Caring for Publics

How Media Contribute to Issue Politics

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Academic writing is often referred to as an activity that takes place in an imaginary ivory tower, secluded from practical concerns. Having completed this thesis, I find the image of a white and tranquil tower quite misleading. The experience of authoring a doctoral dissertation is better captured by comparing it with a wholly different kind of tower – the golden one found in Tivoli, Copenhagen's old amusement park. Before taking a ride in the golden tower, you are filled with expectation. Then you are suddenly in free fall and the experience gets quite uncomfortable. Afterwards, however, you almost want to do it all over again.

I wish to thank a number of people for organizing such a ride for me. First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Torben Elgaard Jensen for his unflinching support and belief in me and my project. Without his advice and encouragement, I am convinced the ride would have been much rougher. I also wish to thank my two co-supervisors, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Noortje Marres, for taking an interest in me and my project. Both were generous with their time and offered crucial disturbances to my work.

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Andreas Birkbak
Copenhagen, January 2016

English Summary

The subject of this dissertation is how media contribute to the unfolding of public engagement with issue politics. The introduction outlines the nested problems of publics, media and issues. I suggest something of a puzzle, i.e., that the media can be seen as crucial for democratic politics as well as a threat to such politics. The introduction suggests adopting a pragmatist approach to the problem, and draws on John Dewey, Walter Lippmann and recent work in science and technology studies (STS). I argue that the pragmatist approach on the one hand helps avoid a problem with Habermasian approaches that adopt an ideal and fixed notion of public debate that is not issue-specific. On the other hand, I also argue that the pragmatist approach avoids the media studies problem of attributing deterministic effects to media. As an alternative, the pragmatist approach formulates an empirical examination of the (issue-)specific work and contributions of particular media. I suggest that these contributions may be conceptualized as a ”caring” for publics, where media are studied as part of an ongoing tinkering with issue articulations and how to organize publics in relation to issues.

Following this approach, the empirical component of the thesis comprises a comparative investigation of two media, specifically a newspaper and a social media website. These objects of study are motivated in Chapter 2, which argues that even though Dewey and Lippmann attached great importance to the role of media in issue politics, recent work in STS inspired by these authors tends to assume that some kind of media publicity is available, yet leaves publicity media understudied. Chapter 3 discusses some of the key analytical challenges raised by studying media in relation to issues. It argues for the notion of devices as useful for taking into account how media dynamics are intertwined with issue dynamics, and how the media are not conveyors of publics but performative of publics and issues. At the same time, the Chapter points to the challenge of taking into account the ontological politics of assigning different domains and roles to different media devices, as in ”news” media and ”social” media. This challenge is particularly important in relation to controversial issues, where what counts as social or news are part of what is at stake, as illustrated by a recent

controversy over congestion charges in Copenhagen. This congestion charge issue serves as an empirical case throughout the thesis.

Addressing the challenge of the ontological politics of media devices, the two first empirical chapters (4 and 5) trace the roles that two large and influential media devices are assigned in relation to issue politics. Chapter 4 traces the shift of the Copenhagen congestion charges controversy from a policy setting to a news media setting; it argues that news media are not only associated with generating a public, but also constitute a setting that assumes a rather generic public agenda to exist externally from issues. Chapter 5 shifts focus to the social media site Facebook as an interesting contrast to the traditional news media, because issues on Facebook constitute a vantage point for public engagement. However, the Chapter argues that viewing Facebook primarily as a vehicle for gathering authentic public engagement tends to overlook the contributions of Facebook to the articulation and development of issues.

The two last empirical Chapters (6 and 7) seek to push beyond the division of roles between social and news media traced in Chapters 4 and 5 by pursuing a more praxiographic account of the two media devices by articulating some of the practices that tend to be overlooked at each site. Chapter 6 examines the discursive exchanges on the Facebook pages devoted to the congestion charge issue, and argues that what goes on here is not the delivery of some kind of pre-given social take on the issue, but the careful construction of an issue-specific public that is also very much an intervention into the substance of the issue. Facebook has become part of the media's intervention into what is newsworthy, which is no longer the exclusive privilege of the traditional news media. Chapter 7 pursues this analysis of current media practices further by shifting focus to a specific news medium, the major Danish newspaper *Politiken* and its recent launch of a so-called School of Debate and Critique. This is an opportunity to investigate how news media work hard to stage sociality and thus contribute to the articulation of new issues and new publics, rather than keeping an arm's-length relationship to a public debate that is assumed to exist externally.

Chapter 8 returns to the questions raised in the opening chapters. It argues that if we are interested in issue politics and public engagement in politics as something that is closely intertwined with problematic issues, we need to rethink the role of media devices as crucial parts of the ongoing tinkering with articulating issues and publics that issue politics requires rather than devices that clear up issues through publicity. I argue that a comparative perspective on multiple media contributions is key here, and discuss the notion of caring for publics as a way to approach media practices.

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1. Introduction

I am sitting on a black folding chair in a large room with about 150 other people. There does not seem to be a single empty seat. Most of us are strangers to each other, but we are all young. The majority of us appear to be in our twenties. The space is buzzing with excitement. To get into this room, we all had to queue up on the street outside, spilling onto the road at times, and then have our names checked against a long list in order for the security guard to admit us.

Is this a university lecture? A social movement gathering? No, the room and the complex of buildings in which it is located belong to a newspaper called *Politiken*. It is one of the biggest and oldest daily newspapers in Denmark, and it has resided at this address for a long time. The location is not random. The corner office of the editor-in-chief overlooks the central square in front of the Copenhagen City Hall. The feeling of intensity in the room is mirrored by the intensity of the busy city center right outside.

Our particular room in the newspaper's offices has a stage with 150 chairs facing it. Fruit, coffee, sandwiches and soft drinks are available. There is a projector, and there are microphones. For one semester, we will sit in this room every second Wednesday for about three hours, listening to speakers and eating fruit, because we are enrolled in what *Politiken* calls its new "School of Debate and Critique" ("Debattør- og kritikerskolen" in Danish). At this point, we do not know much about the school and what we are about to go through together, but we do know we are supposed to learn about debate and critique and newspaper writing.

The room calms down and waits. The editor-in-chief of *Politiken* takes the stage and welcomes us, saying that he is very happy to see us. He then announces: "We want to be more than a newspaper." What could this mean? His use of "we" refers to *Politiken*, obviously. But what about us? There are now two "We's" in the room. The first one is *Politiken*, the second one is us: 150 young people. We, the second we, are here because of the objective of the first we, *Politiken*, to be "more than a newspaper."

Tonight this is true. Politiken has invited 150 young people into its halls and made itself into a sort of school, in addition to being a newspaper.

The number 150 is not random, a factor I return to later. But for now, I want to stick to the newspaper's stated objective to be "more than a newspaper." For *Politiken,* it is apparently not enough to be a newspaper with journalists and editors, printers and distributors. It apparently also needs to gather together people who read the newspaper and contribute to public debate by writing letters to the editor. The *Politiken* School indicates a willingness to invest in such practices.

Politiken's new school is relevant here, because the aim of this thesis is to challenge what can be expected of publicity media, including newspapers. Part of this challenge is to raise the question of what constitutes the notion of publicity. Since Kant, publicity has been associated with the production of rationality and morality through open discourse (Chambers 2000; Kant 1963), a concept that Habermas (1989) turned into a question for sociology and media studies. Certainly, news media like newspapers have been closely associated with the unfolding of critical publicity in modern democracies.

The belief in publicity as a rationalizing and morally superior force in democratic countries is also part of *Politiken*'s understanding of itself (Bredal 2009). At the same time, its school event suggests that there is a practical question of exactly who can be integrated into critical newspaper publicity. Such issues have not escaped social theory. Habermas's concept of a public sphere of open and rational deliberation does not lack critics, who have pointed out that even if the public sphere is claimed to be open and universal, it comes with many exclusions – not least of workers (Negt and Kluge 1993), women (Fraser 1990), and things (Latour 2004).

While the notion that a public sphere cannot be taken for granted is certainly not new, less attention has been paid to the work that goes into achieving some sort of publicity in practice, however fragile and imperfect it may be (Couldry 2008; Gillespie, Boczkowski, and Foot 2014; Schudson 2003; Tuchman 1978). Yet, the *Politiken* school experiment could also be taken to suggest that there are not just

questions of exclusion from public spheres, there are also questions of how to bring about some sort of participation into publicity at all. Such an observation suggests that publicity is not only a problem of expanding the circulation of rational discourse among strangers, it is also a problem of enrolling participants and qualifying them as "publics." *Politiken* had to deal with such questions to create their school, which makes it an interesting case study that I explore in order to understand what is at stake when publicity is performed in practice.

