

[1] [SLIDE 1 ON] Thanks very much for the invite. Today I want to present to you some material from an ESRC-funded project with Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham at LSE I am just about to finish (so it's very much on my mind at the moment) but that topic is justified this afternoon, not just because it's at the forefront of my mind, but because the project tries to address some difficult questions about media's contribution to quality of contemporary life, and the effective workings of democracy, which I think are of wider interest.

[2] Let me start from Raymond Williams who was never someone to run away from a difficult question. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Drama in 1974 – which I guess was the first moment that media and cultural research was formally acknowledged amongst one of the major British universities, even if under a different name – in that lecture Williams included television when he spoke of how, in an increasingly opaque society, drama addresses a general [quote] 'need for images, for representations, of what living is now like' (1975: 9). An important point still, especially if under drama we include daily news narratives.

[3] There's a danger however of coarsening this insight into a sort of social functionalism that tells us how media present to us the stories that matter, the decisive 'arenas' of contemporary life. If rightly we are suspicious about functionalist narratives of how nation-states bind societies together (I'm thinking here of Philip Schlesinger's deconstruction of Karl Deutsch's theory of the nation), then we should be suspicious too

of accounts of media as our ‘natural’ entry-point into what Charlotte Brunson and David Morley once ironically, and devastatingly, called in scare quotes ‘the nation, now’.

Indeed a lot of my work (including the book *Media Rituals*) has been devoted to undermining such functionalist thinking about media.

[4] Not of course that we should hold back from thinking about media’s contribution to democratic politics and a tolerable social world. Critical media research has, I suggest, a great deal to say to research traditions such as political science that have, historically, paid media less attention. Indeed, two factors have recently converged, almost requiring political scientists to listen to some of what media researchers have to say: *first* a general concern among academics, policy-makers and indeed citizens, about the future of democracy, given long-term declines in voter-turnout, the atrophy of political parties, confusion about what new forms democratic engagement should now take. *Second* there is the renegotiation of old boundaries between news and entertainment, between public and private realms, that enable some (for example Corner and Pels in their recent collection *Media and the Restyling of Politics*) to argue that the content of politics is broadening, and media and popular culture, including celebrity culture, are crucially involved in that change.

[5] So now perhaps is a good time to be asking quite open questions, empirical rather than just theoretical questions, about media’s contributions to the pre-conditions of democratic engagement, linking here with some voices on the critical margins of mainstream political science (William Gamson, Russell Neuman and others) who have been exploring for a decade or more how people’s sense of ‘the political’ is constructed, or as the political anthropologist Robin Leblanc’s put it more vividly in her book *Bicycle*

Citizens (about the alternative local politics of women in Japan) what it feels like to be a citizen, or not as the case may be.

[6] In other words, there's both a theoretical and policy-related opportunity, and an empirical challenge, involved in studying the everyday realities of citizenship in contemporary societies from the perspective of media and cultural research. At any rate, that was the hunch on which Sonia Livingstone and I built a proposal nearly four years ago to the ESRC under the Cultures of Consumption programme - and we got the money, so maybe the hunch was partly right! [SHOW SLIDE 2] We're now in the final stages of the project which is called Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection

[7] Today I want to introduce some of our findings, before linking back, at the end, to the broader question of what difference media make to the conditions of democratic politics.

Public connection – introduction

[8] First some brief background. Our research question is best explained in terms of two connected assumptions about democratic politics: First, that in a 'mature' democracy such as Britain, most people share an orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are, or at least should be, addressed (we call this orientation 'public connection'). Second, that this public connection is focussed principally on mediated versions of that public world (so 'public connection' is principally sustained by a convergence in media consumption: it is a mediated public connection). We would argue most writers on democracy assume both of these, even if only tacitly. Which raises an empirical question: is there evidence for those assumptions in citizens' everyday practice?

[9] When in this project we talk of ‘public’ connection, we mean by ‘public’ ‘things or issues regarded as of shared concern, not purely private concern’, matters that in principle citizens need to discuss in a world of limited resources .This does not mean assuming a traditional definition of politics; nor assuming that a decline in attention to traditional ‘politics’ means lack of attention to a public world in general, let alone apathy. People’s understanding of what constitutes ‘politics’ may indeed be changing.

