Networked Publics: Publicity and Privacy on the Internet

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Introduction: Internetworking, Publicity, Privacy

It is undeniable that contemporary internetworking[1] practices are drastically altering the social, political, moral, epistemological, and cultural landscapes in which we live. In a world in which an increasing amount of information is increasingly available everywhere and in which an increasing amount of everyday activity yields information about our innermost selves, we simply cannot stand still in the face of the political and epistemological changes being ushered in. The rapidity of these changes has provoked, over the past decade, an increasing sense of alarmism amongst pundits, experts, and laypersons concerning the effects of the new internetworked cultural landscape. Alarmism and its attendant modes of celebration and denigration are, however, hardly appropriate to moral and political environments undergoing rapid transformation. What is needed is to discern the contours of these transformations so that we may more intelligently direct them.

We can gain an important amount of understanding regarding these issues by bringing internetworking into focus in terms of the increasing trouble these practices bring to the concepts of privacy and publicity and the attendant opposition between public and private spheres which has been a quintessential feature of so much of modern liberal democratic theory and practice. Internetworking reveals and embodies an increasing breakdown in traditional conceptualizations of publicity and privacy, as well as the relation between these two imperiled concepts. Concerning the quality of publicity enabled (or disabled) by internetworking, witness pundits and scholars arguing at cross purposes that the net does (or does not) constitute a viable medium for the formation of publics. Concerning privacy, witness the anxiety amongst lawyers and netsurfers alike as it becomes increasingly clear that our current concepts of privacy are inadequate to our new technologies and practices.

This paper offers the beginnings of a new conceptualization of the relation between publicity and privacy as these are emerging in an internetworked world. I outline a conception which I call 'public pluralism' that I believe may prove adequate for the difficult labor of reconceptualizing the relations between our much-troubled understandings of publicity and privacy.

Although it is clear that much of my work here is of a more theoretical orientation, careful attention to empirical research is clearly imperative for any work of this kind. A crucial goal of the wider project of which this is part is to establish a more constructive dialogue between political philosophers theorizing democracy on the one hand and empirical scientists inquiring into internetworking practices on the other hand. Such bridge-building attempts are inevitably greeted with caution by those on either side of the chasm. Philosophers are likely to find this work unnecessarily engaged in the complex vicissitudes of real-world practices. Social scientists and other researchers taking the internet as their focus are likely to regard the theoretical contributions I am urging as perhaps overly abstract. Both sets of cautions are

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[1] My use of the term 'internetworking' refers primarily to the social, epistemic, and technological practices typically associated with 'the internet'. I find the colloquial expression 'the internet' (with the connotation of unity implicit in the singular noun form) entirely misleading for my purposes. It is for this reason that I employ the somewhat awkward formulation that I adopt in this paper.

warranted—but too much caution is unsustainable in the long run. What we require is collaborative work whereby theoretical and empirical research is developed in combination. The work of conceptualization is eminently useful for these purposes. Concepts simultaneously face the realm of the theoretical and the empirical. If employed without collaborative attention to both terrains, concepts inevitably break down. My cautions against certain empirical and theoretical approaches in what follows should thus not be taken as refutations so much as invitations to further constructive engagement.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section I outline my conception of 'public pluralism' on the basis of the work of the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and the poststructuralist social theorist Manuel DeLanda. In the following section, I then turn to empirical work in order to survey inadequacies and strengths in a handful of existing conceptualizations of the way in which public and private intersect in internetworking practices. At this point, I return to my Deweyan-DeLandean conception of public pluralism in order to help conceptualize the best extant empirical work. In the concluding section I refer to some of the broader philosophical and historical implications of the contemporary transformations in human practice we are today experiencing.