If such practices are sometimes overlooked or taken for granted, Peters (1999) proposes that the notion of communication may be part of the reason. At the one extreme, the notion of communication expresses a dream of the undistorted transfer of ideas. At the other extreme, the notion of communication points to the impossibility of such transfer. The notion then invokes an unbridgeable gap between people who are stuck inside their individual worlds and unable to fully understand each other. As Peters (1999:12) demonstrates, "communication" became a popular term at the beginning of the 20th century, when scholars were fascinated and troubled by the dichotomy of telepathy versus solipsism. The result of such an understanding of the problem of communication, Peters argues, is that the challenge of finding a middle ground is easily overlooked:

> Too often, "communication" misleads us from the task of building worlds together. It invites us into a world of unions without politics, understandings without language, and souls without bodies, only to make politics, language, and bodies reappear as obstacles rather than blessings. (Peters 1999:30-31)

Instead of associating communication with a dream of overcoming such obstacles entirely, Peters (1999:263) suggests that "communication is a trouble we are stuck with." One of my goals in this thesis is to address this "trouble" by focusing not on public spheres as spaces of free communication that can then be revealed by critical social science as either power mechanisms or naively idealistic. Instead, I focus on the inherent difficulties of bringing about things that are referred to as publics in the first place.

Inspired by *Politiken*'s school, I propose that publicity media are interesting to study because they deal with such problems in practice. However, in order to capture this, it is necessary to avoid evaluating media based on an understanding of publicity as an ideal form of undistorted communication. This is an understanding that can only be found lacking in practice. To do this, I take a comparative approach, highlighting how publicity can be pursued in practice by different means and ideas. Aside from the *Politiken* School, I also present a case study of how Facebook pages became part of the answer to dealing with publicity and the assembly of publics in practice.

However, a comparative approach to media comes with the risk of technological determinism. Media scholars of the Toronto school are a key example here, including McLuhan's famous focus on the medium as the message (McLuhan 1964). Technological determinism focuses on how particular media forms introduce biases to communication (Innis 1951). To be sure, empirical media research has challenged technological determinism, not least by paying attention to the domestication of media by users (Haddon 2004; Silverstone and Hirsch 1992) or by focusing on how different media types are increasingly mixed and intertwined today, (Chadwick 2013), making it harder to pinpoint distinct media "effects". Nevertheless, when it comes to questions of politics and democracy, the media continues to be cast in terms of new and old (Jenkins and Thorburn 2003), which risks extending a technological determinist assumption that new media technologies will fundamentally change how publicity and public participation works (Woolgar 2002).

Drawing on research in Science and Technology Studies (Gillespie et al. 2014), and more particularly actor network theory (Latour and Callon 1981; Law 1994), I seek to develop an approach that does not side with either technological determinism or theoretical idealism in the study of media and publicity. A key point here is to pay attention to how media are linked up with certain qualities in practice and focus on how such associations may have important consequences without assuming that there is anything inevitable about these relationships (Callon 1986). For instance, a newspaper like *Politiken* may claim that it furnishes an open public debate, but events such as the School of Critique and Debate can be studied to examine the costs and

difficulties of establishing such a link to public debate in practice. Similarly, new digital media like Facebook may be associated with a more spontaneous and bottom-up version of public debate (Castells 2008; Dahlgren 2013), but occasions when Facebook pages are used to protest something can be studied to investigate the challenges and opportunities of connecting social media with politics in practice. Such an approach builds on the STS argument that controversies offer opportunities for researchers that wish to explore how associations are made in practice. (Collins 1981; Latour 1996; Pinch 1981).

Throughout this thesis, I draw on a recent controversy over congestion charges in order to connect publicity media with their practical use in relation to issues. The contentious issue was whether to introduce congestion charges in the Danish capital of Copenhagen through the construction of a so-called 'payment ring' around the city center (*betalingsring* in Danish) as a mechanism for charging motorists as they pass in and out of the city. The payment ring controversy activated various concerns and had several facets, as I discuss below, but for now I wish to note how the role of media was also briefly discussed during the controversy. Consider this excerpt from a blog post by a journalist at the political analysis magazine, *Monday Morning*:

> The payment ring is secondary in this case. What is of real interest is the far bigger problem that the media have, namely their intrinsic conservatism in relation to big societal transformations. The inclination to a one-sided focus on problems, conflicts and negative angles means that when our world is changing, and large reforms must be implemented, for instance, then these are automatically met with resistance. All editorial powers are used on finding the hair in the soup rather than tasting it. (Meilstrup 2012a)[1]

This blog post was written as a reaction to the official decision in February 2012 to drop the payment ring project after around six months of heated media controversy.

[1] Translated by me from the original Danish, as is the case for all such quotes that follow.

But while motivated by this particular event, the blog post also makes a general point: it asked what the role is of media in a world where complicated rearrangements of our societies are deemed to be necessary. The journalist's answer is that news media no longer make a constructive contribution. The news media are "in deep crisis," according to Meilstrup, not just because their audiences have moved elsewhere, but also because they offer a "chronic negativity and resistance to change" in a world that has come to be all about change (ibid.).

In order to counter the negativity of the news media he observed in the payment ring controversy, Meilstrup mobilized social media. In another blog post, he surveyed Facebook for resistance to the introduction of congestion charges – a resistance he claimed the news media had implied was abundant. On Facebook, he found five "larger protest pages" (Meilstrup 2012b). He noted how one page had 1893 "likes," another 1326 "likes" and a third had 557 "likes." These numbers did not impress the journalist, who knew that in relation to other issues, Facebook protest pages had grown to the size of tens of thousands of likes. Furthermore, he also found a pro-payment ring Facebook page with 1093 likes. Meilstrup concluded that there was no "public uprising" taking place against congestion charges in Copenhagen. This was based not only on his Facebook observations, but also on public opinion polls with mixed results and online petitions that had failed to attract large numbers of signatures against the payment ring project (ibid.).

The rejection of the value of news media and the turn to social media is interesting. It suggests that the value of the kind of critical debate that news media, including *Politiken* and its school, are pursuing can sometimes seem to be at odds with the development of solutions to a complicated problem like congestion that has been associated with larger issues such as pollution, work time efficiency, and climate change. In this particular case, the journalist found that the news media that he was himself a part of and their commitment to critical publicity was far from progressive in practice, because the news media focused on all the potential problems and negative angles of a project that could perhaps have improved life in Copenhagen had it been implemented.

Some editors-in-chief rejected the critique, stating that they did the right thing by being critical and that they reflected the debate as it was (*Politiken* 2012a). The point here is not to decide who is right, but to note how a controversial issue like a payment ring can make it unclear what effects publicity media have and how their contributions can be understood (Marres 2015).

This example illustrates a similar uncertainty with respect to social media. Based on the rejection of news media publicity, social media came to act as a reality check for Meilstrup: Facebook became a laboratory for determining what the Danish public really cared about. While Meilstrup claimed that the news media was suffering from a media-specific bias that influenced the congestion charges issue in a negative way, Facebook could suddenly be understood as offering a more direct access to how people felt about the issue. Such claims about social media are not limited to Meilstrup, but quite a widespread today. For example, a recent issue of *Monday Morning* stated, "democracy has moved to social media" (*Mandag Morgen* 2015:1).

These initial observations suggest that when publicity media are connected with their practical use in relation to controversial problems, questions are raised about not only how various media differ, but also how they interfere with each other in interesting ways. Here are opportunities for empirical research to move beyond theoretical oppositions between social media and news media and trace their intertwined particularities instead. Furthermore, these initial observations suggest why this matters, because there are difficult questions of where to draw the boundary between issue substance and controversies about media publics. As such, it matters a great deal exactly how the media and their supposed effects are conceptualized and studied.

Studying media from a device perspective

The question whether democracy happens through social media or news media does not have to be decided once and for all. From an ANT perspective, it is more interesting to examine what, in a particular situation, made it possible and relevant for a journalist to refer to Facebook as an indication of the leaning of the public on an

issue. Exploring this question will not just increase our understanding of the Copenhagen payment ring controversy, but also provide hints about what is going on when social media are referred to as sites of democracy more generally. Examining the payment ring-related Facebook pages is a way to ask questions about how social media become part of doing publics and publicity in practice (Chapter 6), just as *Politiken*'s school is an occasion to ask questions about how a newspaper makes publicity in practice (see Chapter 7).

One of the problems here is what to do about the fact that news media and social media seem to be associated with different ideas about what can be expected of public participation in politics. For the news media, it was important to provide critical yet correct and balanced account of the payment ring issue (Politiken 2012a), something which positions members of the public as relatively informed people that can constitute independent opinion based on various information inputs. For social media, it was assumed by journalists that members of the public will register their concerns when they are pressing enough, but that these concerns are not necessarily based on some sort of balanced opinion (see e.g. Rekling 2014). Such differences are reproduced in current discussions about the relationship between social media and public participation in politics, insofar as they focus on social media as "echo chambers" (Sunstein 2006, Pariser 2011, Hendricks et al. 2014).

