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Investigating Coffeehouses as the New Public Sphere: The 9/11 Attacks and Public Sphere Discussion

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In a Coffeehouse Just now Among the Rabble
I Bluntly Asked, Which is the Treason Table?
(Bealer 2002:160)

Coffeehouse culture: an introduction

The smell is usually the first thing that hits you upon stepping through the entranceway of a coffeehouse. Looking around, people are gathered in many different groups playing games and enjoying conversations. On initial observation it is hard to believe that inside this building resides one of the most controversial trades in the world, yet the world of the coffeehouse "has dominated and molded the economies, politics, and social structure of entire countries" (Pendergrast 1999: xviii). A look at the basic timeline of coffeehouse restrictions shows how controversial coffeehouses are.

In 1511 A.D. in Mecca the penalty for having a coffeehouse was to have your coffeehouse's stock burned, and to be pelted by the fragments of your pottery. In 1633 if a person was found with coffee in Constantinople they where sown up in bags and thrown into the Bosphorus River. In 1766 Fredrick the Great employed a special force of "Coffee Smellers" to find people who where indulging in the "unhealthy" beverage. Even during the Vietnam War some coffeehouses, then termed GI coffeehouses, where accused of being "financed and staffed by New Left activist… [and] serve as centers for radical organizing among servicemen" (Pendergrast1999: 300) by Congressman Richard Ichord chairmen of the House committee on Internal Security.

On the surface it appears the laws where directed against the beverage in question, but in fact all the restrictions where put into place in order to suppress "coffeehouse culture". That culture was seen as a threat to the people in power. Since coffeehouses were first seen on the streets of Mecca in the early 1500's, they have been locations where people sit and interact with people of varied backgrounds on a personal level. This interaction has created, over time, a sub-culture that breaks through all social boundaries and greatly influences the world we live in. This sub-culture is part of what is called a "public sphere." The public sphere is a location where private individuals join in debate on matters of state authority (Calhoun1997: 7). A broad definition of state authority can be applied to encompass central leadership of a geographic location, as well as religious convictions and social structure of the area in question.

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1. The Study into Coffeehouses. Literature Review

This study looked at the history of coffeehouses and found many reoccuring situations that occured in several different cultures. Those situations show that coffeehouses have a unique environment. Additonaly an exploration of Habermas's theories of the public sphere have been applied, as well as criticism of his theories. I have also spent time in the coffeehouse environment since 1996, working within the system for 5 years. Using that as a position to observe behavior within a coffeehouse has allowed me to better understand the environment of the coffeehouse.

The literature reviewed for this paper included *The World of Caffeine,* an analysis of the culture surrounding caffeine. This book offered an in depth timeline of the progression of coffee and coffee culture. It also offered insight into the political backlash of the coffeehouse environment.

The World Encyclopedia of Coffee offered some more information into the history of coffee.

Pour Your Heart into It helped with a vision of what can be achieved with the coffeehouse environment by one of the leaders in the coffeehouse revolution (Starbucks).

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society by Jürgen Habermas is a basic text of modern Public Sphere theory. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* offered a great deal of information on Habermas' principles.

To explore a criticism of the traditional Public Sphere I studied Kevin Deluca's and Jennifer Peeples work *From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and "Violence" of Seattle.* This award winning work attempts to dethrone the idea of the face to face Public Sphere that uses rational communication, with the idea of disseminated image warfare that they coin as "Public Screen". DeLuca and Peebles claim that because of the advent of technology the Public Sphere should be supplemented (overtaken) by what they term the "public screen." This is a consept that they introduced in 2002 which challanged the idea of the public sphere

Basic flaws in the idea of the public screen will be shown, as well as proof that the public sphere is working well and is contained within the realm of the coffeehouse. With the emergence of the information age and the coffeehouse revolution, the modern day environment will be discussed and it will be revealed how the public sphere exists in coffeehouses and how it can be applied today. Looking at the present, it can be shown how this cycle will continue to develop our society well into the future.