Theorizing Publicity and Privacy in Internetworking

My primary aim is a conceptualization of the politics of new internetworking practices. This should be distinguished from an inquiry concerning the ways in which new networking practices are being leveraged into traditional political arenas. I am, in short, concerned with 'the politics of internetworking practices' which can be distinguished from 'the internetworking of politics'.[2]

My approach here resembles that of Mark Poster, who writes, "The aspects of the Internet that I would like to underscore are those which instantiate new forms of interaction and which pose the question of new kinds of relations of power between participants. The question that needs to be asked about the relation of the Internet to democracy is this: are there new kinds of relations occurring within it which suggest new forms of power configurations between communicating individuals? In other words, is there a new politics on the Internet?" (Poster 1995). Poster answers this question, as do I, in the affirmative. Such agreements, though, should not prevent us from inquiring into the specific problematizations that provide the conditions of possibility for these emerging politics. This is precisely the sort of inquiry I am proposing. What is the new politics of internetworking?[3]

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[2] The distinction is between 'the possibility of an open source politics' described by King (2006) and inquiry into 'the politics of open source' as we developed it in Koopman, Murrell, and Schilling (forthcoming).

[3] One primary aim of the inquiry I am proposing is to grasp that which establishes coherence amongst a variety of potentially disparate practices in such a way that these practices can come to recognize and amplify their coherence with one another. One way of achieving this is to study the common '*problematization*' (see Foucault [1984], Poster [1990], Hacking [2002], Rabinow and Bennett [2007], and Koopman [forthcoming-b]) in virtue of which these practices render existing conceptualizations (in our case: public-versus-private) inadequate. The method of problematization enables us to grasp the sheer contingency and the full complexity of the objects under investigation. Emphasizing the complex contingency of these practices enables me to underscore a crucial point: we are today at a crossroads as to which way our internetworked polities will develop: it is up to us to decide whether or not we will leverage the new capacities of internetworking toward developing new political forms or if we will reabsorb these capacities into the old political forms in such a way as to attenuate those new capacities not coherent with the old forms. The work of problematization is best followed by the work of '*reconstruction*' (see Dewey [1920], Rabinow [2008], and Koopman [forthcoming-a]).

I would like to suggest that one of the most important emerging potentialities of the networked publics is that they are hybrid objects in which publicity and privacy are fused together. These new networked publics and the user-citizens constituting them are beyond the public-private split. This is indeed a shift of monumental importance from the perspective of much traditional liberal political theory. To justify this understanding of what is at work in the emerging networked publics (and indeed my interpretation certainly requires justification given the depth of the break from current political forms and practices which I am describing) I first need to more ably conceptualize these networked publics. To do so, I will first turn to the work of an unlikely pair of social theorists whose work helps us fashion the concepts we need for grasping the problematization conditioning internetworking practices.

Dewey. The sorts of publics which are increasingly populating internetworked practices are best thought of on the model of publicity supplied by John Dewey in his *The Public and Its Problems* (1927). Dewey's view is that publics are constituted and maintained by actions which form intersections of persons, claims, and values in such a way as to call for the "control" (15) and "organization" (26) of these actions. Those acts and practices are private which do not require such control and organization even though they may form intersections of persons, claims, and values. The idea might be that intersections of persons, claims, and values are nearly ubiquitous such that these intersections can be taken as public only where they demand some sort of organization or regulation or normativity.

Control? Regulation? Organization? Dewey's conception here may have a somewhat antiquated ring. So it is important to clarify the way in which we understand publics to be constituted by reference to their needs for control or organization. Dewey's point was never that the forms of control or organization or regulation called for by publics can be formally specified in advance. In other words, we cannot demand in advance that the means by which we regulate publics must always assume the same logical, structural, or institutional form. Publics are diverse and of many kinds. Dewey's view is that the new public forms are plural, diffuse, and mobile (ibid., 126, 137, 140). Therefore, the forms which regulate or control them may also be of many kinds as well. On Dewey's view we should not be beholden to any particular regulatory form. The state may be useful in one context. The corporation may be useful in another. And the merely temporary social movement could be useful in yet a third. And a well-endowed decades-old political action fund useful in yet a fourth. These regularity forms may also intersect in a variety of ways so as to create the potential for the emergence of new regulatory forms.

