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"A Copernican Revolution": Lippmann, Dewey, and Object-Oriented Politics

The moment has arrived to speak of the importance of John Dewey and Walter Lippmann for Latour's recent political thought. Dewey hardly needs an introduction, since he is widely known as one of the most influential American philosophers of all time, and as someone with a lasting influence on the public life of the United States more generally. Lippmann is no longer as well known to academics outside political science, though in his prime he was a formidable author and journalist of international acclaim. We recall the following words from Latour in his 2007 exchange with Gerard de Vries:

> In contrast to [de Vries], I do not believe that returning to Aristotle is helpful … instead of Aristotle, let's turn to the pragmatists and especially John Dewey … [who], taking his cue from Walter Lippmann, [spoke of] "the problem of the public." Here is a Copernican Revolution of radical proportions: to finally make publics turn around topics that generate a public around them instead of trying to define politics *in the absence* of any issue. (RGDV 814–815)

It is no accident that Dewey and Lippmann should come up in this exchange. Latour and de Vries had recently served as co-directors of the 2005 University of Amsterdam doctoral thesis of one Noortje Marres, currently Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London.[1] In Chapter 2 of her dissertation, Marres dealt at some length with the Lippmann-Dewey debate in a way that clearly left a mark on Latour.[2] We find Marres cited in several of Latour's most interesting remarks on political philosophy. For instance, we read as follows in his response to de Vries: "Following Noortje Marres' reinterpretation of

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Dewey, de Vries redefines politics as neither a type of procedure nor a domain of life. Politics is not some essence; it is something that moves; it is something that has a trajectory" (RGDV 814). On the same page, Latour treats Marres's phrase "issues and their trajectories" as the equivalent of Lippmann's slogan "problem of the public" (RGDV 814). And we are already familiar with the following 2008 remark by Latour at the London School of Economics:

> Can I add one more thing? Because usually it's true, I mean this is a common thing in political philosophy, that reactionary thinkers are more interesting than the progressive ones [*Laughter*] in that you learn more about politics from people like Machiavelli and [Carl] Schmitt than from Rousseau. And the exceptions are extremely rare, like [Walter] Lippmann (an example I owe to Noortje [Marres]). (PW 96)

In *Modes*, in a series of closely related passages, Latour links both Marres and Lippmann to the politics of things. Here is his reference to Marres: "in the forceful slogan proposed by Noortje Marres: 'No issue, no politics!' It is thus above all because politics is always object-oriented—to borrow a term from information science—that it always seems to elude us" (AIME 337). And here is his reference to Lippmann: "It is for just this reason—Walter Lippmann may be the only person who really got it—that one can respect the ontological dignity of the political mode only by grasping it in the form of a phantom public to be invoked and convoked" (AIME 352). And here is where he speaks of things: "If politics has to be 'crooked' … its path is curved because on each occasion it turns around questions, issues, stakes, things—in the sense of *res publica*, the public *thing*—whose surprising consequences leave those who would rather hear nothing about them all mixed up" (AIME 337). But in some ways, the political turn to things was stated even more explicitly in the exchange with de Vries. As Latour put it there:

> Whatever the term one wishes to use—object, thing, gathering, concern—the key move is to make all definitions of politics turn around the issues instead of having the issues enter into a ready-made political sphere to be dealt with. First define how things turn the public into a problem, and only then try to render more precise what is political, which procedures should be put into place, how the various assemblies can reach closure, and so on. Such is the hard-headed *Dingpolitik* of STS as opposed to the human-centred *Realpolitik*. (RGDV 815)

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With the turn to *Dingpolitik*, we approach the state of the art in Latourian political philosophy. Latour escapes the dualism of Truth Politics and Power Politics by noting our basic political ignorance. But what are we ignorant *about*? We are ignorant about whatever issues or things arise in the republic, and it is precisely this ignorance about things that transforms the public. And further, Latour escapes the dualism of Left and Right by having no particular interest in the question of whether humans are basically improvable or unimprovable, since he is not especially interested in the topic of human nature at all. The ultimate fate of humans will result not from some durable inner nature, or from our basic equality or inequality with one another, but from our *attachments* to various things. Strum and Latour were able to outflank Hobbes quite early on by embedding nonhuman actors in the political sphere. More than 30 years later, what remains most characteristic of Latour as a political thinker is the unusually significant role he grants to objects or things. Let's turn now to Latour's 2005 essay contrasting *Dingpolitik* with *Realpolitik*, and follow it up with some discussion of Marres, Lippmann, and Dewey.

