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The Fourth Estate Operating by Means of Silencing

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Abstract: The traditional foundation of the place reserved for the Fourth Estate in democratic practice is under pressure. To revitalize this idea, a focus upon how journalists handle silence professionally is suggested. It is argued that it is important to bring out how the handling of silence is carried out, and to understand that silence is not only something to be avoided. Silence is of foundational importance for communicative significance to emerge. In a reading of Deleuze, Heidegger and Derrida, we argue for a model in which silence is necessary for significant communicative exchanges. We avoid thoughtlessness by allotting a function to silence; for communication requires not just information but a channel of silence, so to speak. It is, finally, argued that it is important not to expect the revealed forms of silence to be *problematic*. It is demonstrated that certain forms of silence can be analysed as democracy enhancing because they permit less heated exchanges that make room for thoughtful contemplation.

Introduction

As is well known, the journalistic profession has been challenged by the emergence of alternative agents in public spheres. The emergence of Internet based media has given all kinds of agents easy access to public platforms. Into this opportunity have rushed all kinds of figures: NGOs, public relations professionals, SoMe influencers, bloggers of all kinds of opinions, etc. (Tumber 2001; Papacharissi 2002; Anderson 2014; Vos & Thomas 2018).

The question that motivates this paper is how all of these elements influence our understanding of journalists as agents of the Fourth Estate.¹ The articulation of journalists as agents of the Fourth Estate was historically associated with the struggle to abolish censorship in order to realize the potential of democratic governance (Schultz 1998: 23-68). The Fourth Estate was defined through its duty to provide a public forum for debate, to articulate public opinion and to force governments to consider the will of the people (Schultz 1998: 30). In the twentieth century, the role of criticizing the democratically elected government came to the fore. The press increasingly saw itself as a watchdog – a conception that gained prominence from the 1950's and onwards, peaking around the time of Woodward and Bernstein's work on the Watergate scandal (Hampton 2010: 6).

These narratives of the journalistic profession as the Fourth Estate have, however, never stood undisputed. Traditional critiques have focused on the commercial ownership of the media, which makes the journalistic workplace dependent on the capitalist system (Hampton 2010: 6-8; Matheson 2010). More recent critiques have argued that journalism was less an indispensable link between the state and the public than a self-interested broker, a relationship that has collapsed as modern Internet based media technologies allowed the direct participation and communication of members of the public in all spheres. (Tumber 2001; Lewis, Williams & Franklin 2008; Anderson 2014; Hansen 2014; 2018c).

The new configuration of the communication sphere calls for reflections on whether or not the journalistic profession still deserves to be understood within the ideals of the Fourth Estate, and in doing this it is certainly important to bring out what is of democratic value in the journalistic practices. We have previously contributed to such reflections in various ways (Hansen 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2021a). In the current paper, deepening our claims, we will argue that if we are to assess the value of journalism as democratically educative, critically enlightening or merely informative, we cannot focus solely on the *products* of journalists. Rather, we

¹ In this paper, we focus upon journalism in its articulation as the Fourth Estate. It should, however, certainly be noted, that journalism cannot be *reduced* to this role. The historical transformations that led to the understanding of journalism as the Fourth Estate has been well described in Schultz 1998.

should as well reflect upon the various forms of *silencing* and *structures of silence* they facilitate. Journalists silence information in their selective practices according to certain underlying values. Some of these values are conscious and explicit (eg. news values that are defining for journalistic practices – Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O’Neill 2017). But due to the self-withdrawing character of silence, some are inevitably not. The practices of silencing crystallize in cases of regularity as structures of silence that makes it possible for journalists to inform their users. To take an example: Even though it is an explicitly recognized news value that magnitude in the number of people involved (Harcup and O’Neill 2017: 1471), we do not regularly read about the fact that the earth’s atmosphere still contains approximately 21% oxygen. More values need to be added, some of which are not necessarily, values that determine journalistic selection and -framing (Vreese 2005; Entman 1993). In this paper we will focus upon the silencing and structures of silence that make such selection and framing possible.

Silencing and structures of silence, we argue, determine what stands out as significant and urgent. Other issues or dimensions must be silenced or put in the shade in order to understand and sort through the clutter of information.

