Publics and Politics

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Abstract

This review surveys the literature on publics: political subjects that know themselves and act by means of mass-mediated communication. It examines classic accounts of how publics form through interlocking modes of social interaction, as well as the forms of social interaction that publics have been defined against. It also addresses recent work that has sought to account for contradictions within theories of the public sphere and to develop alternative understandings of public culture. Historical and ethnographic research on this topic reveals that some concept of publicity is foundational for a number of theories of self-determination, but that the subject of publicity is irrevocably enmeshed in the very technological, linguistic, and conceptual means of its own self-production. Research on publics is valuable because it has focused on this paradox of mediation at the center of modern political life.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology has become increasingly concerned with providing accounts of large-scale political subjects, or "publics," that are thinkable and practicable by means of mass-mediated communication. For a discipline that was long founded on the axiom that ethnography provides privileged access to "local knowledge" (Geertz 1983), recognizing that the very stuff of self-understanding is often produced through a dialectic of exchange with texts circulating on a mass scale required the development of new methods and new ways of theorizing the social. Late-twentieth-century shifts in geopolitics, the proliferation of new social movements, increasing concentration of economic power, as well as the global dissemination of digital media technologies certainly added urgency to the tasks of understanding the development of mass-mediated subjectivity and how communicative practices shape the field of politics. The changing referents and theories of publics have led to a host of new research questions.

In this review, I examine how research in this domain foregrounds the interlocking of scales and modes of social interaction, in addition to related problems of instrumentality and mediation that have been posed for theories of collective political agency. Some concept of publicity is foundational for a number of theories of self-determination; but the very communicative means by which publics come to know themselves as such, enabling collective action among strangers, often appear to sit at the limits of human awareness and control. At the very least, some social actors exert power over the field of mass-mediated self-organization through discourse more than others do. Much of the critical thrust of research on publics has, in fact, turned on the question of how representations of "the public" rest on the erasure of social structures, allowing universalizing claims to be articulated only by particular types of people. If work on publics has encouraged anthropology to revisit classical questions in the theory of democracy, it is therefore a line of inquiry that has also forced political theory to engage more squarely with questions of communicational infrastructure and the semiotics of representation.

A confluence of interests around the problem of how participation in mass-mediated discourse can shape the character and trajectory of political power has pushed scholars to the limits of their home disciplines. Although heavily indebted to earlier studies of public opinion and political theory (Arendt 1958, Dewey 1927, Lippmann 1925), self-presentation in public encounters (Goffman 1963), popular media (Hoggart 1957, Williams 1974), nationalism (Deutsch 1966), and the politics of display (Cohn 1983), the more recent thematization of publics and the politics of communication in anthropology is also linked to the critique of culturalism in the age of globalization and to a broader engagement with alternative experiences of modernity (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1988). To delineate an already broad problematic that has developed in connection with these trends since the late 1980s, this review is more concerned with the anthropology of publics as political subjects, as discursive fields, and as concepts invoked in social interaction than it is with the role of anthropology in the public sphere, or with recent debates about public property and the privatization of space.

MASS-MEDIATED POLITICAL SUBJECTS

The turn toward publics in anthropology and neighboring disciplines was motivated in large part by the publication of two major works: the English translation of Jürgen Habermas's (1989 [1962]) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and Benedict Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities*. In the former study, the rise of a bourgeois "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) is characterized by the exercise of reason in the production of a democratic discursive space among property owners who would supervise the state. This concept of a public that is assembled of private citizens who mediate between state and society rests on the premise that critical discourse can only play its political function if arguments are made in terms of rational

common interest and if communication remains free from coercion. Newspapers and places of public discussion stood as paradigmatic sites for this type of communication because they interpenetrated, with conversations between strangers at coffeehouses and critical essays circulating in print self-consciously echoing each other. These are furthermore taken to be modes of communication in which the social position of those involved is secondary to the logical quality of the argument put forth. Habermas argues that this "liberal model" of the public sphere, which is in principle open to all citizens, reached its height in eighteenth-century Western Europe. It has since degenerated in industrialized mass-welfare democracies through processes of commoditization, monopolization, and competition among private interests over state-directed resource allocation (see Calhoun 1992, Robbins 1993).

