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2014

# Habermas and Intellectual Freedom: Three Paths

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## Habermas and Intellectual Freedom: Three Paths

John Buschman

### Introduction

Jürgen Habermas' fundamental (and continuing) contributions in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries to philosophy, political theory, communications theory, critical social theory, legal theory, and critical education studies among other fields are well known. Space will not be used here to introduce his biography or corpus of work, other than to refer the reader to his entry in the free online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or a shorter précis this author wrote a few years ago (Buschman 2010). Since his has been such a long and productive career that includes significant engagement with contemporary public issues, someone with a passing familiarity with him might well assume that Habermas had long ago weighed in on intellectual freedom (IF) – or academic freedom, its close cousin with which it is much entangled (Buschman and Rosenzweig 1999). However, he has not meditated on the role of either – nor a justification for them, and Habermas has largely passed over educative institutions<sup>1</sup> in his career (1992, 438) beyond broadly noting that “market success is being replaced by professional success resulting from formal education ... [in the] ideology of achievement” (1976a, 381). When he has somewhat turned to the topic, Habermas wrote primarily about the German student protests of the 1960s and the new roles of the German university in a democratic capitalist society. He broadly reflected on the role of free speech in those protests, the “beneficent but archaic freedoms” of the university, and that the “link between our postwar democracy and the traditional university—a link that

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<sup>1</sup> There are two working assumptions around which much of this chapter is built. First, that any rounded conception of intellectual and/or academic freedom largely presumes the rights and protections within democratic societies. Second (in something of a feedback loop), contemporary democracies rely on and produce varieties of institutions, which Mara enumerates as three: 1) educative (the focus here, encompassing libraries, schools and universities), 2) enabling (encompassing voting, political participation), and 3) elicitive (juries, school boards, etc.) (2008, 132). The context of intellectual and academic freedom in classrooms and of libraries is thus situated here as a function of public educative institutions in a democratic society. As it was put, intellectual freedom is “indispensable to librarians, because they are trustees of knowledge with the responsibility of ensuring the availability of information and ideas ... [and] so that teachers may freely teach and students may freely learn” (Association of College and Research Libraries and American Association of University Professors in Buschman and Rosenzweig 1999, 38).

seems ... attractive—is coming to an end” (Habermas 1970, 4-5). He comes closest to IF in a later reflection on the evolution of the university: it is a lifeworld<sup>2</sup> and so the relationship between the “dimension of critical self-reflection [and] the relations of research processes ... [should] be rendered transparent,” noting the historic example of the “exemplary significance given to scientific autonomy” in teaching and research which resulted in a free exchange of knowledge: the “stimulating and productive power of discursive disputes” (Habermas 1987a, 16-17, 21; Ostovich 1995).

His other persistent focus has been the “contradictory steering imperatives [which] assert themselves through the purposive-rational actions not of market-participants, but of members of [school] administration” whose legitimacy is declining since curricula are no longer self-evident (Habermas 1975, 68, 71). It is in the context of those cross-cutting economic and bureaucratic pressures that school and teacher autonomy (presumably also in the form of intellectual and academic freedom) is eroded (Habermas 1987c, 371-373) Habermas wishes to uncover the “affinity [between] the enterprise of knowledge ... [and] the democratic form of decision-making” (Habermas in Ostovich 1995, 473), but he admits that the enterprise “can get along perfectly well without that fond notion it once had of itself” (Habermas 1987a, 18). Beyond these indirect comments, Habermas does not address the issue extensively. That, however, is not meant to imply that Habermas has little or nothing to say about the place, nature, or importance of IF.

There are three paths within his work that provide insight into the topic, and they become increasingly sophisticated, reflective and critical as they are presented and framed here. The final result is a nuanced and supple contextualization of IF, the forces that militate against its full realization and a deeper understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Mara describes the lifeworld concept as “the ‘reservoir’ of societal meanings that surround and enable communicat[ion] ... And it constitutes the informal but structured communicative networks that allow discursive interactions among the differentiated spheres of complex societies” (2008, 143). There is a very useful compilation of references to and quotations of Habermas’ concept, the clearest of which describes the function of the lifeworld: “the propagation of cultural traditions, the integration of groups by norms and values, and the socialization of succeeding generations” (Habermas in Brookfield 2005, 1143, 1140-1145).

the relationship between IF and democratic capacities. We will begin with the logical support for IF within Habermas' concept of the public sphere, then move to neopragmatic appropriations of Habermas' thoughts and their meaning for IF, and finally his ideas of systematically distorted communications and the strong implication for IF as a critical counterweight. Those are three of the paths within Habermas' corpus chosen here to lead us to and reflect on IF.