THE MEANING OF *DINGPOLITIK*

In 2005, Latour served as co-curator of the art exhibition "Making Things Public." This was the second of his two curated shows at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, which is also the home institution of two of Latour's most provocative friends: the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and the artist Peter Weibel. As with the first Karlsruhe show ("Iconoclash" in 2002) this one issued a handsomely illustrated catalog of essays,[3] in which Latour's introductory piece was entitled "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik." The reader will recall that the early Latour looked very much like an advocate of brass-knuckled *Realpolitik*. In 2005, however, he distances himself from the concept, now describing it as "a positive, materialist, no-nonsense, interest only, matter-of-fact way of dealing with naked power relations" (RD 4) and objecting that "[a]lthough this 'reality,' at the time of Bismarck, might have appeared as a welcome change after the cruel idealisms it aimed to replace, it strikes us now as deeply *unrealistic*" (RD 4). Throughout the present book, we have seen that Latour tends to call upon nonhuman things for assistance whenever he seems to be most in danger of advocating a free-for-all human power struggle. The present case is no exception. What Latour now proposes is literally a *Dingpolitik* to replace *Realpolitik*, with the added metaphor of an

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"object-oriented democracy." Latour equates objects with *issues* while also claiming that much modern political philosophy has made great effort to avoid all mention of objects, "from Hobbes to Rawls, from Rousseau to Habermas" (RD 5). Despite this being an art catalog essay, a number of other points of political philosophy are raised, including Latour's praise of Lippmann's "stunning book called *The Phantom Public*" (RD 28) and a passing nod to Lippmann's admiring critic Dewey. But for our purposes here, the most useful aspect of Latour's essay is its closing summary of seven key features of the proposed new *Dingpolitik* (RD 31). We proceed point by point, with a brief commentary on each:

1. "Politics is no longer limited to humans and incorporates the many issues to which they are attached." As we have seen, the attachment of humans to nonhuman actors has been a pivotal feature of Latour's politics (and ontology) since his earliest career, and is what most separates Latour from Machiavelli and Hobbes. It also separates him from his flamboyant contemporary Žižek, whose bare-bones modernist appeal to the innate equality of speaking human beings seems to leave no political role for our attachments to multiple things. Nonetheless, Žižek's well-known hatred of "beautiful soul" politics at least entails that political actors must place their bets and show their hands rather than pretending to be above all political dispute, and this is a point that Žižek shares with both Latour and Schmitt.
2. "Objects become things, that is, when matters of fact give way to their complicated entanglements and become matters of concern." Though the term "matters of concern" is of somewhat recent date in Latour's writings (born perhaps in the late 1990s), the concept it describes was a key element of his ontology from the earliest years, as can easily be seen if we rewrite "matters of concern" as "matters of *relation*." Unfortunately, Latour's objection to matters of fact is not aimed solely at the arrogance of those who claim to have direct access to them, but also against the notion that there could be autonomous facts at all outside how they are registered by or affect other things. The unfortunate aspect of this strategy is that it cannot address the chief problem with the Hobbesian legacy to which Latour is a mostly satisfied heir: the inability to appeal to any authority beyond the Leviathan itself. Although Latour's Leviathan is a distributed network of humans and nonhumans in which sovereignty does not reside in any one privileged point, it remains a network that leaves nothing entirely outside it. This poses a problem for Latour's claim to take account of

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a political "mini-transcendence" that would escape naked power plays by asking that the *polis* take account of previously neglected—though already networked—things.