2. Coffeehouses, Public Sphere, and the Public Screen

An exploration into the history of coffeehouses shows that they have a special place in society by acting as part of the Public sphere. Throughout its history and into today they show up as common places for people of all backgrounds to gather and discuss various topics as politics, religion, and higher learning. They are anomalies in society because they break down social barriers, and attract people from all walks of life. Within these walls the free exchange of ideas presents itself in a new format. Without the social or political barriers that exist in the world, today conversation can take an uncommon tone and freely exchanged ideas are avalible to a broader audience. The coffeehouse environment doesn't have any political drive in of itself,

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thus everything can be discussed within their walls without fear of offending your host.

2.1. Habermas' Public Sphere

This culture fell into Habermas Public Sphere theory. Habermas believed that people created several areas where they interacted. He argued that there was a "public sphere" where private people discussed public concerns in an open forum (Calhoun 1997). This differed from the private sphere, where people ran their lives in controlled environments. Habermas argued that within these public spheres people discussed social and political problems and made decisions independent from government control.

Habermas made the distinction that he was discussing the "Bourgeois Public Sphere" which was the public sphere of the middle class in 18th century Europe. He believed that this was the area that could have possibly changed society. His discussion focused mainly on areas of government and politics, but the public sphere also encompassed the realm of religion and literature. In order for a place to be considered a public sphere, it must fall under certain criteria.

2.2. Four Main Criteria

Public Spheres have four main elements that put them into this classification. The first being that within the public sphere there was a disregarding of social status. Everyone who came to the forum was considered equal in ideas. The second was that rational argument was the deciding factor in any argument. "However often the norm was breached, the idea that the best rational argument and not the identity of the speaker was supposed to carry the day was institutionalized as an available claim." (Calhoun 1997: 13) Third was the fact that people came to these forums with the idea that there were problems with society that needed to be discussed. Habermas stated: "Discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned" (Habermas 1989: 36). The form of entertainment of the masses was to discuss matters of society, religion, and politics. The final factor that caused a place to be considered a Public Sphere was that the members were inclusive. Anyone could participate in the discussion that had an inclination to do so.

All of these principles where ideal in nature. Nowhere in the world can these principals be upheld to perfection. The point that Habermas made was that these where ideals that where striven for, as opposed to rules that must be obeyed. When these principals where put into place, the area of the discourse was considered a Public Sphere.

2.3. Modern Public Sphere

Habermas stated that people in the 20th century discussing politics where less interested in the common good and more interested in individual good and achieving a compromise between opposite factions. Key to the Bourgeois Public Sphere was the fact of an end result of consciences of common good from the discussion of a common problem. In Habermas' mind solidarity cannot be achieved if you end at a compromise within the group. The question thus arises even though a unified direction may not be possible, does that mean that the common good was not achieved? One view of this statement would be that the compromise may be considered the actual common good. A group of individuals acting upon a common compromise, may be achieving what is in fact the common good. Using this view of

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the overall situation, the discussion of a common problem and solution never ceased – it just morphed into a new viewpoint.

The public sphere discussion is no longer limited to only politics; it also establishes and maintains the *status quo*. Interactions between people across social barriers establishes fashion, allows people to exchange cultural experiences, and people will discuss the newest trends and technologies. The public sphere is the place where people realize they are deviating from the social norm, and incorporate new ideas that cross over from other sections of society.

Habermas identified coffeehouses specifically as an institution of the public sphere. On page 33 of his work he stated that the coffeehouse started out as a place for literature to expose itself, the conversation soon turned to economics and politics (1989). He also stated that "The coffeehouse not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier [than the salons of France]; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsman and shopkeepers" (*ibidem*). The French social and political thinker Charles Louis de Montesquieu noted: "It is one of the virtues of the coffeehouse that all day long and throughout the night, too, one can sit among people of all classes." (cited by Heise 1987: 127). The public sphere is so prevalent in historical and current thought it is no wonder that some thinkers would try to usurp it with their own ideas. Two such people are Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples.

2.4. DeLuca and Peebles' Public Screen

DeLuca and Peebles (2002) make the claim that the concept of *public sphere* needs a supplement called *Public Screen* in order to be relevant to today's media driven environment. The rest of their article talks about how the public sphere is an irrelevant player in modern society, and how their idea of a public screen should take its place. The theory was written based on the belief that giant corporations have become the only relevant players on the political stage, eclipsing nations and political bodies (DeLuca & Peebles 2002: 126). The corperations controll everything from environmental programs to higher education and are the only ones who are in power today (*ibidem*). Corporations are using the media, or more specifically images not messages, to evoke participatory democracy among the corporate entities that are the dominant players in today's society, "eclipsing the Nation-state" (*ibidem*). They do this in the form of "dissemination" of images in a shotgun information model.