In Anderson's book, the focus is not on publics, as such, but rather on the emergence of national communities characterized by deep ties among people whose sense of belonging to a mass political subject is nevertheless mediated by "print capitalism." In addition to his emphasis on the role of narrative imagination in forging connections among members of national communities who would never actually meet each other, Anderson's greatest contribution to a theory of public formation is the attention he pays to a specifically modern/historicist orientation to temporality. He argues that printed books, newspapers, and other mass-mediating technologies allowed for a new sense of contemporaneity to arise as the condition of horizontal solidarities among fellow members of a nation. As in Habermas's public sphere, then, print publication serves as a key engine in the development of mass political subjects; but Anderson pushes his argument about the constitutive role of communication further, suggesting that language itself acquired a new fixity through the forms of objectification engendered by the rise of print technology. The standardization of languages that accompanied the rise of print capitalism entails, for Anderson, a homogenization of the very means by which national publics are imagined.

What these studies have in common is a sharpened theorization of the connections among communication, capitalism, and mass politics. More specifically, both theorists insist on the centrality of a form of stranger sociability that arises with the conjuncture of print-mediated discourse and new modes of imagining public life enabled by capitalist production. If Anderson argues that national communities are peculiar because they forge historical connections among people who will never meet in person, for Habermas the political function of the public sphere rests on participants' ability to bracket their individual interests and their social status. The mass circulation of texts in the form of printed books and newspapers is what created the very conditions under which such an abstract assembly of strangers could understand themselves to be acting collectively.

Modern publics are therefore unlike previous forms of association insofar as they can understand themselves as mass subjects, acting together in secular time "in and as a precipitate of common action" (Taylor 2004, p. 96). In a striking image from Anderson, it is only through such a secularized consciousness enabled by print that the nation could conceive of itself as "a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time . . . a solid community moving steadily down (or up) through history" (1983, p. 26). The metaphor of an organism is important because it serves as a model for modern freedom that is produced through self-recursive mediation, unlike a machine (Cheah 2004). A public is a relation among strangers that is analytically separable from the older and more general concept of "civil society," because it performs "an operationalization of civil society's capacity for self-organization" (Calhoun 1993, p. 273; see also Warner 2002). Publics forge their own legitimacy through the medium of common discourse, without having to refer to a transcendent form of sovereignty from without, and this element of agency is precisely what is so attractive about publics for theories of political

emancipation, be they liberal, nationalist, or radical.

Habermasian and Andersonian theories of public formation are both universalizing, but each projects from the particulars of historical analysis in its own fashion. For Habermas, the liberal public sphere "provides a paradigm for analyzing historical change, while also serving as a normative category for political critique" (Hohedahl 1979, p. 92). Habermas's argument therefore has the advantage of being self-conscious about the tension between description and prescription that haunts any account of democratic publicity, although he remains unconcerned with how the ideals of the public sphere might travel outside of Europe. Anderson's model of national public formation, on the other hand, is universalizing in a more strictly historicist sense of tracking the development of a unitary phenomenon over time (Chakrabarty 2000). The story of nationalism begins in the Atlantic world, with the conjuncture of European thought and the restricted social trajectories of "creole pioneers" in the Americas, only to be reimagined repeatedly around the globe in different styles, but with essentially the same format. Whereas Habermas presupposes national spheres of public debate among otherwise socially indistinct interlocutors, Anderson seeks to account for this very framing of collective agency, and his later work goes on to distinguish between bounded and unbounded "serialities" that determine the limits and possibilities of inclusion within a national frame (Anderson 1998).

