# THEORISING EMERGENT PUBLICS

**Clive Barnett**

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## 1). The fall and rise of the public sphere

Since the translation into English in 1989 of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the concept of the public sphere has become a central reference point across a range of fields for trying to evaluate rapid changes in the institutional configurations, economic foundations, technological mediums, and socio-cultural formation of contemporary public life.

Of course, there is a real-world context in which this proliferation of the concept of the public sphere has taken place – a context of privatizations, neoliberalizations, post-socialist transitions, globalizations of capital, commodities and people, rapid technological change in communications, the rise of identity politics, and perpetual crises of party politics.

In short, the concept of the public sphere has proliferated across the social sciences and humanities during the period when the genres, mediums, organisations structures, solidarities, registers and spatial scales that are presumed by the theoretical framework have been undergoing intense and dramatic transformations.

While this helps to account for the attraction of this concept, it also indicates one of the problems that besets much of the work on contemporary public life – the challenge of capturing the dynamics of social change descriptively and explanatorily with a conceptual framework which is explicitly framed as a critical theory, where this means not just a means of evaluation but one that aspires to identify in unfolding transformations the possibilities of emancipatory change.

In fundamental respects, practical and institutional developments in the configuration of public life have outstripped the conceptual, empirical and normative resources for explaining and evaluating innovative new modes of public action.

Evaluations of new publics remain caught between pessimistic discourses *of decline* and optimistic discourses *of originality*. The framing of debate

about publics and publicness within these two discourses has produced an impasse that blocks conceptual, empirical and normative analysis. The pessimistic perspective discerns consumerism, individualism, marketization, and privatization as leading inevitably to disengagement and withering of public life. In contrast, the optimistic perspective sees new technologies as panaceas for past injustices and exclusions, leading to the restoration of direct participation, the proliferation of opportunities for personal expression, and the re-birth of movement activism.

Both pessimistic and optimistic discourses, of the fall and rise of the public sphere, leave in place settled criteria inherited from the past. In both cases, empirical changes in the material, institutional and social configurations of public practices are judged against static criteria of what public action should look like, where it should take place, who should participate, towards what ends it should be directed, and in what registers it should be articulated. It is settled images of these matters that allows the proclamation of new subjects of public life, or the proliferation of new objects of public concern, and the celebration of new mediums of public expression. But the same settled criteria also underwrite laments that public life has been coarsened, fragmented, or individualized. Different narratives alight on different aspects of publicness to either celebrate new forms – the self-organising dimensions of flash-mobs, the exuberant deliberations of on-line forums – or to bemoan them – the replacement of properly informed citizenly media by celebrity-dominated, emotive registers of public culture, or the fragmentation of diverse publics rendering impossible any unified, concerted opinion-formation to take place.

The challenge of theorising emergent publics is not one of just arriving at the appropriate explanatory framework or descriptive vocabulary, nor even of deducing the right normative criteria – it is a challenge to how we approach concepts such as the public sphere which are at once descriptive and evaluative.

As Schudson (2009) observes, while "[t]he historical concept of a bourgeois public sphere has been widely criticized and revised", it is also the case that "the normative concept has also been criticized but stands not clearly revised. Scholars still use it as an appropriate standard of judgement for measuring our political and cultural institutions".

The problem that arises from this situation is that an unreflective idealization gets smuggled back in even to those analysis that disdain explicit normative reflection.

This is most evident in the recourse to the analysis of the construction of publics – publics as 'made' or 'assembled' - where the mere demonstration that public spheres, practices of public life, or norms of public deliberation are historically and geographically variable is often presented as in and of itself carrying 'dis-obliging' force as a critical gesture. This manoeuvre only works if one is willing to buy into the idea that publics have been thought of, and theorised as, and even function in the real world as if they were natural, essentialized entities.

It is not at all clear that this is true of theories of the public sphere, nor indeed whether publics in practice do function as if they were not contingent, variable, fragile.