According this worldview, in order for individual citizens (of the world community of corporate empires) to participate "on the stage of participatory democracy" private individuals must face three major constraints (*idem*: 136). The first one is the private ownership of media by corporations. The second one is "Infotainment conventions that filter what counts as news" (*ibidem*). The third one is "the need to communicate in the discourse of images" (*ibidem*). The only way to have a voice heard rests on the fact that corporations will be willing to show anything if it is profitable, regardless if it is against their personal interest. Another thing the authors try to prove is that people can participate in this new "democracy" if they employ shock tactics and violence to get their "images" shown.

2.5. Loss of personal power

If Deluca and Peebles are right, then coffeehouse discussion has been rendered ineffective in matters of politics and religion because it does not bring corporate bodies together, or apart since dissemination only requires one party, in image dissemination. By negating the influence of private discussion, democracy becomes

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an irrational reaction to life as it is presented to private citizens. In a world of large corporations people strive to have personal interaction. It is in this interaction that decisions are made, and votes decided. Even with the advent of the television, private individuals still can make rational decisions. Coffeehouses become the locations to meet and interact with your fellow man. To realize why the public screen is not applicable to participatory democracy, and how coffeehouses have become more important than ever, we need to look at the public screen worldview and some axioms that it applies in understanding the way the world works.

2.6. Unprovable Axiom

The claim that corporations are the dominant players in a world government seems more like a personal ideology founded in paranoid Marxist beliefs than an unbiased observation. The statement is difficult to prove at best. The evidence presented is that several corporate bodies have a greater profit than some countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP). To invalidate a country's influence on international politics because it made less profits than GE did one year seems like a Non Sequester fallacy in logic. That would only be applicable if the sole purpose of a country is to make money. It assumes that political power is directly proportional to wealth with no other factors in place. If this was true, than John D. Rockefeller would never have been charged with anti-trust laws, and the invasion of Poland would not have started a world war (Poland was poor). One of the most influential movements of the 20th century, the 12-step movement, made the principle of organizational poverty part of its constitution, and in spite of DeLuca's and Peeble's claims of "wealth equals power", those groups have changed the face of the world we know. Many other factors must be considered before the conclusion that "Transnational corporations [are] the dominant powers of the new millennium" (*idem*: 126) can be proven, and the authors fail to bring sufficient testimony to light.

Another statement they make is that "corporate interests are inextricably entwined in 'public' activities" (*idem*). Their backup for this statement is a long list of corporate philanthropies that support education, environmental activists, and scientific research. Again they ask the readers to draw the conclusion that if corporations are giving money to philanthropies, they must be controlling those charities for their own interests. Using the same logic would make everyone believe that Alcoholics Anonymous must also be a Pro-Oil, Pro-Monopoly organization because of the generous support of John D. Rockefeller in 1932 or that BACCUS supports keg parties because of their monetary support of various Fraternities. After showing us this unsupported worldview, the authors expose us to what they believe is the communication that is going on in his world.

2.7. Two-way communicaiton

DeLuca and Peebles (2002) spend several pages summarizing their view that embodied conversation, or dialog, is a romantic notion that does not have a place in the public screen. Rather they state that dissemination is the primary form of communication in the public screen. "Dissemination is the endless proliferation and scattering of emissions without the guarantee of productive exchanges" (*idem*: 130-131). The Shannon Weaver communication model will be used to show what these authors are talking about. Since the time of that model conception, communication scholars have been adding components to better reflect what goes on in communication, so now we have feedback, noise, channel, etc. (the original model was only applicable with the telegraph, otherwise it was too simplistic). What DeLuca and Peebles did was to further simplify the model and take away the

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receiver: all that was left is a sender and a message. They try to justify this step with the statement: "Dissemination reminds us that all forms of communication are founded on the risk of not communicating" (*idem:* 130), and make the claim that "dissemination offers a model of communication that is more…receiver-oriented" (*idem:*131). Even though they talk about dissemination in the rest of their article, it fails to bring to light how sending messages without a receiver makes participatory democracy possible.