It has been my habit at this stage in presenting Habermas to demur about the comprehensiveness, connectedness, complexity and breadth of his thought in relationship to what is presented here. However, Habermas is utilized in the way adopted here in so many fields—and they proceed to redact his work in the same way as those of us who in the LIS field do—that it is perhaps time to simply put him to use and let our colleagues and the process of discursive exchange hone our ideas about and appropriations of him. Finally, some of those précis are cited here in order to save time and space and proceed more directly down the three paths Habermas takes toward IF. The reader is encouraged to use the bibliography and go beyond this chapter.

### Path One: The Public Sphere

Habermas' investigation into the public sphere presents a "stylized picture," historically situated, of its development as an essential element of democratization (1989, xix; Hohendahl 1974). The public sphere itself is "a child of the eighteenth century"—that is, of the Enlightenment, and conceptually it is an abstraction, only fleshed out in its practices and effects (Habermas 1989; xviii; 1974). The briefest way into the concept is to describe what was reacted against: historically, the "public face of the ... state was splendour, its core was shrouded in secrecy. The combination ... was raised to the level of a political philosophy by Machiavelli, but it was a commonplace of ... statecraft. A positive role was given to the secrets of the state" (Peters 1993, 547).

As for the state's pomp and splendor, they are embodied in the "ceremony and imposingness" of monarchy and

were often staged: from jousting matches to the courtly conduct which reached its height in the Versailles of Louis XIV (Peters 1993, 545).<sup>3</sup> Thus was power and hierarchy depicted as legitimate and virtuous, justified by being "capable of public representation" (Habermas 1989, 8). The increasing interests of merchants in the policies of increasingly mercantile governments set up a tension "between the authorities and the subjects[, an] ambivalence [between] public regulation and private initiative" (Habermas 1989, 24). In response, those mercantile interests began to coalesce and then communicate about those policies, becoming in the process a grouping "situated between the absolutist state and bourgeois society, i.e., between the world of social labor and commodity trade ... consist[ing] of discoursing private persons who critically negate political norms of the state and its monopoly on interpretation" and information (Hohendahl 1979, 92). That for Habermas is the indispensable seedbed of democratic functions: "a historical process whereby the shift from premodern feudal, absolutist rule to forms of modern representative democra[tic] public opinion, based on publicly available information and debate, developed both as a check on, and as a source for the legitimacy of government" (Garnham 2001, 12856).<sup>4</sup> Thus "a discursive or deliberative model replace[d] the [traditional liberal] contract model: the ... community constitutes itself not by way of a social contract but on the basis of a discursively achieved agreement" in Habermas' theory of modern democratic origins (1996, 449).

The *process* of that shift brings us into the arena that IF would eventually flesh out. Habermas is careful to distinguish between "plebiscitary-acclamatory" forms of public assent to ruling that twentieth century dictatorships were so successful at manipulating; they represent a controlled and "regimented public sphere" (1989, xviii). By this Habermas means the manipulations of a "stylized ... show ... [and] symbols to which ... one can not respond by arguing but only by identifying with them," and in this sense those controlled and false

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<sup>3</sup> A contemporary manifestation of this phenomenon can still be seen in ecclesial "ritual, liturgy, mass, and processions" (Habermas 1989, 8).