That Dewey is not offering a brief on behalf of a singular unified public sphere (as typically embodied by the state) is suggested by this quintessentially Deweyan passage: "The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best" (ibid., 148). Democracy, for Dewey, was a deep cultural ideal embodied at the surface in a plurality of institutions including but not limited to formal structures of state governance. Dewey's idea seems clear enough here: our pluralistic publics shall be made coherent by democracy but we must not identify democracy with the singular organizational form of the state as liberalism traditionally has done.

What is it that must be made to cohere in today's publics? What is it that demands 'control' and 'regulation' and 'organization' in the publics emerging in the context of internetworking practices? In this context, publics increasingly appear as 'networked publics' or 'distributed publics'. It thus seems to be the case that these publics are characterized, above all, by their pluralization and politicization. This suggests both that few intersections of persons, claims, and values are monistic and that few of these intersections are such that they do not require control or organization. The public sphere is pluralizing itself just as the private sphere is publicizing itself. The new publics are pluralistic in a way that obviates the need for a distinction between unified public and private spheres. This is precisely what Dewey had in mind with his wide ideal of cultural democracy or "democracy as a way of life."

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DeLanda. Despite all of my clarifications and emendations, I concede that Dewey's language can easily seem outdated. So it might be useful to turn at this point to a conception of public space which has a more contemporary ring. For these purposes, I would like to consider Manuel DeLanda's assemblage theory, which is built out of a series of conceptual tools developed by Gilles Deleuze. What DeLanda describes as assemblages are in fact remarkably close to what Dewey described as publics.

DeLanda's theory of assemblages as laid out in his *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006) is particularly useful insofar as it enables us to grasp the full depth of pluralism which imbues the social and political forms we inhabit. An assemblage, according to DeLanda, is in short a way of comprehending the complexity of social forms without analyzing these forms as reducible to either micro-level explanations such as individual rational choice or macro-level explanations such as world-historical totalities. Assemblages, in other words, provide a means for inquiring into social and political realities which do not derive these realities from something more fundamental at either a micro or macro scale.[4]

The point is that the pluralistic nature of assemblages occurs on two levels. The first concerns the plurality of scales at which assemblages can be analyzed. A crucial part of DeLanda's theory is that assemblages can always be decomposed into something simpler (cf. ibid., 18, 32). There is, in other words, no fundamental level to which the constituencies of assemblages can be traced. In existing social theory, complex forms are often taken as analytically reducible to individuals and their rational choices (whether these are posited as merely methodological or as fully substantial unities). DeLanda's point here is that persons as such are themselves assemblages formed as results of historical processes. While we can of course treat more complex assemblages as functions of individual rational choice, there is nothing inevitable about this. There are a plurality of scales on which assemblages might be analyzed and there is no reason to give any of these scales any sort of ultimate methodological preference.

A second level on which assemblages are pluralistic concerns the fact that they always emerge as populations of assemblages. For any given assemblage, that is, there exists a whole population of assemblages at that level. The emergence of a person implies the emergence of persons. The emergence of a nation-state implies the emergence of the very form of nation-states and as such the emergence of a population of nation-states. DeLanda writes that "assemblages always exist in *populations*, however, small, the populations generated by the repeated occurrence of the same process" (ibid., 16). Assemblages, as such, emerge as pluralities. There is no singular highest form of assemblage such that all other assemblages can be described as subsidiary of it. For example, a Hegelian assemblage of world history can only take form in such a way that a plural population of world histories can emerge—and so while a given world history may thus be able to explain assemblages at a lower level, there is no a sense in which world history can be a complete and ultimate explanation of everything.

Thus DeLanda's pluralistic point is that, "A reified generality like 'society as a whole' can be replaced by a multiscaled social reality, as long as the part-to-whole relation is correctly conceptualized to accommodate all this complexity" (ibid., 34). Assemblage theory emphasizes plurality in the form of scales of social reality. There is nothing that stops us from analyzing or synthesizing social realities into

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[4] DeLanda takes the crucial point of his assemblage theory to be that it offers a version of realism without essentialism (cf. 2006, 28, 40). But I do not find this particular aspect of his theory an enormous breakthrough insofar as it essentially spells out a conception of historicism that is already present in Nietzsche, James, Dewey, Foucault, Deleuze, and Latour. The real value of assemblage theory lies not in its supposed contribution to by-now ossified debates between realists and antirealists, but in its provision of a conceptual tool that enables us to grasp the pluralism that is thoroughly constitutive of social and political reality.

something simpler or more complex. Assemblages, as such, are themselves products of pluralities on a vertical level and at the same time constitutive elements of pluralities at a horizontal level.

