

# PREFACE

## ON *PUBLICS*, *NON-PUBLICS*, *FORMER PUBLICS*, *FUTURE PUBLICS*, *ALMOST PUBLICS*, AND THEIR STUDENTS AND GENEALOGIES

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The central question of this book – the question of *non-publics* – triggers immediate curiosity. However, we ask readers to momentarily postpone the satisfaction of their legitimate curiosity and to accompany us for four brief prefatory explorations. The first situates Jacobi and Luckerhoff's work in the context of intellectual history and stresses the diversity of disciplines that have dealt with *publics*. The second compares different sorts of publics and equally heterogeneous sorts of non-publics. Inspired by media studies, the third focuses on audiences and raises a paradoxical question: Could we propose audiences as examples of non-publics? Finally, the fourth asks whether the status of publics is that of discursive form or observable sociation.

We shall then leave the floor to Luckerhoff and Jacobi and their collection of systematic and carefully argued essays, hoping to have offered some useful contextualizations to their provocative book.

# 1.

## FIRST EXPLORATION: PUBLICS, NON-PUBLICS AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Several strands of research contribute to the important issues addressed in this book. One strand can be traced to Gabriel Tarde's (1898) proposal that the newspaper took "crowds" off the street and transformed them into "publics." "Publics," for Tarde, consisted of individuals reading about the issues of the day, forming opinions, coming together to discuss and, ultimately, act on them, notably by voting.

Following Tarde, sociologists at the University of Chicago proposed to distinguish not only between crowd and public, but between different types of crowds and the "masses." (Blumer, 1939). These efforts gave rise to the branch of sociology known as collective behavior, which addressed the dynamics of fads, fashions, rumor, scandal, public opinion, and the like. It seems as if mainstream sociology became uneasy about these unstable processes, and it is a good guess to say that communications research became the beneficiary of this unease.

Radically different definitions of the concept of *public* have since been proposed, ranging from people who are single-mindedly engaged, even for a short while, with an everyday issue or performance to individuals who are at least aware of each other, and/or estimate what similarly engaged others are thinking. Noelle-Neumann (1984), Price (1992), Herbst (1993), Dayan (below) and many others have grappled with this issue, sometimes echoing Tarde himself. But almost none of them have dealt directly with the non-public of the disenfranchised – those who do not take part.

Two notable exceptions are public opinion research and political science. While defying more sophisticated definitions of public, public opinion researchers are deeply concerned about respondents who say "don't know" or give "no answer." Although opinion pollsters do not use the term *non-publics*, they worry about them, at least for statistical reasons, especially those respondents who are not sure whether they will vote or not. As for political scientists concerned with the problem of non-voting, they come even closer to the problems addressed in this volume, from both normative and theoretical points of view.

More humanistically oriented students of audience also have a contribution to make (Butsch, 2008; Dimaggio & Useem, 1978; Livingstone, 2005).

Historians show how excluded citizens were ultimately invited into the noble courts to witness previously restricted performances, and how these paved the way for theaters and concert halls, which opened their doors to anybody who could afford the price of admission (R. Katz, 1986). This is where the non-publics of the arts came to prominence. Walter Benjamin (1968) thought that “mechanical reproduction” might enfranchise them.

Early research on radio anticipated Jacobi and Luckerhoff’s interest in non-publics by some 60 years, but subsequently – and unfortunately – abandoned this missionizing. At the time, a group around Paul Lazarsfeld felt that the new medium might spur interest in reading and the arts among its mass audience. A good example is Edward Suchman’s (1941) “Invitation to Music: A Study of the Creation of New Music Listeners by the Radio.” Suchman compared devotees who were raised on classical music from childhood with those who discovered it on the radio. One major finding of the study was that the newly converted were far more likely to be men than women. Indeed, Suchman (later amplified by Susan Douglas, 1999) goes on to suggest that “radio tends to even out sex differences since it had made men more interested in music and women more interested in the news.” Suchman also found that aspirants to upward mobility were among those who found radio music useful for their “anticipatory socialization.”

In recent years, there has been a notable surge of interest and research in the publics and non-publics of the arts (Dimaggio & Useem, 1978; Katz, 1999). Bourdieu (1984) was one of the earliest to undertake this kind of investigation, from which emerged the concept of “cultural capital.” Related research comes also from the direction of so-called “time-budget” research, a method pioneered in Eastern Europe (Szalai, 1972) and pursued by academics (Gershuny, 2000; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004; Katz & Gurevitch, 1976; Robinson & Godbey, 1999) and public broadcasting organizations such as NHK and BBC.