<sup>4</sup> Habermas put it this way: "By mobilizing citizens' communicative freedom for the formation of political beliefs that in turn influence the production of legitimate law, [communicative] obligations of this sort build up into a potential that holders of ... power should not ignore" (1996, 147).

choices are non-literate (1989, 206, xviii).<sup>5</sup> Historically, the public sphere then was strongly connected to the “intellectual press” and literate, free exchange of opinion, observation, and argumentation in that venue; in other words, a key element of the public sphere (and thus the development of political democracy) was reasoned argument carried out in publication (Habermas 1974, 53). Those journals contained not merely information (prices, the travels of princes, incoming and outgoing ships), but also “pedagogical instruction and even criticism and reviews”; soon the writers began “to think their own thoughts, directed against the authorities,” and then they “readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion” (Habermas 1989, 25). Habermas sees in the historical development of the public sphere the instituting of “rational legal principles ... which were binding for all”—that is, the restriction of public authority in the interests of private, discursive autonomy (Hohendahl 1974, 46; Habermas 1974, 52-53). It is in this sense that the public sphere was literate and literary in its development, and that essential interest continues to this day: “without the flow of information gained through extensive research, and without the stimulation of arguments based on ... expertise ... public communication loses its discursive vitality” (Habermas 2007; 1985a, 97). Democracy for Habermas is not merely choosing from among elites through voting in occasional elections and exercising private liberties within a framework of legal protections; rather, “the legitimate exercise of political power [is] trace[d] to the free communication of citizens” (Cohen 1999, 387).

Habermas is ever concerned with restrictions and blocks on communication, and the “administrative solution favoured by Habermas is to facilitate access ... for a discoursing public” in the interests of the health and functioning of democracy (Rodger 1985, 207; Habermas 1994).<sup>6</sup> It is this mantle that librarianship has

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<sup>5</sup> This distinction represents an effective answer to the red herring set up by Buckland: libraries are important to democratic regimes, “but so is oil,” and they are “important assets in nondemocratic regimes” as well; there are the historical examples of Lenin’s librarian wife or the enthusiasm of Mussolini’s minister of education—thus any theoretical approach that frames these institutions in IF terms in service to democracy is *de facto* falsely essentializing this relationship in his argument (2009; 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Habermas recognizes that formally democratic representative democratic bodies can function, but become utterly disconnected to a functioning public sphere (that is, a legitimate and justified political order): essentially a “state based on the rule of law but without democracy” (1992, 431). The problems with and objections to his model are summarized and reviewed by Lefrançois and Ethier (2010) and Garnham (2001). Essentially the issues come down to objections that empirical experience is not as tidy as a theoretical

taken up and instantiated in its practices and in its IF ethos. Habermas enumerates five basic categories of rights:

- 1) those developed autonomously and politically to ensure "equal subjective liberties"
- 2) those that result from the autonomy "of the status of a member in a[n] association of consociates under law"
- 3) those that "result ... from the actionability of rights and ... legal measures"
- 4) those ensuring "equal chances at participation in the processes of opinion- and will-formation;
- 5) and those "that secure the conditions of ... social, technical and environmental protection, that are necessary ... for an equal chance to use [those] civil rights" just noted (Baynes 1995, 211).

In turn, librarianship instantiates and articulates a set of principles and practices that, if they do not constitute a precise one-to-one parallel to Habermas' enumerations of rights, they broadly articulate them in the form of IF and its purposes in the democratic roles that libraries play:

- Libraries house and further rational discourse through the organization of collections which is coupled with the principle of unfettered information access and transparency.
- The field enacts the principle of critique and rational argumentation through the commitment to balanced collections, preserving access to them over time, and furthering inclusion through active attempts to make collections and resources reflect historical and current intellectual diversity.
- By their very existence libraries potentially verify (or refute) claims to authority in making current and retrospective organized resources available to check the bases of a thesis, law, book, article, policy etc. continuing the process of debate which lies at the heart of the public sphere and democracy.
- The field has sought to reach out to those not served to make access to information and education more widely and universally available, thereby continuing to ground communicative and democratic processes. (Buschman 2003a, 47; 2005)

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description allows, and the related point that the "public" of the public sphere was never exclusive to male bourgeois—a point Habermas (1992) has long ago conceded and integrated into his theory. I agree with Hohendahl's contention that Habermas has provided an essential historical category that has allowed us to understand the historical transition to democracy in the west (1974), and thus "even when Habermas has been contradicted, it is usually within the framework of his theory" (1979, 89).