[10] There is of course a huge underlying debate here (which I’m happy to return to in the discussion later) about the legitimacy of the public/private boundary itself. Our working assumption was that the public/private boundary remains generally meaningful in spite of many levels of disagreement over the content and definition of ‘politics’ and the ‘public’ world. Our understanding of the public/private boundary was deliberately not prescriptive. The point of our research was to ask people: what makes up their public world? How are they connected to that world? And how are media involved, or not, in sustaining that connection to a public world? These are the questions we aimed to explore: first by asking a small group of 37 people to produce a weekly diary that reflected on those questions (in written or spoken form) for 3 months during 2004; second by interviewing those diarists, both before and after their diary production, individually and in some cases also in focus-groups; and finally by a nationwide survey of roughly 1000 respondents in June 2005. I’ve no time to comment on our sampling strategy, but we can return to this later, if people want – it’s here (on the slide).

Survey data

[11] Although the diary phase of the project came first, I want to start with some material from our nationwide survey because it brings out well the complex relationship between our media research and other work on democratic engagement. The key comparison here is with traditional political science. In spite of the existence of the separate field of political communications, the major debates in political science about engagement give a surprisingly marginal, and then largely negative, role to media consumption: most famously Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis which identifies high television consumption with reduced social capital, and indirectly, he argues, with reduced political engagement. While Pippa Norris and others have shown that Putnam neglects the positive consequences for many people of television news consumption, it is more difficult to find extensive work in political science on how exactly in detail do media make a difference. We reviewed also the British Social Attitudes annual surveys and found an intermittent, and only partial, interest in media consumption, whether generally or in relation to political engagement. And Pattie Seyd and Whiteley's important recent book *Citizenship in Britain*, when reviewing a wide range of models of political engagement, mentions media again largely in passing (heavy TV consumption as bad under one model, political news consumption as good under another): by the time they reach their conclusions on what drives political involvement, people's media use (let alone the quality of that use) has dropped out of the mix.

[12] Our survey produced a rather different picture. We asked people about their media consumption, their media tastes, the issues they followed, as well as their attitudes to democracy and public life in general; we asked them to name a particular issue they were currently concerned with; where did they find out about it, did they discuss it with others,

had they done anything about it, and so on? Our analysis is still being finalised – and here, as a largely qualitative researcher, I must emphasise that I’m drawing a great deal on the work of my LSE colleagues Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham – but it’s already clear from our analysis that media can no longer be ignored in understanding the larger picture of democratic engagement.

[13] Isolating media consumption as a factor is difficult nonetheless, and for good reasons: *first*, because demographics (particularly age and class, often also gender) structure both terms we are interested in, both political engagement and media consumption. We already knew before our survey that political engagement is demographically skewed (and we too found that those with an interest in politics are more likely to be older, male, higher social class: with class being an especially important factor among the over-55s); but because demographics skew media consumption also, it becomes difficult to isolate the specific contribution of media consumption. *Second* the way media consumption varies demographically depends on which medium you take: there is a strong link from being young, male and of higher class status to using the internet both generally and as a news source; with the press, there is a significant link between using the national press as a news source and being older and male – but no significant link here to class. By contrast, using TV as a news source is almost universal, but hours of TV watching increase significantly not just with closeness to retirement but with lower socioeconomic status (television remains of course the cheapest form of leisure). Not surprisingly therefore combining ‘media consumption’ into a single variable proved impossible. *Third*, a single, but universal medium such as TV may itself need to be broken down into different ‘strata’. Although it’s disguised at the aggregate level, we

found that high TV consumers (more than 3 hours a day) were distinctive in that among this group disengagement increased with numbers of hours watched. Here we see a hint of Putnam's thesis but as part of a story of alienation that is specific, in large part, to a particular class position. This complexity makes it impossible (à la Putnam) to explain democratic engagement more generally by isolating overall data on media consumption.

[14] [SLIDE 3] The story is quite different however if we take a more complex media-related variable such as news engagement: here's our definition of this variable, although I don't have time to go through it in detail. I want to focus on what happens when we ask what news engagement contributes to our explanation of political interest in the survey. Of course broad demographic factors (age, class, gender) contribute a lot (7%) to explaining how political interest varies. But other factors contribute almost as much and here media-related factors (that is, news engagement, combined with the absence of interest in celebrity or of a sense that media are irrelevant to one's life) – these contribute as much (5%) as does local engagement (an important factor in the Putnam story). By contrast, trust in politicians, another factor Putnam's social capital-based argument would predict as important, is not significant [Rsquared < 0.005].