The present volume raises all the right questions: It asks whether there are different kinds of non-publics; why museum attendance has fared better than in the other arts; why museums “try harder” to justify their legitimacy; whether blockbuster exhibitions really enlist more regular clientele; whether the price of admission makes a difference in attendance; and – most difficult of all – whether modes of reception and interpretation vary with differences in socialization, other background variables, and individual values. (EK)

## 2.

# THE DIVERSITY OF NON-PUBLICS: FORMER PUBLICS, FUTURE PUBLICS

Publics are far from constituting a monolithic ensemble, an obedient army marching in tight formation. By the nature of their concerns, they can be divided into at least three different types. First there are *political publics*, which could be called “issue-driven” publics after Dewey’s model. Political publics are flanked on one side by *taste* or *aesthetic* publics, which are oriented towards “texts” or “performances,” and on the other side by *recognition-seeking publics* for whom mere visibility tends to be a goal in and of itself (Dayan, 2005a, 2005b; Ehrenberg, 1986). Recognition-seeking publics (such as publics of soccer or popular music) use their involvement with games or performances to endow themselves with visible identities.

Aesthetic publics (the reading publics of literature, the active publics of theater, the connoisseur publics of music and the arts) have always been singled out as exemplary by theorists of the public sphere, and by Habermas in particular. Yet, despite their apparently privileged status, aesthetic publics have often been ignored, or analyzed as mere training grounds for much more widely studied political publics. Salons, for example, were initially celebrated before they came to be considered as mere antechambers to the streets. Interestingly the publics that tend to be most studied are political publics. Aesthetic publics have been often neglected. This is why approaches that pay more than a lip service to aesthetic publics, such as those of Jacobi and Luckerhoff, or Ikegami (2000), are so important.

Of course the three types of publics outlined above are ideal types. We know they often overlap in reality. But aside from overlapping or “morphing” into each other, they share an important dimension. Publics have careers. They have biographies. They go through different stages, including birth, growth, fatigue, aging, death, and sometimes resuscitation. We shall discuss the circumstances of their birth below. But let us first address the moments and ways in which publics fade or disappear and become non-publics.

First of all, publics can die a natural death. They can become non-publics because what brought them to life no longer exists or no longer attracts their attention. But we should also consider other, less consensual possibilities such as exclusion or suicide.

Publics can disappear because they have been made invisible, or because they chose to become invisible. Sometimes there is no public to observe because a given public is denied visibility. The media – midwives in other circumstances – become abortionists. Every day,

potential publics disappear down the drain of unrealized destinies. They become non-publics because they are made invisible. Sometimes, however, publics put an end to their own visibility. They are intimidated. They panic and turn into “marrano” publics. Like Harry Potter, they choose to don the mantle of invisibility (Dayan, 2005a; Noelle-Neuman, 1984).

Most of the non-publics discussed here tend to be publics that used to exist and exist no longer. But the temporality of non-publics also includes *not yet publics*, those that have the potential to exist as they linger in limbo, waiting to be born. Such publics – like Sleeping Beauty – await their prince charming (be it a text, an event, or a situation), and the kiss of life that will bring them into existence.

And there is yet another unexpected yet well-known form of non-public: the *audience*. Allow us to explain. (DD)

### 3. FULL PUBLICS, ALMOST PUBLICS AND NON-PUBLICS: THE QUESTION OF AUDIENCES

Publics in general can be defined in terms of the social production of shared attention. The focusing of collective attention generates a variety of attentive, reactive or responsive *bodies*, including publics, audiences, witnesses, activists, bystanders and many others. Among these bodies, two deserve special attention, since, in many ways, they are constructed as antonyms. *Publics* and *audiences* fulfill different roles in the economy of social attention. They also differ in relation to the autonomous or heteronomous nature of their visibility

Publics are generally conceived as mere providers of attention, as responding bodies, willing or unwilling resources that seekers of collective attention can turn to for sustenance. Yet publics are not always mere providers of attention. Some publics themselves call for attention and try to control it. They are both seekers and organizers of the attention of other publics (for the issues they promote). Many publics thus have something in common with Moscovici’s “active minorities.” They act as “opinion leaders” on a large scale. Like the media, such publics are providers of visibility, or agents of deliberate “monstration” (Dayan, 2009). In comparison to these “full” publics, audiences, no matter how active, are still confined to the receiving end of the communicative process.

The question of attention is linked to the question of visibility. Full publics not only provide attention, they receive it. They need other publics to watch them perform. They are eager to be seen. They strike

a pose. Their performances may be polemical or consensual, but they cannot be invisible. Such publics must “go public” or they stop being publics. Not so for audiences. Audiences often remain invisible until various research strategies quantify, qualify, and materialize their attention. For audiences to become visible, one often needs the goggles of methodology (Dayan, 2005a).

Thus, if we use *public* as a generic term, and if we choose visibility as the relevant criterion, we can speak of two types of public. The first type – the *full* public – performs out in the open. It is a collective whose nature consists in being *visible*. One could describe it as “obvious.” No matter how intellectually active, the second type – the *audience* – does not perform in public. It remains in the private sphere. If a collective at all, an audience is an *invisible* one. In reference to Barthes (1970), we could define audiences as “obtuse” publics (Dayan, 2005a).