Furthermore, it is far from clear that the strictly scholastic trick of pointing out that this or that phenomenon is socially constructed carries the unambivalently progressive, democratic force that is often presumed by critical social scientists and cultural theorists; nor indeed why simply observing that the social world is contingent of practices of reproduction helps very much in understanding why it is so difficult to change it.

There is a core, enduring challenge of Habermas' original account of the structural transformation of the public sphere: the problem of how to derive criteria of critical evaluation from historically specific contexts. The problem bequeathed by Habermas' original account is two-fold: not just how to think about the historicity of a normative values (a trick we have all learnt well enough from Foucault); but also of how to think about the normativity of this historicity of values. Or, to put it another way, what difference does it makes to discover that values associated with publicness are historically and geographically contingent?

Our aim here is outline an alternative approach to the analysis of emergent publics, and publics as emergent, which faces head-on the challenge of reconstructing the normative force of the concept of the public sphere in the light of changing socio-historical processes.

This approach has three aspects which form the basis of an empirical programme of research on emergent publics: first, a commitment to listening to how publicness is invoked and to the types of conflict where publicness 'breaks out' as a problem (Section 2); second, a commitment to analysing what 'publicness' is meant to be good for in these sorts of outbreaks (Section 3); and third, and perhaps most contentious, a commitment to critically reconstructing the normative validity of the value claims around which publics are assembled (Section 4).

## 2). What kinds of things are public(s)?

One problem that any discussion of the public, the public sphere, public life – publicness in general – immediately faces is that of definition. Just what is a public? Or, is the right question, just what is public? Is public a name given to particular spaces, by virtue of their openness? Is public a name given to certain institutions, by virtue of their function or degree of accessibility? Is 'the public' a collective subject of some sort, and if so, who is it composed of? Is public a name we give to certain sorts of action done from particular motivations – in the public interest or publicly spirited? Or is a name given to actions undertaken in particular patterns of interaction, collectively, as a public, as distinct from privately? Or is it better to think of publicity as more like a medium into which and out of which one can move – by going public, making things known exposing oneself or others to scrutiny of an indeterminate yet attentive audience? If we attend in this way to the *grammar* of public talk, we begin to see some of the difficulty in trying to nail down a clear and concise definition.

We will notice that 'public' is at once a noun and an adjective, something one can be *in* as well as something you can *move* into (by going public). In this second sense, public is a verb, something one does – publicizing, to publish. We will notice that 'public' is name given to certain sorts of agents (the public, the public sector, public Universities), as well as the name for certain types of action (ones distinguished perhaps by their location, and/or their motivation). And we will notice too that public actions are not necessarily restricted to public agents – all sorts of private agents can undertake actions that individually or collectively serve the public interest – and some people think the best way they can do so is by acting out of self-interest. Mention of the public interest perhaps gives us a way out of this definitional problem, because it reminds us that public is also a name given to certain sorts of values – to the public good, or the public interest.

Placing an action, a group, an institutions, or a space under the description of 'public' is, in short, to ascribe a certain set of values to those actions, groups, institutions, or spaces, and this is a crucial dimension to theorising publicness – there is no straightforward descriptive criteria that can settle what is an isn't public, since part of what is at stake in ascribing this description is a judgement of what sorts of values – what ends and objectives, what means and procedures – different phenomena are or should be expected to strive towards. So, the question now presents itself somewhat differently – not so much what is public or a public, but what sorts of values gather around this 'keyword'?

We can begin to get at this question, without entering into the thickets of normative philosophizing just yet, by returning to the definitional field. If we were to consult a dictionary for the meaning of 'public', we would enter into an enormous terrain of multiple meaning.[1] We find that not just is public, as noun and an adjective, variously defined, but that there are a host of designations of things, sites, activities as public - public lavatory, public house, public eye, public nuisance, public opinion, public transport, public holiday…… It is, however, possible to identify a family of recurring themes across this variety.

