

# The other-publics: Mediated othering and the public sphere in the Dreyfus Affair

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**Abstract**

This article analyses mediated invocations of ‘the people’ or ‘the public’ in the Dreyfus Affair, and orients this historical analysis towards contemporary debates on public spheres and digital media. If the ideal Habermasian public sphere never historically existed, how did the ‘imperfect’ public spheres of the past nevertheless contribute to democratic political participation? The late 19th century is a particularly salient point of comparison, being a time of transition from one set of media technologies and notions of publics to another. Focusing on newspapers, posters and other print-based communicative practices, I identify two general and consistent modes by which the ‘other-public’ is produced: (1) the ‘other’ audience as the target of persuasion, influence and commentary, and (2) the speaker as a distinct ‘other’ from the crowd. This othering was not a pathological barrier to ‘full participation’, but a constitutive part of publicity in an age of nascent mass media.

**Keywords**

Communication, crowd, Dreyfus Affair, journalism, media, otherness, print, public, public sphere, 19th century

This article analyses modes of imagining and invoking ‘the public’, as found in the mediated communicative practices of the Dreyfus Affair. By ‘mediated communicative practices’, I refer to ways in which individuals used mass media to address, and in doing so, imagine their ‘public’, from antisemitic caricatures in internationally distributed postcards to sociological critiques of the Third Republic in semi-academic monographs.

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Although not unprecedented, the Dreyfus Affair was a landmark moment for a thoroughly modern breed of political contestation in which the persuasion of large crowds through media discourse features as a primary instrument of action (also see Eley, 1994). These practices reified public sites of debate, involved publicizing styles of articulation and were predicated on the assumption of an attentive, decision-making, *powerful* public. This presumed public is my subject of analysis. Who did the actors in the Affair believe they were speaking to, and speaking in the name of? How did they understand themselves as individuals who are part of the public, and speaking for the public?

This analysis is directed at the peculiar way in which we make use of history in contemporary debates over public spheres in the age of digital media. As I will show below, we confront today a strange tension. On one hand, it is now well recognized that Habermas' bourgeois public sphere was never an ideal totality in its heyday. However, we are still struggling with the normative expectations of the 'good' public sphere that this idealization had produced: all-inclusive, rationally deliberative and 'civilized'. In response, I ask: if the public spheres of the 18th or 19th centuries were 'imperfect' according to Habermasian ideals, how did they nevertheless contribute to democratic politics and public participation? The Affair is generally memorialized as a triumph of public opinion and debate, an overcoming of unjust sovereignty and state secrecy by the people's call for justice, spearheaded by the Reason and conscience of the intellectuals. But in Habermas' original narrative, the late 19th century is a time of media-driven decline and corruption for the bourgeois public sphere; indeed, the Affair only delivered justice for Dreyfus through a heavily mediated, conflictive public debate, orchestrated by clearly demarcated factions. My focus is therefore on how such an imperfect public sphere nevertheless 'worked', and how this can help us forge such pragmatic solutions for the near future. The nature of this historical lesson is formal, rather than substantial. I do not argue that we should replicate the public of the Affair. Rather, I want to explicitly identify ways in which we are asking many similar questions about publics and publicity as they did in the past, and look to history in that sense. The imperfect public sphere is not a model, but an orientation for debate.

The comparison with the Dreyfus Affair is salient because it is situated within the last great revolution of mediated communications.<sup>1</sup> Improvements in halftone and photosensitive plates enabled cheap, large-scale distribution of photographs; the invention of the postcard dovetailed with railroad infrastructure, not to mention the telegraph and the gramophone, to connect the reading and listening audience more densely and widely. The changes were not only technological. In fin-de-siècle France, rise in rural literacy and the popularization of the penny presses contributed to nationwide networks of mediated communications (Berenson, 1992: 209). Parisians daily engaged with visual spectacles of the crowd in locations like the Universal Expositions and the Parisian Morgue (Hetherington, 2007; Schwartz, 1998). The Affair's contemporaries thus lived through an experience of transition parallel to today, with the relationship between media and the public in flux. Their responses involved the kinds of questions that are now being asked of social media and Web 2.0: who (if anyone) is one speaking to in public discourse? What kinds of imputed audiences drive public communication (Ellison et al., 2007; Marwick and boyd, 2010)? How does a publicized voice achieve relevance and assert its own 'public' nature (e.g. Beer, 2009; Bruns, 2008; Morozov, 2011; Shirky, 2011)? Media

projects itself as the ‘centre’ of social reality: it distributes and demarcates the collective perception of what matters and what happens (Couldry, 2003). Yet this centrality is always in question, and maintained through communicative practices that are themselves guided by imaginations of publics and publicity. It is this configuration of imagination and practice that characterizes the imperfect public sphere of the Dreyfus Affair.