In the current paper, we discuss three specific examples of structures of silence that shape the space of reception in which stories are communicated: news framing through agenda-cutting of media; and the silencing of mere rumours (in order for well-researched news to stand out as more relevant), and the momentarily stepping out of conversations.

In (Hansen 2018c) we argued that traditional narratives of the Fourth Estate ought to be supplemented with a journalistic handling of *structures of silence* professionally and productively. It was argued that journalists should be cautious not to identify all forms of silence with “cover ups” – something to be avoided. In the current paper, these thoughts are elaborated by showing how such structures and practices are found in actual journalistic practices. The argument will start out from a Deleuzian intuition that public engagement should not be measured merely in the intensity and quantity of voices participating:

...it’s not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. (Deleuze 1995: 129).

Deleuze’ point here is that the traditional intuition that democratic public spheres are dependent on a frictionless access to participate in public discussions, must be supplemented with a consideration of how the quality of public contributions sometimes suffer from exaggerated participation. Public statements are dependent upon underlying structures of silence, and in order to navigate competently within these structures, it is at times valuable to step out of actual public engagements. Thus, in order to assess the democratic Fourth Estate-value of journalistic agents it is important to pay attention to the ways such structures are dealt with.

This approach supplements more traditional understandings of the journalistic profession that often focus upon (a) journalism as a profession that produces reliable and qualifying knowledge, or (b) the fight for individual freedom rights, or (c), how information is generated and used by commerce for profit (Donsbach 2010). It will be argued that it is essential that the handling of structures of silence becomes more explicit as a professional journalistic skill.

In the literature of silence research (e.g. Ferguson 2003; Gould 2018; Dingli and Cooke 2019) it is well known that the notion of silence is difficult to embrace adequately in clear definitions, because silence is very multifaceted. On the one hand, one can distinguish between silence as a phenomenon and silence as a practice (silencing, keeping silent); one can distinguish between willed, forced silence, or unconscious silence; one can distinguish between unexpected, expected, or invisible silence; etc. In the paper we will focus upon two dimensions of silence. The main argument will be that the notion of the Fourth Estate should be supplemented with an emphasis upon how a practice of (a) *silencing* (as a

practice) is democratically pertinent. Through a reading of Deleuze, Heidegger, and Derrida it is argued that silencing is a foundational part of communication. Public exchanges are founded upon some degree of agreement about what are the relevant aspects of the discussed issues. As such they are founded upon underlying (b) *structures of silence* that let the discussed issues stand out. We argue that insofar as journalists handle such structures reflectively they can ultimately facilitate a democratic public sphere with an increased thoughtfulness.

I. Traditional approaches to the Journalistic Field

In recent evaluations of journalistic contributions to the public sphere, there is a tendency to focus upon journalistic processing or preparation as a decisive value in the news-making project (Lewis et al. 2008; Svith 2017; Eldridge & Bødker 2018).

Defining professions through what their practitioners do is not controversial. We will, however, argue that the approach is inadequate. Professional practices cannot be fully described by what the professionals positively do. In order to understand the value of journalistic practice, it is also important to look at what journalists *do not* do. An adequate approach to journalistic processing should also consider how a decisive part of journalistic processing is to *silence* voices that try to gain attention.

In the following section we will argue that there is a positive value in the skills-based navigation of structures of silence that goes into quality journalistic work. It is obvious that silencing has always been an important assignment of journalism (e.g. in the practice of tightening or altering the narratives). It has, however, become even more pertinent today because of the prevalence of numerous alternative sources to information in public spheres. Traditionally, journalism emerged in a technological setting in which frequent distribution of information through gradually evolving mass media technologies was fragile (Bro 2009; Hansen 2015a). In current media settings it makes sense to argue that *information overload* is just as threatening to the quality of public exchanges as is the lack of information that was traditionally the challenge. This is what Deleuze was getting at in our quotation above. In order to understand the argument lying underneath these claims, we will in the following section bring out some of the ways in which silence plays a role in establishing communicative *significance*. We argue that what is brought into the discussions in the public spheres gain their value and communicative significance against the background of some issues *not* being brought up. Internet based media have certainly brought important empowering possibilities by lowering the entry level to participate in public exchanges – something that is certainly of democratic value. It does, however, also carry some democratic hazards, given the fact that citizens suffer a true injury by losing the “little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say” (Deleuze 1995: 129).