[1] The printable version of the Oxford English Dictionary's entry on 'public, *adj*. and *n*' runs to 40 A-4 sheets. Thanks to Engin Isin for first alerting to this excess of meaning. <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50191807?query_type=word&queryword=public&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&search_id=bHVF-LGivue-14447&result_place=2> Accessed 27th October 2009.

First, there is an adjectival sense of public, defined against things private, which signifies a sense of openness – this might be a spatial sense, where public is related to exposure, to being on shown or available to others; but it is a sense that resonates too across a political-economic terrain of definitions of the market and the public sector, without wholly capturing what is at most at stake in this field.

Second, there is the nominal sense where the public is a name for a certain type of collective, a synonym perhaps for the community, or the nation, or sometimes offset against these more *embodied*, substantive collectives. This second sense is perhaps crucial to different understandings of the value of publicness, because depending on which field of analysis one looks at, one finds markedly different senses of what sort of existence this collective view of the public can and should have. In certain strands of strongly republican political theory, for example, perhaps exemplified by Hannah Arendt, the public as a collective entity exists only in and through the reflexive medium of its own openness, as it were – this tradition sees publics as self-organising collectives, gathered together in a 'space of appearances' to consider matters of shared concern. It is a tradition that is intensely suspicious of any institutionalization or instrumentalization of the public in organizational form – for example, the idea that the state can embody the public is anathema from this perspective.

Yet there is a third sense of public which does open itself up to this more institutional sense of the public as a concentrated, sovereign actor. Here, public refers to certain functions that authorize some actors to act on behalf of others in a particular way – in a the name of a quite abstract sense of the public, the public good, public health, or public interest. It is this sense that is captured by the ideas of public service and the work of public servants, who act for, represent, act on behalf of, care for members of the public, sometimes up close and personal, sometimes in the most general of senses. What makes these sorts of delegated agency and trusteeship public, one might suppose, is that they are enacted in the name of values of equality and impartiality that loop back to the first sense of openness. With this third sense, the idea that the value of openness, as equality or impartiality, and the idea of the value of collectivity and commonality over purely egoistic self-interest finds its most proper form in institutional configurations of state-like, bureaucratic-looking agencies.

We suggest thinking of these three senses of public – a reference to openness, to collectivity, and to serving or representing – as the core values around which publicness is constituted, contested, and transformed. As suggested above, bringing these three senses together throws into relief the importance of attending closely to the question of what sort of collective actor a public is supposed to be – to thinking about what distinguishes a public from society, the nation, community, the people, audiences, civil society, or the state. We can begin to get at this issue by noticing two features that are ascribed to publics and the public sphere by scholars working across different intellectual traditions.

1). First, for social thinkers concerned with understanding publics as a distinctive feature of modernity, such as John Dewey or Gabriel Tarde, a key feature of publics was their emergence through processes of 'indefinite extension', associated with the development of communications innovations such as print, railways, and telecommunications. The significance of this extension of human communication lies, for thinkers like Dewey and Tarde, not just in the stretching out over time and space of social interaction – the 'distanciation' or mediation of social life – but precisely in the associated development of new forms of interaction shaped by the phenomenologically indefinite qualities of these mediums of extension – publics are characterised as collectives in which social bonds work through rather than just in spite of anonymity and difference.

2). Second, then, in both classical literary accounts of the modern public, as well as recent literary-theoretical and philosophical accounts of the public sphere, a key feature of a public is this idea of a community of strangers . Both reading publics and the modern city are recurrent figures for this type of collective, in which the value of openness of a public space or medium is specifically related to being exposed to 'initiation of communication by others'.