The article first reviews contemporary efforts towards new models of the public sphere, and on this basis, makes the case for ‘imperfect’ public spheres. The next two sections examine the mediated communicative practices surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, with specific emphases on print media and the community of the ‘intellectuals’. What emerges through this reading of the Affair is how public acts of communication invoke publics as *others*. This includes the othering of the audience which one addresses, attempts to influence and offers commentary on. At the same time, public speakers project themselves as othered spokespersons: they are at once part of the public they speak for, and distinct from it. The publicity of one’s communication involves not (only) an autonomous voice and opinion, but the capacity to draw upon the polyphony of other voices. I suggest that one lesson of the Dreyfus Affair might be to problematize digital public spheres less in terms of full inclusion and equal representation, and more as a question of furnishing a diversity of available options for individuals to enter into and reconfigure public–nonpublic relationships.

## The imperfect public sphere(s)

It is now widely recognized that the bourgeois public sphere of *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1991) never quite existed. The concept – or interpretations of the concept – has been humbled to admit that it was rather exclusive, partial and not always governed solely by Reason. Habermas (1992) himself has recognized this partiality or plurality of public spheres at any given time. Strangely, this corrective has not extended to the *ideals* of a ‘good’ public sphere. The ‘Habermasian vision’ of an all-inclusive public and its rational debates among informed equals persist to a significant degree. (I use the term to denote not the ‘authentic’ opinion of Habermas, but this optimistic interpretation.) We now speak of agonistic publics, plebeian or proletariat public spheres, non-Western public spheres, and even private spheres; but while these efforts begin by drawing away from the bourgeois public sphere, they nevertheless retain many ideals of the public sphere. Public sphere theory thus remains ‘morally admirable’ but analytically condemned to disappointment, unable to admit ‘inequality’ in debate as an inevitable aspect of any public sphere (Adut, 2012: 238–241). The Habermasian vision has been banished from the past, but not yet, perhaps, from the future.

Allow me to briefly qualify these claims through some of the most prominent and thoughtful articulations of potential public spheres. In 1992, Nancy Fraser argued for a plurality of publics, predicated on the rejection of a Habermasian totality:

... my argument undermines the bourgeois conception as a normative ideal. I have shown first that an adequate conception of the public sphere requires not merely the bracketing, but rather the elimination, of social inequality. [...] Third, I have shown that a tenable conception of the

public sphere must countenance not the exclusion, but the inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois, masculinist ideology labels 'private' and treats as inadmissible. (pp.136–137)

It is important to note the different uses of 'ideal' here. Fraser dispels the idealization of *the bourgeois public sphere* as fully inclusive, equal and totalizing. My critique is that in doing so, she brings into the future that is the stakes of this debate an ideal public sphere(s) that *does* get those values right. If the bourgeois public sphere was only able to 'bracket inequality', we must eliminate it; if a singular public sphere had to exclude many peoples, plural publics must integrate them all; and through this, a pluralist public sphere will guide truly 'everyone' towards rational deliberation. The bourgeois public sphere is refuted as a *substantial* or historical truth, but is distilled into a *formal* or ideal truth that the pluralist vision aspires to. Seven years later, Chantal Mouffe (1999) proposed 'agonistic pluralism' to address the failures of deliberative democracy:

... this presupposes that the 'other' is no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary', i.e., somebody with whose ideas we are going to struggle but whose right to defend those ideas we will not put into question ... (p.755)

Mouffe explicitly states that a fully inclusive public sphere is impossible, and that deliberative democracy excludes radical and nonnormative views and actors as a result of this false hope (pp.754–755). Yet her proposed inclusion of conflict in the tempered form of agonism introduces an essential tension. Who determines, and how, the distinction between an acceptable agonism that may enter into the debate and antagonism that cannot (lest it scuttle the field of participation altogether)? If a pluralist democracy must be capable of arriving at a 'conflictual consensus' (p.756), this is another way of saying that some moderating force contains agonistic interests to prevent conflict *sans* consensus, a force which then occupies the position of the sovereign exception. It is a very different form of inclusion and exclusion, to be sure, but one that is still predicated on the ideals of a maximally inclusive and consensual public sphere. This contradiction is also visible in similar arguments. Terje Rasmussen (2013) calls on the digital public sphere to 'ensure legitimacy and stability for the political system', even as it contributes to an 'increasing differentiation of groups, topics and styles' (p.98). How? By combining the 'representation' of different interests with a 'presentation' of common issues – in other words, the solution to combining diversity and unity is to be united and diverse at the same time. How can different interests always have common issues, and how can they have equal access to the determination of which issue is common?