Instead of assuming that balance is a self-evident ideal, the notion of devices used in ANT-inspired research offers a way to think of the media as heterogeneous arrangements that come with specific assumptions about the world (Lury and Wakeford 2012; Weltevrede, Helmond, and Gerlitz 2014). The device concept departs from the idea that media should be evaluated as right or wrong according to some external theoretical standard, such as the public sphere concept. Instead, the device literature argues that devices should be understood as performative, in the sense that the assumptions they hold about the world are also made to exist in part with the operation of devices (Callon 2007).

Here is a way to analyze media that does not try to establish their significance by referring to either how the technology actually works, how politics and participation

is theorized, or how users modify media as they use them. The notion that devices are heterogeneous assemblages seeks to capture how all these things matter at the same time, and that it will always be an empirical question how they matter in relation to each other more specifically in concrete instances.

Conceptualizing media as publicity devices offers a way to study how media generate publicity without first deciding theoretically what publicity is and asking whether the media fulfill this requirement or not. This approach makes it possible to see different kinds of media as offering various constructions of publicity in practice that are all potentially valuable in relation to situated standards, instead of assuming that any single media technology is supposed to be superior, as the journalist came close to doing in the example above. Considering media as devices is a way to consider media as allies in the attempt to deal with problems of publicity, because it pays attention to how media devices struggle to build orderings that work in practice (Birkbak and Carlsen 2016a; Marres 2012b). This includes dealing with challenges such as how to get young people to write more letters to the editor and how to get people to participate on a Facebook page.

The notion of devices also comes with the problem of how to delineate the object of study (Asdal and Moser 2012; Marres 2012b). Which devices deserve to be studied comprehensively? And if these devices are heterogeneous arrangements of technologies, practices, theories and methods, where to put the emphasis? Even if there are advantages to keeping the definition of publicity open in order to appreciate the work done by different media devices in assembling publics in practice, there is also a need to develop an orienting concern in order to specify the contribution of such a project.

As noted above, the orienting concern is based on the idea that public participation must be understood as a problematic phenomenon. Work in science and technology studies has argued that when it comes to problematic objects such as a payment ring, the uncertainties generated are not just misunderstandings, but real uncertainties as to how the world will change in relation to such new things, infrastructures or technologies (Latour 1996, 2004). This idea about the political significance of

uncertain situations related to emerging issues raises a challenge of how to conceptualize public participation in politics in ways that do try to settle into abstract procedures what is inherently underdetermined (Marres 2012a). As a part of this challenge, an issue-oriented take on democratic politics raises new questions about the role of media and publicity (Marres 2010, 2015).

An issue-oriented approach

In recent years, STS researchers have turned to the work of John Dewey and Walter Lippmann and their thinking about publics. Broadly speaking, this focus is intended to develop an account of public participation in politics that does not rely on the assumption of a public sphere, but also does not reduce the public to some sort of unruly mass (Gomart and Hajer 2003; Latour 2003; Marres 2005a). As such, the work is relevant not least as an attempt to find a conceptual middle ground between the two extremes that news media and social media were associated with in the example above.

The work of Dewey (1927) and Lippmann (1922, 1927) offers a particular problem-oriented take on public participation, one in which the role of the public is to indicate what issues are of public concern, and then to ally itself with experts and professionals who then deal with these issues (Peters 1999). This could sound like an almost too-neat and quite elitist arrangement. Indeed, critics have pointed out that the consequence seems to be either that democratic politics become highly technocratic because it is up to experts to make the difficult decisions, or that democratic politics become highly idealistic in that the public is supposed to be part of ongoing problem-solving that requires it to master all sorts of detailed knowledge (Westbrook 1993). The former position has been associated primarily with Lippmann and the latter with Dewey, giving rise to the so-called Lippmann-Dewey debate as a classic dilemma in political philosophy (Schudson 2008; Whipple 2005).

However, STS scholars such as Latour and Marres emphasize how Lippmann and Dewey both warned that public participation would be quite problematic in practice, due to how issues implicate people in unpredictable and indirect ways. The result is

an understanding of democratic politics as something that cannot be solved by appealing to "the facts" or "the will of the people," because issues are marked by a deep uncertainty with regard to what count as facts and what counts as the public (Barry 2002; Marres 2007).

This understanding of politics is relevant in a world where science cannot be appealed to in order to solve political dilemmas (Latour 2004), because science itself is full of controversies and under-examined assumptions, as documented by STS researchers (Latour 1987; Shapin and Schaffer 1985). From an issue-oriented perspective, this means that democratic politics is a far too ambitious endeavor if it tries to become a matter of rationality and morality, whether through publicity or by other means. The alternative question raised by STS is whether problems are able to play their role of generating uncertainty with regard to what the facts are and where the relevant public is, or whether issue dynamics are cut short by too- quick assertions about these things (Marres 2007, Latour 2003).

The payment ring controversy is a prime example. Consider this statement from the Helle Thorning-Schmidt, then prime minister and leader of a center-left coalition. When she was asked by a journalist why she decided to drop the payment ring project, she said:

> What hit the nail on the head was that those who use public transportation suddenly also opposed the payment ring, even though they were the ones that would benefit from it. That made it clear to me that it was not just the motorists and the environing municipalities, but broad parts of the population, who did not find it a good idea. (Vester 2012)

This statement indicates some of the uncertainties raised by the payment ring as a controversial policy, including who will benefit and who will be harmed by it. But Thorning-Schmidt also divides the Danish public into two clear groups, one of which must be disregarded, because it has vested interests in the issue at hand, such as owning a car or a home at the outskirts of Copenhagen. In contrast to this group, the

reasoning goes, there is the general population, which must be listened to – especially those whose vested interests go against their opinion, as the prime minister claims is the case for users of public transportation. No doubt, these claims about the opinion of the Danish public can be problematized empirically. The point here, however, is that the prime minister assumes that it is clear what actors belong to the public in relation to the payment ring issue and what actors do not, i.e., the motorists. Following an issue-oriented understanding of politics, such a statement short-circuits politics by closing down the uncertainties that a controversial issue generates.

Consider also this quote from Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who led the right-wing charge against the payment ring, and who is today the prime minister of Denmark:

> The circus we have seen in relation to the payment ring is a magnificent example (…). For a period, it was possible to make do with some buzzwords at a high level of abstraction, and a nice story, and a lot of pretty money that one would use to do good with. However, this could not survive the encounter with reality. (Jyllands-Posten 2012)

Again, the quote is suggestive of some of the tensions in the payment ring controversy, not least the question of how the project would interact with state finances. However, in this statement, Rasmussen makes a distinction between political wants and the "reality" that sets limits for these. He invokes a well-known trope in modern politics, in which politics is a specific domain delineated by what is possible in relation to an external, physical reality (Latour 2004). In this version of the controversy, the payment ring was quite an attractive plan ("a nice story"), but it was no more than a story in the sense of an unrealistic fiction. This quick delineation of fact and fiction does not allow the uncertainties generated by the payment ring proposal to unfold.

To be sure, these statements must be understood as after-the-fact generalizations and rhetorical moves in a struggle over governmental power in Denmark. Nevertheless, they are illustrative of how issue politics can be shut down in political discourse.

These observations also raise the question of where to look for the kind of issue politics that Latour and Marres are after. As Marres (2010) notes, Lippmann and Dewey maintained that the media had a crucial role to play. Note that the statements made by the *Monday Morning* journalist above indicate that indeed congestion charges became a public issue when the payment ring object was problematized in the media. For the journalist, this was problematic, but following an issue-oriented understanding of politics, it could also mean that media may be a primary site for democratic politics insofar as media contribute to an ongoing questioning of what facts and what publics are relevant in relation to issues.

These arguments raise the question of what qualities to look for in publicity media. Instead of understanding news media as external to publics that need to be "informed" and issues that need "coverage", an issue-oriented perspective makes it impossible to deliver balanced information or coverage. Similarly, it is impossible to merely measure public opinion by social media activity or opinion polls, because it is an open question exactly who counts as "the public" in relation to an issue marked by ontological uncertainty. These claims raise the question of how the media deal with the simultaneous exploration of issues and publics. Instead of the Kantian understanding of publicity as securing rationality and morality, there will be questions: rational in relation to what situated understanding of the issue? Moral in relation to what public?