PRIVATES, CROWDS, COUNTERPUBLICS

I now turn to the concepts against which publics are often defined to introduce recent engagement with these theories of public formation. Accounts that focus on the rise of print, especially the modern novel, argue that the new social orientation to strangers that characterizes the rise of modern publicity correlates with a new sense of "private" interiority. For Habermas, the development of privacy is a bourgeois phenomenon that allowed property owners to understand themselves as the legitimate representatives of humanity in general. He adheres to a delineation of private and public largely inherited from Kant (1996[1784], pp. 60–61), for whom the "public use of reason" is exercised "before the entire public of the *reading world*," as opposed to the private sphere of one's particular civil post or position within the family. Privacy remains a residual category in early conceptions of the public, however, and a number of conceptual problems arise from the widespread tendency in liberal political theory to conflate (*a*) privacy as a sense of interiority found in certain models of personhood, (*b*) regimes of privacy pertaining to individual property ownership, and (*c*) spatially defined privates that might derive from any number of classificatory logics, not all of which can be reduced to domesticity.

A large body of feminist scholarship has questioned the role of privacy in social thought and has critically examined the specific means by which this sphere has been cast in gendered terms (e.g., Elshtain 1981, Fraser 1985, Pateman 1988, Rosaldo 1974, Ryan 1990). In a direct engagement with Habermas's thesis, for example, Landes (1988) argues that "the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public sphere was not incidental but central to its incarnation" (p. 7). Landes documents the political and communicative shifts that accompanied the decline of the *ancien régime* in France, where women were prominent in both politics and public life, to argue that the rise of republicanism was organized around a masculinist form of publicity that relegated feminine virtue to the private sphere. To the extent that the political has been coterminous with issues of public interest, contrasts with the private and with domesticity have systematically excluded women from participating in politics, leading scholars to argue that a critical history of gender "dissolves the distinction between public and private" (Scott 1999, p. 27).

The public/private binary has generally barred marginalized subject positions from a sphere of legitimate politics dominated by impersonal norms of discourse—those very

communicative features of stranger sociability that made the public sphere so attractive to a theory of democracy based on unmarked subjectivity. Critiques of a faceless, deliberative public sphere therefore point to the limits of the very Kantian ethics upon which this model has been built (Cheah 1995). In postfeminist conceptualizations of the political, this realm is thus commonly understood to cut across the distinction between private and public. But to the degree that this distinction is recursive and far from stable (Gal 2002, Hill 2001), research on the shifting mechanisms by which the hidden is rendered public continues to provide new grounds from which to critique liberalism itself (Berlant 1997, Povinelli 2006, Warner 2002).

If the private serves as one foil against which the notion of publicity is commonly defined, another primary counterconcept is "the masses" or "crowds." The French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1969[1901], p. 277), for example, anticipates later formulations by characterizing a public "caused" by the invention of print as a "dissemination of physically separated individuals whose cohesion is entirely mental," as opposed to the crowd (*la foule*) which is driven by excessive, embodied passion making it more prone to manipulative suggestion and violence. Crowd-like behavior has been associated not only with face-to-face gatherings, but also with the dangers of new technologies, as in the case of cinema's purported capacity to work directly on the senses, thereby escaping rational intellection (Hansen 1991, Mazzarella 2009). What Habermas dismisses as politics defined by "pressure from the street" might well prove an important starting point from which to consider the production of publicity from the perspective of those who are not privileged enough to inhabit the disembodied voice of public reason (Hill & Montag 2000).

Recent interest in the energies of crowds has gone further, however, arguing that the problems posed by communal affect for the theory of democracy can shed light on the production of mass political subjectivity more broadly. For instance, Laclau (2005) argues that the libidinal excess of crowds in populist movements can help illuminate the workings of any form of mass politics to the degree that any political movement operates through modes of rhetoric and semiotic indeterminacy that are often pejoratively attributed to populism. Crowds inevitably fail to live up to the standards of self-measuring agency attributed to publics (Mazzarella 2010), but they can nevertheless stand as embodiments of popular sovereignty, creating "a tangible representation of 'the people'" (Tambar 2009, p. 532; see also Bate 2009, Chakrabarty 2007, Manning 2007, Rafael 2003).