Coupled with Habermas' earlier comments on the necessary freedom of educative institutions in democratic societies, that these institutional locations form smaller lifeworlds themselves in need of free communicative exchange, the importance of informed (that is, research-based) public opinion formation, and the articulated role of rights, and Habermas' theory of the public sphere welds a justification for IF strongly to the needs and just functioning of democratic societies and their educative institutions.<sup>7</sup> This then is the most direct route to IF within Habermas' work.

### Path Two: Habermas as Neopragmatist

From the very beginning Habermas' work could be characterized as practical and pragmatic in the sense that it is "directed principally toward society" and concerned in its analysis with "implications ... for our life together" (Haught 1988, 25). Specifically, he has plumbed the "practical interest [in] improving mutual understanding and preserving intersubjectivity of understanding," (Habermas in Frankel 1974, 47), and in pursuing that practical interest, he has drawn specifically on Pragmatism to ask: "How shall we employ what we know to direct our practical behavior so as to test these beliefs and make possible better ones? The question is seen as it has always been empirically: What shall we do to make objects having value more secure in existence?" (Dewey in Habermas 1973, 272) In other words, at a very high level of abstraction (Wood 1985, 147-148), Habermas has long been in sympathy and congruence with the tradition of the American Pragmatists, and he further identified and articulated many of the same problems of the intertwined relationship between the functions of democracy and the development of a capitalist economy as Dewey (1927; Habermas 1996, 171, 316). A good deal of this can be encapsulated in the meaning of his word "scientism," which for Habermas signifies that thought, investigation, and rationality "must be identified with science" alone; the scientific

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<sup>7</sup> It also provides an empirical answer to Garnham's claim that Habermas and deliberative democrats generally valorize direct participation and do not deal well with intermediary arrangements and their roles (2001, 12589-12590). Habermas' look at the role of educative institutions as lifeworlds and the articulations of rights carried out within associations has, I would argue, answered some of this line of questioning.



society has welded these techniques to production and the shaping of social practice so as to obviate utterly “democratic planning as a steering mechanism” within the enormous scale of modern economies in putatively democratic societies (1971, 650-652; 1970, 81-85). Thus reason becomes exclusively instrumental action in service to economic ends, excluding reason—understood in Haberasian practical terms as of communicative reaching of mutual understanding, problem solving, and life-making that underwrites the health of the lifeworld and democratic functioning: “to the extent that practical questions are eliminated, the public realm loses its political function” (Habermas 1970, 104).<sup>8</sup>

The Neopragmatic appropriations of Habermas make a decisive move back toward a less boxed-in position and toward IF, drawing from his insistence on communicative rationality’s “stubbornly transcending power, because it is renewed with each act of unconstrained understanding” (Habermas 1982, 221). It is instantiated in pragmatic and practical terms in a “substantial-ethical procedural democratic theory”—that is, the search for the means to enact and replicate democracy and its ethos in fair, neutral, and rational discursive ways (Bernstein 1996 1145). Habermas “relies on a particular conception of human excellence; the best way of life is the autonomous life” (Mara 1985, 1053): “Only in an emancipated society, which had realized the autonomy of its members, would communication have developed into that free dialogue of all with all which we always hold up as the very paradigm of a mutually formed self-identity, as well as the ideal of true consensus. To this extent the truth of statements is based on the anticipation of a life without repression” (Habermas 1966, 297). People cannot realize their autonomy (or their interest in it—the same way in which they have a practical interest in mutual understanding) based “on their collective tutelage to social relations, institutions or values to which they cannot adopt a detached, critical attitude, and which they cannot accept [or justify] on rational

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas clearly links these concepts to that of the lifeworld: “To the extent that action coordination, and with it the formation of networks of interaction, takes place through processes of reaching understanding, intersubjectively shared convictions form the medium of social integration” (1996, 35). White’s contention that this analysis of “‘scientism’ may have made some sense in the heyday of logical positivism, but [is] not very telling [in terms] of contemporary philosophy of science” is far too narrow and academic (2004, 316). There is an empirical reality outside of intellectual currents in the form of the economy, its functioning, and its tight relationship with Big Science that this critique still speaks to in effective ways.