3. "Assembling is no longer done under the already existing globe or dome of some earlier tradition of building virtual parliaments." Here we see the unfairness of critics who assume that Latour's distaste for the traditional Left entails a gradualist, reformist politics that would basically leave "neoliberalism" intact. Assembling will require entirely different instruments from the outdated ones at hand, as further emphasized by Latour's approving laughter at Sloterdijk's mocking notion of an inflatable "pneumatic parliament" for the recently invaded Iraq. (RD 7)
4. "The inherent limits imposed by speech impairment, cognitive weaknesses and all sorts of handicaps are no longer denied but prostheses are accepted instead." The target here seems to be the ideal speech situation advocated by Habermas, governed by inclusive rationality free from all forms of coercion. Given Latour's disagreement with the claim that rationality and coercion are utterly different in kind, the Habermasian model can only strike him as hopelessly *modern* in the bad sense of the term. The Latourian parliament must leave room for the "irrational" and for "power plays" no less than for ideal speech.
5. "It's no longer limited to properly speaking parliaments but extended to the many other assemblages in search of a rightful assembly." The reference here is not only to nonhuman actors, but also to humans who do not "speak" in the usual propositional sense of the term.
6. "The assembling is done under the provisional and fragile Phantom Public, which no longer claims to be equivalent to a Body, a Leviathan, or a State." The concept of the Phantom Public comes from Lippmann, of course. We will encounter it again shortly.
7. "And, finally, *Dingpolitik* may become possible when politics is freed from its obsession with the time of Succession." Recall that one of the pillars of Latour's critique of modernity was his distaste for any assumption that history proceeds from worse to better, with people gradually *believing* less and relying on *reason* to an increasing degree. For Latour as for his former teacher Michel Serres, time moves via spirals and eddies, forever reviving dead forms in new guise.

Keeping in mind these key features of *Dingpolitik*, we are ready to turn to Noortje Marres's innovative account of the Lippmann-Dewey debate.

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MARRES ON LIPPMANN AND DEWEY

Marres gives a good summary of her fresh reading of Lippmann and Dewey in Chapter 2 of her dissertation, and a somewhat less detailed one in Chapter 2 of her book *Material Participation*. It is well known that Dewey's political theory, spelled out most explicitly in his 1927 book *The Public and its Problems*, is greatly indebted to two works by Lippmann: *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1927). The two thinkers are often portrayed as polar opposites, as Marres describes:

> In such accounts, Lippmann represents the technocratic solution: he made the case that due to the complexity of current affairs governmental decision- and policy-making must have a strong component of expert advice, and allow for only a limited role for citizen consultations. This sobering argument is then contrasted with Dewey's radical proposal that the constraints on politics in technological societies precisely require an expansion of democracy.[4]

Against this usual view, Marres claims that there is "a striking similarity between the arguments developed by these two thinkers … Both Lippmann and Dewey conceptualized democratic politics as a particular practice of issue formation" (p.35). While other commentators have noted that the two philosophers partially agreed in their diagnosis of what was going wrong with American democracy at the time, Marres goes a step further, trying to show that they "also developed strikingly similar critiques of the modern *theory* of democracy … Lippmann and Dewey came to question the existing standards by which actually existing democracy is to be judged" (p.38). Lippmann was especially concerned with modern democracy's poor grasp of complex or mediated objects. Whether in wartime or at peace,

> it could not be assumed that the object of politics is known by those involved in public debate or political decision-making. It led Lippmann to make the following drastic inference: if it cannot be assumed that those involved in the debate have a good grasp of the affairs under discussion, then it cannot be expected that the opinions they form about them are pertinent. (pp.41–42)

In *Public Opinion* this led Lippmann to the verge of abandoning hope in democracy, though in *The Phantom Public* five years later his conclusions were not quite as grim (p.44). In the latter book, "Lippmann rejects the notion

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that for democracy to work … it is necessary that citizens are competent judges on public affairs and have access to high quality information … The emergence of a strange, unfamiliar, complex issue, he posits in *The Phantom Public*, is an *enabling* condition for democratic politics" (p.45). Since transparently accessible issues can be handled by existing institutions, they are less interesting and relevant for democracy than problems whose solution is less clear. "For Lippmann, public involvement in politics is thus sparked by the failure of existing social groupings and institutions to settle an issue. It is the *absence* of a community or institution that may deal with the issue that makes public involvement in politics a necessity. Because if the public doesn't adopt the issue, no one will" (p.47).

Lippmann had noted that the public's involvement in politics was not direct, but mediated by whatever indirect information it receives. "Dewey took over from Lippmann this notion that the relation between a public and its issues is secondary and indirect. But for Dewey the indirectness of this relationship does not prevent the public from being substantially implicated in the affair in question" (p.49). Indeed, many indirect political effects are highly significant ones, though they must be dealt with by different means than is the case with issues in which one is directly involved.