My aim here is not to reject these arguments wholesale. They are valuable efforts to articulate a workable model for contemporary public spheres. Neither is it to criticize Habermas yet again. His theories still have a great deal to offer for contemporary debates by rendering them more accountable to power and nonrationality (e.g. Dahlberg, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). My point is that the tension between consensus and dissensus, unity and plurality, remains a major obstacle to debates towards contemporary public spheres, and this problem can be traced to enduring beliefs about how 'good' public spheres work – beliefs that originated from early interpretations of the bourgeois public sphere. I address this tangled knot by asking: if the idealized and totalized form of the bourgeois public

sphere never existed, *what did?* If the bourgeois public sphere was much more imperfect, partial and exclusive than previously supposed, *how did it nevertheless contribute to the historical maturation of democracy and public participation?* There is little questioning the fact that 18th and 19th centuries produced unprecedented levels of public debate and decision-making. Indeed, if a public sphere must be host to a plurality of publics, as well as agonistic contestation between them, perhaps this imperfect ‘messiness’ is the public sphere at its best. It must therefore be asked, ‘did this imperfect public sphere “work”, in both senses of the word: how did it operate, and how did it contribute, to some degree of success, the realization of the ideals of the public sphere?’ Habermas (1992) would later argue that since the bourgeois public sphere is a historically specific entity, his theory of communicative action strives to identify generic and formal requirements for public spheres – a move which ‘removes the necessity for stylizing particular prototypical manifestations’ (pp.442–443). This article takes the opposite stance. It argues that we should consider these historical, partial, imperfect public spheres as the *only* historical models available to us for an equally partial and historicized situation that is our present; that we should not replace the idealized public sphere with an idealized abstraction of communicative action, but return more forcefully to history.

The stage is now set for the Dreyfus Affair as a case of the ‘imperfect public sphere’. This was an event involving highly publicized, often less than civil debate between relatively small and partial factions, while much of the French population were silent spectators (see Adut, 2012: 241). Nevertheless, the Affair achieved something that is now hailed as a triumph of reason and public participation. What kind of public sphere(s) do we find in this famous controversy, and how did this collective belief and investment in the public ‘work’? Specifically, I engage here with the emergence of the Dreyfusard ‘intellectuals’. I examine, at a schematic level, the relationship between the intellectuals and their political cause; the communicative practices they were involved in such as newspapers, academic journals, drawings and photographs; and the believed-in mechanisms of publics and publicity that emerge from their actions.

## The other-public, I: the crowd as audience

By 1899, the Dreyfus Affair was in full swing. Zola’s *J’accuse* the previous year was only one of innumerable articles, stories, accusations, caricatures and analyses that occupied the French public. Addressing the related rise of antisemitic sentiment and violence across the country, Jewish sociologist Henri Dagan published a collection of essays entitled *Enquête sur l’antisémitisme*. Its contributors would include Zola and Durkheim:

When society suffers, it needs someone to blame, someone upon whom to avenge itself for its disappointments [...] What confirms my interpretation is the manner in which the trial of Dreyfus, in 1894, was greeted. There was a fervent joy in the streets. People celebrated as a success what they should have marked by public mourning. As a result of the trial, people finally knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and the moral distress through which they lived. (Durkheim, 2008: 322)

What is notable for our purposes is not Durkheim’s explanation of the scapegoat, but the pathological interpellation of the public. In the piece, he attributes this anti-Semitic fever

to a state of ‘social malaise’, an abnormal collapse of social solidarity (see Goldberg, 2008: 302). At the time, Durkheim’s place in the founding myths of sociology was not assured, and he was working to articulate a relatively rationalist sociology of the group in direct competition with Gustave Le Bon’s Charcot-inspired mysticism and Tarde’s theory of imitation (Birnbaum, 1995: 4). Yet in this piece, we find an imputed public that is bloodthirsty, misguided and, indeed, a single body of undifferentiated ignorance. This writing was certainly not intended for academics alone; Durkheim’s contribution was part of his sustained, if behind-the-scenes, engagement with the Dreyfusard cause (Fournier, 2005: 52–53). The nature and role of the ‘people’ was not only a theoretical question, but one which set the parameters for strategy and action.

This anecdote illustrates the essential ambiguity of the notion of the public in fin-de-siècle France. On one hand, individuals felt that it was critical to address ‘the public’, and to persuade them in order to legitimize and achieve their political objectives. On the other, it was often divided and reconfigured into different forms and boundaries to suit the goals of the speaker. This imagined and strategically interpellated nature of the public became critical in the 19th century, when the rise in urban populations and literacy rates created a larger population of the potentially ‘public’ than ever before. The ability to imagine a public has always been necessary to modern public spheres (at least), of course. Joseph Addison of *The Spectator*, Habermas’ prized example of 18th century public communications, can be found speculating not only about the size of his readership but also its nature: he believes it will be of use to ‘the Fraternity of Spectators’ like himself, the ‘Blanks of Society’ who live in unimaginative and ignorant torpor, and depend on such reading materials to know what to think and speak of, and so on (Addison, 1711c). The nameless spectator, the ‘Mr. *What-d’ye-call-him*’ (Addison, 1711b), thus embodied Addison’s reflexive and conscious aspiration to be able to represent an Other which he, by and large, had to imagine (also see Warner, 2002: 99). Not only was this an effort to justify the publication’s existence, such imagination guided and was guided by Addison’s sense of what he should discuss and how (Addison, 1711a). The fundamental irony of the reading public was that the more connected one became to larger public spheres, the more one ‘had to spend part of each day in temporary isolation from his fellow man’ (Eisenstein, 1980: 131). The lack of focus groups, audience surveys and reliable sales figures did not discourage generations of individuals from publishing – often in clandestine forms (Eisenstein, 1980: 142; Zaret, 2000: 159–160), sometimes out of their own pockets (Darnton, 1982; Felton, 2010, 2011) – the incredible volumes of reading material that inaugurated the modern age of mass media. The small and narrow circle of mostly male, bourgeois writers in metropolitan centres, and their immediate interlocutors in cafés and *grands boulevards*, required a relatively silent and undifferentiated mass to act as their backdrop, their convenient example, their virtual interlocutor: the ‘*other-public*’. This public, often seen but rarely heard, would serve as the writers and speakers’ imagined audience as well as objects of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> The public sphere required not only ‘participants’ but non-participating spectators also (Adut, 2012: 244). To accuse the ‘people’ of bad judgment and simultaneously appeal to their judgment, to be labelled an ‘intellectual’ and then speak on behalf of the nation from that position – all this involves relative displacements of ‘the public’. I speak as a part of it, but I address it as an other that does not speak back. I am at once of the public, and outside it. Again, this dynamic,