If we combine these two emphases, one on the quality of *indefinite* extension characteristic of the mediums of public communication, and one on the binding together of *strangers*, we begin to glimpse a sense of publicness as an emergent quality which oscillates between dependence on a pre-given background of social relations, communications mediums, urban infrastructures, and the transfiguration of this background in an excessive movement of reflexive self-organisation. This idea of publics as properly self-organising collectives has a powerful normative hold over a great deal of theorisation of publics, suggesting that publicness is an intrinsic value in and of itself, to which instrumental or strategic concerns are foreign. But if we underscore the sense that the self-organising aspects of publics is an emergent quality, dependent on background conditions which might themselves be problematized in the process, then we can see that there is a purposive dimension to this intrinsic quality of self-organisation – publics are formed around problems or matters of shared concern – or to put it another way, they are **about something** – and this means that they oriented towards action. In turn, this means that the instrumental is not so foreign to publicness after all, and in turn that concerted, concentrated authority of, say, the state is likewise an internal dimension of publics understood as emergent.

What we are trying to get at here is to identify what it is that connects a set of debates and fields of scholarship that focus on the communicative dimensions of publicness – media and cultural studies, literary studies and the humanities, some strands of urban theory – and debates and fields of scholarship that focus on the organisational dimensions of publicness – social and public policy, social work, urban and regional policy, political economy, theories of government and governance, public administration. In the former fields, publicness is all about embodied interaction, more or less dispassionate deliberation and argumentation, and affective encounters. In the latter fields, publicness is all about delivery of services, management of complex organisations, administration of populations, and revenue raising and financing of programmes and policies.

Now it is tempting to see these as just two separate fields which happen to use the same word, public, in different ways. But apart from the fact that in many cases, these apparently disparate fields share an overlapping intellectual genealogy with roots in the nineteenth-century genres of representing and problematizing modernity, the 'grammatical' style of analysis developed above suggests there might be a set of relationships between these fields which, while not adding up to a singular meaning of public, does suggest a shared field of problems and concerns.

In order to map this set of relations around which the different senses of public take shape and are differentiated, it is useful to consider the recent work on the topic of publics by Craig Calhoun. Calhoun's work crosses a number of the fields in which the theme of public is currently at stake – social theories of multiculturalism and national integration, political theories of cosmopolitanism, public engagement of University institutions, the privatization of welfare systems. Across Calhoun's recent writings in these different fields, it is possible to reconstruct a relational understanding of publicness which is sensitive to the variable combination of different adjectival, nominal, and verbal senses of publicness outlined above and which helps us to understand the intimate relations between intrinsic, self-organising aspects of publicness and the concentrated, instrumental and strategic dimensions of concerted public action. Calhoun (2009) identifies four features that make a public: the collective creation of institutions and the sharing of collective life; a sense that some goods are inherently public goods, in the sense derived from economics, where we can only enjoy some things if we share them; a sense of a public joining together strangers; and a sense of active participation in discussing and deciding what is held to be good. What is interesting in this fourfold emphasis is the play across the sense of public goods as material artefacts or services (clean water, access to health care) and the public good as a shared understanding of what values should guide a political community. The first sense, of public goods, is of course central to modern understandings of social democracy, the welfare state, and the public sector – it draws into focus the question of whether there are some activities that, because of characteristics such as non-excludability or non-rivalrous consumption, can only be efficiently and fairly provided through some form of public agency rather than being left to market forces of revealed preferences. Technical, economistic definitions of public goods are, of course, highly disputed; the case for the provision of public goods and services is not solely based on efficiency, but also on claims about equality and fairness. But the key point from our perspective is that there is a strong sense of what a public is, derived from the first two of Calhoun's emphases on collective sharing in the life of a political community, which focuses on the proper role of public agencies – the public sector, government, the state. At first sight, as we have already indicated, this emphasis on the instrumental features of a public seems at odds with the strong emphasis on self-organisation that the latter two of Calhoun's emphases, on open interaction with strangers and participation in deliberative reflection on the public good. The common element in Calhoun's view is the sense of *sharing*.