grounds" (Wood 1985, 148-149). Therefore, if "autonomy and responsibility in the evaluation of individual and social choices" are to be rational and healthy and deliberative, then educative institutions have a substantive role to play in fostering those baseline capacities (Mara 1985, 1038; 2008, 132, 141; Warren 1993, 214-216; 2002, 692; Englund 2000; 2006; Gutmann 1987). That act of fostering autonomy has a political trajectory—there is a strong connection between a democratic ethos, political autonomy, inclusion, individual autonomy, and self-rule (White 2004, 321-323; Bernstein 1996).

Those educative institutions—libraries and schools and universities in this case—are the best sites to discursively sort through "real interests ... without either entailing some form of authoritarianism, or giving up entirely on ... [a] normative viewpoint" (White 2004, 312). "Normativity and communicative rationality intersect with one another" in this process (Habermas 1996, 5). Neopragmatist uses of Habermas make this not merely a question of problem-solving (that slides too easily toward the authoritarianism critique to which the Frankfurt School was vulnerable), but rather the "bringing forward complex questions of problem constitution" (White 2004, 319)—or as Brown put it, expanding those things that are say-able and ask-able in the first place (2006, 693-694). This approach does not abjure addressing power, specifically in the form of "the interesting question ... [of] the conditions that prevent [the] wholly natural and predictable process [of learning and autonomous development] from happening" (Brookfield 2005, 1151, 1149; White 2004, 315). In the terms of our concerns here, educative institutions have a role to play in revealing how "the relations of power embodied in systematically distorted communication<sup>9</sup> can be [addressed] by the process of critique" (Habermas 1973, 9). "Without the capacity for critical reflection we are unable to separate our identity from the steering mechanisms of money and power that have invaded the lifeworld," and the specific functions of IF within educative institutions furthers that neopragmatic process of problem-formulation in the interests of individual and political

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<sup>9</sup> A fuller meaning of this phrase will be addressed more fully in the next section.

and communicative autonomy (Brookfield 2005, 1155). Specifically, IF in our educative institutions is interwoven tightly with the characteristics of deliberative communication and democracy:

- The representation of all voices and viewpoints in adequate, articulated way;
- The confrontation of those voices/viewpoints with one another in a non-coercive way;
- The ability for the "force of the better argument" to emerge and be accepted (or creating the spaces for it), or at least be acknowledged as the best contemporary contingency;
- Space/the ability to question or investigate authority, tradition, or received wisdom;
- Safe space/ability to do all of the above without oversight or control from political or religious authorities, or for that matter teachers, librarians, etc. (Habermas 1996, 305-306; Brookfield 2005, 1161; Englund 2006, 512).

"Every association that institutionalizes such ... procedure[s] for the purposes of democratically regulating the conditions of its common life thereby constitutes itself ... as ... an association that agrees to regulate ... its common life impartially" (Habermas 1996, 306). In other words, coming somewhat in parallel now to the nature and role of IF drawn from the development of the public sphere, there is a communicative-, democratic-, and individual-autonomy-interest in IF in Neopragmatist-Habermasian terms that is tightly interwoven with the lifeworlds of educative institutions and their positive roles in the formation and continuation of democratic societies.

### Path Three: On Systematically Distorted Communication and IF as a Counterweight

Much of the theoretical basis of what has been conveyed about Habermas and discourse or understanding is captured and systematized in his theory of communicative action (1984; 1987c). Put as simply as practicable, the theory "sets itself the task of seeking out the rationality embedded in everyday communicative practice and of reconstructing a comprehensive concept of [it] from the validity basis of speech" (Habermas 1985b, 176). Communicative action can be summarized as: 1) "meaning is tied to the truth