imaginative work of othering became all the more necessary by Dreyfus' time. The lived experience of fin-de-siècle Paris exemplifies the other-public as spectacle. Streetside café seats and hotel lobbies were frequented as 'theatre seats' for people-watching, while new locations like the arcades, department stores and exhibitions provided a diversity of crowds that enlivened such spectatorship (Schwartz, 1998) – not to mention Benjamin's *flâneurs*. The bourgeois public sphere and its writers thus had the vantage-point of looking into such crowds, always half-displacing themselves from them. The penny presses of the day, such as Millaud's wildly successful *Le Petit Journal*, exemplified the textualization of this relation: they were filled with *romans-feuilletons*, daily instalments of fictional suspense, romance and crime, and *fait divers*, an ambiguous mix of hearsay, urban legends and curious happenings (Berenson, 1992: 211–212, 227–233; Datta, 2013; Dubied, 2004: 23–26). As these publications reached millions of readers by the century's end (Berenson, 1992: 209), its readers – bourgeois and otherwise – daily consumed their other-publics.

This relationship between bourgeoisie or elite 'public individuals' and their interpellation of the other-public(s) explains both Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard activities. The affair produced massive volumes of media which attempted to persuade – and in doing so, invoke and generate – a French public. After all, when Dreyfus was initially condemned, 'the public' had scarcely paid notice (Mitterand, 2013: 15–16). The Dreyfusards turned to the mass media in the belief that persuasion of large crowds was critical to their success. The Affair became an Affair through their belief that Dreyfus' sentence could only be effectively problematized by making it the concern of the public at large. Again, this reflects the total shift in the English and French political public spheres between the 16th and 19th centuries; where the rule of court intrigue was secrecy, the Dreyfusards felt their most effective weapon was mediated publicity (see Zaret, 2000). The press played a crucial role in turning this open-and-shut case into an Affair, to its profit. When Dreyfus was arrested, the antisemitic *La Libre Parole* leaked the news and reaped the benefits in circulation; Clemenceau saw 300,000 copies of his *L'Aurore* fly off the shelves when it hosted Zola's *J'accuse* (Kleeblatt, 1987: 7). As the media-driven public debate grew in visibility, some launched new publications to ensure their views were heard, or rather, could be cast into the thick Parisian air. When Jean-Louis Forain launched the anti-Dreyfusard *Psst...!*, the Dreyfusard Henri-Gabriel Ibels immediately began *Le Sifflet* in response (Katz, 2013a). Such publishing activity was driven not only by competition but by a belief in the imputed audience and public – that one could not allow the silent public to be led astray by the proliferation of (anti-)Dreyfusard polemic. Paradoxically, publishing, as an act of communication, was predicated on an other-public which *did not include* the community of writers, publishers, artists and the like; at the same time, assessments of this other-public and its opinion were made on the basis of texts and images produced by the latter community of 'speakers'. It has been noted that 17th century English print culture unveiled a 'dialogic order', where readers of a text were expected to have read other texts and enter into conversation by comparing them to each other (Zaret, 2000: 176–177). We find in the Affair such intertextual conversation, maintained through rapid publication. Any given text interpellated its own public according to its rhetorical and strategic needs. At the same time, the text would address other texts – an implicit recognition that the latter text reflects in some way the opinion of the public, or at least their

*potential* opinion. Each text referred individually to its own public, but would thereafter be seen (by other texts) as a partial reflection of the public as a whole. This complexity is well illustrated in Ibels' (2013) *Le Sifflet* piece, entitled 'The People':