If there is a connection between the grand sounding ideal of the public sphere, most often theorised in terms of the intrinsic values of agonistic deliberation and debate amongst virtuous citizens, and the nitty-gritty of managing hospital waiting lists or education funding, then the connection is this issue of the degree to which these very different institutional configurations can and do embody an image of sharing in the collective life of a community of strangers on more or less equal footing. This helps us too understand a little more clearly just what might be at stake in processes often dubbed 'neoliberalism' and bemoaned as unleashing rampant individualism. Margaret Thatcher's famous remark to the effect that 'there is no such thing as society' is often recounted as encapsulating this process, but it is worth noting that the context of Thatcher's remark involves her specifying where responsibility lies, and this is not with individuals so much as families and communities. It would surely be unwise to presume that modern conservative political theory is unrelentingly individualistic after all. Thatcher's remark does not embody a divide between collective values and individual ones, so much as a division between two very different visions of the type of social bond upon which collective life should be based: it is the *abstraction* implied by 'society' that is a problem from this perspective, and the rhetorical force of the remark lies in its rejection of the commitment to sharing equally in the fate of one's fellow citizens – what is rejected is the idea that one should expect assistance from, or be expected to provide it to, others who do not conform to the models of social bond epitomized by family, community, or nation. This is a much more serious matter than simply celebrating 'individualism'.

The understanding of public life which emphases sharing in collective life therefore helps us to specify that stakes in the contemporary politics of the public when this focuses, as it so often does, on questions of what should be funded, who should have access to services, and who should pay for them: these are struggles to shift the distribution of risks across patterns of social relations, cultural difference, and division. Perhaps rather than thinking simply of a process of the privatization of risk, we might identify a redistribution of risks as welfare systems increasingly fine-tune access to various social goods (benefits, education, health) while expanding provisions for managing the risks to private business and multinational capital of operating in volatile, lightly regulated markets. The denouement of this redistribution of risk is the political conjuncture we now find ourselves in, where in the UK where public debate revolves around the question of how to manage apparently vast public debt incurred because certain financial institutions were 'too big to fail' (i.e. the impact of their failure would reverberate across economies and social groups), and the idea that the solution to this problem is to cut spending on public services is justified because 'we are all in this together'.

And the very terms of these debates, narrowly focussed around the question of when to cut public spending, remind us of just how important questions of access and availability to the public sphere, understood as a communicative space for addressing and engaging in citizenly debate.

Focussing on public life as a family of practices of *sharing with others* - whether this is sharing goods and services, sharing risks, or sharing in political discourse and cultural life – where this sharing necessarily involves an aspect of mediation and difference, means that we should not think of publics as simply being formed by people finding themselves thrown together in the same community of fate as others (Calhoun 2002). Part of what makes a public a public, as already suggested, is the element of reflexivity or recursiveness towards the background conditions that throw people together – in Deweyian terms, a public emerges when people *recognize* themselves as members of a shared community by virtue of their indirect implication in causal patterns of functional interdependence.

If we keep this in mind, it should become clear that any analysis of contemporary transformations of the institutional configuration of public life must attend closely to the ordinary, everyday contexts in which, for example, popular understandings of risk are formed and reproduced, encounters with state agencies are experienced and communicated, and horizons of responsibility, generosity and hospitality are formed and shaped.

Or, to put it another way, understanding publics *theoretically* as emergent formations, which combine the problematization of the materialities of life practices and participation in communicative practices, requires us to approach the analysis of emergent publics with a strong ethnographic imagination – where this means more, it should be said, than simply a call to do lots of detailed, qualitative empirical case studies. What it means is that empirically *and* theoretically, the analysis of publics needs to be approached with an understanding that *what matters* to actors is of considerable causal significance in how publics are shaped and reshaped.

The emphasis should be on focussing in on the variable combination of what we might call, after Boltanski and Thévenot and Stark, the **vocabularies of worth** through which the dimensions of public life are formed and contested.