The concept of a "counterpublic," defined in a more precisely delineated opposition to dominant forms of publicity, found early expression, in German, in Oskar Negt & Alexander Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience* (1993[1972]). In this book, Negt & Kluge engage with theories of the liberal public sphere to argue for a distinctly proletarian experience of public life that resists expression in the "economy of speech" that defines bourgeois publicity. The debate around counterpublics in the English-speaking world begins in earnest, however, with the publication of Fraser's (1990) critique of Habermas, where she develops an argument for the political importance of multiple "subaltern counterpublics" among subordinated groups who formulate oppositional discourses in a range of parallel spheres. Fraser argues that those who are excluded from being able to speak for the public at large consistently produce discourses that are nevertheless oriented toward publicity as such.

Warner (2002) argues that orientations to publicity as self-abstraction among counterpublics may come at the cost of normalization and possible foreclosure of alternative modes of collective experience. Since the establishment of these interventions, a number of questions have arisen about whether counterpublics are to be defined only by the content of discourse, by the social status of those who articulate their opposition to a dominant public, by the spaces of articulation, or by marked cultural style, ensuring that counterpublics "lack the power to transpose themselves to the level of the

state" (Warner 2002, p. 116; see also Asen 2000, Dawson 1994, Urla 1995). In an ethnographic exploration of counterpublicity, Hirschkind's (2006) work on cassette sermons in Egypt focuses both on the difference in discursive style employed by popular Islamic preachers versus that endorsed by the state and on their very medium of dissemination. His study suggests that what is at stake in the development of a counterpublic organized around devotional listening practices may well be a challenge to the hierarchy of the senses underpinning post-Kantian visions of the public sphere.

PUBLICITY AS COMMUNICATIVE EFFECT

It has become clear that what counts as "public" is not determined by the simple fact of large-scale address. What more recent theories of public formation have added to received sociological understandings of the difference between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Tönnies 1963[1887]) or the study of social strangers (Simmel 1971[1908]) is focused attention to the productive role of "social imaginaries" in giving substance to the articulation of mass-mediated subjectivities (Anderson 1983, Appadurai 1996, Calhoun 2002, Castoriadis 1987, Kaviraj 1992, Taylor 2004). These studies have shown how the effect of publicity relies on a reflexive recognition of textual circulation among indefinite addressees (Warner 2002) and on the presupposed background of what Taylor (2004) calls a "metatopical space" that would enable such forms of circulation among people who do not know each other. In linguistic anthropology, it is the study of language ideologies that has allowed researchers to theorize the interaction that unfolds between different orders of social relation and to develop accounts of how particular communicative acts are intertwined with large-scale regimes of value (Kroskrity 2000, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Silverstein 2003). A number of research questions have arisen from the observation that modern publicity is performed through concrete communicative practices that are themselves mediated by language ideologies (Gal 2005, Gal & Woolard 2001). But how is this effect of mass circulation among strangers who inhabit a social imaginary produced?

Attention to the ideological mediation of performativity in language use enables researchers to understand that the effect of publicity cannot be determined by the form of texts alone or by simple reference to their mode of dissemination. "Instead, circulation interacts with the semiotic form of the circulating objects to create the cultural dimensions of the circulatory process itself" (Lee 2001, p. 165). Warner's (1990) work on colonial America, for example, describes how the intersection of republican ideals of disinterested reason with forms of decontextualization enabled by print technology produced conditions under which political discourse could be construed, not as a relation between individuals or social interests, but rather as the disembodied voice of an abstracted "people" in conversation with others who are similarly undefined socially. "People who enter into this discourse do so on the condition that the validity of their utterance will bear a negative relation to their person" (1990, p. 38). Warner is thus able to historicize the specific techno-cultural mechanisms enabling the abstracted circulation of public discourse in a manner that is reducible neither to the question of print nor to Enlightenment narratives depicting the newly unfettered rise of reason from the shackles of tradition.