We will elaborate upon that claim below. However, insofar as this claim is acknowledged it raises the question whether understanding how to navigate “gaps of solitude and silence” should be highlighted as an urgent (modern, but also classical) skill needed by members of the Fourth Estate. Since the journalistic role as gatekeeper has (to some extent) been challenged by non-journalistic media forms, the value of journalistic work could instead be measured by the degree to which they serve to create a thoughtful *selection* of possibly relevant voices in the public spheres – unlike social media’s constant input of raw information. To understand how professionally run media still add value to social media that social media cannot generate for itself, it would thus be necessary to understand that professionally run media contribute by the use of certain *styles*. Styles are, in Deleuze’ words, precisely founded by introducing silence into the words:

... style requires a lot of silence and work to make a whirlpool at some point. [...] Because you don't get a style just by putting words together[...]. You have to open up words, break things open, to free earth's vectors. (Deleuze 1995: 133-134)

Deleuze joins *style* and *silence*. In his understanding, style emerges with the silencing of words – with the *selective* putting together of words, bringing forth some words as relevant or urgent, to the detriment of others. Style is the product of *not* saying everything, but bringing forth, opening up words, to what is relevant for thinking. Style produces *significance* by letting some aspects of reality stand out as particularly relevant, but this cannot happen without putting other aspects in the background. So, when saying that individual media have each their own style, a typical way of selecting and framing issues (Entman 1993; 2010; Hansen 2021b; Karidi 2018; Vreese 2005²), in Deleuze' understanding this means that they adhere to a *certain* kind of silencing that differ from other media with other styles. The style of (e.g.) *The Guardian* differs from the style of (e.g.) *The Sun* because they differ in their accounts of what is relevant, which is again founded upon differing choices or selections of what is to be silenced in day-to-day processes, from the macro level of selecting news stories to the micro level of writing them.

II. Silence as Constitutive for Communication

Style is thus important. In this section we will elaborate the argument, in order to assess how it could become relevant in assessing the relevance for journalists assignments as representatives of the Fourth Estate. In a reflection upon Deleuze' ideas of silence and style we will argue that it is important that the Fourth Estate³ takes up the urgent assignment to *avoid* overwhelming citizens. The overwhelming character comes from contributions without style, i.e. contributions in which silence is not allowed to do its work. From this perspective, it can be said that journalistic products contribute to democratic culture by presenting *styled* engagements and distributions of information. When we study such media in themselves, rather than amalgamating them with the more talkative social media, we can see that what is specific to the Fourth Estate is a learned technique for presenting styled accounts of *urgent* or *relevant* issues without embracing a confusing number of issues (Karidi 2018; Lischka 2021). In the more-is-better approach of social media, underlying criteria of relevance are ultimately undermined whereby actual influence upon already taken positions is undermined.

By comparing different kinds and tokens of stylized journalistic products (ie. different structures of silencing), we can trace differences among the silences involved, because criteria for urgency or relevance are not pre-given (we will return to this below) but institutionally generated. Such differing should, however, not necessarily be considered a problem insofar as the variety would stem from the *style* of the particular institution and more generally of the type of media in which it is sited. The style is what makes media stand out, it is their *raison d'être*.⁴ The style constitutes a possibility of bringing certain issues to the fore as urgent, as something its readers should consider seriously. And this cannot happen if everything is considered equally relevant. In public spheres where everything is said, nothing is actually brought out as more relevant than something else. Everything is equally important, and the

2 The reflections on silence and style in this paper is closely related with reflections on framing, discourse, agenda setting, etc. However, as will become clear the focus of this paper is to emphasise reflection upon what is brought to silence – rather than what is being accentuated, brought forward, etc. In the terms brought up later in the paper: Our interest is the agenda *cutting* rather than agenda *setting*.

3 It should be stressed that we do not follow Deleuze' understanding of *journalism* (as articulated in Deleuze 1995: 130) as such, because he disqualifies this profession too crudely. Rather we will argue that Deleuze' ideas of silence and style should play an important and explicit role in journalism.