> As Dewey says, in these cases, if the issue is to be addressed, those who are jointly implicated in the issue *must organise* a community. What the members of a public share is that they are all affected by a particular affair, but they do not already belong to the same community: this is why they must also form a political community, if the issue that affects them is to be dealt with. (p.51)

Marres notes some backsliding on Dewey's part as *The Public and its Problems* progresses. Though early in the book he sticks to the notion that the community does not exist in advance but must be organized, in later chapters he seems to indicate that a shared community must exist beforehand: "Here, his earlier point—that a prime characteristic of the indirect consequences that call a public into being is that there is precisely no pre-existing community to settle the problems these consequences give rise to—is lost" (p.54). But Marres concludes that Dewey demands a pre-existing community only as a bulwark against the power of narrow private interests. "In this respect, it makes perfect sense that Dewey comes to posit a unified social community as a necessary condition for democracy. Such a community provides democracy with a location that can be successfully defended against the invasion of private interests, and

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it may provide the resources required to compel government to serve the public" (p.55). But Marres proposes that we downplay the usual focus on Dewey's concept of community, since "political democracy is *not* about the fulfillment that can be derived from participation in community life as such—that seems to me to be a moral challenge, not a political one. Political democracy is about taking care of the serious trouble in which those who do not necessarily share a way of life are collectively implicated" (p.56). Rather than a *moral* challenge, we might call community a *social* challenge, since for Marres the distinction between the social and the political is no less important than it is for Latour himself. Marres continues: "I want to emphasise that Dewey's account of the public's genesis suggests that members of political communities are not in [the] first instance connected by way of shared or opposing opinions and interests, but by issues" (p.57). Since issues often put "actors' whole being at stake" (p.58), Marres wittily notes that

> a public as it is organized around affairs may be most appropriately defined as a community of strange things. This elaboration of the Deweyian public also points towards another reason why it must not be understood as a sociable collective. Not only can a political community not be equated with a social community, the event in which modes of living prove irreconcilable [as between vegetarians and Kansas agribusiness splicing pig genes into tomatoes] is not exactly a situation that invites a leisurely exchange among those involved. (pp.58–59)

Since even the public cannot settle an issue directly and without mediation, "the solution that Dewey proposed as part of his theory of the state is … [that] the principal way in which a public can assure that an issue is dealt with is by *acquiring* the resources to do so. The task of a public is thus no less than to assemble an institutional arrangement that will allow the settlement of affairs" (p.59), a task that Dewey described as nothing less than "the discovery of the state."

The problem, as Marres sees it, is that "Lippmann and Dewey have surprisingly little to say about the *process* by which a public gets organized. In their writings, the public has a tendency to appear (and disappear) instantaneously" (pp.60–61). But they do tell us something very important in the negative sense, by forbidding the public to be treated as some sort of abstraction: "In their critiques of the Rousseauist assumption that only an abstract, general entity can perform public acts, Lippmann and Dewey emphasise that actual people or groups of people perform the role of the

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public" (p.61). And further, "both Lippmann and Dewey emphasised that actually existing individuals do the work of the public. Lippmann didn't tire of pointing out that a public can only be ascribed agency insofar as individual actors influence the course of an affair, by aligning themselves for or against the protagonists in the affair (which again are individual actors)" (p.63). Yet Dewey leaves us with a tension between what seems to be two different publics, "referring both to the set of actors that are affected by an issue, and to the set of actors who organize themselves so as to assure that the issue is addressed" (p.62). The danger of this ambiguity is that it suggests a "correspondence" model in which the public that gets organized is asymptotically obliged to match its membership as closely as possible with the public that is affected, when in fact it is never fully clear either at the beginning or the end of a political process who is affected by an issue and how. The political circle that Latour borrows from the pragmatists cannot function if the political actors and their goals pre-exist the process of forming a public around an issue.

The novelty of Marres's reading of the two figures becomes clear at the end of the chapter. As for Dewey, "it is somewhat ironic that Dewey's work is frequently mobilised in support of the definition of democracy as deliberative procedure … For Dewey, democratic politics could not be made sense of if the content of politics—the contingent but vital problems that it addresses and the settlement that is sought for them—was left out of account" (p.66). More briefly put, Dewey does not just philosophize about speaking and deliberating humans, but also about the objects that mediate human interaction, and thus for our purposes he can be treated as a kind of proto-Latour. And as for Lippmann, it hardly makes sense to read him in the usual manner as a technocrat, since much like Latour, Lippmann does not think the needed technocratic knowledge is attainable in the first place: hence, no Truth Politics for Lippmann. In the words of Marres, "Lippmann rejects the idea that adequate knowledge is a necessary condition for democracy … [He] adds that it is precisely under conditions of imperfect knowledge that we must engage in democratic politics" (pp.66–67).