... ordinary citizens are not to be confused with the two or three hundred hoodlums, hired for three francs apiece, who gathered outside the Courthouse and screamed 'Death to Zola!' and 'Long Live Esterhazy!' under the watchful eyes of the army police officers who surrounded them. The general public, then, did not march. It merely watched, perhaps biding its time. It acted wisely. (p.140)

On one hand, we have the silent other-public who are lauded for their prudent inaction; these are explicitly distinguished from the bourgeoisie, whose amoral profiteering is criticized in another entry. Meanwhile, the intellectuals are later praised *for acting* even when ordinary people do not consent (Ibels, 2013: 180). On the other, we have 'two or three hundred hoodlums' who Ibels discounts as an ignorant minority; yet these were the most visible and vocal portions of the non-publishing public, and precisely 'the people' that Durkheim referred to earlier (also see Kaplan, 2013: 207). Protest is a fundamental form of public communication, and these 'hoodlums' did indeed achieve visibility; but Ibels and others found it convenient to dismiss them as *not of the people*. Ibels' 'people', precisely in their silent otherness, become divisible in various ways. Decades later, the 'silent majority' would again become an ever-present figure in discourse *about the public* (e.g. Champagne, 2004: 61–67). The Dreyfus Affair is full of the *imputed* voice of the other-public, if not their 'actual' voice.

How did the bourgeoisie 'public individuals' attempt to communicate their Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard views to this other-public? The coverage of the Affair was – by the objectivist standards of 20th century journalism – partisan, sensational and emotive. Dreyfus was alternatively a martyr, a spy, a hero, a traitor, an emblem of the Republic, a hook-nosed money-grubbing Jew (Sion, 2013: 348). What is notable is that this sensationalism was a long-standing norm, and was key to opening the Dreyfus case for national debate. If we restrict ourselves to the intellectuals, we see that many members of this incipient group were already engaged with journalistic endeavours, partly as a way to earn a living when more 'artistic' enterprises were not forthcoming (Kleeblatt, 1987: 3). The likes of Zola and Lazare wrote regularly for the mass print media; the same publications enlisted Parisian painters, illustrators and photographers. Forain's *Psst...!* was a collaboration with the caricaturist Caran d'Ache, who devised a series of striking and often antisemitic sketches for the covers. Legal and technological changes such as the reduction of penalties for defamation enacted by the 1881 Press Law (Katz, 2013b: 4) and the arrival of photo-sensitive plates enabled 'photo-mechanical reproduction, real-time courtroom drawings, editorial cartooning' and other multi-media coverage of the Affair (Katz, 2013b: 4; Kleeblatt, 1987: 10). Postcards, in particular, demonstrated the mindset involved in addressing the other-public. Produced by a small group of illustrators, Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard postcards were shipped in the millions, multiple times a day, as far as Naples and Constantinople. They had to address an indeterminate public, yet their success was based not on any semblance of reasoned argument, but the emotional sentiment they could produce within that silent public (Sion, 2013: 346–347). *J'accuse* itself, it is well known, was

a provocative performance designed to bring prosecution upon the writer. Such techniques tug insistently at the accepted confluence of objective journalism, the ‘public’ intellectual, and the Habermasian public sphere. Histories of the intellectual tend to idolize the Dreyfus Affair as the founding and pure moment of impartial, reasoned advocacy (Eyerman, 1992: 53; Franz, 2007: 98–101; Silverman, 1994). The fact that intellectuals in the Affair were relentlessly ‘sensationalist’ and implicated in mass media does not necessarily bring these intellectuals into disrepute. Indeed, it has been argued that the 18th century European press that Habermas praises was also full of “faction fighting, financial corruption and ideological management” (Curran, 1991: 41). What it does do is question the normative judgments we pass on journalism and public debate, and call for affective and emotional modes of communication to be admitted as a legitimate part of a healthy public sphere. If the Dreyfusards engaged in the reification of other-publics, this was not an aberration, but a central part of their bid for publicization. If their victory was the triumph of public debate and a robust public sphere, then sharing in that triumph was their affective, rhetorical and partisan strategy of imputed other-publics.

This reading of the Dreyfus Affair takes us further away from the Habermasian vision of full inclusion. Even excluding the typically Other like the mentally ill, financially destitute or politically radical, we find that even localized, historicized public spheres involve imagined audiences and publics, and that this imagination occurs through various techniques of interpellating other-publics. The ‘silent majority’, in this case dovetailing with the notion of the irrational crowd, becomes a critical device for public debate and decision-making. After all, without ‘the people’ to call upon, the intellectuals’ cause would not have had the requisite authority; and for the anti-Dreyfusards in particular, it was such sensational use of mass media and the imputation of indignant publics that was able to intimidate politicians into action (Mitterand, 2013: 15–16). We might thus ask: what if the public sphere is held together not only by a sense of belonging and the ability to hear and speak with “the public”, but also *the ability to objectify the other-public and speak in its name, infusing my being and my speech with the power of the multitude?*

The strange thing [is that ...] these men do not come in contact, do not meet or hear each other; they are all sitting in their own homes scattered over a vast territory, reading the same newspaper. What then is the bond between them? This bond lies in their simultaneous conviction or passion and in their awareness of sharing at the same time an idea or a wish with a great number of other men. It suffices for a man to know this, even without seeing these others, to be influenced by them *en masse* ... (Tarde, 1969: 276)

More than ‘awareness’, a *belief* which enables ‘influence’; that is, the subjection which occurs when I have been othered as a member of the public or when I am persuaded through this belief that the public *other than myself* wills it. The figure which channels this influence is the spokesperson.