The mass-mediated production of personhood rests on specific, ethnographically locatable acts of "entextualization," whereby a unit of discourse can be detached from one context of enunciation and placed into others to create an effect of circulation, often across media channels (Bauman & Briggs 1990, Silverstein & Urban 1996, Urban 2001). In a study that brings this point vividly to life, Spitulnik (1996) tracks instances of recycled radio language in everyday speech in Zambia to argue for an approach that can account for the lateral modes of communication that have been obscured in studies, such as Anderson's (1983), that appear to assume uniform uptake of mass-mediated discourse. To the degree that Anderson projects

from a textual form to posit a form of subjectivity (Silverstein 2000), he ignores the social distribution of communicative means in the formation of national publics (Bourdieu 1991). Ethnographic work on the reception and consumption of television, for example, illustrates differential uptake of media forms within the space of the nation-state (Abu-Lughod 2005, Mankekar 1999). In film studies, Hansen (1991) has focused on what she terms the "public dimension . . . distinct from both textual and social determinations of spectatorship because it entails the very moment in which reception can gain momentum of its own, can give rise to formations not necessarily anticipated in the context of production" (p. 7). Work on publicity as an effect of entextualization can thus help transcend a lingering impasse between studies of production and those of reception.

Methodological emphasis on circulatory process has instead opened new modes of apprehending the contours of historical change in the production of publics. Researchers are now theorizing the dynamic formation of "split publics" with differential access to state power and radically different visions of the bases of national belonging (Rajagopal 2001), questioning Anderson's central thesis that the temporality of the nation is in fact experienced as "homogenous" (Bhabha 1990, Chatterjee 2004, Kelly & Kaplan 2001, Lomnitz 2001). Rather than assume uniform time consciousness to be a simple effect of mass mediation, I have argued elsewhere for a method that is attentive to specific "regimes of circulation": cultivated habits of animating texts, enabling the movement of discourse along predictable social trajectories (Cody 2009a). Attention to the active cultivation of such textual habits allows us to account for the variegated means by which newspaper discourse does, in fact, move along both oral and written channels to produce classed and gendered orientations to time and space.

A number of scholars have questioned the assumption that linguistic communities themselves exist prior to their being imagined into existence in much the same fashion as the nation that would claim to represent them (Eisenlohr 2006b, Gal & Woolard 2001, Mitchell 2009, Silverstein 1998, Urla 1993). The fact of establishing a national language that would embody the primordial qualities of a people is a political achievement of "iconization" (Gal & Irvine 1995; see also Bate 2009). However, a striking counterexample is the successful construction of Bahasa Indonesia as the linguistic infrastructure for public speaking that was attractive to Indonesian nationalism in large part because it could rarely be said to be the first language of any particular ethnic group (Errington 1998, Keane 2003, Siegel 1997). Research on language standardization efforts in English documents the process by which linguistic difference within what is commonly thought of as a single code is both objectified and denigrated in producing normative monolingual emblems of nationhood and publicity (Agha 2003, Milroy & Milroy 1999, Silverstein 1996).

Inoue (2006) has pushed this argument further in her monograph on the register of women's speech in Japanese, showing how print capitalism and practices of reading associated with the rise of a modern, normatively male, Japanese citizenry were entangled in a standardizing movement to make written Japanese closer to speech. In the case Inoue examines, stereotypical representations of women's speech actively created that which they purported to be describing through practices of citation, thereby placing the reader in a position to gaze at what was taken to be a naturally occurring genre. Inoue argues more broadly, "Just as labor and social relations are reified in capitalist society, the voice of alterity represented in print language is also stripped of its history and material agency and put on public display, incessantly dislocated, circulated, and subjected to the consuming gaze" (Inoue 2006, p. 49). The national public produced through the circulation of Japanese print language thus rests on the availability of traditional women's speech as an object of mass consumption, and the "culture of circulation" (Lee & LiPuma 2002) enabling the movement of texts appears in this narrative as none other than the social imaginary of late capitalism itself.