Marres assesses the situation in her book *Material Participation* by saying that "the writings of John Dewey and Walter Lippmann develop a particular conception of the public as organized by material means, one which suggests that the material public is best understood as an *inherently* problematic formation."[5] Unlike many uses of the term "material" that merely employ it as a thin alibi for a thoroughly human-centric theory, Marres means this word in a truly object-centered sense. As she puts

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it, "the notion of the problematic situation … is *not* an epistemological concept, according to which the problematicness of a situation would have to be understood as an artefact of it being 'perceived' or 'seen' as such. Rather, it foregrounds a kind of 'ontological trouble,'" to use Steve Woolgar's phrase (p.44). Stated even more plainly, "in [Dewey's] account, phenomena like clash and conflict, lack and need, loss and satisfaction, are most productively approached as dynamics that unfold 'on the plane of objects.'" Dewey holds that far from having an alienating effect on us poor disenchanted humans, the spread of technology leads to a "radical *multiplication* and excess" of publics. As Marres concisely puts it: "the joint implication of actors in problematic arrangements, technological, material, natural and otherwise, secures the proliferation of the entanglements called public" (p.46). Lippmann would surely approve of such entanglements, since he "explicitly challenged … a 'horror of things' in modern democratic theory" (p.49). Marres is at pains to emphasize that "pragmatist theories of democracy in technological societies bring into view a material public that clearly differs from the object-centred publics that are associated with scientific liberalism" (p.55). These supposed object-centered theories are really nothing more than problem-solving technocracies of the sort called for by Karl Popper—theories that lose all sense of our permanent *ignorance* of the object and its impermeability by adequate knowledge. Moreover, there was a longstanding tendency among liberals to associate objects with science and therefore with consensus, such that all conflict and disagreement could only fall on the *human* side of the spectrum. But by turning the object from an epistemological object into an object of dispute, the pragmatism of the Marres variety closely approaches the theory of Latour. But Marres also seems to approach the views of Chantal Mouffe, who "shows that it is both possible to approach publics as taking form on the 'plane of objects' and to grant a formative role to dynamics of 'strife and conflict' in democracy" (p.57). Though it is not clear to me that Mouffe is as object-oriented a thinker as Latour, we saw earlier that she and Latour draw similar lessons from Schmitt, in a way that would make a full-blown Latour-Mouffe dialogue an intriguing prospect.

LIPPMANN, DEWEY, AND LATOUR

We now cite the following important passage from Latour for a fourth and final time:

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> instead of Aristotle, let's turn to the pragmatists and especially John Dewey … [who], taking his cue from Walter Lippmann, [spoke of] "the problem of the public." Here is a Copernican Revolution of radical proportions: to finally make publics turn around topics that generate a public around them instead of trying to define politics *in the absence* of any issue. (RGDV 814–815)

Latour is so consistently critical of Kant's metaphor of the Copernican Revolution, and so dismissive of the modern adjective "radical," that we have to take notice when he uses these terms in a rare positive spirit. Though Latour denies that Kant pulled off the purifying revolution in the history of philosophy with which so many scholars credit him, he nonetheless grants Copernican status to the following political principle: "to finally make publics turn around topics that generate a public around them instead of trying to define politics *in the absence* of any issue." Since Latour uses "object" and "thing" as synonyms for "issue," let's rewrite the principle as follows: "Here is a Copernican Revolution of radical proportions: to finally make publics turn around objects that generate a public around them instead of trying to define politics *in the absence* of any object." Latour's call for an object-oriented politics is meant to remove politics from the domain of purely human interactions, a career-long strategy that Peer Schouten detected in Latour and Strum's remark that humans rise beyond baboons largely by way of nonhuman mediators. We recall Latour's amusing words from his 1996 article "On Interobjectivity": "while I am at the counter buying my postage stamps and talking into the speaking grill, I don't have family, colleagues, or bosses breathing down my neck. And, thank heavens, the server doesn't tell me stories about his mother-in-law, or his darlings' teeth" (INT 233). To use the increasingly archaic terms of modern philosophy, politics has more to do with the object than with the subject. This is not because stones and neutrons deserve to have votes or seats in Parliament, but because politics is not about human power struggles any more than science is about direct access to the real.