[15] But if news engagement is an important factor in explaining political interest – and perhaps one the political science tradition has neglected – [SLIDE 4] what predicts for news engagement? In terms of broad factors, it's above all the social expectation to follow the news; in terms of media, it's above all levels of newspaper and radio use, and the use of all media news sources other than the internet (where there are cross-cutting factors linked to age).

[16] What predicts broader disengagement? [SLIDE 5] Low socioeconomic status and also being older, as well as lacking a sense that you can affect things locally.

Interestingly, turning to media, disengagement is predicted both by an interest in celebrity and by a sense that media are often irrelevant to one's life: in other words, by a sort of disengagement with media as well. However variations in television hours watched have no simple relationship to variations in disengagement except among the manual working class (where levels of disengagement are much higher in any case). An echo of Putnam, again, but less important than the wider demographic pattern.

[17] When we turn to what issues people engage with, the survey reveals some interesting distinctions. We asked people which of three from a list of 20 issues they followed. Unsurprisingly, we could group replies into types of issues associated with each other: traditional politics, broad issues (such as health and environment), and celebrity-related topics (under which for convenience we include here 'reality TV', fashion, and so on). But grouping people by what they followed proved much more difficult, because some issues (particularly, health and crime) are close to universal and others, such as the headline issues of security and Iraq, are widely prevalent. [SLIDE 6] But there is a pattern nonetheless, with the majority of people falling either into (1) [N=427] those interested in the widest range of issues, both traditional political and broader issues or (2) [N=305] those interested in a range of non-political issues (sometimes with some traditional politics also). However there are also two significant minorities: (3) [N= 145) those primarily interested in what we call here celebrity-type issues, and (4) [N=140] those with little interest in any issue. These groups of people are distinguished in terms of news engagement: with the first group being well above average

and the last two groups well below average. The two outer extremes of this mapping – those with broad interests that include traditional politics and those less interested – are also socially stratified, the first being more middle class, the second associated with lower class status. Given the extreme interconnectedness of the world of public events, any patterning among issues people follow, even if subtle, is worth noting.

[18] Similarly in relation to actions people said they took on an issue that they nominated as important: those interested in celebrity-type issues were less likely to have signed a petition, for example, or indeed to have taken any action at all. Given the further correlation of celebrity interest with disengagement, this makes us skeptical about suggestions by Stephen Coleman and others that, under the right conditions, following Big Brother (with its mimicking of democratic ritual) might be a route into political engagement. On the contrary, there may be a faultline here that our diary material also cast light upon.

[19] We've established, then, from our survey that media consumption is complex and has complex consequences; we've established that news engagement contributes independently to political interest, alongside demographics and local involvement, so that media use does help sustain one form of public connection. We found also that, when we categorise people by the types of issue they follow, while the differences are subtle, there are some groupings, and the clearest grouping (people with celebrity-related interests) is the one associated with least news engagement and most disengagement. But crucially all our terms – political interest and media engagement, disengagement and media consumption - are in varying ways stratified by age, class and gender. So media make a different kind of difference, to your chances of engaging in democratic public life,

depending on where you are in the social spectrum. The highest TV consumers in our survey (who, you'll recall, were more likely to be of lower class status) were also more likely than average or low TV consumers to say that 'the things the media cover have little to do with my life': to regard media as irrelevant to their lives. This is not paradoxical as soon as we remember that media always matter alongside other large-scale forces (including class and occupational status) that structure your chances of acting effectively as a citizen.

The Public Connection Project: Diary phase data

[20] Let's see how these themes are carried over to the much more detailed material from the diary phase of our project which enables us, indeed requires us, to make rather different kinds of claim. Clearly we can't on the basis of 37 diarists prove the demographic basis of particular forms of mediated public connection. But we can say many new things (not possible in the survey's overview) about the different forms that mediated public connection takes, the subtle ways in which it intersects with the routines of daily life, and the constraints, social and otherwise, that may be at work. I can only highlight a few points here. **[SLIDE 7]** We define 'mediated public connection', as I said earlier, as an orientation to a world of public issues sustained in part through the media you consume: it's a term therefore with two components, media consumption and public orientation. The first, and most basic, point to make is that there is no single 'ideal type' which mediated public connection takes. This is for many reasons, including the inherent contestability of the public/private distinction itself.