conditions of statements"; 2) truth/validity does not consist in mere facts; that is, expressive and normative speech can be validly and rationally judged; 3) those judgments are real; that is, they actualize the truth or falsity of the statement: we either accept what is conveyed, or reject it (Young 1990, 103). In turn, truth/validity comes about through meeting some key requirements that have a familiar affinity with IF: no one affected is excluded; all included should have equal possibility to speak/make validity claims and must be willing to hear/empathize with others' claims; power differences among participants are neutralized and have little effect on reaching agreement; participants must be transparent about their intentions and goals (Flyvbjerg 1998, 213). We can see that Habermas utilizes of his theory of communicative action in his definition of democratically-valid and rational arrangements sketched out previously. More specifically, a theory of communicative competence that is routinely achieved<sup>10</sup> sheds considerable light on systematically distorted communication: e.g. communicative incompetence, deviance, and speech or psychological pathologies (Habermas 1976b; Young 1990, 106-115). While those form the baseline of analysis in intersubjective communication problems, Habermas wishes to extend the concept to the *social* level: "the communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalized into a utilitarian lifestyle.... As the private sphere is undermined and eroded by the economic system, so is the public sphere by the administrative system" (Habermas 1987c, 325). He makes a series of distinctions between communicative action oriented toward understanding/consent/cooperation and strategic or instrumental communication oriented toward success/manipulation/the reaching of goals (Habermas 1970, 92-93; 1985b, 169-172).

[T]here is an expansion of social subsystems that coordinate action through the media of money (capitalist economy) and administrative power (modern, centralized states). ... [T]hey increasingly invade areas of social life that have been or could be coordinated by the medium of understanding or "solidarity." Modernization in the West has thus generated a pathology: an unbalanced development of its potential ... [or the] "colonization of the lifeworld" that brings in its wake a growing sense of meaninglessness and dwindling freedom (White 1995, 8).

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<sup>10</sup> That is, communicative competence is a non-extraordinary part of the lifeworld. The citation to Young here gives an exceptionally clear and concise idea of Habermas' technical working-through of these ideas, including the key area of developmental issues of import for the young which has implications for IF in the schools as well.

In turn, Habermas contends that these social patterns have become strong enough to influence the ability to form personal relationships and a healthy lifeworld: "processes of monetarization and bureaucratization penetrate[d] the core domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization" (1987b, 355). Put another way, the "authority of markets" and other forms of strategic/instrumental action result in "nondiscursively created identities" (Warren 1993, 211). These ideas bring us very much closer to the statement by Brookfield above about the interesting question of what stands in the way of a natural and progressive development of communicative competence and mutual understanding. On a social level, systematically distorted communication is that which persists and "maintain[s] legitimacy despite the fact that [it] could not be validated if subjected to rational discourse" (Schroyer in Held 1980, 256). This in turn brings the question of systematically distorted communication much closer to issues of IF. Though Habermas has described the colonization of the lifeworld in systemic and theoretical terms (broadly, as a crisis of legitimation),<sup>11</sup> Dryzek points out that his framework need not be only theoretical, and can in fact help identify and frame empirical circumstances and cases as systematically distorted communication (1995, 100-103). A selection of examples puts us even closer to the issues and concerns of IF. Given Habermas' deep concern with the Nazi past of Germany and its twisting postwar path toward democracy, two of the most revealing examples/analyses of systematically distorted communication and the counterweight of IF concern that era.

Gross examined the history of a 1995 exhibition curated and sponsored by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research on the role of the German Wehrmacht in the Eastern Front during World War II, and

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<sup>11</sup> That the state intervenes in the economy means that the original wellspring of its democratic legitimacy (the neutrality of the function of the market and those who find success in it) is utterly obviated, therefore the "political system [is obliged] to maintain stabilizing conditions for an economy that guards against risks to growth and guarantees social security and the chance for individual upward mobility [resulting in] manipulation [to limit] private law, secure the private form of capital utilization, and bind the masses' loyalty to this form" (Habermas 1970, 102; 1976a; 1989). As a heuristic, I would argue that this quasi-Marxist formulation still holds analytic power on certain levels. At the other end of his theoretical spectrum, in terms of culture "we are witnessing an increasing substitution of images for words, and also that inter-mingling of categories such as advertising, politics, entertainment, [and] information.... The banal coalesces with the unreal [in a] high-tech style [of ] the highly personalized, consumeristically polished bizarre" (Habermas 1985a, 97). Thus are politics defined in terms of the market and entertainment, and the public sphere is distorted and obviated for Habermas, leading to a paralyzed civil society and "a mood of antipolitics" (2006, 422; 1985a).