They judge what were successful political tactics based on airtime that the event received, rather than results of meetings and decisions made by elected representatives (*idem:*140-141). In the end of their article, they offer a broader definition of the Public Screen which reads just like they are trying to coin a new phrase for "Media Theory." The list for what the public screen involves includes pundits on talking head TV, staged campaigns of electoral politics, Sitcoms, films, advertising and public relations, newspapers, books and novels, and public relations releases (*idem:* 146). Basically any media that can be used is included in "image dissemination" even if it has no images. And thus they try to show how Public Screen eclipses the public sphere rather than "supplementing" it.

2.8. Principles in action

One question is whether it is the environment of the coffeehouse that causes social unrest, or whether coffeehouses just happen to be convenient forums for revolutionary actions to take place. Social change takes place, and it has been observed that certain changes are going to take place regardless of the forum that brought the changes into existence (buses do not by nature cause social revolutions, but they became the stage for the civil rights movement when Rosa Parks refused to move as a reaction to segregation).

The coffeehouse being a social gathering place, it will, by default, have many of those ideas appear within the confines of its walls. And in spite of DeLucas and Peebles' claim that embodied conversation and rational dialog is a romantic notion of the past, having no real use in his disembodied corporate disseminated reality (*idem:* 127-131), coffeehouses change the environment of the political landscape today as well as in the past. So does the internal environment cause a change in ideas and behaviors, or does it just happen to be there when ideas change. The coffeehouse culture does have many elements that foster an environment of unbridled discussion and free exchange of ideas. Looking at the groups that gather within the coffeehouses, at the environment that is fostered, and at historical evidence it can be shown that the environment is in fact a Petri dish for new ideas and political debate.

2.9. Principle I – All arrive on equal social footing

Habermas states that "first, [public spheres] preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether" (Habermas 1989: 36). This is important to the nature of the arguments because "the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy" (*ibidem*). This breaking down of boundaries would ultimately make all restrictions and limitations imposed by society null and void. This gives the discussion, as well as individuals within the discussion, absolute intellectual freedom: "Laws of the market where suspended as were laws of the state". (*ibidem*)

DeLuca and Peebles challenge this principle by pointing out that now we have private ownership of all media, and the public screen relies solely on mass mediated dissemination. Since private corporations filter all dissemination, they have become the ruling class in the pseudo-communication world of the public screen. As a ruling

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class, media corporations control all political and social matters thus undermining the people's control of their own society. Since there is a dominant power in their political world which is the disembodied corporate structure, people cannot meet on equal footing, and thus the public sphere cannot exist. This statement disregards all theory on power, which states the power in society always comes from the people on the bottom.

One thing that makes the coffeehouse a unique society is the free interaction, because of the lack of social class in the coffeehouse environment. Being a public sphere, the basic structure of the coffeehouse society allows all people to arrive on equal social footing. This can be a revolutionary experience in societies where the private sphere is dominated by your position in society. This rule was formalized in the early English rules for coffeehouse behavior where it states:

> First, gentry, tradesmen, all are welcome hither, and may without affront sit down together: Pre-eminence of place none here should mind, but take the next fit seat that he can find: Nor need any, if finer persons come, rise up for to assign to them his room.
>
> (Bealer 2002: 322)

Social class was negated within coffeehouses. Having every man enter on equal footing challenges the ruling elite especially in a class run society like England and the Middle East. The thought that people who where struck with poverty would be discussing solutions to the poverty question with poets and governors can cause a loss of control for the ruling class. Watching the break down of society's class barriers can be a challenge to anyone who is comfortable within their current social structure.

A great example of turmoil caused by the breaking down of social class in coffeehouse is in the 1511 ban by Kha'ir Beg, the governor of Mecca. The motivating factor behind the ban was when Beg walked past "the rough and ready coffeehouse, in which people of many persuasions met and engaged in heated social, political and religious argument" (Bealer 2002:12). It is rumored that Beg was insulted by several people who where lounging outside a coffeehouse. Viewing those people as overstepping accepted boundaries he found a way to get back at the insult from people below his station. The discussion of politics was also a motivating factor. Beg found two physicians who testified that coffee was both bad for the health and intoxicating. After the debate Beg ordered that all coffeehouses be closed and the sale of coffee stopped. Even though the ban was worded against the health effects of coffee, more effort was spent in breaking down the coffeehouse structure. After all, it was the coffeehouse owners who where pelted with their own pottery. The ban did not hold for long because the Sultan of Egypt reprimanded the governor and told him he had exceeded his authority, a less than subtle irony to think about (Atkinson 2004:21). The breaking down of social boundaries causes a relaxed and opened social climate, where people engage in many different activities.