Still, publicity is required in order for public participation to find a direction. As Lippmann argues, the public is not automatically informed or even mobilized:

> We must assume as a theoretically fixed premise of popular government that normally men as members of a public will not be well informed, continuously interested, nonpartisan, creative or executive. We must assume that a public is inexpert in its curiosity, intermittent, that it discerns only gross distinctions, is slow to be aroused and quickly diverted; that, since it acts by aligning itself, it personalizes whatever it considers, and is interested only when

> events have been melodramatized as a conflict. (Lippmann 1927:54–55)

Following Lippmann's problematization of the role of the public in democratic politics, there is a question of whether the media must be understood to intervene not just as *conveyors*, but as *generators* of publics. Publics may be key to the questioning of issues, but they are also in dire need of help when it comes to orienting their actions and concerns. Here, publicity media could be understood as playing a crucial and constructive role in articulating both publics and issues and making them circulate.

This is a perspective that both politicians quoted above leave out when they refer to publics and reality as given. Furthermore, such an understanding of the role of media as publicity devices that make publics and issues accessible also reconnects the media to the substance of controversies. This is contrary to how the journalist from *Monday Morning* tried to keep these things separate by asking whether the Danish public was truly against the payment ring, or if the opposition was a media effect. From the perspective of publics and issues that always need articulation, this is not a helpful way to ask questions, since any media representation of a controversy will inevitably also be a part of the controversy (Marres 2015).

In fact, an issue-oriented understanding of democratic politics is at odds with the notion of public debate insofar as controversies are characterized by the overflowing of any sort of pre-given arena that may host public debate. This raises a question of what it is more specifically that media have to add if they cannot be expected to stay safely inside a clearly delineated public domain. Instead, I focus on practical attempts to connect and assemble a non-predetermined group of actors and a non-predetermined range of elements, perspectives and arguments related to a given issue.

The object of study: Caring for publics

Following these two initial discussions about studying media as publicity devices and the potentially constituting role of publicity in an issue-oriented understanding of

politics, the orienting concern I now pursue is how media become part of processes of formulating issues and organizing publics in practice. These processes matter from a perspective where democratic politics revolves around problematic objects that generate uncertain situations, also referred to as issues. In order to foreground both the importance of media devices for issue politics and the many challenges and imperfections that the operation of such devices entails, I suggest the notion of caring for publics as a way to conceptualize the object of study.

If publics are inherently problematic formations, it may require a considerable dose of patience to deal with publics. As such, it may be necessary to focus not just on whether a public is activated and how it performs, but also on sites that attend to the problematic realization of public participation (Lezaun and Soneryd 2007; Marres and Lezaun 2011). From an issue-oriented perspective, the problem is not so much how media allow us to tap into or activate publics or not, but how problems of public participation are unfolded or not (Marres 2012a). The notion of care, explored further in Chapter 3, is useful because it suggests that the value of publicity is not automatic: it needs to be done and redone in practice. A shift towards care highlights publics as ongoing and situated achievements (Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010; Mol 2008). The notion of caring for publics can thus be used to frame a study of media that pays special attention to public participation as a problematic endeavor.

More specifically, the notion of caring for publics draws attention to activities directed at the careful maintenance of issue-oriented publics with media devices. As already indicated, this thesis traces two such attempts empirically. One is located in the newspaper *Politiken* and its school to train young people to become participants in newspaper debates. Another is located in social media, more specifically the several Facebook pages set up to build and demonstrate public engagement in the recent controversy over road pricing in Copenhagen. These two sites are divergent in many respects, and the value of the publics they care for is by no means unambiguous. Nevertheless, it is this divergence and the way in which different democratic "goods" and "bads" are performed in practice (Mol 2009) at *Politiken* and on Facebook that makes it possible to not just propose caring for publics with publicity media as an object of study but also to take steps towards tracing what it looks like in practice.

Both media devices are prominent examples of news and social media, and played significant roles in the payment rink controversy. As such, these media are suitable sites for the development of a comparative study of how media contribute to issue politics.

In undertaking such a study, it follows from my preliminary discussion of the notion of devices above that is it important to stick to the orienting concern of caring for publics from an issue-oriented perspective. At the same time, there is a question of situating the work of media devices in their wider and not necessarily very issue-oriented settings in order to avoid ascribing these devices a coherence and significance that they do not have in practice (Asdal 2014). The challenge is to pay attention to both how media contribute to an issue such as the payment ring issue and how media do not appear out of the blue, but are entangled with various ideas, histories, technologies and other media. In meeting this challenge, it is possible to think of the empirical work presented in this thesis as a process with two steps.

The first step focuses on practices where publics are involved in relation to specific problems. What I investigate here is how news media and social media were activated in the payment ring controversy. This is also an occasion to expand a bit more on details about the controversy and the payment ring project (Chapter 4), and to describe the particular issue-oriented use of Facebook pages more thoroughly (Chapter 5). However, the main purpose of this step is to register what is "present" and "absent" in how news media and social media are perceived to make a difference in relation to controversial issues (Law 1994).

While the first step looks for the differences and similarities in how two different media devices contribute to issue politics, the second step of the empirical process situates these media in some of the practices and projects that constitute and define them. What is important here is not to refer to idealized contrasts between different kinds of media, but to pay attention to how these media come to play specific roles in practice and how these roles shift and change. Here, I draw on Mol's praxiographic approach of examining in detail practices that tend to be taken for granted (Mol 2002). More specifically, I examine qualitatively what goes on with the payment ring-

related Facebook pages, instead of assuming that they are substitutes for opinion polls or that their participatory value can be rejected due to media effects that create an unbalanced public debate, sometimes referred to as "echo chamber dynamics" (Chapter 6). In relation to the news media, I use *Politiken*'s School to study how such media do not just subscribe to an ideal of an inclusive and balanced public debate, but also how they work hard to put into practice the public debate that is assumed to exist (Chapter 7).

One of the objectives of this second step is to insist that questions of how media become part of a caring for publics in practice can be asked of both news media and social media without invoking a predetermined hierarchy in which one is more democratic than the other. Instead, I expect there to be multiple media arrangements for approaching publicity in practice and that these will relate to each other in different and potentially unexpected ways (Mol 2002). Registering such variability may be key to understanding how media publicity may not be able to "solve" issue politics, but still able to contribute.

Research questions

Based on these initial motivations, I explore two research questions in the following chapters:

1) How does media publicity, including both news media and social media, contribute to public participation in controversial issues?
2) How are the roles of media devices at stake, and how are publics and issues at stake in these processes?

The aim here is not to provide single answers to these questions. The point of drawing on device analysis as a source of methodological inspiration is to be able to keep open how different devices make issues and publics count in different ways, and how individual media devices may have varying situated effects. The point is to open a space of inquiry where some of these variations may be explored, based on the

argument that such variations are easily lost in the way media are generally understood in relation to public controversies.

The chapters that follow

In Chapter 2, *Issue politics and the problem of publicity*, I present the notion of issue politics in more detail, with a special focus on what role there is for media in such politics. I argue that the question of the role for publicity media remains underexplored by some of the most influential conceptualizations of a more issue-oriented politics, notably the ANT-driven accounts of Latour and Callon. I draw on Marres's work for her argument that publicity is key to issue politics, while also observing that what can be expected from publicity media in practice is an open question. This observation is based in part on work in media studies that expresses high expectations of the transformative capacities of new media, but also remains highly critical of such capacities.

In Chapter 3, *Studying media as democracy devices*, I draw on the notion of devices found in recent ANT-inspired research to develop an approach to media as heterogeneous assemblages, rather than as technologies that are associated with strong hopes and fears for democracy and social life. From a device perspective, the media do not have an external "technological" effect on a pre-existing democratic society, but may bring about orderings that perform a particular kind of democratic politics and bring it into partial existence. I take into consideration some of the critiques that ANT perspectives comes with the risk of developing accounts where the devices under study come to appear as all-powerful and marginal perspectives are written out. I then propose to understand the object of study not so much as different kinds of media devices as it is an activity of caring for publics with media devices. Here, I borrow from the work on care practices by Mol to develop an understanding of media as part of an ongoing and situated tinkering with public participation in practice that I argue is particularly relevant for an issue-oriented understanding of politics.

Chapter 4, *Some limitations to "paternoster politics": The Copenhagen payment ring controversy,* introduces the recent controversy over congestion charges in Copenhagen and traces how the news media contributed to the unfolding of this issue. I do so by contrasting the news media with a policy setting in which the idea of a payment ring in Copenhagen was born. More specifically, I observe how the issue of congestion charges had been on the political agenda in Denmark for many years without becoming a controversial issue. However, in 2011-2012, news media attention to the issue skyrocketed and became part of a controversy that was later understood to have made it impossible for the policy makers to follow through with the implementation of congestion charges. The difference that the media interventions seem to have made was that congestion charges were no longer discussed in abstract economic terms, but in terms of the concrete object of a payment ring and its potential consequences. At the same time, I note how the policy setting and the news media setting seem to share a commitment to a general public agenda that is distinct from particular issues and concerns. Inspired by a special kind of elevator in the Danish parliament, I propose to term this as a commitment to a "paternoster politics" that I argue is at odds with the variability of publics and the significance of different settings that is key to issue politics.