[21] There are however some differences which give a sense of the analytic space in which we can map particular diarists. Amongst those who have mediated public connection, there's a difference between diarists whose sense of a public world emerges principally out of their media consumption, and those who bring to media an independently existing orientation to a public world. Henry [D22] for example, a man aged 52 who worked in insurance and lived in a Northern suburb, was a voracious media consumer who enjoyed a constant media flow:

I start off [the day] with Radio 2 . . . and I'm reading [the papers] by that stage while I'm breakfasting . . . And then because I catch the [bus] into work and there's a local free paper that you get . . . and read which is the Metro which I'm sure everybody has around the country . . . and that has just soundbites . . . and sort of pictures from all over the place . . . but again – it sets you up.

Do you follow up these stories?

Some of them yeah . . . well a lot of them you catch them . . . it's mentioned several times throughout the day . . . and it's seeped into your consciousness anyway. [D22 I2]

The public world that Henry's media use was oriented to was the public world of which he was a member, as a listener, viewer and reader, not other public constituencies independent of his media consumption. **[SLIDE 8]** By contrast John, a retired chief executive of a financial services company from the same region, enjoyed media, especially newspapers, but it was their ability to deliver him facts about a broader public world that he valued:

I read the business section [of *The Times*] everyday and I read all of it, partially because I'm interested and there's people who I still know . . . And I'm just interested

in what happens to the financial world in general, just to see what's developing. And I'm . . . interested in the country and the politics of the country and so forth. And worldwide events. I like to keep up to date and see what's going on. (D20 I1)

The public world, for John, was not so much the shared world of a media audience, but the public world to which he had contributed, initially as a businessman and now he was involved in as a magistrate. Many people of course fall between these two poles.

[22] Then there was a small group of diarists who were not easily categorisable in these terms, either because they felt they could easily live without media (yet lacked a strong separate sense of a 'public' world to which they were orientated). Or because they had become so alienated from the 'public world' that trying to evaluate whether their media consumption contributed to their orientation to that world would distort their distinctive sense of the pointlessness of any such thing. At the same time, we were well aware that the contentiousness of the term meant we could not dismiss alternative conceptions of the 'public' (that for example foreground entertainment or celebrity) – I'll come back to this issue later.

[23] With such rich data (a diary of up to 30 pages, 2 interviews, sometimes a focus group too), it would have been easy to get lost in the logic of particular stories, so we've spent some time trying to identify common structural patterns across the whole range of diarists. There are factors which may undermine or reinforce mediated public connection for particular diarists: negative and positive factors. Let me start with the negative.

Negative factors undermining people's media consumption were rare (occasionally change of life context or just lack of time - one community worker was simply too busy to watch much TV or indeed to do a diary). But generally our diarists appeared able to

access sufficient media if they wanted to. Negative factors undermining public orientation were more important. Factors which relate to capacity in some sense (political efficacy, time to get involved, social isolation) may be compensated for - at least over the short term - without destabilising mediated public connection – compensated not least by the habit of media consumption itself. Similarly with specific forms of political disenchantment, based as they are on a judgement grounded in a sense that politics still matters. Less likely to be compensated were a wider cynicism [D12, 15] or disillusionment [D39], or a naturalized distance from the public world of issues and politics [D13, 18], and least of all a sense of an alternative valuation of what matters beyond the private (for some diarists this was the world of the arts, for example [D15, 25]).

[24] Turning to positive factors, one factor reinforcing mediated consumption was a broad interest in media as a way of accessing a collective world of celebrity, reality TV, fashion, music or general entertainment. Positive factors reinforcing public connection (where not explicitly political – and note that we tried to exclude political activists in our recruitment) could be work-based, or could relate to a sense of collective solidarity, or to personal values, including the values embedded in personal routine. Under work, we include voluntary work (2 of our diarists including John had constructed a post-retirement ‘career’ out of a range of fairly high-status voluntary work); but it might also be full-time paid work that was inherently entangled in public issues (teachers, nurses, a trainee architect). Collective solidarity might be linked to ethnicity or class or the rural ‘way of life’; in a few cases, religion was important here.