When Marres speaks of "issues and their trajectories," we can also think of the synonymous phrase "objects and their trajectories." Politics requires the existence of such objects. As Latour puts it: "Following Noortje Marres' reinterpretation of Dewey, de Vries redefines politics as neither a type of procedure nor a domain of life. Politics is not some essence; it is something that moves; it is something that has a trajectory" (RGDV 814). Perhaps the most interesting thing that Latour ever said about

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trajectories came in 2007 when he introduced the spectrum running from "Political-1" through "Political-5." Let's again replace the word "issues" with its synonym "objects" and see what Latour can tell us: "In the same way as stars in astronomy are only stages in a series of transformations that astronomers have learned to map, objects offer up many different aspects depending on where they are in their life histories." As we saw, objects for Latour generally pass in a series from vague background concerns (Political-1) to nascent problems for the public (Political-2), to the locus of sovereign intervention (Political-3), to the sphere of explicit political debate and problem solving (Political-4), and finally to banal problems of governance (Political-5). Naturally, the reverse movement is also possible, though surely not as common. The widespread fluoridation of drinking water in the United States was initially opposed by some as a communist plot, was later transformed into a fairly banal public health measure criticized mostly in the conspiracy theories of cranks, and is now once again under fire from a growing number of respected physicians. To summarize, fluoridation passed from Political-3 to Political-5, but has now probably moved back to the stage of Political-4. Much the same thing happened in the United States with the circumcision of male infants, which was viewed for decades as standard neonatal practice before later coming under fire as an industry too lucrative and unnecessary to be trusted. In this case, circumcision reversed course in much the same way as fluoridation, moving upstream in salmon-like fashion from Political-5 to Political-4. There are even numerous examples of Political-5 issues swimming against the stream all the way back to Political-3 as objects of sovereign intervention, such as alcohol in the United States during Prohibition. Whether an object can travel backwards as far as Political-2 or Political-1 seems more dubious, but perhaps some examples could be found. In any case, the trajectory of life stages of a political issue is surely one of Latour's most fascinating loose ends, though one that we must now leave aside in favor of a brief return to Lippmann and Dewey.

Perhaps the most interesting idea in Lippmann's *The Phantom Public* is that each issue/object generates a new public, instead of the same grey anonymous mass weighing in foolishly on every possible topic. This actually provides some grounds for optimism, since it eliminates the ridiculous expectation that the good democratic citizen must be informed about everything, and hence does not make democracy look like a massive failure every time someone loses touch with an issue. This topic causes especial distress in America, which still assumes it is supposed to educate its citizens for self-government, though "realistic political thinkers in

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Europe long ago abandoned the notion that the collective mass of the people directs the course of public affairs."[6] Speaking of a school text he had recently read, Lippmann objects that "the author of the textbook, touching on everything, as he thinks, from city sewers to Indian opium, misses a decisive fact: the citizen gives but a little of his time to public affairs" (p.14). The unfortunate reader of such a book

> cannot know about everything all the time, and while he is watching one thing a thousand others undergo great changes. Unless he can discover some rational ground for fixing his attention where it will do the most good, and in a way that suits his inherently amateurish equipment, he will be as bewildered as a puppy trying to lick three bones at once. (p.15)

Even Lippmann himself, one of the best-informed journalists of his era, cannot possibly live up to the official mandate of the democratic citizen: "for, although public business is my main interest and I give most of my time to watching it, I cannot find time to do what is expected of me in the theory of democracy; that is, to know what is going on and have an opinion worth expressing on every question which confronts a self-governing community" (p.10). Stated differently, "when we remember that the public consists of busy men reading newspapers for half an hour or so a day, it is not heartless but merely prudent to deny that it can do detailed justice" (p.109). The best one can possibly do as a student is to develop a general intellectual attitude and learn to notice a basic *pattern* in human affairs. However, "that pattern cannot be invented by the pedagogue. It is the political theorist's business to trace out that pattern. In that task he must not assume that the mass has political genius, but that men, even if they had genius, would give only a little time and attention to public affairs" (p.17). Here Lippmann shows an awareness of human ignorance at least as far-reaching as Latour's own. The various despairing efforts to produce well-informed democratic citizens actually have no right to despair, since they are hobbled solely by their own choice of a false ideal:

> I do not mean an undesirable ideal. I mean an unattainable ideal, bad only in the sense that it is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer. An ideal should express the true possibilities of its subject. When it does not it perverts the true possibilities. The ideal of the omnicompetent, sovereign citizen is, in my opinion, such a false ideal. (p.29)