In Chapter 5, *Unscrewing social media twice: Seven issue-oriented Facebook pages*, I shift focus from the news media to a social media site, Facebook, where publics seem to have been organized around the payment ring issue rather than around a general public agenda. I observe that such social media formations are increasingly associated with political leverage and propose to explore how the new macro actor of public pressure expressed in social media is constructed. Here Facebook material is introduced in some detail. I argue that this material lends itself to several methodological approaches. Instead of immediately siding with one over the other, I register how Facebook is being addressed in multiple ways, including qualitative, quantitative and network approaches. While each of these is important for understanding how social media contribute to controversial issues, I also note that the Facebook pages are positioned as representations of a more social or even authentic public rather than as contributing to the transformation of publics and issues.

In Chapter 6, *An asocial payment ring: Everyday publicity on Facebook*, I ask how a social media site like Facebook could become relevant to the payment ring controversy in the first place. Acknowledging that this is in fact surprising is a way to disturb the assumption that social media somehow registers public opinion in relation to issues. To answer the question, I delve into the discursive interactions on the Facebook pages and demonstrate how they contain substantive engagements with the issue and critical discussions of the role of social media publicity in a controversy. I supplement the Facebook material with an interview with one of the page administrators to suggest how politicians and issue advocates invest time and effort to generate social media publicity. I argue that these efforts cannot be reduced to some kind of manipulation of unknowing Facebook users, but requires a careful alignment with the everyday concerns of Facebook users. Drawing on Cochoy's (2007) notion of "captation" of publics, I propose to understand the Facebook platform as an ad hoc device for the capturing of publics for purposes such as being elected to parliament. As the same time, however, an issue-oriented public is brought about with such social media that expresses both a weariness with policy makers and a creativity with respect to alternative solutions to the issues at hand.

In Chapter 7, *Qualifying publics and issues: The School of Debate and Critique*, I argue that the news media can also play surprising roles in relation to issue politics. The chapter offers a discussion of *Politiken*'s School based on my fieldwork there. The School was understood by the newspaper as an experiment to highlight issues that concern young people today. As such, it demonstrates how the news media invest in the reproduction of a general public debate by supplementing such debate with certain voices or issues that are perceived to be missing. At the same time, the school offers a chance to study how the construction of such missing voices works in practice, which indeed requires a carefully orchestrated effort. First, a population of interested young people has to be generated so that intake can be selective enough for the school to be able to represent the "sharpest young minds." Then, these young people have to be qualified by being initiated into the life of public figures. Finally, they all have to write a steady stream of letters to the editor so that the best of the best can be selected for publication in the newspaper. I explore these efforts in some detail and propose that they can also be understood as testament to how a newspaper

is clearly engaged in the making of new publics and issues, even when this work is always at risk of being removed from view by the appeal to a pre-existing public debate.

In Chapter 8, *Media contributions to issue politics*, I return to the core questions and themes raised in chapters 1-3. In this chapter, I discuss the contributions that media devices may offer for issue-oriented public participation based on the results of my empirical investigations. I return to the notion of caring for publics as a way to conceptualize such contributions and guide further research.

2. Issue politics and the problem of publicity

With a few exceptions that primarily serve to raise the question (Anderson and Kreiss 2013; Couldry 2008; Turner 2005; Gillespie et al. 2014), publicity media have not been dealt with very much in an ANT perspective (Marres and Rogers 2008, Marres and Moats 2015). I clarify this lack of interaction in this chapter by asking what is different about an ANT-inspired understanding of democratic politics and the kinds of democratic politics to which publicity media and studies of publicity media tend to orient themselves. In my discussion of what politics comes to mean with ANT, I draw primarily on the work of Bruno Latour, one of the ANT scholars who has dealt most explicitly with politics. I first characterize his conceptualization of politics and then move on to discuss how Latour has explored some of the consequences, paying special attention to the role of media.

I then introduce a critique of Latour that also draws on ANT, but is based more on a device-oriented perspective (Marres 2012a). Marres's work is especially interesting here because it argues from a pragmatist perspective that publicity is a key problem. This is related to the argument that issue politics will have to be a democratic politics, because, Marres argues with inspiration from Dewey and Lippmann, issues raise acute problems of participation and thus spark publics into being (Marres 2005a, Marres 2007).

Marres's contribution is useful not least because it points to media as a key constraint on issue politics, which I suggest is in line with Dewey and Lippmann. However, as I explore in the last part of the chapter, this also raises a question of what can be expected from media more exactly. Work in media studies has struggled hard to answer this question, including whether some kind of rational and moral publicity can be associated with particular media. Different questions can be raised with inspiration from ANT, as I explore in Chapter 3, but the variability of the capacities of publicity media found in media research is worth registering as part of the problem of participation raised by issues.

Broadening politics with ANT

One initial observation that can be made when discussing ANT and politics is that ANT comes across in part as a project of "politicizing" things that are otherwise taken to be outside of politics. The motivation for doing so comes out of an STS interest in, and critique of, "the elevated status of scientific knowledge" and the "heroic accounts" of innovation in science and technology (Crawford 2005:1). The problem with such accounts for an ANT scholar like Latour is that political processes are cut short by reference to scientific facts or technological inevitability. As Latour has recently put it, "the Moderns are those who kidnapped Science to solve a problem of closure in public debates" (Latour 2013:129). Here, science becomes politics by other means, which for Latour introduces an unproductive confusion where the specific values of both science and politics get lost.

To counter accounts of science and technology as solving politics from the outside, ANT offers a processual and anti-essentialist understanding where facts and techniques are not given and found, but are fragile effects of heterogeneous and sociotechnical networks. ANT is perhaps best understood as an empirical project of unpacking or "unscrewing" those entities we think of as actors by tracing the networks that hold them together as actors (Muniesa 2014). There are many examples of case studies that try to do this (Latour 1993a), but one of the most relevant examples to apply when discussing politics is Latour's and Callon's (1981) early treatment of the state as a network effect in a book chapter called "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan". The argument here is that there are no *a priori* "macro actors" and "micro actors." If there are such differences, they must be explained as the outcome of processes of assembling and coordinating. This applies also to an actor such as "the state," which is often taken to be a macro actor, but Latour and Callon claim can always be unscrewed.

A central argument in ANT is that in order to trace these associations, it is necessary to accept that some participants may be surprising and that agencies at work will make it hard to uphold a distinction between humans as active subjects and nonhumans as objects being acted upon. This is an argument Callon (1986) uses

when he tries to show that not just humans, but also scallops, for example, can enter negotiations and alliances, too. The reason why this matters for Callon and Latour is that if an actor such as a state is understood as a collective of human actors, as in Hobbes's notion of the state as a Leviathan (Hobbes 1996[1651]), it becomes difficult to explain why it would hold together. This again imbues the state with the sort of transcendental quality that ANT seeks to undo (Callon and Latour 1981).

For this reason, ANT comes with the idea of a "generalized symmetry" (Callon 1986; Gad and Jensen 2007). The idea of a symmetry principle is taken from another strand of research in STS called the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK), which holds that false and true scientific beliefs must be examined in the same way (Barnes and Bloor 1982). The point of this symmetry is to avoid explaining true beliefs with reference to an objective reality and false beliefs with reference to social or psychological factors (Olesen and Kroustrup 2007). The reason for applying a sociology of scientific knowledge is to pay attention to how social factors also play a role when claims are believed to be true.

The notion of generalized symmetry associated with ANT builds on the SSK principle, but seeks to avoid a shift to social constructivism by arguing that neither "objective reality" *nor* "social factors" can be treated as explanations. Instead, the ANT analyst must move across any divide between social and technical without treating these as different domains. This is the principle of generalized symmetry, which is also sometimes referred to in a slogan-like form stating that, according to ANT, "nonhumans have agency" – a formulation that is easily misunderstood as saying nonhumans are no different from humans (Sayes 2014). What is important to remember is that ANT proposes that agency is distributed – a relational effect. So the idea that nonhumans have agency only makes sense in the ANT perspective if we simultaneously complicate the notion of agency.

For Latour, it becomes a political aim to bring what he terms "the missing masses" of nonhumans into view (Latour 2005b). In fact, he says that "the burning desire to have new entities detected, welcomed and given shelter is not only legitimate, it's probably the only scientific and political cause worth living for" (Latour 2005b:259). The way

to do this, according to ANT, is to pay attention to the "negotiations" and "alliances" that always contribute to the construction of any stable entity (Callon 1986). Doing so comes with a broadening of politics in comparison with a more conventional understanding of politics as a specific domain in modern societies that centers on political institutions such as parliaments, ministries and elections. A much more wide-ranging way to talk about politics with ANT comes with the focus on how politics is conducted by other means. Latour (2005b) suggests that sociology can be understood as politics by other means, drawing on Bauman (1992) among others. Latour also suggests the same for natural science (Latour 1988:229). From an ANT perspective, then, it can be very hard to determine where politics starts and where it ends.