specifically the varieties of public response to it. The exhibition generated protest, academic disputation, and parliamentary debate, resulting, in his analysis, in systematically distorted communication in the form of academic nitpicking about the provenance and sensationalism of the exhibition photographs from historians, parliamentary rhetoric conveying patriotic pieties about the past and excuse-making (the atrocities in the East were the work of a minority), and the reemergence of racist Neo-Nazi justification for the actions. "Given the heavy burden of the German past, efforts are understandable to re-shape that past in the interest of a more comfortable present. Among these ... none is more prominent than the myth of a 'Wehrmacht free of moral taint,' a German army that fought ... with honor and dignity, along side but separated by a moral gulf from those who behaved very differently" (Gross 2006, 310). The Institute could not have been more scrupulous or open in revealing its research and documentation processes and corrections, but he contends that "in the deepest of senses, these are all *German* atrocities" and there remains an empirical "uniqueness of the German crime" (Gross 2006, 319-320). Gross implicitly makes clear that IF was a vital part of the process, and the process genuinely pointed toward a discursive assembling of a public sphere around a vital issue of social memory and the public reckoning with history needed for the health of German democracy. But Gross also points to the prevalence of obviating factors: that historians and parliamentarians used power and manipulative methods to cloud and blunt the point of the exhibition, calling to mind Habermas' worries about the effects of media culture on rational exchange. In the end, the role and existence of IF is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for constitution of a public sphere and/or the accuracy of public representation and memory—i.e. it was only a partial counterweight to systematically distorted communication. Power and manipulation must still be overcome.

The second example ironically concerns the opposite end of the political spectrum: those opposing the Iraq war quoted Hermann Goering, Nazi Minister of Propaganda on the manipulations of leaders: "Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell

them they are being attacked" (Goering in Buschman 2003b, 65). As superficially appealing and convenient as the quote was for the political purposes at hand, and as "verified" as a "true" "Urban Legend" by Snopes.com at the time, there were significant problems with the quote, and its use. First, Goebbels was the Propaganda Minister for the Nazis, not Goering; second, upon even minor investigation the provenance of the quote was dubious, "based on a private conversation (eventually written up) by [a] sympathetic interlocutor, not while Goering was in power, but while ... on trial for war crimes ... said ... by way of rationalization of his alleged lack of direct responsibility .... [and] not said in his strutting role as second in command to Hitler" (Rosenzweig in Buschman 2003b, 67). The convenient and telling "quote" exhibited media-like trivialization in its "verified" status which screened entirely its context. Information seekers often "turn away from any question that requires a bit of ... effort [and] research ... [and] without [investigation the] Goering quote would have been 'verified' as 'fact' ... and that would have been that" (Buschman 2003b, 71). The "quote" incident was a different-but-classic case of systematically distorted communication, and IF in this case serves as a goad—a different kind of counterweight to the blithe recitation of "known" facts.

Under this broad analysis, the opportunity to identify numerous contemporary and historical instances of systematically distorted communication (that which cannot be legitimately maintained when subjected to rational discourse) is quite broad and many are of particular interest in terms of IF:

- Annette Gordon-Reed traces historical work that undermined the worth of "fully formed [black] persons with innate worth and equal humanity that links them directly to us all" (Gordon-Reed 2008, 32): "I stand at the end of this writing, literally aghast at what American historians have done" to the role of African-Americans in history (Du Bois in Gordon-Reed 1997, ix). In the process, "historians, journalists, and other ... enthusiasts have ... shamelessly employed every stereotype of black people and distortion of life in the Old South to support their positions ... (and continue to do so today)" (Gordon-Reed 1997, xiii). She asks, "in what universe could the humanity, family integrity, and honor of slave owners count for more than the humanity, family integrity, and honor of slaves?" (Gordon-Reed 2008, 32)
- Similarly, "women ... had been prominent in late eighteenth century salon society and elite public spheres, but were widely excluded from nineteenth and twentieth century public space; this was mirrored by a commensurate bias in political thought [and it took] feminist struggles [to] ma[ke] gender a basic political issue in new ways" (Calhoun 2001, 12596).

