There are very few areas left in life that have not been explored and mapped, codified and quantified, and that now lay tucked away in textbooks for people to read about. We have fission and fusion, we know how old the universe is and we know what the dark side of the moon looks like. Habermas is one of the last explorers of the twentieth century, pushing the boundaries of language ever farther in his search for the incandescent and irreproachable truth of communication. As the tide of democracy sweeps the earth, we begin to question the foundations on which it lays. It is at this point that the ideal speech situation steps up to the breach and performs its role as a courtesan to the democratic process.

As a proposed ideal of discursive regulation, the ideal speech situation is very fitting. However, I would like to press great stress upon the *ideal* aspect of it. I am unwilling to go so far as to call dismiss the “telos of truth in the transcendental power of language” as unrealistic as I feel this removes the spirit of language and the power it holds from the debate.1 Instead, I am inclined towards skepticism regarding the potential for application of the ideal.

With regards to this particular question, one has to address the issue of definitions. The ideal speech situation itself is relatively simple to clarify – Habermas sets out his rules of discursive interaction to which he believes we should aspire in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*.2 Given his predilection for extensive analysis of seeming obscure features of language, it seems only apt to question the internal conflict of the question itself. Who is defining these terms? What measure do we have for viability? What is meant by ‘offer’? Why ‘collective political action’?

Having considered the individual and the collective, I will explore the political action possible for this collective. What is political? What is the purpose of the political for Habermas? Does Habermas locate a source of what is responsible for the atomisation and fragmentation of said collective?

Can deliberative democracy, as an example of collective political action rooted in the ideal speech situation, work? How naïve is it to believe that because the masses co-authored legislation that they are able and willing to comprehend and to conform to said legislation?3 Is it not a ridiculous self-anointment of false consciousness to contend that individuals are passive because they desired these laws to be in place? I wish to explore whether it as the point of application to reality that the ideal speech situation and the concept of deliberative democracy starts to skid towards its inevitable dead end. Is this a new generation of *aporia*, manifested in the removal, or even absence, of plausibility?

In an attempt to confront the practicalities of the ideal speech situation as a basis for collective political action, I shall consider it with respect to different realms (state, civil, public sphere), on different strata within the realms (private/personal, local, intercommunal, national, transnational) and within different temporal framings. With regards to the last aspect, I intend to place a heavy emphasis on the role of the internet and whether it can assume the mantle of the new public sphere. Does the anonymity provided by usernames on a basic level and anonymity proxy community on a more complex one allow the true practice of the ideal speech situation?4 Does relative equality of access remove pseudo-feudal hierarchies? Is the meritocratic nature of the online world the embodiment of the first clause of the ideal speech situation?

A great volume of work is beginning to form around the topic of the internet as the new public sphere. I intend to use the work of [Howard Rheingold](http://www.smartmobs.com/author/howard/) as my starting point on this, as he offers one of the more comprehensive and exhaustive studies of the subject.5 This will be complimented by the writing of Benkler, Poster and Fraser who offer a variety of stances on the subject.6

With regards to the other areas of discussion I have found Alford’s writing to be very instructive.7 His critical defense of Habermas’ work is concise and much easier to read than that which he is defending. Blaug’s consideration of various uses and applications of Habermas’ theories has been similarly informative.8 As such a prolific writer, various works of Habermas himself will play a central role in my arguments, including *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Between Facts and Norms*, and *The Postnational Constellation*.9

1 C. Fred Alford, ‘The Possibility of Rational Outcomes from Democratic Dicourse and Procedures: Comment’, in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Aug 1996, pg. 754

2 Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Polity Press, 1990, pg. 89

3 Martin and… pg. 204

4 JAP Anonymity & Privacy, ANONYMITY IS NOT A CRIME, found at –

<<http://anon.inf.tu-dresden.de/index_en.html>> (checked on 5th February 2008)

5 Howard Rheingold, ‘Habermas blows off question about the Internet and the Public Sphere’, found at –

<<http://www.smartmobs.com/2007/11/05/habermas-blows-off-question-about-the-internet-and-the-public-sphere/>> (checked on 5th February 2008)

Howard Rheingold, the electronic version of *The Virtual Community*, found at –

<<http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html>> (checked on 5th February 2008)

6 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, found at –

<<http://www.congo-education.net/wealth-of-networks/>>

Mark Poster, ‘CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere’, found at –

<<http://www.uoc.edu/in3/hermeneia/sala_de_lectura/mark_poster_cyberdemocracy.htm>>

Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing in a Democracy’, in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, 1993

7 C. Fred Alford, ‘The Possibility of Rational Outcomes from Democratic Dicourse and Procedures: Comment’, in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Aug 1996

8 Ricardo Blaug, ‘Between Fear and Disappointment: Critical, Empirical and Political Uses of Habermas’, *Political Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1

9 *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Polity Press, 1990

*The Theory of Communicative Action*, Polity Press, Vol. 1 1984, Vol. 2 1987

*Between Facts and Norms*, Polity Press, 1996

*The Postnational Constellation*, Polity Press, 2001