At the same time, taking Latour to say that he sees the same sort of ANT politics everywhere is likely too simple (Blok and Elgaard Jensen 2011). He also seems keen on maintaining the specificity of distinct activities, not least in his work on different "modes of existence" that co-exist in modern societies (Latour 2013). Here, Latour reserves a spot for politics as a distinct mode. Blok and Elgaard Jensen (2011:87, italics in the original) suggest that "Latour wants to conjure up an image of science and politics as complementary, and *mutually enriching*, forms of practice that aim to explore the same problems – the same matters of concern – but using very different means and resources". In his book *Politics of Nature*, Latour (2004) seeks to set up an arrangement for such complementarity under the banner of political ecology, which I discuss in more detail below.

There seems to be a tension in ANT scholarship on this point about politics. On the one hand, scholars like Latour and Callon do talk about politics by other (science and technology) means, and about the abundance of negotiations and ally-making politics taking place everywhere action takes place. On the other hand, the same scholars are engaged in setting up new and more proper forums and institutions for politics (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2011; Latour 2004). To be sure, the latter efforts are motivated by the former realizations, and the aim is to forge procedures that take ANT arguments into account. Nevertheless, there seems to be an open question of what is specific to politics with ANT and whether politics belongs in specific institutions or not.

In *Politics of Nature*, Latour says that political ecology needs work. He argues that the political ecology he calls for (and which could be said to be issue-oriented in the sense that it invokes facts of nature as well as politics) "has *not yet begun to exist*" (Latour 2004:2, italics in the original). According to Latour, nature and politics have not been reconceptualized to take into account how the relevant collectives do not reside in one domain or the other. At the same time, a few pages later, Latour claims that "political ecology is already doing in practice everything that I assert it has to do" (ibid.7).

In order to understand Latour's ANT-inspired thinking about politics, it might be better if we do not try to straighten out these tensions and apparent self-contradictions too much, because Latour's goal does not seem to be to provide us with a consistent theory. Instead, the key may be to examine how Latour finds inspiration in the American thinkers John Dewey and Walter Lippmann when developing his political philosophy. Dewey (1927) warned against defining exactly what the good state is and what the right procedures of politics are, and Latour seems to follow Dewey some of the way.

Latour's pragmatist politics

In an article titled "What if we talked politics a little?," Latour (2003) cites Walter Lippmann as one of the sources of inspiration for his understanding of politics. Considering the quote Latour has chosen from Lippmann's (1927) book *The Phantom Public*, it is not too difficult to see affinities between ANT and Lippmann's comments about the notion of society:

> Because liberalism could not accommodate the universal need of adjustment and the reality of individual purpose, it remained an incomplete, a disembodied philosophy. It was frustrated over the ancient problem of the One and the Many. Yet the problem is not so insoluble once we cease to personify society. It is only when we are compelled to personify society that we are puzzled as to how many separate organic individuals can be united in one homogeneous

> organic individual. This logical underbrush is cleared away if we think of society not as the name of a thing but as the name of all the adjustments between individuals and their things." (Lippmann 1927, 161–162, cited in Latour 2003:162)

Lippmann's problem and solution expressed in this paragraph resembles Callon's and Latour's (1981) argument about the state. The problem, which Lippmann assigns to liberal political thought, of reconciling both individuals and the state as instigators of action is only a problem if society is assumed to be an independent, personified macro actor. If society is not taken *a priori* as a macro actor, but redefined as the sum of all the associations that make it possible to refer to some kind of society in the first place, then the problem of reconciling two "levels" disappears. This is Lippmann's remark from 1927, but it also comes close to Latour's (2005b) sociology of associations.

Indeed, Latour (2003) makes politics part of his larger enterprise of re-describing science and sociology. He also draws on Lippmann's contemporary John Dewey, but contrary to Dewey's (1927) book title *The Public and its Problems*, it is not just the public that is a problem for Latour, but society as such. In line with the generalized symmetry principle in ANT, the aim of Latour's sociology of associations is to explain society instead of using society to explain (Latour 2005b). This takes Latour to studies of what he terms "regimes of enunciation" that deploy the social (Latour 2003:144). There are more than one of these, as Latour argues in his most recent book on "modes of existence," which could be seen as the latest attempt at providing an account of society that rests not on a pre-given social, but on different modes of making associations (Latour 2013).

In his attempt to specify politics as a regime of enunciation among several such regimes, Latour (2003:145) refers to politics not as that which takes place in institutions that are normally called political, but as a "manner of speech" that he

initially defines negatively as being disappointing[2]. Latour claims this is because politics is evaluated from an outside perspective, where honesty, transparency and "faithful representation" is expected (ibid.). In defining politics on its own terms, instead, Latour is inspired by Dewey's (1927) definition of the public, which Latour interprets as follows:

> It is not the opposite of private but a result of the unexpected and invisible consequences of actions. Thus, the public is not the general will, nor the state, nor the "public good", but only that which defies us, which we blindly pursue and in the pursuit of which we mandate specialists as blind as ourselves. (Latour 2003:163).

In Latour's reading of Dewey, it is again apparent how Latour is looking to pragmatist thinking in order to develop a concept of politics. In Dewey's political philosophy, the public is defined not as a stable entity, but something that is always emergent due to shifts in what he calls "associated behavior" (Dewey 1927). Such shifts have only increased in quantity and scope due to the rise of advanced technological societies, such as the modernizing of the United States that was occurring in the 1920s when Dewey was writing. These ongoing and inherently sociotechnical changes create various unexpected consequences of actions ("that which defies us") that can only be handled by reconfiguring the public.

Latour (2003) draws on this idea to support and develop an account of politics that focuses on the bringing about of new collectives that include not least those things, or "missing masses" (Latour 1992) that people were "blind" to before, but can no longer ignore. The commitment is expressed in the truth condition that Latour claims is specific to politics as a regime of enunciation, which is whether a group has been "traced into existence" or not (Latour 2003:148). While appealing to "truth" may sound like an ultimatum, this is not to be taken as an either-or, but as a process in

[2] Latour is not the only one who has made observations about politics being disappointing. Dunn (1979) argues that democratic politics has disappointed in all ages, and Rancière (2006) refers to what he calls a "hatred of democracy."

which the work of tracing a group either continues or is suspended. Continuing is "truth" in Latour's pragmatist politics, and suspending is "falseness."

Here is a meeting point between Latour and Dewey, in the sense that Latour takes from Dewey an understanding of publics as always emerging. At the same time, Latour continues his own project of redefining society as something that has to be continuously traced rather than something that can be used to explain other phenomena, which Latour (2005b) thinks conventional sociology has done. Politics, in this Latourian sense, is a way of speaking that keeps a group together; it can only be appreciated if it is not assumed that groups exist prior to politics. That is why political talk will seem disappointing as long as the existence of society is assumed. Against an already fixed notion of society, Latour warns that the politics of slowly formulating and reformulating "we" and "us" will always seem incomplete and lacking (2003). However, if a pre-existing "we" is no longer assumed, politics can be re-established as a valuable and even indispensable regime of enunciation.

The argument is not so different from Latour's critique of philosophy of science, which he says has not taken into account all the construction work that scientists have to do to make facts work in practice (Latour 1999). According to Latour, conventional political institutions are all about representation, much like the philosophy of science he thinks has misunderstood science by . The problem with the politics of representation is that they cannot handle the difficulties that new hybrid objects constantly introduce to collective life.

If Latour's argument is intriguing, it is not least because it seems to be able to re-establish the value of politics. But it also introduces a great deal of confusion, because politics is now necessary for "any aggregate" (Latour 2003:149), while at the same time Latour's examples of why his theory is useful focus on politicians in the conventional sense of elected representatives. It seems that Latour is both out to underpin his sociology of associations (Latour 2005b) and to explain why we misunderstand contemporary politicians and why these politicians feel misunderstood. Still, these arguments are related because the many misunderstandings that Latour (2003) observes in relation to politicians are due to

translations that are normal from the perspective of his sociology of associations. When a politician speaks of a "we", those who are incorporated in that word are bound to feel misrepresented because otherwise there would be no translation from many to one. Correspondingly, when politicians try to implement a project, they also feel misunderstood because the realization of policy ideas require that "one" has to become "many" again. These misunderstandings that are taken as anomalies in today's politics, Latour (2003) argues, are in fact inherent to politics.