## The other-public, II: the spokesperson

If the imputation of an audience as object of address, persuasion and analysis involves an ‘other-public’, inversely, this is also the case with the imputation of the speaker as a

representative of that public. This spokesperson is inherently ambiguous. On one hand, I claim some kind of membership with the public, which authorizes and valorizes my publicized opinion; on the other hand, I necessarily set myself apart from that public by the very act of speaking on its behalf. Here, I focus on the position certain learned Dreyfusards became identified with – the new category of the ‘intellectuals’ – as one such figure of the spokesperson.

Historical narratives of the intellectual generally idealize the ‘good intellectual’ of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and lament his or her decline over subsequent decades. The good intellectual is characterized by a humanist and universalist perspective; a willingness to speak out on matters outside his or her own class interest, driven by a sense of guilt and personal responsibility; an independent identity where his or her critique is not associated with one particular allegiance or another (Chametzky, 2004: 212–213; Eyerman, 1992: 35; Kellner, 1995: 434–436) – a ‘principled sniper’, as Pierre Bourdieu was once called (Wacquant, 2004: 4). This figure is said to then decline into professionalized, compliant, ‘policy-oriented’ workers whose vocation is the manufacturing of consent (Franz, 2007: 98–99; Jennings and Kemp-Welch, 1997: 1; also see Tucker, 1996: 105–106, 114).<sup>3</sup> Many aspects of this ‘good intellectual’ are recognizable in the Dreyfusard intellectuals’ self-characterization and strategies. Ibels took pains to frame the Affair as a *French* question rather than a Jewish one, arguing that the Dreyfusards were ‘independent minds’ whose enemies were the clerical order ‘coming out of the shadows to strangle the Republic’ (Ibels, 2013: 126; Kaplan, 2013: 199). Even if the ordinary people do not understand, their knowledge and learning shall be put to a public service.<sup>4</sup>

However, this self-articulation of intellectual qualities does not mean these same qualities were key to their role in the public sphere. Was it really the independence and learning of the intellectuals that ‘gave’ them authority to speak to and for the French public? That is what is implied in accounts like Habermas’ – where the Dreyfusard intellectual was made possible by “a public sphere that is capable of response, alert and informed” (Habermas, 1989: 73; also see Lassman, 2000). But just ‘who’ does this approving, and ‘how’, remains unclear. The origin of *intellectuels* category was with the anti-Dreyfusard Maurice Barrès: ‘these intellectuals are an inevitable waste product of society’s effort to create an elite’ (quoted in Bredin, 1986: 277). The Jewish race of Dreyfus as well as several of his defenders was readily exploited by anti-Dreyfusards, leading to an unprecedented popularization of anti-Semitism (Marrus, 1987: 50). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, such individuals were already an active part of a sensationalist and conflictive mediasphere. There are even incidents of illustrators and artists abandoning their usual publications and their known political convictions to peddle their drawings according to perceived popular interest (Kleeblatt, 1987: 8). There is little to suggest that the French reading public broadly recognized and lauded the intellectuals *specifically* for their ability to deliver independent Reason. Although the intellectuals themselves took their success as proof that ‘French public opinion was responsive to the rational arguments advanced by social scientists’ (Tucker, 1996: 105), whether this truly was the case is not at all clear. I suggest that the intellectuals were not bestowed with public authority; rather, in characterizing themselves as learned, independent and moral, the intellectuals *claimed for themselves* the right to

speak in the name of a public that had never, in any explicit way, given them that authority. The birth of the intellectuals as a distinct group was a technique by which one mobilizes the authority of others, of an other-public, to authorize one's speech in public space and on matters of public import. The intellectuals were not consecrated with a right to publicity or to public spokespersonship, but *seized it*. Their access to privileged information about the Affair, from leaks by the military and connections to Dreyfus' brother Mathieu; their entrenched position in the production of mass print media; the public visibility men like Zola had already commanded; all of these historically contingent factors enabled the intellectuals to speak *as if* they spoke for the French nation, and in doing so, consolidated their position as such. Historically, too, the intellectuals had a 'class' interest in distinguishing themselves as other in order to acquire public authority; the 'learned' demographics in 19th century France were characterized by their contempt of the common man on one hand, and fear and resentment of exclusion from the elite establishment on the other (Charle, 1990; Forth, 1998; Jennings, 1993: 10, 21–22). Dreyfusard discourse thus features a fear of a voracious, dangerous mass, seen too in Durkheim's quote from earlier; indeed, intellectual ideals of disinterested reason may even be traced to their reaction against the Third Republic's idolization of the physical, virile, anti-intellectual hero (Cerullo, 1996: 185–186). If media projects itself as the 'centre' of social reality, the intellectuals claimed for themselves a seat in this centre not through the merit of their arguments in a deliberation of equal voices, but through their ability to make their voice unequally prominent. This is the sense in which we can understand Mouffe's (1999) argument that any speech situation, any political arena, is prefigured and constantly reconfigured by power relations. The power we identify here is not a classically repressive one, but the power to *give oneself* a voice and give weight to that voice. After all, who gave the intellectuals the *right* to defend Dreyfus?