CONTRADICTIONS OF PUBLICITY

In the preceding analysis of a commodified speech genre, we return to one of the central dynamics that concerned Habermas as well as his teachers at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt: The agentive capacities of publics are undermined to the degree that the quality of modern publicity is determined by the reifications of consumerist capitalism. Unlike the self-recursive mediation enabled by a public sphere, according to this analysis, the culture industry of late capitalism "integrates its consumers from above" rendering "the masses into an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery" (Adorno 1975, p. 12). For Habermas, the antinomy between critical public discourse that once grew out of bourgeois society and a newly manufactured mass public is betrayed by the phrase "public relations work," words that are commonly used in both politics as well as advertising, indexing shared orientations to a sphere that was meant to stand independently of markets and states in his original formulation. He has also been criticized, however, for not bringing class critiques to bear on his analysis of the early modern public sphere itself insofar as a new mode of social domination was always central to the effect of mass subjectivity (Hill & Montag 2000, Negt & Kluge 1993[1972]).

Pursuing a parallel line of argument, Bourdieu (1979, 2005) has provided a powerful critique of the liberal assumptions behind public opinion polls, later extending his analysis to question the social conditions of representation presupposed in the act of voting. In an intervention aimed at undermining opinion polls' claims to scientific legitimacy in France, Bourdieu argued that the very possibility of having an opinion on certain subjects that are already assumed by poll takers as being of public interest is unevenly distributed. This form of opinion is always already individuated, and "within this logic, which is that of voting but also that of the market, 'collective' opinion in the product not of a genuine collective action, a work of collective elaboration of opinion . . . but rather a pure statistical aggregation of individual opinions individually produced and expressed" (2005, pp. 57–58). This mode of representing a mass of people to itself as a public favors the dominant classes, who can be content with individual strategies of expression because they benefit from the status quo. A similar dissatisfaction within minimalist procedural definitions of democracy in political theory has led ethnographers to argue for an approach that would pluralize its meanings and locate politics in the production of opinion itself (Paley 2008, Wedeen 2007).

Democratic projects to bring the workings of the state under public scrutiny and of making politics more open (as in the German "*Öffentlichkeit*") have long centered on epistemologies of transparency. Particular genres of language, for example, have been considered more appropriate than others to perform modern transparency (Bauman & Briggs 2003, Cody 2009b, Hull 2010, Jackson 2009, Keane 2007). The ideology of neoliberalism, however, has fused this political and epistemological bent of Enlightenment thought to an information-driven capitalism in which new technologies of communication are presented as cures to the problem of political opacity and corruption (Dean 2002, Mazzarella 2006, Morris 2004). Computer programming has been a potent site at which technologically driven social imaginaries are tied to an ethic of transparency, but also to freedom from corporate ownership, exposing a key contradiction between privatization and open access within neoliberalism itself (Coleman 2009, Kelty 2008).

Claims regarding transparency appear to require the uncovering of secrets, and we are faced with a paradox of sorts insofar as "secrecy must itself be performed in a public fashion in order to be understood to exist" (Herzfeld 2009, p. 135; see also West & Sanders 2003). Research on the management of public secrecy may therefore focus on the performative power of unmasking and the revelation of that which was already known (Taussig 1999). Recent work on journalists, who have long been portrayed as guardians of the public sphere endowed with

the power to expose state secrets, has tended to focus on their role as experts involved in the social production of truth (Bird 2009, Boyer 2005, Boyer & Hannerz 2006, Hannerz 2004, Hasty 2005). Censors too have appeared in a similar light, as regulators producing cultural forms that are acceptable for public circulation (Boyer 2003, Kaur & Mazzarella 2009).

If critics of the capitalist public sphere and its technologies of representation have argued that a public-in-itself is consistently misrecognized as a public-for-itself, it is in the realm of postcolonial critique that the contradictions of liberal publicity have made themselves felt most strongly. Chatterjee (1993) has shown how, in colonial Calcutta, "public opinion" was a sphere that was limited to European residents, following what he terms the "rule of colonial difference" (pp. 16–18). Indian nationalism was therefore a form of collective action that must, of necessity, have defined itself against the norms of an impersonal association of strangers that was also racially defined. The nationalist vision of collective emancipation articulated in Gandhian thought was instead founded on an affective community based on kinship, austerity, and sacrifice that explicitly resisted the depersonalizing forces of capitalism. A number of scholars have argued that the imposition of a pedagogical vision of public life as "civil society," derived from the canons of European theory under conditions of colonialism, continues to contradict democratic recognition of actually existing forms of sociality within the postcolonial state (Abu-Lughod 2005, Bhabha 1990, Chakrabarty 2000, Chatterjee 2004, Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, Kaviraj 1997).