Because coffeehouses have no agenda other than to be selling coffee, no one has privileged status within the discussion. Even giant media corporations may be present in the form of executives and employees, relaxing after a day at work. But contrary to DeLuca and Peeble's ideas, those people will have no more privilege within the coffeehouse than anyone else. They too will submit to rule I of the public sphere.

2.10. Principle II – Problems to be resolved

Habermas states "discussion within such a public [of the public sphere] presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned" (1989: 36). The *status quo* was put into question by scrutinizing the laws and rules of society

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where scrutinized. Within this crucible of inquiry, people forged the status of society and discarded broken or oppressive ideas with the whole of society in mind, rather than just a portion of said society.

DeLuca and Peebles argue that the public screen contains "infotainment conventions that filter what counts as news" (2002: 136). Thus all news must be entertainment, with no real goals or objectives other than to entertain. This being the case, politics ceases to be founded on any rationality and reason, and instead is founded on ratings (and those ratings hold no actual influence because in dissemination there is no feedback). The authors also mention that rather than the public sphere producing the *status quo*, "media produces culture, but [is] also the primal scene upon which culture is produced and enacted" (2002: 132). Historically, and presently, this model does not make sense.

One uneasy, and hypocritical, ruler was Charles II who, in 1675, banned coffeehouses in an edict that lasted 11 days. According to Sir William Coventry, many of Charles' II early supporters had met and rallied in coffeehouses "where they spoke more freely 'than they dared to do in any other [forum]'and it was justly remarked that [Charles II] might never have come to the throne but for the revolutionary fervor of the gatherings that occurred there" (Bealer 2002:160). Realizing the problems with the current government, debates raged until the people within the coffeehouse decided to rally support for Charles II. So seeing how he was able to gain control of the government using the coffeehouse as a forum to stir up revolt, Charles II was trying to protect himself from anyone who may find the same route to the throne. After his rise to power he issued an edict. The original edict stated that the coffeehouses where being banned because they produced "very evil and dangerous effects…diverse false, malicious and scandalous reports are devised and spread abroad to the defamation of his majesty's Government" (Bealer 2002:159). The king was petitioned by several fans of the bean and in short order renounced his original ban because of his "princely consideration and royal compassion" under the pretence that the coffeehouse owners prevented "reading of all scandalous papers and books and libels; and hinder every person from declaring, uttering or divulging all manner of false and scandalous reports against government or ministers" (Atkinson 2004:42-43). Although the measure was withdrawn soon after being written, coffeehouse owners continued to post a list of rules which included the rule that people where not to "saucily wrong Affairs of state with an irreverent tongue" (Bealer 2002:323), however this posting seemed to be ignored. This action taken by Charles the II was to prevent a likelihood of revolt and try to control the masses gathering inside the coffeehouse.

The coffeehouse culture creates a separate society where ideas can be discussed and groups formed. This society is different from other social groups because the only cohesive factor between individuals is a temperance beverage. This gathering can consist of many people made up of different ideologies, backgrounds, and opinions. The discussion under question will inevitably drift to one of common concern. One of the few times people of different backgrounds can come together, new ideas will be given a vast array of opinions that may not occur without an eclectic gathering. Thus the coffeehouse provides the same basic forum that used to exist in political forums, church assemblies, or university level talks but will have a much larger impact because of the groups attending the discussion. Having a general cross section of the population with no common ideology causes the discussion to take many different turns than would happen in a more confined gathering. The format of the discussion will innately be different from any other location. Since the discussion is focused on common problems, and the general public

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is represented, it is within the coffeehouse environment that we forge the status quo for society.