In many ways, these are the very same points which Dewey was striving to articulate with his conception of 'publics'. Certainly, like Dewey's publics, they point beyond the idea of analytically-macro units like a unified public sphere which constitutes the entire terrain of politics and analytically-micro units such as private groups which would be supposedly insulated from political interaction with one another. In the end, DeLanda's conception does not in fact add all that much to Dewey's conception. But it does give it increased currency in contemporary debates in social theory and political philosophy. It also enables us to add to the Deweyan account certain crucial elements drawn out of the spatial metaphors of scale which permeate DeLanda's exposition of his theory.

Habermas and Arendt. Dewey and DeLanda are both explicit in that they are not putting forth a conception of publicity in terms of one unified public sphere. In this their conceptions of publicity differ markedly from the more commonly-used conceptions developed by other social theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (1962) and Hannah Arendt (1958). For Habermas and Arendt, the public sphere is a space of univocity tending toward (even if never arriving at) consensus and homogeneity. The public sphere in this way nicely contrasts with the private sphere. As such, Habermas and Arendt should be read as theorizing the conditions of the liberal distinction between public and private spheres. Their work is eminently useful for that purpose, but there is no reason to think that such work would apply equally as well to changed political conditions. In suggesting that we model the politics of networks according to the pluralistic conception of publicity offered by Dewey and DeLanda, I thus agree once again with Poster: "For Habermas, the public sphere is a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims. This model, I contend, is systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics. We are advised then to abandon Habermas's concept of the public sphere in assessing the Internet as a political domain" (Poster 1995). It is important to take careful note of the modality of argumentation here. The point is not that Habermas's claims about the politics of modern liberal democracies are false. The point is only that they are increasingly irrelevant to the politics of internetworks.

Existing Research on Internet Publicity and Privacy

Theoretical specification can only go so far. The real value of my contrasts between a Deweyan-DeLandan conception of publicity and a Habermasian-Arendtian conception consists in the way in which we can use these concepts to better understand the actual practices we are inquiring into. Testing our concepts in this way obviously requires rigorous empirical inquiry. I can here only survey a handful of some of the best empirical accounts already on offer.

boyd. Among current work in this area, there is general agreement, and for good reasons, that danah boyd's work is clearly among the best. But I find boyd's characterization of the new networked publics too narrow. I accept that boyd has usefully pointed to crucial new elements constitutive of the new networked publics. But her work understates the crucial significances of networked publicity.

In a paper specifically devoted to my topic of publicity and privacy on the internet, boyd offers four characteristics which she believes distinguishes the new networked publics as they are specifically instantiated on social network sites (SNSs): persistence, searchability, replicability, anonymity (boyd 2007). While boyd is correct to discern each of these properties in some actually-existing forms of networked publics, it ought to be emphasized that networking publics will undoubtedly change over time (and if recent history is any indication then these changes will be quite drastic and rather quick)

instantiate new capacities which will come to seem more definitive of the process of networking as a whole. Of course, this is an unending process with no final endpoint. No single list of properties can sufficiently capture what is at stake in networking publics, just insofar as the process of networking enables not just a range of capacities, but a whole platform for the constant innovation of new platforms.