## 3). What is a public good for?

In the preceding section, we suggested that understanding publicness as an emergent quality requires us to attend to variable combination of practices, meanings, and, crucially, of values. The suggestion is that the analysis of the formation and transformation of publics should be guided by the question of 'what are publics good for?' The question is not, we should suggest, open to a purely theoretical-normative resolution, rather it is meant to attune analysis to the ways in which different repertories of evaluation and different claims of value are used to sustain, challenge, and transform settled public formations.

Approaching the analysis of publics with this question in mind means more than simply looking at what 'public' or 'the public' means in different contexts; the sense guiding us here is that 'public' is not best thought of as merely an empty signifier. Rather, as we have already suggested, there is a cluster of values that overlap around the vocabulary of publicness – openness, sharing, living together, authority, legitimacy – and attention should focus on how these are assembled and re-assembled in contested claims about what should or should not be a matter of public debate, an object of public management, or a benefactor of public financing. We should also learn to attend to how the meanings of the public emerge not least in contrast to other values – values associated for example with 'privacy' or 'the market'. If we are to negotiate between strongly objectivist understandings of the public – that there are some activities which just are public by their very nature – and purely nominalist understandings – public things are things contingently named public – then we need to keep in view the importance of communicative action (deliberating, engaging, encountering) in understandings of the public. And in particular, we need to keep in view the sense that publics are formed through open-ended processes of address (Ivesen 2007), for this reminds us that *claims* of publicness are crucial dynamics of public formation and deformation (Mahony et al 2010).

In this section, we want to outline the analysis of **vocabularies of worth** through which the formation of publics might be approached analytically. In order to do so, we consider in turn three paradigmatic publics, the focus of attention in different academic and practical fields. We do so to draw out the values that are embedded in these institutional fields and which are at stake in critical and diagnostic accounts of their transformation.

The **first paradigmatic public** is public space, the focus of attention in spatial disciplines such as human geography, urban studies, architecture, and urban sociology. Public spaces are, though, also a focus of attention in political philosophical accounts of the public sphere, as either figures of the public or as empirical scenes for certain sorts of practices. This field of literature focuses on particular sorts of spaces – public parks, streets, shopping malls, cafes – as exemplary of certain features of publicness. The first thing to say about this field is that it is primarily concerned with a particular function of the public – the background conditions of a certain sort of sociality that is taken to be crucial to more formally public, citizenly forms of engagement. These are, then, in the vocabulary of public sphere theory, relatively weak publics, not strongly articulated with concentrated sites of authority, but rather scenes where the virtues and capacities of public encounter are learnt and put into practice. One of the crucial contributions of feminist scholars to understandings of public space is to point out that the sorts of virtues and activities often associated with these paradigmatic public spaces might well go on in more privatized, secluded or secreted locations. This work begins to unsettle the assumption that *public action* is necessarily action that takes place in *public space*, an assumption further unsettled by work on queer publics which draws into view the ways in which different configurations of public exposure might support emancipatory or oppressive relationships. Related to this functional concern, with sociality, is the primary concern in these fields with a particular set of public values, primary those associated with openness, accessibility, and inclusion in spaces of interaction.

Specifying the function and values associated with public space in this way allows us, in turn to notice the ways in which transformations of public space revolve attempts to redefine these functions and values – so, for example, concerns with public order and public nuisance lead to regulatory adjustments in the management of public space which give less credence to the citizenly value of unanticipated encounters with difference than to norms of security and safety or put a premium on not being offended. In crucial respects, this logic might amount to a privatization of public spaces in so far as it shifts the balance from openness to uninitiated contact with others towards allowing subjects in public exercise more control of the shape and content of their interactions.

The **second set of paradigmatic publics** we want to note have a different function from the first set, one which focuses primarily on the *opinion-forming* aspect of the public sphere. This is, of course, one aspect of the public spaces discussed above as well, but a crucial dimension of the notion of the public sphere is the way in which such 'real' spaces of face-to-face interaction are embedded within mediated circuits of communication. So the key institutions of public opinion-forming would include broadcasters (public and private), newspapers, print cultures more generally (publishing, public libraries), museums, churches, schools and Universities. These form the circulatory infrastructure through which opinions, information, science and religion is made available to dispersed populations. If the key public function of these institutions is that of keeping citizens informed and allowing them opportunities for free and unfettered expression, then in turn there is a primary value at stake in thinking of these sorts of institutions as public, irrespective of the source of funding or degree of selectivity of particular examples. This is the contribution such institutions make to the development and circulation of a *shared culture*, of a world held in common by all citizens and available to all to engage with and appropriate as their own.