2.11. Principle III – Rational argument

Since the Public Sphere is discussing problems within society, with no social boundaries in place, the only deciding factor available is rational argument. Without the societal censors of church and state, when people discussed society and culture "they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another)". (Habermas 1989: 37)

According to DeLuca & Peebles, the public screen disseminates images, rather than reason (2002: 136). In their paper they argue that "the fondness of bodily presence and face-to-face conversations ignores the social and technological transformations of the 20th century" (*idem*: 131) and argue that "there is no real public, but, rather than the public is the product of publicity, of pictures" and that "images, then, are important not because they represent reality but create it." (*idem*: 133). Thus it is images, rather than reason, that create the world that we know, and rational argument is unnecessary.

Within a coffeehouse the lack of a common ideological or political background causes people to justify their basic beliefs before further discussion can take place. Before a discussion on a political situation can take place, the speaker must first explain their political ideology to the group, an action that would be unnecessary if they were among like minded individuals. In that explanation the speaker may find a basic flaw in their foundation, and develop a new set of ideas because of that basic discussion. The coffeehouse also offers the opportunity to hear other people's opinions first hand, and debate those opinions on equal footing.

The nature of the beverage being drunk would also have an influence on the discussion. Unlike alcohol which has the effects of sedating the speaker and causing loss of memory when consumed in large quantities; coffee stimulates the speaker and shows evidence that it increases the thought process (Bealer 2002:291-302). One notable example is when coffee was used in diplomatic espionage in France. The story told was that the emissary of the Turkish sultan took up residency in France; during his time there he invited the ladies of the court to visit his home. While they visited him there, he served them dark Turkish coffee and spoke of his homeland. The ladies, wives of generals and politicians, had their tongues loosened by the high amounts of caffeine and began to tell all the secrets of France to the emissary. Through this action he learned that Turkey was being used as a pawn by the king of France, and that the king could not be relied upon to help Turkey in time of trouble (Bealer 2002:68-71). This information would account for the lively discussion that is often remarked upon during conversations in coffeehouses. With a lack of social boundaries, active conversation, and a heavily caffeinated group of people the coffeehouse seems to be a volatile place for political dissidence.

2.12. Principle IV – Inclusive environment

Since culture is being discussed, no part of that culture can successfully shut themselves off from the rest of society. Whenever a protest on a portion of society came up, those individuals had to incorporate all the citizenship behind them, thus forming an inclusive public (Habermas 1989: 37).

The public screen is tightly controlled by corporate media, thus only they determine who can disseminate images that may or may not be seen. People who not understand or react to those images, and thus participation in government is

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completed only by individuals who make entertaining images that probably will have no effect on that society.

An Arabian historian once observed the social climate that formed around drinking coffee "thither crowds of people resorted at all hours of the day, to enjoy the leisure of conversation, play at chess and other games, dance, sing, and divert themselves all manner of ways, under the pretence of drinking coffee" (Atkinson 2004: 14). That environment did not change when coffee moved to England. A broadside was published that claimed that "the coffeehouse seduced men into an idle life of dissipated conversation with people they hardly knew" (Bealer 2002:157). John Bartram, a colleague of Benjamin Franklin, observed coffeehouses as places for "the curious amusements of natural observations" (Bridenbaugh 1965:322). The manifest function of the coffeehouse is to serve coffee, while the latent function is that of idle, or deep conversation, and amusement while drinking heavily caffeinated beverages.

Today this rule is still in full effect. Unlike social clubs and restaurants, no one is hindered from entry in a coffeehouse due to social class restrictions. On any day of the week you can observe a full microcosm of the surrounding society located within a coffeehouse. And with the price of admission ranging from two dollars up, no one is limited due to financial constraints (it may be noted that you don't even have to buy anything in order to remain within the environment). There are people who do not drink coffee, and thus never enter a coffeehouse, however this isn't a restriction imposed on by the coffeehouses themselves. Modern coffeehouses offer an array of non-coffee beverages in recognition that some people don't like coffee. However, just because some people choose to self-restrict their attendance in the public sphere, does not invalidate the public sphere at all. The fact that those people are welcomed, in fact encouraged to attend a coffeehouse, makes this rule stand within the coffeehouse environment.

2.13. Remarks on the Public Sphere and the Public Screen

Habermas' public sphere gives a template that views history and shows how free society is shaped. By applying Habermas' principles it is shown how the absolute intellectual freedom of a group of individuals can bring revolutionary results. People have also tried to artificially reproduce the principles within the public sphere to gain radical results; Six Sigma was one such exercise.

