Rather than support the democratic process, as in the ideal scheme of things it should be doing, journalism has become an alienating, cynicism-inducing, narcoticising force in our political culture, turning people off citizenship rather than equipping them to fulfil their democratic potential.

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view of citizenship, the rationale is that the media serve citizens by making them aware of their rights so that they can exercise them. The media's role in a democracy is thus to provide citizens with the access to the information and debates they need to make informed political decisions; and to provide the means through which citizens “recognize themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations” (Murdock and Golding 1989: 183), which confirm and construct their personhood, and their identity as citizens (Gitlin 1998: 168; Ronning 1994: 15).

This kind of theorising begs questions about how ‘youth’ are to be regarded vis-à-vis citizenship and, more particularly, how the media can play this integrative, democratic role vis-à-vis young people. A key question is, therefore: How are we to think about the relationship between youth media consumption and citizenship?

Citizenship

Marshall’s hegemonic view of citizenship is that it is the condition of one’s membership of a polity. He identifies three main dimensions which constitute citizenship as a particular social identity, with their associated rights and the institutional means for securing them: the political, civil, social and cultural (Murdock and Golding 1989: 187; Dahlgren 2000: 317). In this way, citizenship is a means of establishing equality in a structurally inequalitarian state. The significance of South Africa’s 1994 elections is that it enabled all South Africans to be constituted as citizens.

However, a more recent view of citizenship is that it should no longer be seen as a state of being, but one of ‘becoming’: that one can learn to become a citizen (Delanty 2007). There is thus a move away from a state-centred view of citizenship, to a ‘people-centred’ one (see Hartley 2010: 234). This view shifts the focus from membership of a polity, to “common experiences, cognitive processes, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment” (Delanty 2007), which can take place in the informal context of everyday life, and is influenced by the critical and formative events in people's lives. Citizenship is thus not just about rights and responsibilities, but about capacity for action, the learning about the self, and the relationship of the self to the other.

This is perhaps a more useful way of thinking about youth as citizens. Hart, for example, uses the term “cultural citizenship” which foregrounds broader aspects of youth social identities; recognises differences between young people (class, race, cultural backgrounds etc.); and argues that equality of citizenship can only be attained by getting youth views of, and participation in, the polity to be constructed (Hart 2009: 243-245). In other words, youth should not be seen as merely fitting in, or providing a rubber stamp for a normalised state, but rather that their participation should help to constitute the very nature of the state.

Another concept related to citizenship is civic engagement. Many argue that it can be seen as a form of social capital, and thus a critical resource for positive social, emotional, and intellectual development (Winter 2003), and thus a pre-requisite component of democratic practice (Galston 2003; Flanagan and Levine 2010; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner and Lerner 2010). Public sphere: Nexus of media/youth engagement

The basis of the news/civic engagement/democratic practice argument is the Habermasian argument that the media constitute a public sphere for rational-critical debate through which “strangers” can constitute public opinion and public consensus. But the alternative views of citizenship noted above speak to post-modernist and constructivist critiques that the Habermasian public sphere neglects issues such as gender, class and age (Fraser 1990); sidelines the role of alternative media (see Schudson 1997; Buckingham 1997; Gitlin 1998); ignores the existence of “counter-public spheres” and multiple public spheres (sphericules) (Gitlin 1998); and disregards “dis-sensus” and the agency of audiences. Equally important is the critique of Habermas’ assumption that the public sphere fosters rational deliberation, thereby also ignoring Bakhtinian notions of dissimilarity, dialogical engagement, carnival and spectacle (Gardiner 2004: 30).

Youth reception of media

The re-thinking about the kinds of spaces and the modes of deliberation that the media offer, as noted above, provide important perspectives on the youth/media nexus. Youth researchers offer another dimension. They argue that adolescents’ views are mediated by their relationships with peers and parents, and thus it is not just youth media consumption that is important, but whether and how they discuss the ideas they get from the media with their peers and family. They argue for the critical importance of “communication competence” (Shah, McLeod and Lee 2009; McCleod, Shah, Hess and Lee 2010) “which includes media use (with focus on public
affairs news consumption) and interpersonal communication (discussion of public affairs and politics with others), as underpinning civic competence” (Boyd et al 2011: 1169). These communicative abilities are therefore described by civic scholars as an “important aspect of civic development and critical for effective civic participation” (Boyd et al 2011: 1169).

Youth, media and citizenship

All these ideas arguably give us clues to how the media can help in the constitution of youth citizenship. Modernist approaches to citizenship focus on the structural relationship between citizen and state, suggesting a privileging of information (hard news), and a particular form of critical engagement, namely rational critical debate. Eschewing the hard news/soft news divide enables experimenting with form/content in order to reach young people (see Buckingham 1997; Costera Meijer 2006; Baum 2003). However, it does not negate the value of information (Patterson 2000: 4), and is consistent with arguments about convergence culture which points to the complex ways in which content flows between different media and genres in the new media environment, thus offering opportunities for youth consumers to become producers of meaning, with an attendant shift in their identities (Jenkins 2006).

In contrast, post-modern, constructivist approaches focus on citizenship as a complex identity – not the binary citizen-or-consumer (Hartley 2010: 238) which exists in relation to other identities. This view points to the potential importance of all media (news and entertainment), in the constitution of this identity. Critiques of the Habermasian public sphere also point to the social importance of alternative spheres, alternative media forms, alternative modes of address and ways of communicating with a range of publics, who are often politically and culturally marginalised (Atton 2002: 4; Dockney et al 2010: 77).

They challenge the privileging of hard news and information, and even the producer-consumer polarity, pointing to the significance of popular cultural forms (rise of social media) and the technologically enabled collapse of the binary producer-consumer into “produsers” (producers + consumers) (Bruns 2007). This approach echoes James C. Scott’s (1990) theorisation of everyday forms of resistance and Gluckman’s (1954) rituals of rebellion, which point to the hidden discourses of youth which potentially go on “offstage”, making them difficult for the power elites to decode. This is a useful way of thinking about youth protest as it departs from the narrow definition of resistance (and related identities) as referring to physical and material protests in the streets, to include sets of practices used by the dominated to challenge those who attempt to dominate them (Willems 2010: 4).

For the connected, new media technologies enable individuals to self-represent, self-organise, and construct for themselves what the associational relations among strangers will be, thereby offering the possibility for re-shaping/re-configuring social relationships, and thus the public sphere (kinds of debates, nature of debates). New media thus offers the possibility for combining the personal/lived with the social/political that some argue the revitalisation of youth engagement in/with politics requires (Hartley 2010: 245; Buckingham 1997). But the digital divide is real for us in the South. From a recent South African baseline survey of youth, media and citizenship (Sanpad 2013), it appears that most youth still favour the legacy media as their main source of news; they also trust these media more as sources of information. But they also think that the media would serve them better by dealing with issues that help them understand their world. This seems to be a fundamental requirement of all media if they wish to fulfil their democratic role of contributing to the constitution of the social identity we call citizenship.

References