The institutionalized, mediated qualities of public culture in this expansive sense has always been haunted by the worry of paternalism involved in presuming to know what is good for audiences, listeners, readers, viewers by the way of information, entertainment and education. This paternalist worry has of course underwritten a strong trend towards market populism across various fields of cultural policy and cultural economy. But markets in cultural goods are hardly 'perfect' in their responsiveness to the needs and preferences of members of the public. Some worry that the combined impact of new technologies and privatized media lead some to worry about the fragmentation of a once unified public culture into myriad enclosures means we end only ever being exposed to our dose of 'The Daily Me' as Cass Sunstein puts it. In contrast to this worry about *fragmentation* of the public sphere, there is a contrasting worry that market-dominated logics in cultural provisioning lead to a decline of *pluralism* in public culture. This concern with pluralism is, we would suggest, more interesting precisely because it does not suppose that the value of shared culture needs to be modelled on the ideal of a unified, single culture – rather, it focuses attention on the quality and quantity of opportunities for sharing as such, where sharing is understood as a process of exchange and communication across difference.

These two paradigmatic publics – public spaces and institutions of public culture – underscore the importance of recognising that the public sphere is about much more than politics or citizenship narrowly conceived. They remind us that the relationship between a wide, dispersed public *culture* and the political functions ascribed to public *deliberation* are complex ones and that these two fields are not best thought of as identical or directly, causally connected (Wessler 2009). The question of defining their relationship is, of course, a staple of public sphere theory from Habermas's original tragic narrative onwards. The **third set of paradigmatic publics** cleave more closely to what this tradition of thought calls 'will-formation' than the first two, and would include various political formations of the state, including both welfare agencies but also procedures of election, legislation, and policy making. In both cases, the function of institutions of will-formation is to filter dispersed opinion-formation into *actionable decisions* and to implement these through programmes of service provision and distribution. Or, to put it another way, these institutions are mediums for the 'political efficacy' of public opinion as distinct from the normative legitimacy of public opinion that is meant to be secured by the configurations of the first two sets of publics (cf Fraser 2007). And the key value underwriting these configurations in their idealized social democratic form at least is that of equality – whether the equality of participation through electoral enfranchisement, or the equality of impartiality embodied in expansive systems of welfare provision.

These different paradigms embody and enact particular values of publicness – interaction, common culture, equality, etc., and with different emphasis on the relation of opinion to will formation

These examples – indicate that value of publicness is enacted in various ***practices*** – in voting, in being counted, in deliberating, in shared rituals; is expressed through various forms of ***communication*** – rational ones, reasonable ones, passionate ones; and engages with various modalities of ***power*** – sieges and sluices, weak and strong, influence and exercise.

## 4). Investigating emergent publics

I have been arguing for an approach which is equal to the task of understanding the development of new practices, sites and definitions of publicness. Publicness is an emergent quality, by which I mean that issues of public value 'break out' around problems, issues, and processes that are not easily anticipated. There are, I would argue, three distinct but overlapping dimensions to this processes of emergence:

1. **The emergence of new objects of public action**. The concerns over which public debate and decisive action are demanded, and around which communities of affected interest are formed, have multiplied. For example, the proliferation of environmental concerns transforms the most mundane of everyday, domestic practices into activities with public significance.

2. **The emergence of new subjects of public action**. The identities around which collective, participatory agency is mobilized have likewise been transformed. For example, the restructuring of welfare systems generates new forms of rights-based mobilization by patients groups, while 'living wage' campaigns engage multiple identities around contingent, issue-specific campaigns of limited duration.