- Historically, people have often identified their social and “political location ... through opposition [to] the Other as an adversary”; it is the lack of experience or intellectual grounding or information with difference that allows “misunderstanding, mudslinging, name-calling, and petty searches for insidious motivations ... [and to] stereotype the Other ... in ways that allow ... grasp and confirm[ation of] place and identity”—recently this is particularly the case with religious differences and disagreements (Warren 1996, 252; Habermas 2003).
- American voters have persisted in wrongly believing the Bush Administration assertion of the role of Saddam Hussein in the 9/11 attacks and other such “facts” (Shenkman 2008), higher levels of education do not necessarily lead to more accurate information or opinions on issues or the voting of one’s interests (What do you know? 2011), and initiatives are often couched in purposefully confusing language to deter or confuse voters (War by initiative 2011).
- Neil Postman has been the most explicit in exposing the specifics of Habermas’ critique of the non-rational and non-discursive underpinning of media, and particularly advertising, which is “immune to truth[:] propositions are as scarce as unattractive people”; an advertisement is “not a series of testable, logically-ordered assertions. It is a drama ... of handsome people selling, buying, and eating ... and being driven near to ecstasy by their good fortune” (Postman 1988, 42).
- The work of Maret copiously illustrates the IF interest as against government secrecy “manifest[ed] by way of assorted stealth methods: lying, the withholding of information, information pollution and manipulation through propaganda as well as bureaucratic rules that formalize information classification” affecting social and democratic ability to oversee everything from toxic waste and other forms of pollution to military and diplomatic and security decisions made on our behalf (2002, 74; 2011).

Nor is this a specifically recent and American phenomenon. McCullough recounts the utter frustration of ardently democratic and republican Americans in Paris at the commencement of the imperial Franco-Prussian War in 1870 who could not accept that “singing the ‘Marseillaise,’ the hymn of the French Revolution, had any connection with any of the Napoleons [but now] was the emperor’s song” (2011, 258). The role of IF is less central in this path, though no less consequential. In a Habermasian frame, IF is an important element in the constitution of a rational society (whether in the institution of the library, the school, university, or the broader society) “where reason is understood as communicative praxis” (Ostovich 1995, 476). This is opposed by (and therefore IF has a role as a counterweight to) “the powerful [who] can prevent conflict ... not by direct confrontation, but by surreptitiously manipulating sources of information and by tacitly shaping ... beliefs” (Gross 2006, 327). That manipulation can take the form, as we have seen, of “detached and manipulated



[discourse]—especially through the visual media—because they are [not] sustain[ed by] processes of argumentation” (Warren 1989, 521). IF has a role to play in the conditions under which these media operate and make their “claims,” and the key terrain at stake is autonomy: “the discovery, articulation, and exploration of concerns, as well as formulation of new understandings ... must not itself be subject to ... control [by] specialized interests, routines, and vocabularies”—the methods and grammar of media and its financial base in marketing being prominent in considerations here (Cohen 1999, 409). So situated, IF has a role to play as a counterweight to systematically distorted communication in a variety of subtle ways, but always in the interest of “the freedom to move from a given level of discourse to increasingly reflected levels[:] a progressive radicalization” of the process of discovery, inclusive of revealing the non-linguistic/non-rational bases of positions held or the grammar of media messages (McCarthy 1976, 482).

## Conclusion

In some ways, Habermas has done us a favor by not weighing in on IF and academic freedom *tout court*. As a result we are forced to grapple with the concept and the practice in much less black and white terms. IF thus becomes much less of a trump played at key points effectively ending discussion by the assertion of a right. Rather, IF so contextualized in Habermasian terms has a deeper relationship to the democratic functioning of educative institutions in democratic societies, and is played out in complex ways with more interests at stake than a simple moralism about the ability of an individual to solipsistically get information or merely have available alternative viewpoints. IF has a social function within much larger social and political functions, and Habermas helps us to think about it and enact it in our inevitably more complex social and ethical environments.

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