It is thus far from clear that boyd's list of characteristics sufficiently captures what is new in the emerging networked publics. It is also not clear that this list actually serves to distinguish the new networked publics from the old unified publics, though clearly this is what she intends in claiming that "these properties change all of the rules" (boyd 2007). The old publics were certainly just as capable of persistence and anonymity as are the new publics and while replication and persistence were technically more difficult they were not in principle any less possible. A quick comparison of internet information sources and newspaper information sources suggests that their differences are not fully captured by boyd's criteria. Taking each property in turn: *searchability* (one could always search the full back catalog of *The New York Times* though perhaps not quite so simply as anyone familiar with microfiche knows), *persistence* (there have always been archives though again they have not been quite as accessible to those not living near major urban or academic libraries), *replicability* (this is much easier in digital mediums, but the information in newspapers etc. was always replicable at relatively low cost, hence the supposed need for copyright protections), and *anonymity* by which boyd means to refer to the invisibility of audiences (writers and editors have always been aware that the publics consuming their work can maintain their anonymity).

One way of generalizing the sorts of concerns about boyd's research that I am expressing is to say that her work proceeds on the assumption that we can and ought to offer something like a single list of categories which specifies the essential characteristics of the new networking publics. This approach to social theory is reputable and has a venerable history grounded in a good deal of careful empirical inquiry and solid theoretical argumentation. But my view is that this approach simply no longer applies. The new networking publics are too pluralistic for any single list of specifications to be of much use. What we need is a description of how the many component elements which have contingently contributed to the complex formation of a new kind of social practice. More colloquially, we do not require a specification of *what it is* if we can get by with a description of *how it emerged*. What is more useful at this point are thus broader inquiries concerning the new problematizations of internetworking that have enabled and facilitated the elaboration of more pluralistic, diversified, and differentiated practices of publicity.

Dean. Having suggested that internetworking does not constitute a public sphere in Habermas's or Arendt's univocal sense, I want to issue the reminder that my conception of networks as pluralistic publics is still a clear claim on behalf of networks as publics. My claim is that internetworking produces not a singular public sphere but rather a plurality of publics. My Deweyan-DeLandean view needs to be contrasted both to views over-emphasizing a unified singular public sphere and inverse views over-emphasizing the emergence of a highly-fragmented private sphere on the internet. My view thus needs to be contrasted to research that attempts to show that networking does not result in the production of publics at all. Such a view has been developed and articulated by Jodi Dean, who in a truly intriguing essay writes of the "illusion" of politics on the internet (Dean 2003).

To make this point, Dean adopts a two-step procedure. She first denies that the internet is in fact a public sphere and she then second asks why everyone would want to assert that the internet is a public sphere in the first place. This is ideology critique in its classic form. The approach is interesting, to be sure, but if one approaches the internet with an alternative conceptualization of publicity and privacy, then the whole critical procedure seems rather besides the point. In other words, perhaps we do not need to expose the false ideology of the widely-held idea that the internet constitutes a universal public sphere a la Habermas

and Arendt if we can instead simply start conceptualizing the internet in the quite different terms supplied by the idea of pluralistic publics a la Dewey and DeLanda.

Dean considers this possibility early in her essay but dismisses it as incoherent: either the various publics all have the same norms in which case they are a singular public after all or they do not all have the same norms in which case they do not constitute publics at all but rather interest groups (Dean 2003, 97).[5] I would urge, however, that it is difficult to account for the conflictual and contested interactions which take place amongst these various 'interest groups' if they are not conceptualized in terms which emphasize their publicity such that they are all capable of interacting with one another. These interactions amongst various publics do not require a singular public sphere as their shared basis, because they can generate the competing and contested terms of their interaction on the basis of their own pluralistic norms. In fact, that is precisely why these groups are often characterized by such conflict.[6]

Kelty. My conception of pluralistic publicity enables us to play the opposed conceptualizations of boyd and Dean off of one another. boyd makes a claim for publicity on the internet in vaguely Habermasian terms. Dean explicitly denies that the internet exhibits Habermasian publicity. But perhaps we need not busy ourselves with debates over whether or not the internet is a Habermasian public. Perhaps a Deweyan-DeLandean conception enables us to more adequately grasp what is actually going on in internetworked publics.

One recent example of subtle conceptualizations of the public as a means for inquiring into internet practices is furnished in an anthropological study of free and open source software by Christopher Kelty.[7] Kelty's just-published *Two Bits* (2008) offers a nuanced description of a specific set of emerging internet

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[5] Dean's target is pragmatist critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1992) who argues for a pluralization of publicity.