The story of contradictions within the politics of the public sphere is often told in terms of the return of repressed genres of sociality that liberal publicity had tried to relegate to the private sphere. Religious claims to occupy the public sphere in the name of a transcendent power have probably posed the greatest challenge to the normative bases of public formation in both the postcolony as well as the metropole (Asad 2003, Casanova 1994, de Vries & Weber 2001, Eickelman & Anderson 1999, Hansen 1999, Hirschkind 2006, Meyer & Moors 2006). Republican panic over the head scarf in France (Bowen 2007, Scott 2007) and liberal outrage over the Rushdie affair in Britain (Asad 1990) are just two instances that illustrate how religious display can violate nationally specific norms of publicity that claim universal significance. In both cases, a historical amnesia about the colonial and neocolonial conditions under which religious minorities came to the metropole seems to play a large role in enabling a newly aggressive secularism that slides easily into racialized majoritarianism. Muslims who protest the abuses of the secular press are accused by liberal majorities in Europe of having mistaken understandings of the power of representation (Keane 2009). The protocols of tolerance and openness therefore take on an exclusionary character for those who would seek to make religion public.

The manner in which states everywhere seek to intervene in religious life has led scholars such as Asad (2006) and Mahmood to argue more broadly that "secularism has sought not so much to banish religion from the public domain but to reshape the form it takes, the subjectivities it endorses, and the epistemological claims it can make" (Mahmood 2006, p. 326). Politics, here again, takes the form of a cultural regulation of publicity, and sovereignty is asserted in the very capacity to regulate the limits of public display. In response to changes in the meanings of citizenship in the United States, Berlant (1997) has argued for a reworked understanding of the "intimate public sphere" (p. 1) to account for a conservative politics concerned almost exclusively with regulating sexuality and other aspects of private life. The rise of televangelist Christianity, in particular, has raised new questions about the secular character of political discourse as the world of personal revelation has become mass-mediated (Harding 2001). It appears that claims to politicize that which was once relegated to the private sphere are hardly the exclusive domain of secular or progressive politics.

ALTERNATIVE DELINEATIONS

In retrospect, it should probably come as no surprise that so much innovative work on publics, politics, and the state should emerge precisely when the absolute political primacy of the nation-state, and the type of communicative actor that anchors it, has been thrown into question. But if the public sphere is made up of multiple publics and counterpublics that are oriented toward a polity, a wide variety of transnational movements and social processes have posed new problems for understanding the legitimacy and efficacy of public formation in a post-Westfalian world (Calhoun 2002, Fraser 2007). In an early attempt to capture the new forms of cosmopolitanism that have challenged conventional understandings of the public sphere, Appadurai & Breckenridge (1988) devised the rubric of "public culture . . . as a *zone* of cultural debate" (p. 6) that increasingly blurs distinctions among state, society, and market. The journal that was founded as a forum for the study of this zone has contributed much to our understanding of the ongoing production of national and transnational publics in relation both to newly mass-mediated "local" cultural forms as well as globally circulating texts.

Another contribution that takes up the invitation of examining publicity in a globalizing world can be found in Herzfeld's (2005) work on social poetics in the nation-state. Attention to "cultural intimacy," those shared understandings of collective identity that are easily obscured in theories that fail to connect mass-mediated projections of nationalism back to everyday experiences of the state, illuminates a pervasive "familiarity with perceived social flaws that offer culturally persuasive explanations of apparent deviations from the public interest" (2005, p. 9; see also Mbembe 1992). A range of recent research projects have developed this problematic further to account for the cultural work that is required "off-stage" when more public projections of collective subjectivity must be formatted for official circulation (Graan 2010, Graham 2005, Shryock 2004, Yurchak 2006). In her account of Palestinian orientations to Yassir Arafat's funeral and elections for the Palestinian Authority, for instance, Bishara (2008) examines how "Palestinian actions were in part a response to their variable assessments of the worth of local popular participation, on the one hand, and the value of performing for an international audience, on the other hand" (p. 489). Much cultural production among marginalized social groups takes on a sort of self-conscious dual addressivity in a globalized media context, not unlike that found in Fraser's (1990) earlier delineation of subaltern counterpublics, insofar as they often function according to contrasting value systems, one generated within and another oriented toward imagined onlookers.