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In fact, our limited range of ability does not just pertain to politics, but extends to every aspect of our lives:

> The farmer decides whether to plant wheat or corn, the mechanic whether to take the job offered at the Pennsylvania or the Erie shops, whether to buy a Ford or a piano, and, if a Ford, whether to buy it from the garage on Elm Street or from the dealer who sent him a circular. These decisions are among fairly narrow choices offered to him; he can no more choose among all the jobs in the world than he can consider marrying any woman in the world. (p.35)

The public is made up of millions of such people, all of them only slightly more ignorant than their leaders and their sharpest public-affairs journalists. Abstractly pasting all such people together in a single amorphous blob called the public does not create a higher unity, as some philosophers have held. As Lippmann puts it, "the making of one general will out of many is not an Hegelian mystery, as so many social philosophers have imagined, but an art well known to leaders, politicians, and steering committees" (p.37). There is no genuine mass, but only what Lippmann calls a "deep pluralism."

> Against this deep pluralism thinkers have argued in vain. They have invented social organisms and national souls, and oversouls, and collective souls; they have gone for hopeful analogies to the beehive and the anthill, to the solar system, to the human body; they have gone to Hegel for higher unities and to Rousseau for a general will in an effort to find some basis of union … We, however, no longer expect to find a unity which absorbs diversity. (pp.87–88)

This leads Lippmann to a conclusion that is not as cynical as it looks. "Before a mass of general opinions can eventuate in executive action, the choice is narrowed down to a few alternatives. The victorious alternative is executed not by the mass but by individuals in control of its energy" (p.38). Lippmann continues the theme: "We must abandon the notion that the people govern. Instead we must adopt the theory that, by their occasional mobilization as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally" (pp.51–52). And hence "it is idle, then, to argue that though men evidently have conflicting purposes, mankind has some all-embracing purpose of which you or I happen to the

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be the authorized spokesman. We merely should have moved in a circle were we to conclude that the public is in some deep way a messianic force" (p.57). Instead, "the ideal of public opinion is to align men during the crisis of a problem in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis" (p.58). Stated differently, "it is the function of public opinion to check the use of force in a crisis, so that men, driven to make terms, may live and let live" (p.64).

Lippmann now touches base with the title of his book, which Marres showed us was borrowed from Kierkegaard. Against "the belief that there is a public which directs the course of events[,] I hold that this public is a mere phantom" (p.67). The idea is strikingly simple: "The public in respect to a railroad strike may be the farmers whom the railroad serves; the public in respect to an agricultural tariff may include the very railroad men who were on strike. The public is not, as I see it, a fixed body of individuals. It is merely those persons who are interested in an affair and can affect it only by supporting or opposing the actors." He picks up the theme once more in Chapter 10:

> the membership of the public is not fixed. It changes with the issue: the actors in one affair are the spectators of another, and men are continually passing back and forth between the field where they are executives and the field where they are members of a public … [though] there is [also] a twilight zone where it is hard to say whether a man is acting executively on his opinions or merely acting to influence the opinion of someone else who is acting executively. (p.100)

Or again, "the random collection of bystanders who constitute a public could not, even if they had a mind to, intervene in all the problems of the day" (p.115). Not infrequently, they are in fact called upon to intervene. For when it is a question of "the hardest controversies to disentangle … the public is called in to judge. Where the facts are most obscure, where precedents are lacking, where novelty and confusion pervade everything, the public in all its unfitness is compelled to make its most important decisions. The hardest problems are those which institutions cannot handle. They are the public's problems" (p.121). Despite Lippmann's passing reference to "the random collection of bystanders who form a public," the public is no random or even universal collection of humans, but a specifically different group in the case of each issue that arises. They are there, Lippmann said, for "the hardest problems … which institutions cannot handle." His sparring partner Dewey will soon tell us that the

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public's task is precisely to create new institutions capable of handling such problems. If Lippmann represents the moment in Latour's *Politics of Nature* known as "taking into account," Dewey tells us a bit more about the complementary moment of "putting in order."