[6] Employing different phrasing in a later collaborative piece, Dean writes of the "postdemocratic governmentality of networked societies" (Dean, Anderson, and Lovink 2006, xv). I find Dean and her collaborators all-too ambivalent about this new space of governmentality. Although it is clear that networked practices severely problematize many of the familiar forms of liberal democratic politics, there is no reason to stop hoping that a "reformatted" version of liberal democracy cannot withstand these challenges. A large part of the problem in this case is that Dean and her collaborators are wedded to a rather limited conception of democracy framed in the familiar terms of a singular public sphere. While they are right to insist that networked practices will force us to rethink the core concept of the nation-state, there is no reason to narrowly identify democracy with the nation-state and its attendant forms of state-based representation and election. A more pluralistic conception enables us in fact to affirm the tremendous potentiality for democracy evinced in new internetworked practices.

[7] See also recent work by Noortje Marres (2005, 2006, 2007) explicitly adopting a Deweyan framework of publicity to develop an issues-based interpretation of the politics of internetworking. The politics of networks, for Marres following Dewey, are defined in terms of complex intersections forming around issues: "As opposed to the friendly networks of the social and the noncommittal networks of information sharing, the issue network directs our attention to antagonistic configurations of actors from the governmental, non-governmental, and for-profit sectors, and the contestation over issue framings that occurs in them" (2006, 15). One advantage of Marres's use of Dewey is the association of issues-based networks with a politics that is neither strictly public nor strictly private.

practices (namely Open Source software and the Free Software movement) in terms of a conception of recursive publicity that does not fit well with the familiar Habermasian pattern.[8]

At the core of Kelty's account is a conception of recursive publics which helps us understand the modulations of knowledge and power that contemporary culture is experiencing in domains of free and open source software. Kelty distinguishes his 'recursive' publics from 'regular' publics as follows: "While a 'public' in most theories is a body of people and discourse that give expressive form to some concern, recursive public is meant to suggest that geeks give not only expressive form to some set of concerns… but also give concrete infrastructural form to the means of expression itself" (2008, 290). A recursive public is one in which publicity itself is an explicit object of public concern: recursive publics value their own conditions for publicity. Contrast to regular publics in which the conditions of the possibility of publicity are taken as mere means to the primary end of that which is being publicized.

Kelty's distinction between recursive and regular publics helps us focus on a key distinction between two kinds of pluralism which my account of networked publicity seeks to take into account. While recursive publics obviously admit of something like a Deweyan-DeLandean public pluralism, regular publics are more congenial to something like interest group pluralism. These are two very different forms of pluralism, their similarities notwithstanding. One tends to regard the public sphere as a common ground for adjudicating between a plurality of interests such that the public is itself valuable only insofar as it enables this adjudication. The other tends to regard public space as itself a platform for the development of new political and ethical forms such that publicity itself comes to be pluralized in a way that inevitably leads to the conferral of value on publicity itself.

In this sense I would argue that Kelty's description of free software and open source practices as exemplifying a recursive public suggests that these practices ought to be conceptualized as somewhere between the standard dividing line between the public and private spheres. It is precisely in this sense that Kelty's account, rich in ethnographic detail and genealogical history, nicely anticipates and neatly motivates my own attempt at a Deweyan-DeLandean conception of pluralistic networked publics. Kelty writes: "My claim that [Linux and Apache] are 'recursive publics' is useful insofar as it gives a name to a practice that is neither corporate nor academic, neither profit nor non-profit, neither NGO nor governmental," and, one might add, neither private nor public (ibid., 290). That claim about free and open source practices functions as a kind of preview for a broader claim about the sorts of objects and practices that are emerging on the basis of the internetworking problematization more generally. Kelty's concept of recursive publics points, both theoretically and ethnographically, to practices that are neither private nor public. Recursive publics are in this sense somewhere between publicity and privacy in a sense which familiar Habermasian and Arendtian accounts can only fail to discriminate.