What was the role of the other-audience in this process? To be sure, it was important that the public gave the intellectuals sufficient attention and respect; even the most 'silent' individual contributed in choosing to read or ignore intellectuals' publications. Indeed, contemporaries had reported 'widespread indifference' about the Affair in provincial France (Cahm, 1996: 104). In general, however, we can say with some confidence that intellectuals had sufficient attention and influence as a result of their communicative strategies. The Parisian public at least appears to have taken them very seriously. *J'accuse* sparked mass demonstrations, like the 500 students in the Latin Quarter who lit a bonfire of *L'Aurore* copies. The representative associations of the two camps, *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* and *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, accrued tens of thousands of members and monetary contributions (Bredin, 1986: 349–350; Cahm, 1996: 136–137). Leading Dreyfusard/anti-Dreyfusard papers like *L'Aurore* and *La Libre Parole* enjoyed circulations of tens of thousands, and international media too paid the intellectuals a great deal of attention (Brennan, 1998: 10, 25). We might also note the eventual acquittal of Dreyfus, the rapid emergence of 'intellectuals' as a category internationally, and indeed, the rise of Clemenceau and other Dreyfusards to positions of political power. This assures us of a sufficient degree of public relevance the Dreyfusard intellectuals enjoyed. Beyond this, however, what the public precisely 'thought' of the intellectuals, or whether they were 'influenced by' them, is somewhat besides our point.

The intellectuals grasped publicity for themselves through the act of publicization. They declared themselves to be representative of the wider public, and in doing so, *to a sufficient degree* (for politically effective action), made this a reality. Of course, their success was not guaranteed. The intellectuals' self-styling as representatives of public opinion, emblemized in the practice of signed petitions, would later be seen as elitist and disingenuous (Charle, 1998). Why and how the Dreyfusard intellectuals succeeded is not a question we can fully address here. What is relevant is the general *form* of their success – an assertive, self-validating move of publicity predicated on the invocation of an other-public as audience and object of representation.

Pierre Bourdieu identified the essential contradiction of the spokesperson. A spokesperson is the means by which I and others delegate our voices, and thus invest that one voice with the authority of the many. It carries an inherent risk that once invested, this relationship can be usurped by the spokesperson, a reverse appropriation; we allowed you to speak for us, and now, against our will or opinion, you speak *for us*, in place of us (Bourdieu, 2004: 41). This is not a problem limited to union representatives or elected politicians. After all, other modes of representations, such as public opinion polls, contain their own mechanisms of power reversal. The Dreyfusards also understood the need to strategize not only how 'their voice' is represented but how their voice can be given authority in the mediated public sphere. For instance, Durkheim preferred his name absent from petitions and bylines, and Dreyfusards as a whole keenly felt the need to articulate a Dreyfusard voice as distinct from a Jewish voice (Birnbbaum, 1995: 12–13; Fournier, 2005: 52–53). Dreyfusard communicative practices also changed constantly in response to anti-Dreyfusard ones, again in an effort to protect the authority of their voice and its *alleged* representation of the French public (Katz, 2013b: 1–2; Mitterand, 2013). This was not just about the voice of the experts. It was a question of how *any* voice develops a visible and recognized identity in the public sphere, and how that voice must draw upon other voices to authorize itself. This includes the voice of numbers, such as found in opinion polls; it includes the voice of the eloquent, the sensational; it includes the voice of the witness, whose powerful *strategic* capacity for legitimation is well recognized by activists today (Ristovska, 2013). We find in the intellectuals not only the struggle to participate in public debate and 'make themselves heard' but the struggle to reify themselves as a spokesperson of the French public. They draw on and contribute to a public sphere that takes the form of a Bakhtinian (1981) polyphony. Their struggle also suggests that any vision of equal representation – that every voice is articulated, and has the same weight everywhere – is unrealistic, and may even be *unnecessary* for a 'working' public sphere, given that such 'inequality' is inherent to a *public* gathering of such large and diverse populations. Rather, what is at stake is to provide individuals with relatively equal *access* to different voices of others, and equal *ability* to combine and mobilize those voices for their public self-authorization. Although Habermas later recognized the importance of an ethical articulation of differences for a healthy public sphere, he remained committed to communicative action as a framework of universal validity and value (see Lunt & Livingstone, 2013). The emphasis on 'ability to manipulate' instead follows through on the logical implications of that ethics of difference. This is about making the playing field of manipulation as equal as possible, rather than the finish line. A politician,