4 As will be clear in the following, style is thus closely related to news values (as discussed in Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2017; Karidi 2018; Lischka 2021). However, while news values often attempt to articulate what is *common* to various news media (an attempt to articulate a certain journalistic style), the styles are here more concerned with values that make media *differ*.

minds of the participants are not invited to contemplate, discuss, reflect upon, take stances, etc. The forwarding of public views and statements become an empty game, in which nothing is actually at stake, no consequences when it comes to actual decision-making. This is the reason why *styled* approaches or engagements are important, styled approaches in which certain criteria of relevance (based upon certain structures of silence) are clearly upheld. Because *this* invites for actual engagement and position-taking.

The argument that it is more important to focus upon *relevant* issues rather than *all* issues certainly opens for some democratic concern as to who decides what is relevant and by what criteria. Why would it not be better to distribute all information and then let users themselves decide what is relevant? We suggest that Heidegger's⁵ analysis of how true communication degenerates into chatter or idle talk (*Gerede*) if communication is not brought to silence explain the problem of excessive talk. Idle talk, for Heidegger, retains the communicative surface patterns of authentic speaking, but fails to communicate anything seriously meaningful (Heidegger 2010: §35). Heidegger's recognition of the function of silence in creating meaning can be seen in the way silence can make room for awareness of the substantial content of the communicative exchanges. If communicative exchanges persist in a competition to say something that will fill the silence, little margin is left for listening to the issues or problems that may be meaningfully articulated in the exchanges. The mere exchange as such becomes the end of the participating agents. In a less Heideggerian articulation: The relationship between communicative exchanges and the realities that underlie these exchanges disappears, because the former shades the latter.

Silence may function to avoid this dynamic of corrupt deliberation in numerous ways. Early Heidegger argues that silence makes room for the listening and "obeying" (*horchen*) aspects of communicative exchanges (Heidegger 2010: §34). Later Heidegger focuses upon how what is actually articulated is itself a product of a silencing that makes it possible for something to *stand out* on the background of something else receding into the background (e.g. in Heidegger 2012: §9 + 123 + 188 + 242).

Jacques Derrida's work has absorbed certain of Heidegger's themes here. He further emphasizes the impossible assignment that emerges from the analysis: A certain amount of silencing is necessary and called for, however each concrete form of silencing is problematic or even violent. Derrida is talking about a "ghost of the undecidable" which articulates an *imperative* decision while also articulating the impossibility of decision (Derrida 1992: 24-26). Related to the above analyses of the relationship between communicative exchanges and silence, the aporia articulates that communicative exchanges can only emerge on the background of structures of silence. Yet, in concrete situations the decision is *impossible* in the sense that the decision as such is in discontinuity with the same rationality that grounds its possibility.

The above readings of Heidegger and Derrida suggest that criteria of relevance on the one hand substantiates communicative exchanges in ways that internally limit the corruption of the communicative situation. Pertinence counter-acts the trivializing tendency of idle talk. Communicative expressions are loaded with content that seeks to answer adequately or appropriately to prevailing situations; they are necessarily sensitive to their adequateness as expressions and to their pertinence to prevailing situations. But this happens in ways that are *necessarily* inadequate, for the organizing pertinence in communication is never whole contained within communication – it legitimates itself in that which is exogenous to the language. The question of adequateness is only possible through the founding cut that is introduced by the never completely endogenous rules of relevance. A cut that by itself feeds inadequacy into the communicative exchange.

5 My use of Heidegger (and other philosophical positions) in this paper is deliberately selective, eclectic. We will not claim that Heidegger's general philosophy offers an adequate account of neither journalism, democracy, or the public sphere in general. However, we hope to show that his reflections on silence are illuminating.

Thus far, the reflections of Heidegger and Derrida have shown that silence has a dual character: On the one hand silence is a precondition for communicative relations not to become idle. Silence, as it were, preconditions the semantics of communication. On the other hand, silence is also reductive. In order for communicative messages to stand out, it is imperative that certain criteria of what is relevantly articulated in actual situations is brought forward. The criteria of relevance modulate what is brought discursively into the foreground and what is left in the background – and what is left out altogether.

The criteria of relevance have foundational implications of what is part of communicative exchanges. They are, however, not themselves part of the communicative exchanges. They operate for the most part in silence. In the following sections we will discuss how different forms of silencing are part of journalistic practices: Silencing as agenda-cutting, silencing of mere rumours, stepping out of conversations.