It is hard not to be sympathetic to such statements in a time when politicians seem to be constantly ridiculed and score among the least trusted professionals in surveys (Mortensen 2015), and in a time where citizens are considered apathetic and unwilling to engage in democratic politics and civil society organizations (Eliasoph 1998; Putnam 2000). With his ANT insistence on the ever-present work of translation, Latour offers a way to re-establish some appreciation for the value of politics, something that Dewey and Lippmann did not address in any substantive way. Latour also invites his readers to compare his account of politics as inevitably involving misunderstandings to "the ideal conditions of communication invented by Jürgen Habermas" (Latour 2003:155). In contrast to Habermas's (1985) ideal speech situations, what Latour wants to offer is a conceptualization of politics that begins with its difficulties in practice.

A comparison with Habermas, however, does not have to be very detailed in order to notice that Latour's thinking makes it difficult to see where politics start and where they end, and perhaps even more so where democratic politics start and end (Marres 2007; Vries 2007). With Habermas, this may also be difficult to see in practice, since reality never seems to live up to ideal speech situations. But nevertheless there is a theory about what good politics are and what they are not. In a minimal definition, good politics for Habermas (1989) is a politics that is as deliberative and inclusive as possible – rational, but not instrumental.

Latour also wants to be inclusive in the sense of avoiding aggregates of "fixed elements" (Latour 2003). The constitution of groups has to be "variable." This is why, for Latour, rationality is not a good way to be inclusive, because being reasonable

threatens the variability Latour is after. Rational arguments, in Latour's view, suppose that there is a fixed settlement that can be appealed to with reason. His rejection of Habermas's criteria for inclusion, however, raises the question of how Latour wants to be inclusive.

What is important for Latour is that in order for something to qualify as political talk, such talk must always examine whom it speaks for. The truth condition is to always travel "the entire route again from the multitude and back" (Latour 2003:153). This understanding of inclusiveness could sound almost as impossible as Habermas's ideal of including all rational arguments, but Latour emphasizes that this circular movement of political talk should never be expected to be completed. As such, Latour's politics resembles Dewey's (1938) notion of inquiry as necessarily ongoing, even when it is also what is required in order to constitute a public (Dewey 1927). This is Latour's methodological advice about how to facilitate the variable reconstitution of groups that is politics: "It is necessary above all not to start with beings with fixed opinions, firmly established interests, definitive identities and set wills" (Latour 2003:159). It is crucial for Latour that the circular movement between the many and the one continues to happen, because the alternative is to grow indignant, stubborn and disillusioned about politics, which he claims the widespread discontent with politicians demonstrates.

In recent years, Latour and his colleagues have pursued two agendas in order to operationalize a more pragmatist conception of politics. One strategy has been to formulate new guidelines for how politics can be conducted under banners such as "cosmopolitics" (Latour 2007) and "hybrid forums" (Callon et al. 2011). Another strategy has been to try to harness the potential ascribed to new digital media technologies for making collectives traceable in new ways (Latour et al. 2012). In the following, I briefly examine both of these research agendas in order to be able to discuss the current state of Latour's pragmatist politics.

New procedures

When talking about what good politics looks like, one of Latour's preferred notions is the aforementioned cosmopolitics, a term he borrows from Stengers (2005) that seeks

to capture politics as dealing with the cosmos in which everyone lives rather than being confined to a few political institutions (Latour 2004, 2007). The need for cosmopolitics arises from the realization that significant modifications to the cosmos happen outside of the conventional political institutions – notably in research laboratories, as demonstrated in Latour's earlier work (Latour 1987, 1993a). Every time a new complicated object is constructed, it will disturb the composition of the cosmos, or the common world – or the collective, which is the term noted above.

Latour's cosmopolitics is an attempt to devise a politics that can handle such ontological shifts. In *Politics of Nature*, he (2004:111) proposes a procedure where scientists, politicians and other professionals work together to answer two questions that he argues must be kept separate: "How many are we?" and "Can we live together?". One purpose of distinguishing between these two questions is to replace the distinction between facts and values, which for Latour no longer maps onto a distinction between science and politics. In Latour's model, the two questions that must be kept separate include consideration of both facts and values, and scientists and politicians can contribute to answering both questions. The point of distinguishing is not to purify facts and values from each other, but to ensure a due process of taking all relevant entities into account before proceeding to compose a life together. Again, what is key for Latour is an inclusiveness of unexpected beings.

Nevertheless, Latour decides to maintain a distinction between scientists and politicians, economists and moralists, and so on. In a sense, this is not surprising, given that Latour has expended a lot of effort trying to specify and maintain the value of scientific practices and political practices (Latour 1987, Latour 2003, Latour 2013). However, the result is that the model comes across as surprisingly abstract given Latour's Dewey-inspired interest in the political significance of unexpected consequences of actions. As de Vries (2007) argues, Latour seems to stick to a (modern) question of how to lend legitimacy to a sovereign with his focus on a model for ensuring inclusiveness and due procedure. Here, Latour does not follow the actors but maintains a non-empirical distinction between scientists and politicians, for instance. The risk is that "the object of politics disappears from view" including its crucial tendency to change over time (de Vries 2007:805).

In an answer to de Vries, Latour sums up five meanings of "the political" to show how its meaning needs to be broadened and diversified in order to capture cosmopolitics (Latour 2007). I summarize these meanings below.

1) New human/non-human associations appear, e.g. through scientific tests.
2) A new problematic public is forced into being by the new hybrid objects.
3) Governments try to translate the hybrids into a clear question of the common good.
4) In a "Habermasian moment," fully conscious citizens try to discuss the new hybrid because the problematics are more than puzzles to be solved – there is real antagonism present.
5) Finally, there can be a political pause as objects come under routine administration.

The payment ring case could be analyzed with this model of politics. First, a new object in the shape of an infrastructure and a policy was sketched by politicians and experts. Second, this object implicated a new set of actors, sparking potential relationships between them. Third, the government tried to articulate the payment ring as a simple question of whether it would be a good idea to make the motorists pay a fee in order to make Copenhagen greener and more efficient (cf. Chapter 4). Fourth, it turned out that there were real conflicts not only of "interest," but also with respect to the world in which the payment ring would be located. Fifth, the payment ring was never built, but if it had been, some sort of habituation and decline in attention would most likely have followed.

Used in this way, Latour's model turns the payment ring controversy into something that is easier to handle analytically. The five meanings of politics nicely scaffold the story into a manageable chain of events. However, based on the argument about the inventiveness of new objects (Barry 2002), there is also a question of whether the payment ring is able to influence Latour's model in return. As Laurent (2011) argues, each time we are told about a technique that is said to deliver democratic politics, there is a question of how it became separated from the issue it was supposed to

handle. There is no reason why Latour's own technology of democracy should be exempt from this problematization.

Indeed, Latour's stated intention is to put problematic objects ("issues"), instead of procedures, at the center of politics. The reader will notice, however, that these five points read not just like five different "meanings" of the political, but also as five different stages that can follow after each other. Latour himself talks about his five meanings of the political as moments or stages (Latour 2007). At the same time, he notes that the list of stages is likely to be incomplete, so there is no good reason to understand these five steps as a finished procedure of cosmopolitics. What must still be noted, however, is that despite his interest in being object- and problem-oriented, Latour does not abandon the idea of some kind of political procedure as being appropriate to democracy (Law 2010; Marres 2012a). Latour's commitment seems to be not to *break* from procedure entirely, but rather to *broaden* procedure to include the hybrid human/non-human associations that are normally out of view in modern politics (1993).

Callon's position is not so different. He and his colleagues have another term for a politics that takes into account the insights of ANT, namely "hybrid forums" (Callon et al. 2011). Pointing to a forum, however, also means to propose a standard technology of democracy that can be deployed across different issues. Also inspired by Dewey, Callon and his colleagues devise procedures to repair a fragility they identify in Deweyan politics:

> Dewey … says little about the procedures enabling the publics, necessarily in a situation of weakness, to play their part and especially not be swallowed up by a powerful state apparatus (Callon et al. 2011:241).

The problem that Callon and colleagues raise here is motivated by a fundamental agreement with Dewey that in order to deal with complicated consequences, it is key that "publics launch inquiries to explore the issues and the evolving and changing networks connecting them" (ibid.). But Callon and his co-authors ask how would

these “emergent concerned publics” be able to re-create something as well-supported as the state? In order to repair this situation, Callon et al. (2011) propose a set of procedures that they argue can furnish the emergence of “hybrid forums” that harness the insights of both experts and emergent publics. For instance, a public space, Callon et al. (20011:181) argue, is key to hybrid forums because “a durable framework is required so that whatever will be will be, that is to say, so that collective exploration and learning continues.”