Internetworking as a Plurality of Publics

The common tendency to refer to '*the* internet' as a singular noun is entirely mistaken: *there is no such thing as the internet, and there is only internetworking*.[9] There are billions of little boxes which use electromagnetic waves and extraordinarily complex mazes of cables of all variety to link together various other plastic boxes of indescribable diversity by means of a plurality of layered protocols operating on a

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[8] This is true even though Kelty himself sometimes suggests that his conception is Habermasian insofar as he derives parts of his conception from certain theorists (Charles Taylor and Michael Warner) working in a broadly Habermasian lineage.
[9] Much has been written around this point; see Kelty (forthcoming) on the history and theory of inter-networking.

wide range of hardware and software platforms, and all this for the sake of an immense array of purposes, programs, and projects whose complexity is so great that the merest glimpse at just a portion of it would spin the head of even the most learned polymaths. There is, then, no such thing as the public sphere in internetworking practices, because there is a plurality of public spaces, evolving and expanding every single day by means of the thunderous energy of the trillions of keystrokes which we collectively depress over the course of a single rotation of our beloved earth on its axis.

My view emphasizes the sheer plurality of this extraordinarily complex process. It is obvious, and also fortunate, that I am not the first to reach a conclusion such as this. In addition to empirical inquiries broadly resonant with the conceptualization I am proposing, there is a small but growing body of theoretical literature in which similar conceptualizations of the internet have been offered.[10] I am urging that Dewey and DeLanda provide additional tools that enrich existing accounts. What they provide is a sense of the dual-dimensionality of the pluralization that internetworking effects.

In Dewey's work, the two dimensions of plurality are represented as internal and external. The internal pluralization of publics helps us recognize that every public is itself constituted by a plurality of different voices, interests, claims, and values. The external pluralization of publics helps us recognize that for every such internally-plural public, there are a plurality of other publics operating at the same level which establish coherence for other voices, interests, claims, and values. This is why for Dewey there are no super-institutions which can effectively organize every possible claim and value, but rather only a plurality of processes which performs this organizational work for as long as it can.

DeLanda's scalar conceptualization of the complexity of assemblages is particularly useful for highlighting these points. One of DeLanda's core points is that assemblages cannot be reduced to an ultimate micro-level or highest macro-level. This point sounds theoretical, but its practical cash-value is now readily available. If there is no smallest micro-level, then it follows that every public can always be analyzed into its component parts. This means that every public is internally complex such that it is composed out of a plurality of constituent elements. At the same time, if there is no highest macro-level, then it follows that every public can always be synthesized into a greater collection. This means that every public is always a constituent component of some wider public concern such that no public can ever have the final and complete say about an issue that is widely relevant.

Conclusion: Beyond the Politics of Public versus Private

If internetworked publics are plural publics in the sense that I am suggesting, then it would behoove us to carefully consider the precise ways in which these practices are enabling new forms of political practice which are beyond the familiar liberal dichotomization of public and private spaces. Conceptualizing internetworking practices in terms of Deweyan and DeLandean concepts of pluralistic publics suggests a rather monumental shift in the way in which liberal democracy is being organized, developed, and deepened in contemporary culture. There is no reason to interpret this monumental shift as a break from the core values of liberal democracy, such as freedom, equality, and self-governance. But neither is there any indication that this shift necessarily must deepen these core democratic values. This is another incredibly complex question with a vertiginously contingent answer. It is easy to insist that we should want the politics of the internetworked spaces rapidly proliferating all around us to serve our basic

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[10] One of the best of these is Yochai Benkler's *The Wealth of Networks* (2006). Benkler, for example, nicely phrases the point I was just making about internetworking as a process rather than a thing: "The networked public sphere is not made of tools, but of social production practices that these tools enable" (2006, 219).

democratic values. But our more difficult task is seeing that they do. In a democratic culture such as ours, this task falls on no one but us. We ought to do whatever work we can to uphold the fragile values of liberal democracy in a world which constantly preys upon their vulnerability. So that we might more effectively use the evolving set of internetworking capacities for more democratic good, it is important in the first place to properly conceptualize these capacities so that we can understand their potentials, their limitations, and above all the historical trajectories which describe their motion.

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