[25] But there's a key asymmetry. Whereas a strong 'public attraction' generally feeds back into mediated public connection (media being a key source of information for most public issues), a strong media attraction may well be accompanied by an aversion from (not attraction to) following issues of public concern. We found no cases of talk about celebrity or reality TV being linked to public issues, in the sense of issues requiring shared resolution (reinforcing a point I made earlier about the survey)

[26] We were on the lookout for other feedback loops that reinforced a sense of connection to a public world through media. These proved to be of two sorts: those based on social expectations and those based on individual habit/ values. I have already touched upon the first, so let me say more about the second. A sense of duty to keep up with news is in one sense an individual matter, but it may be important in reinforcing links between the space of individual choice and a world of more than private concern. **[SLIDE 9]**

Values are bridges between private and public worlds, that may reinforce and give meaning to habit. Here are some examples:

'I need the radio 24 hours. Like regular 24 hours because all the time in car, I listen radio news and everything. . . . the news all the time, every hour I have to listen to news just to find it out what's happening.' (Ashok, aged 47, garage manager, London suburb)

'Yeah, I've always felt that anyway that you need to know what's going on all over the world.' (Kylie, single mother, 24, unemployed, inner city London)

'I'm compulsive, I have to pick up any paper that I see and have a look through it.' (Enid, 62, retired school assistant, London suburb)

Sometimes this value is implied through harsh judgements about others;

‘What I find quite astonishing really that most people I know really just don’t care about what’s going on. They’re focused on their own thing and as long as they know that David Beckham’s had a new hair cut and that they can go and get it done at the salon just like this . . . they just carry on with stuff.’ (Josh, 24, trainee architect, Northern suburb)

[27] But others [SLIDE 10] lacked this value of keeping up with the news, such as Beccy, a 27 year-old woman working in marketing: ‘I mainly pick the news up from the internet or radio news and I think well should I be more aware and what difference does it make in the world whether I am or not, and sometimes I think I should but (quietly) I’m not (laughs)’.

Her explanation and justification for this is interesting:

‘I think there’s a hell of a lot of choice out there and I think . . . it’s up to me to go and find out and be informed. . . . I think everybody would have their own line. My cynical friend would say that you know everybody should be obligated to know about politics and everybody should use their vote responsibly because he’s really into that . . . Whereas me, . . . I don’t know where my line would be because I know I look at a lot of celebrity news but that’s not important and I wouldn’t say people were obliged to know about that at all. But certain things in my head I think I should be obliged to know about I’m not.’

[28] What emerges here is that media-related values and habits (keeping up with the news, news engagement) do not work in isolation. They are part of a wider field of values and orientations. In the last quote there is a hint of individualism as a positive value, although it is close to pure rationalization. We can never of course from a distance definitively claim to chart people’s underlying orientations, but we have tried to identify our diarists in terms of the dominant frames of reference that emerged in the accounts

they gave us of their lives. [SLIDE 11] There are many possibilities to be considered: most importantly, family (14 diarists), work (10) and social life (9 diarists), and of course in some diarists these orientations overlap. Rather different were five diarists with a clear sense of media as providing their main interface with a wider world, and six diarists for whom the individual value of keeping up with the news as part of daily routine seemed primary. A tentative conclusion here is that a primary orientation to social or family dimensions (something we would ordinarily see as positive) is most likely to be associated with having low mediated public connection and feeling at a distance from both media and public worlds. By contrast, the absence of social and family as principal orientating frames is associated with a clear tendency towards mediated public connection. If we look for orientations that seem associated positively with high mediated public connection, work seems to be the most regular – and strikingly local civic context barely registers at all. This is a major difference with the US project that Andrea Press and Bruce Williams at University of Illinois are running on similar methodology alongside ours.

[29] There's no time here to go into details about the quality of diarists' media use although it's worth noting that when people reflected back over their media use for the past week and its relevance to their sense of public issues, Internet consumption was relatively unimportant (another major difference from the US project) – and this even though our sample had roughly average UK levels of home computer and online access. It is of course a complex matter to compare people's accounts of their media use, because there is an instrumental element to everyone's media consumption (media offer basic relaxation time). But one crucial point is habit: with very few exceptions those with high

mediated public connection had regular habits of media consumption. Media habits (particularly habits of news following) are an important stabilizing factor in practice, although their distribution is skewed by age.

[30] What about broader issues? I want to close with some comments first on talk and then on democracy. In general, diarists regularly reported they talked about public issues with others and in a range of contexts. Only four diarists appeared not to. Talk at work was particularly interesting. Sometimes such talk was incidental to work (in work breaks): people casually chatting while consuming media. Beccy again:

‘At lunchtime, [female - the other half of the marketing team] and I did some web surfing to catch up on the news. We like anything light-hearted and diverting to entertain us, especially when we’re so busy. I was checking out Courtney Love’s latest adventures on nme.com, and she was checking out Ananova for celebrity gossip.’