a ‘grassroots’ organization spokesperson, a tweeter – none of these individuals are authentically or a priori ‘representative’ of the public. To assume so is to rigidify the relation between those who speak for and those who are spoken for, leading precisely to the power reversal Bourdieu warned against. Even a private citizen can be ‘over-represented’, as the US media discovered when they realized one Greg Packer had accounted for hundreds of their ‘man on the street’ interviews (Watson, 2013). Each act of communication attempts to performatively authorize itself as speaking to and for a public, and what we must strive to equally distribute is the resources and skills necessary for this performance. Simply put: the performance: the power to quote, the power to interpellate, the power to take another’s side, the power to make another’s concerns my own, to join another’s voice with my own.

## Conclusion

If the Dreyfus Affair was a ‘triumph’ of publicity and public opinion, this was due to a historical situation that provided *sufficient diversity* in modes of voicing and othering. The many techniques of othering were here divided into two general forms. The first was the other-public as *audience*; the work of exclusion and demarcation necessary to invoke a ‘public’ or ‘people’ as one’s imputed audience, one’s source of implicit validation, one’s object of commentary. Converse to this process was the other-public as *speaker*. The articulation of oneself as a public voice requires the polyphonic work of drawing on many different voices and identities – to exhibit belonging, to demonstrate general agreement, to define the target of one’s discourse. At the same time, it necessarily marks oneself out as an other; one *protrudes* from the amorphous mass by the very act of forging for oneself a public voice, becoming something else. In all these cases, the success of the Dreyfusard intellectuals may be traced to their access to diverse resources for *manipulating* the conditions of publicity, and thus asserting their own terms for their articulation into a public voice. Such resources included diverse modes of entering public debate; a plurality of voices and styles of expression within each mode; the availability of other-publics to leverage in dynamic ways; and diversity in modes of persuasion and veridiction. I suggest that in this particular case, at least, othering was not pathological to the public sphere, but a constitutive act of publicity. Maurizio Lazzarato has argued that political action must aim to ‘increase the liberty, mobility and reversibility of power games ... [which] are the preconditions for resistance, creation, and the experimentation of relationships to oneself and to others’ (Lazzarato and Henninger, 2007: 104). It is precisely this *power to publicize through othering* that was critical to the Affair.

I began by arguing that this imperfect public sphere, caught in the midst of an earlier period of new media revolution, may serve as a useful reference point for debates over digital public spheres. What if we were to think of our public spheres in the digital era not in terms of the ideal of maximum inclusivity and equality of voices, but towards an ‘imperfect but working’ solution which prioritizes the distribution of powers of manipulation? We would ask; how could we provide a more diverse pool of techniques and resources of voicing and othering? That is, how could we ensure that as many individuals as possible are able to leverage tools and skills – discourse proficiency, technological access, social capital, media publications – in order to articulate their voices, and

articulate their other-publics? The question would be not of standardizing different needs and styles into a common form of discussion, such as rational deliberation, but ensuring that as many individuals as possible are able to strategically and dynamically manipulate definitions of the public towards their own publicization. This perspective would emphasize participation *on their terms*, participation as a creative endeavour, not simply a matter of tweeting or having internet access, but a matter of ensuring the confluence of legal, sociocultural, economic and technological means by which individuals can manipulate those digital platforms for their own ends. Research and debate on digital public spheres could be usefully supplemented by such an emphasis on *dynamic and multiple modes of articulating public voices and invoking other-publics*. The question is not what the next public sphere should look like, but how we can enable individuals to contribute to its organic emergence.

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### Notes

1. It has been suggested that the mid–late 19th century, and its grappling with new technology, urban masses and spectacular consumption, is the more appropriate historical precursor to today than the Enlightenment (e.g. Manovich, 2002; Marvin, 1988).
2. This ‘other-public’ did not encapsulate the entirety of the nation. In France, non-textual traditions of public communication – songs, prophecies, peddler’s tales, magic lanterns – persisted until the 19th century (Weber, 1976: 455–456). Annik Dubied (2004) has argued that the French ‘public’ was essentially split in two, ‘*semble scinder le public en deux*’, for this reason (p.19).
3. Certainly, there are attempts to regenerate and diversify the role of the intellectual, including Michel Foucault’s ‘specific intellectual’ (see Kellner, 1995: 431), and arguments for partial and ‘interstitial’ intellectuals to succeed the universal one (Eyal and Buchholz, 2010: 128–133). My point here is strictly limited to the authoritative position the Dreyfusard intellectual enjoys in most histories.
4. This positioning itself drew on relatively recent history. The mode of accusation was continuous with preceding forms of ‘enlightened indignation’, such as the 18th century case of La Barre (Boltanski, 1999: 80), and older meditations on the (public) morality of the spectator (Boltanski, 1999: 35–39, 49–51).

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