III. Agenda-Cutting as a Practice of Silencing

The argument in the previous section mainly brings out a dual relationship between communicative exchanges and silence. In this section, we will return to reflections of what this means for understanding the journalistic profession.

Journalistic professionalism is certainly deeply embedded in communicative structures. If one combines Heidegger's argument with Deleuze's worry as to the ability to find gaps of silence and solitude in which the freedom of expression might be added with an ability to "find something to say" (as explained above: something that actually affects the others), it can be argued that one of the indispensable journalistic skills is handling silence professionally. What this means is certainly still an open question. In this section we will discuss a recent suggestion as to how the role of silence in journalistic practices might be investigated more explicitly. We will argue that this approach definitely brings to the fore an important theme for journalistic research, but, as well, a theme that must confront our currently reduced understanding of the role of silence in journalistic practices.

In a discussion of the widespread research into the agenda-setting role of journalism, Yosuke Buchmeier has recently argued that traditional approaches to how journalists through their selection and framing of public issues set the agenda (Entman 1993; 2010; McCombs 2014; Wanta & Alkazemi 2018) is infested by a persistent blind spot: The analyses of how media and journalists *set* the agenda should be complemented by analyses of how media and journalists also *cut* the agenda (Buchmeier 2020: 2008). In line with the argument presented so far in the current paper, Buchmeier sets out to sketch a methodological approach within journalism research that aims to bring out how journalistic practices cuts the agenda of public discourses. Analyses of the agenda-setting powers of media must, according to this view, be supplemented with analyses of how media power also operates through choosing not to bring out stories. Media power, Buchmeier argues, is not only about the agendas it sets but also the agendas that are cut out of the public mediaflow.

This suggestion indeed targets an important aspect of journalism practices, and to a large extent is in line with the argument brought out in previous sections. It does, however, in the details of his argument reveal assumptions about the character of silence that we find too simplistic.

The problematic side of the issue comes to the fore in Buchmeier's attempt to handle one of the most pressing difficulties when analysing silence scientifically – i.e. the identification of *which kinds* of silence to analyse. Obviously there are an immense number of issues, events, phenomena, etc. that never make it into the news. Buchmeier suggests that agenda-cutting be analysed in close affiliation with a set of normative implications (Buchmeier 2020: 2012-2014). For agenda-cutting to be of relevance, according to Buchmeier, the cutting must be normatively significant in the sense that the issues that are brought to silence *should not* have been brought to silence:

When a proposition of agenda-cutting is made, it automatically implies that the omitted issue actually ought to be on the agenda. (Buchmeier 2020: 2014)

The efforts to highlight how media power operates in such kinds of silencing is definitely of significant worth. Buchmeier ends his suggestions with an important reminder that “just because the phenomenon is difficult to pin down empirically, it does not mean that it does not exist”. (Buchmeier 2020: 2021).

We will, however, argue that Buchmeier’s attempt to make agenda-cutting empirically testable, itself runs the risk of missing out on important aspects of how media power operates through silence, which goes back to our contention that silence has a *dual* character.

On the one hand, it was argued – and here we are in line with Buchmeier – that silence is reductive and can be understood as repression of important information. This kind of silence operates in many ways. Historically of course the paradigmatic kind of violent and repressive silencing is the execution of censorship, but obviously the selective practices of media sometimes support/counter powerful interests as well, and this certainly must be a major concern in any adequate exploration of how media shape or affect public agendas.

But our argument destabilises this stereotypical view of silence by showing that silence, far from being merely repressive, is what makes communication and information possible. In this sense, silence per se is not necessarily repressive. Indeed, distracting noise, trivialization, and the pattern of corrupting deliberation is, as we have pointed out, a mishandling of silence that can lead to a democratic deficit. A positive value, then, within the structure of silence is that silence makes styled contributions possible, contributions that are clearly based upon underlying criteria of relevance. Styled contributions allow certain issues (that are seen to be urgent or relevant) to stand out.

The diversity of the ways in which silence settles criteria of relevance cannot be adequately articulated in this paper, nor is it our purpose here. Rather, we propose to contribute to the analysis of the journalistic dealing with silence by sketching two different approaches to how *productive* silence may be analysed in journalism research. Both approaches are, in line with Buchmeier’s suggestion (Buchmeier 2020: 2010), *contrastive*: The analysed silences stand out as significant in contrast with alternative practices. But, contrary to Buchmeier, the silence is found to *counter* prevailing power structures, facilitating new understandings or approaches within the public discussions.