Other talk about public issues may be integral to work, for example in a beauty salon or a newspaper shop or a magistrates court. Back to John, our retired financial executive:

‘I’ve discussed a lot at the magistrates. I usually go down and get there about half an hour before the court starts and everyone has a cup of coffee and you have a chat and there’s about an hour and a half over lunch time and inevitably you lunch and generally talk to the people you’ve been sitting with. You get a good cross section of views there cause there’s all sorts of people magistrates. It’s very interesting to hear people’s views.’

[31] Constraints of various sorts operate against public-related talk. As we’ve already seen work contexts may discourage ‘serious’ talk – so too going out for a drink with friends when, as one diarist put it, you don’t want ‘doom and gloom’. But the thing that strikes us most about the evidence on talk we’ve gathered is that there is almost never any

evidence of a link between talk and action. As we've seen the social context of talk may sometimes reinforce, or even provide the basic motivation for, publicly oriented media consumption, but we found only one case where a diarist said they had talked about an issue and then decided to act publicly. It's always difficult of course to assess exactly what significance to give to an absence in your data, but this is an absence we can hardly ignore – especially as it fits badly with the classic political theory notion of deliberation within democracy. Put crudely, we found virtually no examples either of people deliberating or of them feeling effectively linked to the deliberation of others. And it's striking here that Pattie Seyd and Whiteley at the end of their book on *Citizenship in Britain* come to a similar conclusion, that there is very little of a deliberative culture in contemporary Britain.

[32] Which takes us back to the larger questions from which I started. Media consumption matters - it contributes for many, but certainly not all, to their public connection which is, we'd argue, a basic precondition for being an active member of a democracy – but that does not mean it is enough to study media consumption in isolation: there is always a wider context to be considered. Many of our diarists told us as much: - Kylie, the unemployed single mother I quoted earlier, certainly had 'mediated public connection' (as we have called it), indeed a link to a public world defined partly against traditional politics but defined through an emotional engagement based on being an audience member who has easy access to global tragedy as to national or local suffering: but she did not vote, since there was no space within the public world where she felt she could convert her engagement into action: 'I leave them to get on with it. Can't change anything, can I?'

- other diarists [D31, 34] had been strongly engaged in politics in the past and by and large kept up to date with news through media, but had become disillusioned with the shift in politics, away from the working-class local politics they had once participated in.

- still others, of higher class position and among the most civically active of our diarists (after all, they had much greater opportunity to find civic voluntary work after retirement than those of lower class position), while at one level what they did was enjoyable and provided a stable context in which it made sense for them to use media to keep up to date, at another level they despaired of their actions ever making any difference or their opinions ever being heard by those in power. The retired chief executive again, speaking this time in a regional focus group: **[SLIDE 12]**

‘there’s really very little an individual can do. In fact, nothing that an individual can do. I could feel as strongly as I like about an issue and my wife’s always complaining that I do feel strongly about an issue and do nothing about it because there’s nothing you can do about it. Well I suppose I could do, I could stand in the middle of [the city] and spout but nobody’s take a bit of notice, would they?’ (John, Northern suburb focus group).

And when in another focus group, I asked whether people would go so far as to say they had a ‘duty’ to follow certain things, a senior public health nurse got to the heart of the issue:

‘It’s all right having a duty and following things but is there an action at the end of it? For some people if there isn’t then what’s the point? I’m not saying that’s my view but you could put that forward, is there a point if there’s nothing at the end of it?’ (Sheila, Midlands rural focus group).

[33] Media do make a difference, then, but we cannot expect media institutions, or

improved media literacy (taken by itself), to supply the action-context that makes sense for us over the long-term of remaining orientated to a world beyond the private. Our media consumption cannot heal the rift in public space which is inherent to a neoliberal discourse which absolutely legitimates the market and systematically delegitimizes the social and the spaces of organized public action. I am not claiming of course that the evidence we have found in our project amounts to a cry against neoliberalism! But I am suggesting in conclusion, and speaking personally, that some of our diarists' unanswered questions - about their place as audience members and as citizens - make most sense to me when seen within that wider perspective. So, to recall Adorno's great phrase, people's practices of media consumption can never be more than a 'torn half' of a much larger picture, but those practices are no less important for all that. Thanks very much. [**SLIDE 13 = project website address**]