public and let the public choose whether it is relevant to democratic decision-making¹. By arguing that the public has a right to know about 'private' issues, journalists can present themselves as more devoted to transparency than journalists of the past. While journalists previously would have killed stories about private sexual behavior, contemporary journalists can claim that they are offering a freer, more open form of public debate in which they no longer play the role of paternalistic gatekeepers. Some journalists can even convince themselves that they are empowering the public through these revelations. But instead of empowering their audiences or increasing information, journalists may in fact simply be altering the mix of stories presented to the public; the practical effect may be a contraction of the scope of public discourse.

However, we should not lay blame for these changes entirely at the feet of journalists and media executives. In fact, politicians themselves have contributed to the gradual change in the contours of public discussion. Politicians, like other public figures, have discovered over time that in a world shaped by television, it is increasingly important to communicate not only information but also ethos. Public figures hope to persuade and possibly manipulate their audiences by presenting themselves as likeable or down-to-earth characters that a television

¹ see Overholser, Geneva 1998: Pushing the Limits. *Washington Post*, October 10, p. 23A.

audience can relate to. Using television to humanize public figures is related to the rise of media events as a form of governance.

By displaying their personalities for consumption by television audiences, public figures simulate yet another form of transparency – the transparency of ethos. The television audience gains access to what the public figure is ‘really’ like ‘up close and personal.’ Celebrities and public figures, who regularly appear on television try to garner high popularity ratings by appearing close to their viewers. In this respect television differs somewhat from motion pictures; movie actors may deliberately attempt to establish aloofness or distance from their fans. Fans of television actors, on the other hand, often think themselves closer to the actors as people.

Politicians have learned that the appearance of intimacy or the production of an attractive ethos on television is very helpful to political success. As a result, many public figures have attempted to project as far as possible a personable, warm, or approachable image appropriate for television. Public figures who appear distant, cold, or uncaring on television generally succeed in spite of their appearance.

In order to simulate a transparency of ethos, politicians and public figures have been collapsing the distance between the public figure and his or her private persona for some time. They have attempted to connect with viewers and voters by emphasizing their emotional availability, friendliness, and closeness to voters in ways dictated by the medium of television. Successful politicians have always run on character issues and emphasized their own good character. But television culture gradually changes the sort of character the successful politician must portray. To succeed as a television personality, politicians have tended to emphasize elements of their persona that might otherwise be thought ‘private;’ they have shown more and more of their (seemingly) ‘private’ sides to the public. They show themselves to be ‘family people.’ They engage in confessional displays, revealing private features of their past, their family’s past, or their family’s current difficulties. They provide seemingly unguarded moments of revelation and deep connection to the voters. They emote on cue in public. To a large extent this presentation of the private side of a politician’s life is a fabrication – it is the work of publicity agents and campaign staffs. Nevertheless, politicians persist in it because it works well in terms of the dominant medium of political communication – television.

But this simulated transparency comes at a cost. Simulating a transparent ethos for television necessarily reconfigures the boundaries between publicity and privacy. The more politicians attempt to use television as a means of establishing closeness to their constituents, the more they erase the boundaries between the public official and what they promote as his or her private persona. The exhibition of a private persona for public consumption invites the public to expect that elements of the private appropriately merge with a politician’s public persona and hence is appropriate subjects of public discussion. Politicians have manipulated television imagery for so long that they have helped to create the very erasure of public and private persona that now haunts them¹. They have been willing accomplices in the creation of a new political culture that sees private aspects of a person’s life as politically relevant that collapses older boundaries between public and private. The current wave of media propagated scandals in Romania is the price we are currently paying for the construction of a simulated transparency between governments and the governed. Traian Basescu, for example, won the presidential elections by consistently making voters feel that he personally cared about them. Indeed, one of the clichés most often used to describe President Basescu’s personal style is his famous remark delivered in the 2004 campaign: ‘Live in a good way.’ Basescu has proven

¹ see Hoggart, Simon 1987: The Big Bang: The Press and the British Royal Family. *New Republic*, November 23.

himself a master at pushing himself – his emotions, his desires, his empathy, his appetites, even his moments of personal pain – at the Romanian public.