DeLuca and Peebles' public screen fails to recognize many elements that exist in reality. The axioms of corporate controlled world, along with the belief that all relevant communication is done threw images and based on entertainment value creates a very narrow perspective. The fact that coffeehouses are a current example of embodied conversations, through rational dialog based on issues that affect people rather than entertain them throws a big stone at the public screen.

Coffeehouses have shaped society since man first roasted beans. Through a need in society to have public spheres and facilitate public discourse, coffeehouses became such a location. Their value in society was so great that it overcame the ruling classes' attempts to close them down. Today the public sphere embodied in coffeehouses and elsewhere, has become so inundated within our free society that the recognitions of its workings are seen as the norm. Just as water surrounds the fish, our society is seeped with the effects of the public sphere to the point that it eludes common observation.

Historically, as well as today, coffeehouses live up to the four principles of the public sphere. They have no class structure within the walls, people inside discuss problems within society that would not be considered elsewhere, rational argument

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as opposed to image related events is the deciding factor of the discussion, and no one is barred from entry. Having been shown how those principles affected the world in the past, it can be seen how the presence of the public sphere will regulate and shape the world to come.

3. The Global Public Sphere and 9/11

Throughout history, dates have been used to commemorate dramatic shifts in a nation's culture. The fifth of November is used to commemorate the gunpowder plot in England; "quatorze julillet" is the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille in France, and in America the seventh of December marks the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese. On September 11, 2001 the world woke to see airplanes crash into the twin towers in New York and the pentagon, and that day marked a change on a global level. This was the biggest foreign attack on American soil since 1812 and it fueled the population of the United States to dramatically change its identity.

3.1. September 11, 2001

Habermas identifies the September 11, 2001 (to be identified as 9/11) attacks as "the first historic world event" (Borradori 2003: 28) which would make this study the first event for the global public sphere. The world has witnessed a plethora of events since the advent of electronic media, however 9/11 is different from the rest. There are three reasons 9/11 can be seen as separate from other events.

The first is that it was uncensored on a global level. Prior televised events where filtered through censors, Habermas references the First Gulf War as an example, although televised "the world was struck at how 'staged' the war seemed" (Borradori 2003: 49). He also stated "we outside observers were all too aware that a good portion of the reality-in fact, the warlike dimension of the war- was being withheld" (*ibidem*). This gave the public a "media construction" of what was actually going on (*ibidem*). This was not the case in the 9/11 attacks, "never before did anyone get as much reality from a TV screen as people worldwide got on 9/11. The footage of 9/11 wasn't edited or even produced for its own media coverage" (*ibidem*). Habermas argues that because of the uncensored mass mediation of this event the world became a "universal eyewitness" of 9/11 (*ibidem*).

The second reason is because of the unexpectedness of the attacks. Although people argue information existed that indicated the World Trade Center was a target for terrorist attack, that event was not a realistic expectation from the point of view of the common citizen (of the global community), especially not at the scale that it occured. This is in contrast to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1988. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany was an event that had many signs and was debated on for over a decade. The Berlin Wall falling was only the culmination of those events and, although historic, lacked the same impact that 9/11 had as a single event. The magnitude of the terrorist attack was completely unexpected, it wasn't until the second plane hit the tower that people realized that this was an attack (prior to the second plane crashing one commentator was wondering what kind of instrument malfunction caused the first plane to crash into a building). The world had no chance to prepare itself prior to the attacks actually occurring.

The third reason 9/11 differed from historical events was that there was an immediate reaction to the terrorist attacks at a global level. Everyone had been

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aware that the world was entering into a new form of warfare. This new warfare was one that did not involve nations or armies in the traditional sense. The 9/11 attacks made this point very clear and caused the nations to implement new policies around this new world identity. Ultimately the single event of 9/11 had an impact on the whole of the world in a way that no other event had ever done anywhere else in history.

The 9/11 attacks are perfect for this study because they have all the elements that public sphere theorists study. It was mass mediated on a global level allowing us to address the question of how the media affects the public sphere. It is becoming known as an epoch in recent history, and the events themselves set off a chain reaction of public policy. The public sphere is still very active in determining how international and local policy is shaped.