Dewey clarifies the nature of a public (deliberately in the singular) in the following terms: "the essence of the consequences which call a public into being is the fact that they expand beyond those directly engaged in producing them."[7] For this reason, "special agencies and measures must be formed if they are to be attended to; or else some existing group must take on new functions" (p.54). This all-important task is broader and more difficult than it sounds, since there is constant tension between the need to have new institutions to deal with new consequences, and the resistance of the already existing institutions:

> The new public which is generated remains long inchoate, unorganized, because it cannot use inherited political agencies. The latter, if elaborate and well institutionalized, obstruct the organization of the new public. They prevent that development of new forms of the state which might grow up rapidly were social life more fluid, less precipitated into set political and legal molds … The public which generated political forms is passing away, but the power and lust of possession remains in the hands of the officers and agencies which the dying public instituted. This is why the change of the form of states is so often effected only by revolution … By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be remade. (p.56)

Dewey continues to emphasize the *experimental* aspect of politics:

> In concrete fact, in actual and concrete organization and structure, there is no form of state which can be said to be the best; not at least till history is ended, and one can survey all its varied forms … And since conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, the experiment must always be retried; the State must always be rediscovered. (p.57)

An important related idea of Dewey's, thoroughly pragmatist in flavor, is the notion that we should not waste time looking for the supposed causal origins of the state, but should simply look to its consequences. "The wrong place to look … is in the realm of alleged causal agency,

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of authorship, of forces, which are supposed to produce a state by an intrinsic *vis genetrix*" (p.60). Critiquing Hegel by name, Dewey adds that "the notion of an inherent universality in the associative force at once breaks against the fact of an obvious plurality of states, each localized, with its boundaries, limitations, its indifference and even hostility to other states" (p.61). This leads him to make the humorous aside that "it is peculiar, to say the least, that universal reason should be unable to cross a mountain range and objective will be balked by a river current" (p.63). It follows that "only the theory which makes recognition of consequences the critical factor can find in the fact of many states a corroborating trait." And yet, "in spite of the fact that diversity of political forms rather than uniformity is the rule, belief in *the* state as an archetypal entity persists in political philosophy and science" (p.64). Dewey finds this regrettable, since "the attempt to find by the 'comparative method' structures which are common to antique and modern, to occidental and oriental states, has involved a great waste of industry" (p.65). At times it has even led to outright metaphysical extravagance, with Hegel again prominent among Dewey's targets:

> The next dialectical conclusion is that the will … is something over and above any private will or any collection of such wills: is some overriding "general will." This conclusion was drawn by Rousseau, and under the influence of German metaphysics was erected into a dogma of a mystic and transcendent absolute will … The alternative to one or other of these conclusions is surrender of the causal authorship theory and the adoption of that of widely distributed consequences. (p.69)

Both Lippmann and Dewey view the public in local and transient terms, as formed by some novel issue/object that existing institutions are not equipped to handle. Latour's point of agreement with these authors is easy to see. Politics is not a purely human realm of power plays and language games, but results from the hybrid crossing of humans with things: one of the major themes of all of Latour's work, not just his political writings. Since even experts cannot fully sound the depths of things, let alone those non-experts who are affected or concerned by a given issue, ignorance lies at the basis of all human action. This is what links both Latour and Lippmann with Socrates, despite Latour's misreading of Socrates as an epistemology policeman, and Lippmann's misreading of Socrates as holding that virtue means knowledge[8] (precisely the opposite of what we learn from Plato's *Meno*).

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The real question, we have seen, is whether Latour and Lippmann have *sufficient* respect for ignorance. Though Latour is fully convincing when he calls his politics object-oriented, simply recall what Latour and Dewey think objects to be. For Latour they are actants defined by their effects and relations rather than by some essential nature held in reserve; for Dewey, objects are consequences rather than hidden causal powers. In both cases we are in the orbit of pragmatism, which as a philosophy is respectable enough. However, the whole point of bringing objects into politics was to counter the widespread model of empty power plays without transcendent standards. Latour addressed this drawback of his early position by gradually building up the middle-Latour notion of "mini-transcendence" (in *Politics of Nature*) and finally the late-Latour claim that his entire philosophy is governed by an overarching morality (in *Modes*). But nothing can really be transcendent if it is stipulated to consist of its current effects, or even of the sum of its possible effects. Replacing the power play among humans with a power play distributed between things and humans merely displaces and retains the political dominance of power, and gives us no sense of what humans and things really are when *not* deployed in some relational network. As Leo Strauss might have put it, if only he had been on our side: "In principle, however, it is always possible to reach agreement regarding the effects of an object that is already fixed, whereas there is always quarreling over the objects themselves: we are always quarreling with ourselves only over what objects are."

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