Studies of information technology have proven particularly adept at theorizing the very technological protocols allowing for new forms of networked social control (Castells 1996, Galloway 2004) and online communities who thematize their own virtual character (Boellstorff 2008, Escobar 1994, Malaby 2009, Miller & Slater 2001). Proliferating media technologies give new forms to the ongoing production of a homeland in the imaginary of diasporic publics (Axel 2002, Bernal 2005, Eisenlohr 2006a, Kunreuther 2006). Research on the politics of computer software has gone further to develop the concept of "recursive publics" to account for globalized publicities "that just as often take the form of argument-by-technology as they take the form of deliberative spoken or written discussion" (Kelty 2008, p. 186; see also Coleman 2009). It has also been claimed that the recognition of a global "commons," enabled by the communicative technologies of empire, allows for new forms of democratic claim-making by an emergent multitude that is now thoroughly deterritorialized (Hardt & Negri 2004). However, the process of mediation that would enable the rise of such a postpublic and postnational formation of collective agency remains unclear (Mazzarella 2010).

In a recent intervention, Latour (2005) reminds us that publics consist of relations among people who are mediated by material

infrastructures of communication, each with its own qualities, extending beyond printed texts to include parliament buildings (Schwarte 2005), political rallies (Bate 2009, Jackson 2008), literary salons (Landes 1988), teashops and coffee houses (Cody 2009a, Laurier and Philo 2007), neighborhood "interkom" networks (Barker 2008), movie theaters (Hansen 1991, Larkin 2008), and virtual worlds (Boellstorff 2008, Malaby 2009). Just as important, for Latour, political subjectivity gathers around particular things of concern that are hence made public, issues that might range from purported weapons of mass destruction to the problem of global warming. What is being represented and debated matters greatly in this vision of the *res publica*, as does the very technology of representation. The vision of democracy he advocates focuses on the entanglement of things, in the widest possible sense of the term, and the people who assemble around them.

CONCLUSION

The formation of publics raises serious questions about the ontological status of the political subject because the very capacity of publics to know themselves and act in the world is premised, not on the instrumental use of communication to represent that which is already there, but rather on recursive processes of mass-mediation and self-abstraction. The political subject of publicity is deeply entangled in the very technological, linguistic, and conceptual means of its own self-production. Publics might sometimes even appear as effects of such media. But it is not for these reasons that publicity should be considered merely epiphenomenal. On the contrary, the importance of research on public formation lies precisely in its coming to theoretical terms with the fact that modern ideals of self-determination are irrevocably enmeshed in the social infrastructures of mass communication.

Whereas general arguments about the semiotic mediation of subjectivity have been made in a range of contexts, work on publics has pushed anthropology to focus more squarely on the specific social conditions that allow for a sense of self-organization through mass-mediated discourse to be construed as politically efficacious in some places and times and not in others. To the degree that ethnographic and historical accounts of actually existing formations of publicity have become more rigorous, it becomes more difficult to hold onto classical models associated with the print revolution, rational deliberation, and impersonal modes of address. Whereas earlier anthropological studies of publics exhibited a tendency to measure empirically observable forms of collective action against these norms, research has now turned to focus more on the cultural production of political claims that have been crafted for public circulation, to assess the sometimes high price of entry into the public sphere for those who have long been excluded, and to consider the specific qualities of communicative technologies shaping the organization of intimacy and multiplicity among counterpublics. A tension between social scientific investigation and normative appraisal continues to propel much of this research. The challenge therefore lies in providing analytically sophisticated accounts of public formation while continuing to appreciate and critically examine the very attractions of publicity for attempts to practice politics on a large scale.

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