3.2. Public Screen and 9/11

For the discussion of the public sphere, we need to look at the public screen interpretation of 9/11, and how it fails to explain the effects of the terrorist attacks. The reason for this address is the 9/11 attacks reached people mostly through their television sets. Since it was such a heavily televised event, 9/11 is a great comparison between the two philosophies regarding the democratic process. It is a fact that 9/11 became a global event because of heavy media coverage. It is also common understanding that this dramatically affected policies and actions of the nations. What comes into question is in what way the terrorist attacks actually affected the world.

According to the public screen, 9/11 was an image event, disseminated upon the world population from corporate entities for the purposes of ratings. The public screen relies exclusively upon media, and believes that the public react to the media without engaging in rational discourse. Using this as the general understanding of the events of 9/11 we assume that all subsequent reactions were the irrational reactions to the observation of the United States under attack.

DeLuca and Peebles state that the terrorist were merely using the rules set forth on the public screen to stage an image event. Because of the three rules of the public screen – media companies need to be competitive regardless of corporate ideology, some media are more open to radical events, media gives small groups a world voice – terrorists were able to use the media to change the world. Having staged a major image event, that image was broadcast across the world. From this point it is up to the media to tell us what that event means, and determine the validity of such information in isolation.

3.3. 9/11 and the Public Sphere

The public sphere offers another interpretation of the events of 9/11. The public sphere focus is on the dialog surrounding the event after the information of the attacks was broadcast to the world. The event of the twin towers collapsing is monumental, and the image is engrained in all who saw it, it lacks the information to make decisions. After the event took place people engaged in dialog in order to make sense of the tragedy that happened. From a personal level, this author went to three venues the day of the event, and the only discussion that was taking place was the 9/11 attacks.

The information given to the population was defiantly dispersed by the media, and people got a lot of their information from television and internet sources. After receiving this information people engaged in dialog to make sense of what they saw. “Political conversation (even with family and friends) leads to higher quality

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opinions" (Carlin & all. 2005: 620). This is what developed the public sphere to begin with; Habermas argues that it was the loss of censorship that made the public sphere a center of rational discussion. The church and state "had the monopoly of interpretation not just from the pulpit but in philosophy, literature, and art" however "as commodities they became in principle generally accessible" (Habermas 1989: 36). It was the public that took the cultural products and "had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), [and] verbalize it" (*idem*: 37). To parallel this in the context of 9/11, the public took the cultural product of the media information and discussed it within the public sphere in order to make sense of what they saw.

This is counter to the public screen model, which gives all the power to the media. It is based on the theory that people take the information from the media and make decisions on that information alone. In the public sphere model people take information that they are given and discuss it before they make decisions. "Political conversation leads to higher quality opinions…citizens who talk more about politics are more knowledgeable about politics" (Carlin & all. 2005: 620). We know that political activity and national awareness where catalyzed by the 9/11 attacks. In the time after the 9/11 attacks "Americans were more united, readier for collective sacrifice, and more attuned to public purpose than we have been for several decades" (*idem*: 618). It was also found that after the attacks there was an upswing "in civic engagement and communal behavior" and that Americans were "rallying around each other [and showed] increased interest in and knowledge of political issues" (*ibidem*).

After 9/11 there was "a proliferation of political discussion boards and blogs" (*ibidem*). People where getting information from the media, but they were taking that information to the public sphere for discussion.

The effect of media use upon citizen knowledge is largely mediated through political talk, and that as citizens talk more about politics they are also more likely to participate in the political prossess (*idem*: 620)

This is supported by Mohan Dutta-Bergman's research on community participation after the 9/11 attacks. The results stated that people who participated in internet discussion where significantly more likely to use the public sphere in order to make sense of what they read (Dutta-Bergman 2006: 11-14).

9/11 Conclusion

Despite the heavy media attention of the 9/11 attacks, people took the information given to them and discussed it within the public sphere. This allowed the world to collectively make sense of the attacks, and tell their leaders how to respond. Within the public sphere America reworked its identity, and developed a status quo that allowed the people to protect themselves from future attacks. The 9/11 attacks ushered in the era of the global public sphere, which means we now have the need for global discussion. 9/11 makes us realize that although this is the first global public event, it will not be the last.

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