3. **The emergence of new mediums of public action**. The means through which issues emerge as public concerns, through which demands for attention are addressed, and through which action in response to these concerns is enabled have been reconfigured. For example, new communications technologies restructure the rhythms and norms of public media cultures, while the potential for markets to serve as mediums for public action is being explored by a variety of activist campaigns.

The point of the preceding analysis, of course, is that these three different dimensions might be combined in different ways in specific situations. I will close by indicating some examples of contemporary emergent publics, the analysis of which requires us to think differently about the formation of public value.

First, there is what might be called e**nterprising publics.** It is common to counter-pose public values to the values of markets. However, following academic literature on the embeddedness of markets in social relations and cultural practices, it seems plausible to ask whether markets can serve as mediums for collective values of care, welfare, and the public good. It should not be a surprise to learn that market mechanisms can be deployed in the pursuit of public goals. One can think of, for example, the models of public value at work in the proliferation of new public management theory, public choice theory, and theories of public value in post-welfare states; the emergence of new models of ethical business and corporate social responsibility and the growth of repertoires of consumer activism amongst a diverse range of participatory political movements; or regulatory and activist politics of access to affordable medicines and treatment regimes. The relationships between regimes of property, market processes, and the pursuit of public values such as welfare and accountability needs to be freed up from static paradigms of the proper configurations of these practices and processes.

Second, there is the whole field we might call '**publics in crisis'.** Theories of 'risk' have been pivotal to the redefinition of the public roles of state and non-state actors. But there is relatively little research on the ways in which different "communities of affected interest" emerge in response to traumatic disruption of orderly patterns of life, or into the organizational challenges involved in constituting publics around anticipated future events. But these questions have become central in the context of 'global' problems such as climate change, international terrorism, and global health issues such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, or avian flu. The dynamics of the emergence of new publics around shared exposure to catastrophic events or vulnerability to risk-events needs further investigation: for example, investigation of the formation of public awareness of environmental futures and international humanitarian crises; investigation of the relationships between public values of security, liberty, and privacy in a the context of enhanced 'global' risks such as terrorism and disease; and investigation of the emergence of novel organizational assemblages of agency for the pursuit of concerted public action around 'global' crises of various forms.

Third, there is the importance of **public feelings** to understanding how public spaces are constituted. Contemporary public life has often been characterized as displaying distinctively new affective registers of emotion, compassion, fear, and sentimentality. This phenomenon is linked to philosophical and theoretical critiques of normative models of the public sphere that privilege models of rationality as the communicative mediums for the identification of public matters and the legitimation of concerted public action. In light of these issues, further investigation is required of the forms of public interaction enabled by new technologies of expression; of the forms of public interaction distinctive of complex sites of the contemporary multicultural city; and the ways in which expressions of rationality and revelation, reason and faith, are combined in distinctive ways in contemporary public life.

Finally, academic knowledge is implicated in these reconfigurations of publicness too. Academic practices are increasingly defined as forms of **public knowledge.** Institutional research designed to enhance knowledge of publics is proliferating. Such knowledge of publics may be constitutive in its effects, producing new sites of public identification and forms of strategic action. How publics become known in various fields is both a practical problem for institutions seeking to engage, consult with or involve 'their' publics, and a focus of academic work about the implications of the increasing mediatization and fragmentation of the public domain.

These four issues – of enterprising publics, publics in crisis, public feelings, and public knowledge – are examples of emergent fields in which the meaning, practice, and value of publicness is reconfigured and contested in new ways. One of the ways in which publics are reconfigured, and in which these processes are contested, is by recourse to a rhetoric of real, authentic, proper publicness – no one ever tried to mobilize a public by telling people that publics are socially constructed. This should remind us, however, of the degree to which static models of public life are part of the object of analysis when it comes to understanding emergent publics, rather than a helpful tool for understanding those processes.