Of course, we should not forget that obvious and less obvious publics are often composed of the same people. Publics easily become audiences and vice versa. They are not separated by some conceptual iron curtain, but rather by a stage curtain that separates – in Goffmanian fashion – public performance (full publics) from non-performance (almost publics, audiences) (Dayan, 2005b). In the political domain, full publics stop being audiences when their concern for an issue prevails over their engagement with the narrative that raised the issue, thus triggering public engagement. It is this “coming out” in public that transforms an audience into a full public. Of course, that same full public can revert to the status of a mere audience when other issues are concerned.

To conclude these reflections on publics and audiences, two points should be made. First, in contrast with full publics, audiences, which have been described here as “almost publics,” “obtuse publics,” or “non-performing publics,” appear to provide an interesting example of non-publics. Yet it seems more constructive to describe them as another form of public. (After all, in many languages, *public* is a generic word encompassing all sorts of collective attention providers, including those generally understood to make up an “audience”) (Dayan, 2005b; Livingstone, 2005). Nevertheless the distinction between full publics and audiences remains useful since it allows for further differentiating of actual non-publics from “non-audiences” (Fiske, 1992; Dayan, 1998).(DD)

#### 4.

## A GENEALOGICAL VIEW OF PUBLICS: *PERSONAE FICTAE*, DISCURSIVE BEINGS, OBSERVABLE REALITIES

Speaking of non-publics presupposes, of course, an ontology of publics. Publics are at once discursive constructions and social realities. Must we choose?

For Schlegel, “public” was not a thing, but a thought, a postulate, “like church.” A similar awareness of possible reification is expressed by literary historian H  l  ne Merlin (Merlin, 1994), for whom the public stems from a *persona ficta*, a fictive being. Of course church – or, more precisely, the unity of church – is indeed a postulate. But any sociologist would point out that church is also an organized body, a political power, a land owner, and an economic institution. An ambivalence concerning the real status of publics, or as it was put recently, “the real world of audiences,” lingers to this day (Hartley, 1988; Sorlin, 1992).

Yet, following Hartley’s insight, it seems clear that publics – whether simultaneously or at different times – do belong in Popper’s three universes: (1) publics are notions, ideations, or as Schegel puts it, “postulates”; (2) publics offer specific registers of action and specific kinds of subjective experiences; (3) publics constitute sociological realities that one can observe, visit or measure. Thus we might view publics as a process that combines (1) a *persona ficta* and (2) the enactment of that fiction, resulting in (3) an observable form of sociation. What this sequence suggests is the essential role played by the *persona ficta* – the “imagined public” – when it comes to generating actual publics (Dayan, 2005a).

A public is a collective subject that emerges in response to certain fictions. Thus, as John Peters remarked, a propos Habermas, 18th century publics emerge through reading and discussing newspapers where the notion of “public” is itself being discussed (Peters, 1993). Observable realities are born from intellectual constructions. A given *persona ficta* serves as a model for an observable sociation. What is suggested here is that the observable realities differ because the constructions that begot them also differ.

In the situation described by Peters, “public” belongs to the category of collective subjects that are imagined in the first person by a “we.” As such, it is one among many examples of imagined communities, the most famous of which is, of course, the “nation” (Anderson, 1983). But publics are not always imagined in the first person. Only obvious

publics result from autonomous processes of imagination. In the case of other publics, imagination relies on heteronomous processes: the adopted fiction is often projected by outside observers.

Heteronomous processes, like autonomous processes, lead to observable realities. But they do not lead to the same realities. Different types of publics can indeed be linked to the professional bodies that produced them and to the professional or lay uses they allow. Thus the audiences of quantitative research could be described as the result of a demographic imagination. They are the version of publics that demographers construct. Similarly, meaning-making audiences could be described as semioticians' publics. They are produced by reception scholars, either for academic purposes (extending to the discourse of users' (readers or spectators) know-how gained in the analysis of texts) or for ideological purposes (rebutting Adorno's "great divide" and redeeming the "popular").

Both result in observable facts. Yet a demographer's audience and a semiotician's audience are quite different. An empirical object that consists in being counted is not the same as one that consists in being listened to. When demographers look at publics, they see age groups or classes. When semioticians look at publics, they see interpretive communities.

A last point concerning the type of public described earlier as "obvious" or "autonomous." While such a public may appear to be self-produced by its members, it is also modeled by the narratives of journalism, since, beyond the publishing of polls, much of journalistic production consists in what one could call "publi-graphy," the chronicling of publics. In a way, autonomous publics – whether political or cultural – are only autonomous up to a point. They are also children of the journalistic imagination.

What this genealogical analysis means is that different types of publics are born in the eyes of their observers. It is therefore essential to closely watch those who watch publics. Who is interested in publics? The question of *who* immediately translates into the question of *why*. Why should this or that *persona ficta* be conceived at all? What purposes do they serve? Publics often start their careers as a glint in the eye of observers. This glint is performative. Let us now turn to Jacobi and Luckerhoff and ask them: Why study non-publics? (DD)

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