IV. Alternative Forms of Silencing

a. Silencing of rumours

It has recently been argued that in investigations of the agenda-setting powers of media, it is important to distinguish between news and rumours (Guo & Zhang 2020). One way to understand this distinction has been suggested by Konkes & Lester:

... the emergence of a rumour and speculation also tests a news organisation’s preparedness to be first, fast but flawed rather than well-researched and accurate. (Konkes & Lester 2015: 827)

One important difference between what we characterize as rumours rather than news is that news is backed by the research and accuracy that is acquirable at the time. This is the reason why rumours, which spread faster than news, are both so attractive – appealing to the desire for the spectacular – and so potentially damaging (Guo & Zhang 2020).

Research is thus definitely important to consider when understanding the difference between rumours and news. In the current media setting, it is however furthermore important to notice that journalistically run media, in comparison with non-journalistically run media environments such as SoMe, may seem to have opted for silence – especially in heated situations where the urge of the public for quick information is pressing.

An analysis of how silence plays an important role in such situations has been brought out by Mike Ananny. On the background of the “Boston Marathon bombing” in 2013, Ananny analyses how some of the professional media coverage was deliberately slower, when compared to the dissemination of information (false and true) on social media like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and 4chan. Ananny argues that this slowness is a result of reflections on questions like:

Why do you need to *know* something now? And why do you need to *say* something now? Both questions demand awareness of what *not* to say, and when *not* to say it... (Ananny 2013)

Insofar as media live up to the ideal presented by Ananny, they stand out with the quality of knowing when to remain silent – silence understood as “the thoughtful absence of speech” (Ananny 2013).

In this paper, Ananny’s concern is that silence in some cases is the condition under which qualified research can be undertaken that tests the validity of distributed information and creates a reliable channel of communication. The style of journalistically processed information is of special value in democratic exchanges, because it comes with a higher degree of certainty than mere rumours. Silence thus induces a certain quality to the content of news communication – achieving the narrative that best approximate to what is known – rather than disseminating unverified rumours.

This kind of silence is certainly difficult to analyse within traditional agenda-setting approaches. The agenda-cutting approach might notice this form of silence – in a contrastive comparison between the issues found on social media and journalistic media. For our perspective, it is however important to notice that the silence in Ananny’s example is not from a democratic perspective *problematic*, as is the silencing in Buchmeier’s article, because the withheld information consists of rumours without obvious factual basis.

In more recent writings (Ananny 2017; Ananny 2021) Ananny argues that silence should be understood as creating the conditions for improved *communicative* relations. The value of communication is not determined solely by what is brought into the conversation, but, as well, by the affordance of a certain absence of content that allows for thoughtful discursive exchanges:

Such absences [...] are not simply failures to speak but are, most broadly, opportunities to rethink political participation in digital communication contexts. (Ananny 2021: 146)

This is in focus of a study carried out by Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller.

b. Stepping out of Conversations

The approach of Hess and Waller (Hess & Waller 2020) is also based upon a wondering about the *disappearance* of a certain form of agency within a heated discussion of an event that provoked intense feelings. The feelings were centred around a local planning proposal to construct a mosque in the Australian city of Bendigo. Hess and Waller notice that at a certain point, the locally owned newspaper *Bendigo Weekly* stopped its participation in the discussions on social media (Hess & Waller 2020: 580).

On the basis of interviews with the editor they were able to exclude certain reasons for that inactivity: social and commercial anxieties, lack of resources, or even censorship. The discussions about the mosque soon turned quite polarised. The result of Hess and Waller’s investigations reveal that the exit from participation was based on the conclusions that the discussions on these media *deepened* the polarisation (Hess & Waller 2020: 583). *Bendigo Weekly* furthermore decided to shut out (bring to silence) “racist, racially bigoted and unconstructive voices” (Hess & Waller 2020: 584). Once again not merely as means to restrict public communicative exchanges, but rather from a concern of the value of communicative exchanges – in order to “take back control” (Hess & Waller 2020: 584).

Now, these strategies of silence are certainly open for discussion. It may well be argued that sometimes heated (and to some extent polarized) discussion is called for, and also that it is important that even voices driven by hatred and racism have a right to express themselves in public discussions.