VIII. Conclusion

Romanian Revolution was among the first in history to use Television as a tool. It certainly contributed to “building freedom and democracy” and to the elimination of a Communist regime. It also provided a lesson in community media, journalism, manipulation, and how media can influence politics. A civil society is growing in Romania, and closely related, the diversity of the Mass Media. Political life continues to be lively and extreme, but the Mass Media enjoys a greater deal of freedom. Appearance of the Internet is a new aspect that could not be influenced by the old structures of power. Media moved from a highly political polemics type to sensationalistic - entertaining articles, together with a relatively small informational and analytical media. It focuses primarily on entertainment, similar to British tabloids. Romanian society is a dynamic one, and mass media is part of it, constantly changing, adapting or struggling.

For a postmodern politics, power is diffuse and local and not merely to be found in macroinstitutions like the workplace, the state, or patriarchy. Macropolitics that goes after big institutions like the state or capital is to be replaced by micropolitics, with specific intellectuals intervening in spheres like the university, the prison, the hospital, or for the rights of specific oppressed groups like sexual or ethnic minorities. Global and national politics and theories are rejected in favor of more local micro politics, and the discourse and function of the intellectuals is seen as more specific, provisional, and modest than in modern theory and politics, subordinate to local struggles rather than more ambitious projects of emancipation and social transformation.

Such a binary distinction between macro and micro theory and politics is problematical. Using the example of the events of 1989 that saw the collapse of communism, for instance, it is clear that the popular offensives against oppressive communist power combined micro and macropolitics, moving from local and specific struggles rooted in union halls, universities, churches, and small groups to mass demonstrations forcing democratic reforms and even classical mass insurrection aiming at an overthrow of the existing order, as in Romania. In these struggles, intellectuals played a variety of roles and deployed a diversity of discourses, ranging from the local and specific to the national and general.

The radio, television, and other electronic modes of communication were creating new public spheres of debate, discussion, and information and that intellectuals who wanted to engage the public, to be where the people were at, and who thus wanted to intervene in the public affairs of their society should make use of these new media technologies and institutions, and develop new communication politics and new media projects.

The effective use of technology is essential in contemporary politics and that intellectuals who wish to intervene in the new public spheres need to deploy new communications media to participate in democratic debate and to shape the future of contemporary societies and culture. Our argument is that first broadcast media like radio and television, and now computers have produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain both the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas -- as well as new possibilities for manipulation, social control, and the promotion of conservative positions. But participation in these new public spheres -- computer bulletin boards and discussion groups, talk radio and

television, and the emerging sphere of what it is called *cyberspace democracy* require critical intellectuals to gain new technical skills and to master new technologies.

A revitalization of democracy in capitalist societies will therefore require a democratic media politics. Such a politics could involve a two-fold strategy of, first, attempting to democratise existing media to make them more responsive to the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." The media watchdog group has developed this alternative, criticizing mainstream media for failing to assume their democratic and journalistic responsibilities and calling for an expansion of voices and ideas within the media system. Another strategy involves the development of oppositional media, alternatives to the mainstream, developed outside of the established media system. On our view, both strategies are necessary for the development of a democratic media politics and it is a mistake to pursue one at the neglect of the other.

Developing a radical democratic media politics thus involves continued relentless criticism of the existing media system, attempts to democratise and reform it, and the production of alternative progressive media. On our account, democratising our media system will require expansion of the alternative press, a revitalization of public television, an increased role for public access television, the eventual development of a public satellite system, democratised computer networks, and oppositional cultural politics within every sphere of culture, ranging from music to visual to print culture.

** Mrs. Carmen Chirea-Ungureanu, PhD, is Lecturer of Communication, Head of Communication Department, at Andrei Saguna University, Constanta, Romania.*

** Mrs Andra Seceleanu, PhD, is Lecturer of Communication, Director of Survey and Socio-Human Investigation Center, at Andrei Saguna University, Constanta, Romania.*