However, the opposite is also true: Sometimes unlimited debate, which allows any commentary whatsoever, does merely deepen the dissent of the community without adding democratic value thus hindering democratic decision making. It does, in other words, make sense to think of journalistically run media as permeated by the institutional obligation to reflect on whether or not to participate or remain silent – in order to facilitate what is considered to be of democratic value in the present context. And it is not obvious that a similar reflection may be carried out by participants on social media generally. In the words of an interviewee in Hess and Waller's investigation:

. . . what we put up in quick grabs on social media can be deceiving. Sometimes it's better to stay off it. (Hess & Waller 2020: 583)

The quote reveals that for the concerned participants, more engagement in the public discussion in this vein and on this venue will not further democratic decisioning ("... the newspaper deployed silence as a deliberate strategy for countering hatred and to tourniquet debate to the local level." (Hess & Waller 2020: 574). Journalists at *Bendigo Weekly* felt that they could contribute better to democratic debate by remaining silent on social media, choosing another venue, their local publication, with its more limited, community-specific audience, to focus on these issues.

In this case, *Bendigo Weekly* clearly takes a stand in favour of a less polarised debate, and there is no doubt that some participants may have felt censored, that in a certain sense they were driven out of the public exchanges. The decision to silence in this way is thus problematic. It is however important to emphasize that the opposite decision would have been, in the eyes of the newspaper, even more problematic. Democratically speaking, both a plurality of voices and a silencing of voices is called for. Plurality is needed for an opening of the fields of discussion. However, insofar as the debate became too heated there is a risk that participants stop actually listening to one another, or that the dispute attracts participants whose main goal is to create noise in order to sabotage resolution. This kind of situation tends to create the kind of idle talk Heidegger warns against: it could go on forever, but nothing would actually change. Journalists cannot help navigating in these dual considerations, but, as professionals, it is important that they do so reflectively, explicitly and thoughtfully (Hess & Waller 2020: 586).

Returning to the issues brought out by Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze in the opening sections of this paper, it can be argued that the analysed journalistic practices that are revealed in Hess and Waller's paper are examples of how silence can be used to exit the circle of mere idle talk in which participants tend to amplify the volume without deepening the issue – indeed, distorting it until it becomes unresolvable. In Hess and Waller's cases, the journalists they interviewed insisted that for real conversation to emerge, there has to be a proper connection between reality and dialogue (conversation needs to be based upon news rather than rumours). They insist that the quantity of communicative inputs does not proportionately enhance the deliberation of the discussed issues, but sometimes produce the opposite effect. This runs counter to the maxim of being open towards what is actually said by the discussants on all sides of the issue. As such, this is an example of how the thoughtfulness that is advocated by Deleuze, the permission and willingness to allow pauses and silence, only emerges from conversations in which the participants have a stake in making the exchange meaningful for all relevant participants. This is not an argument for censoring challenges brought forward by any particular side judged "out of bounds", but instead is pointed against the real censorship exercised by argumentative styles that allow no pauses and/or silence – in other words, that stimulate sensation rather than meaning (this argument is elaborated in Hansen 2018b).

This approach suggests that the democratic task of the Fourth Estate should allow a sophisticated handling of structures of silence that condition any meaningful communication event, making possible substantial conversations in which participants actually challenge each other and movement towards the resolution of problems or issues can take place. Understanding the correct time and place for agenda-cutting, refraining from dissemination of rumours, and stepping out of destructive conversations are different ways (however, not the only ways) in which journalists can participate in and manage underlying silence styles.

V. Conclusion

Buchmeier suggests that agenda-cutting may be found through contrastive analyses, and both examples in the previous section are indeed contrastive in the sense that researchers have stumbled upon a *significant* lack of communication – compared to other practices. However, in contrast to Buchmeier's account, there is no immediate *normative* problematisation in the approaches of Ananny and Hess/Waller's approaches. With Derrida's aporetic analysis in mind, this is of course not to say that they are unproblematic. It is merely to point out that the alternative to silencing is not to avoid silencing, but other kinds of silencing, other kinds of style.

The contrastive approach will not be able to find all significant types of silencing. Every time a journalist delays the publication of a story in order to make certain it is properly based upon facts, it is a kind of silencing. Every time journalists decide to follow one story rather than another, silencing is involved. Every time journalists decide to frame an issue in a certain way, it is based upon a kind of silencing.

These kinds of silencing do, however, tend to go under the radar, they are not often brought up when we reflect upon the democratic role of the Fourth Estate. We will argue that a refocus of our understanding of journalism towards an awareness of these practices of silencing influence the understanding of journalism significantly. It will bring into the light the importance of silence in the work of journalists, how styled journalistic contributions to the public sphere furthers that communicative exchanges maintain a possibility of actually listening to and contemplating the significance of expressed views. It furthers contemplation by focussing it – through silence. Reflections upon the structures of silence on the lines we are suggesting has the further advantage of taking the discussion of silence out of the censorship paradigm where it has been stereotypically set, allowing journalists to see that silence is both problematic and important to democratic public exchanges.

It will furthermore suggest a shift in the understanding of why professional communication is different from non-professional communication in the democratic public spheres: professional journalists can be understood as communication professionals who understand and can navigate the thought provoking function of silence and communicative pauses. If it is necessary to stay silent to have the time to get the facts in order for a news story, then it is necessary to recognize the positive side of silence and of silencing. If silence may counter heated discussions that tend to diminish their deliberative purpose – by for example creating a circus like atmosphere that eliminates the participants willingness to listen – then the choice of silence and silencing is a good one. Journalistically run media cannot hinder heated discussions on social media, and certainly to some extent is challenged by the competition of social media, but on the account suggested in this paper, it is not fruitful to imitate the mechanisms that hinder the reflective impetus of silence. Journalistically run media are on a more viable path if they insist on being real alternatives – rather than vague copies of what we find on social media. And yes: Journalists then operate by cutting the agenda. This is sometimes problematic, but it is always necessary. Certainly it is important to be able to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic cases, but it is also important to understand that the criteria underlying such distinctions will themselves be informed by the underlying structures of silence.

One suggestion in trying to approach the distinction between problematic and unproblematic kinds of silence could be to return to the opening discussion of the journalistic embeddedness in norms of the Fourth Estate. To argue that journalists handle silence professionally does, obviously, not articulate how journalism as practised and legitimated in liberal democracy is distinct from other communication disciplines.

We will, however, argue that a return to Deleuze's reflections might help: Towards the end of section I, we approvingly quoted Deleuze's claim that for communicative exchanges to be of thought-provoking value, it is essential that it is *styled*. In Deleuze's approach the idea of style is, however, not exhausted merely by noticing that (e.g.) information from *CNN* is differently styled than information from *Fox News*. That is obviously true, it is however also an open question whether or not these different ways of style promote deliberativeness. Deleuze argued that style is not merely about putting together words. Communicators should not, according to Deleuze's analysis, merely be understood as describing something that is already there – communicators should, properly understood, be thought of as creators (Deleuze 1995: 133). Communication that invites for thoughtfulness creates awareness for unknown issues in our social world. Deleuze calls for communication that does not merely happen within prevailing structures of silence that seeks out issues that are well in place and appear to be uncontroversial. Thought-provoking communication should seek out instances that do not seem to make sense (within mainstream structures of silence), but that are nevertheless real and urgent.

In line with this argument, we will argue that a rearticulation of journalism's democratic commitment (the understanding of journalists as the Fourth Estate) should focus upon the duty of journalists seeking out issues or problems in society that are not easily articulated within mainstream structures of silence – hereby forcing the users to reflect upon these issues. For journalists to be successful, they certainly have to understand and to some extent respect, the structures of silence that prevail among their supposed target groups, without conforming their work to it so as to shirk the sometimes violent response of those who do not wish to be disturbed in their presuppositions⁶ For journalistic products to be of democratic value, users of journalist products should be *challenged* on their underlying structures of silence. Hereby the Fourth Estate, in an environment of comments and social media, can continue to be of democratic value by enhancing, challenging, and revealing the limits of the horizons of understanding among its citizens. This task requires, in one way or another, silencing information and communication in challenging ways.

Silence is not per se the enemy of democratic public exchanges. Silence is foundational for communicative exchanges to take place – in a problematic way (the *aporia* of silence). And thus it is also immensely important that journalists and media science in general understand it with some sophistication.

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