The inspiration for these hybrid forums is found in case studies of how lay people organize to address concerns unforeseen by politicians and scientists. Such contributions break any simple dichotomy between professionals and lay people, where the former are supposed to inform the latter. In reality, Callon et al. (2011) argue, there is a two-way relationship, and this is an indispensable part of the ongoing inquiry that is needed if we are to deal effectively with the many complicated uncertainties of today’s advanced technological societies.

At the same time, the above quote is surprising given Callon’s and Latour’s (1981) earlier commitment to not giving a “powerful state apparatus” the privilege of being assumed to exist. As mentioned earlier, Dewey (1927) emphatically argues against trying to devise procedures for settling the question of what the proper public and the proper state looks like. Yet, it seems that both Callon and Latour are in each their own way engaged in modeling such procedures.

In sum, these recent attempts at devising new procedures that are appropriate for an ANT-inspired more-than-human politics deploy methods that risk being external to the issues at hand. As such, the question of what an issue-oriented understanding of politics looks like remains open, even when ANT research has argued that things like “democracy” and “society” must be approached as empirical effects to be traced back to specific objects rather than something to be instituted theoretically (Latour 2005b, Laurent 2011, Marres and Lezaun 2011).

In the matter of how issue politics play out in practice, Callon et al. (2011) in *Acting in an Uncertain World,* identify three main elements that take part in the organization

of collective exploration of issues: organizations, the media and public authorities. A lot of time is spent in the book on tracing and articulating the meeting points and contrasts between organizations that organize emergent concerned groups and public authorities with their experts and scientists. Very little time is spent, however, on the analysis of the third main element, the media, even though they are deemed to make a key contribution. "The media provide an infrastructure that gives publicity to positions and controversies, to the structuring of which they obviously make a major contribution" (Callon et al. 2011:181).

As already noted, Latour (2005b:265) is also concerned with the problem of coming up with new ways of composing the "collective" through "due process." He has very little patience for what goes on in a newspaper: "As soon as you open it, it's like a rain, a flood, an epidemic, an infestation" (Latour 2005b:27). Nevertheless, Latour uses the reading of a newspaper, as he has done before (Latour 1993), to disturb essentialist instincts he thinks are at work in the social sciences. What he finds noteworthy about the newspaper experience is how social groupings are constantly made and remade:

> With every two lines, a trace is being left by some writer that some group is being made or unmade (….) If we simply follow the newspapers' cues, the central intuition of sociology should be that at any given moment actors are *made to fit* in a group – often in more than one. And yet, when you read social theorists, it seems that the main, the crucial, the most urgent question should be which grouping is *preferable* to start a social enquiry (….) Is it better to view markets, organizations, or networks as the essential ingredients of our collective life? (Latour 2005b:27-28).

In the rest of the book, Latour is busy dealing with the mistakes of other social theorists; he does not venture further into the world of newspapers, which could seem surprising, given that this is where he locates the lively business of making and unmaking groups that he is interested in. It seems to be assumed by both Latour and Callon, at least to some extent, that the media are capable of delivering some kind of

open-ended public space, but the assumption is not explicated, nor is it explored in their respective development of new procedures for a more object-oriented politics.

Controversy mapping

However, Latour is engaged in a second effort that does not so much seek to devise procedures as it tries to take steps towards rendering it easier in practice to deal with the questions of "how many are we?" and "can we live together?" (Latour 2004:111). This other research agenda relies on the capacities of new digital media to raise these questions in new ways. But the argument is broader: there is something especially instructive about controversies when it comes to Latour's pragmatist politics (Latour 2005b). Following the argument that new objects bring about inherently problematic reconfigurations of collective life, controversies are not just something to avoid or settle as quickly as possible, but ongoing explorations of "how many are we now?" and "what would it take to live together?".

Controversy analysis precedes the current digital efforts in STS as a way to open up the taken- for-granted. In their book *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* on the emergence of experimental science, Shapin and Schaffer (1985) use a scientific controversy between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes as an opportunity to explicate what was at stake in the new experimental science championed by Boyle. One important benefit of analyzing this 18th century controversy is to make it easier to understand the taken-for-granted experimental mode of science as just one possible approach among others. Shapin and Schaffer are not interested in experimental science as a self-evident superior approach. But they are also not interested in deconstructing experimental science. Instead, they seek to reduce it to one "form of life" among others, but one that was particularly successful at a specific moment in Northern European history, for specific reasons and with specific consequences. As such, the book by Shapin and Schaffer does not have to be read just as a work in the history of science. It can also be read as contributing to the assembling of what Latour (2013) has called an "anthropology of the Moderns", specifying their particular ways of knowing and living together.

Latour's recent digital efforts also use controversies in science as an initial frame of reference, but extend to the argument that such controversies can also enhance politics. One of Latour's first projects, which was a collaborative project involving many universities funded by the European Research Council, was called Mapping Controversies in Science for Politics (MACOSPOL). The project description states quite clearly that the goal is not just to do controversy analysis for its own sake, but to improve politics:

> Technical democracy requires spaces and instruments to facilitate public involvement in technological and scientific issues. Such democratic equipment is yet to be assembled, even though much theoretical research has been done to envision its articulation. At the same time, digital innovations are providing an increasing number of new instruments and forums that can be used to promote public participation. (MACOSPOL 2015)

The notion of technical democracy comes out of the aforementioned efforts to conceptualize what a more object-oriented politics could look like (Callon et al. 2011). With MACOSPOL and similar efforts, Latour and his colleagues – not least at the medialab at Sciences Po in Paris – are trying to translate some of these theoretical arguments into practice. A key component here is the notion of issues in the sense of problematic objects around which politics turns (Latour 2007); one primary question is how to deploy such issues without "closing" them in advance by assuming that the list of relevant actors is pre-given. This is related to the argument that political shifts only happen when frames are unsettled (Barry 2002; Callon 1998).

The way in which controversy mapping has become methodologically possible in practice is tied to the rise of digital technologies (Latour 2011; Latour et al. 2012). It is largely through the existence and access to a large and unruly amount of digital data that controversy mapping has been able to render the delineation of issues an empirical question (Venturini 2010). It is also through digital tools that it has become possible to manage and analyze large amounts of unstructured data, and make the results accessible. With digital methods, it becomes possible to generate open-ended

lists of the actors that are entangled in a given issue (Beck and Kropp 2011; Munk and Jensen 2014; Yaneva 2012). It also becomes possible to identify multiple versions of an issue and trace how these different versions are associated with different actors, thus mapping the controversy without privileging one position as the authoritative one (Venturini 2012).

In one sense, these ambitions are not so different from other social research methods that try to be open-ended in terms of what should be taken into account, such as Shapin and Schaffer's (1985) historical methods, and also the more ethnographic approaches often taken up in ANT-inspired research (Whatmore 2003). However, while historians and anthropologists have spent much time wondering about the specific constraints of the instruments on which they rely, i.e., historical documents and fieldwork, the controversy mapping agenda has so far spent more time mastering digital methods rather than scrutinizing the digital materials on which these methods rely (Jensen et al. 2014; Marres 2015).

Some of these shortcomings have been explored by parallel research on digital methods, which has argued that digital research must be understood as a radically distributed endeavor, where the question of how existing digital devices operate methods and theories is just as important as an interest in substantive issues (Marres 2012b; Rogers 2009, 2013, Birkbak and Carlsen 2015b). One thing has become clear about using digital traces: the distances and proximities of controversy maps are not just contingent in the sense of being generated by an algorithm aptly named "ForceAtlas" (Jacomy et al. 2014). The distances are also not accountable, because the data that is contrasted is often derived from different media platforms that have different ideas about making links. As Koed Madsen (2013) demonstrates, when we set out to map controversies with digital techniques, we often end up mapping media effects.

Despite such complications, Latour seems to maintain a focus on digital media not as interesting in themselves, but as interesting in relation to a program of associational sociology that is supposed to facilitate better compositions of collectives. In a recent article, Latour et al. (2012) argue that social media sites have special affordances

when it comes to studying the social without assuming two levels, a micro level and a macro level, as givens. The reason for this is that social media profiles are heavy with hyperlinks so that any actor, according to Latour and his colleagues, comes across as explicitly made up of the sum of that actor's associations.

With such arguments, new digital media are put to work on Latour's much more general program of deploying a sociology of associations inspired not only by Lippmann, as argued above, but even more by the sociologist Gabriel Tarde. Latour finds in Tarde's work a use of the concept of monads to capture entities that are "not a part of a whole, but a *point of view* on all the other entities taken *severally* and not as a totality" (Latour et al. 2012:598, italics in the original, Latour 2005b). Here is an ANT interest, again, in not assuming society as a "whole" or "totality," but maintaining that situated entities tie things together. Following Latour's notion of politics developed above, this matters not just for a program of associational sociology. It matters also for deploying controversies in ways that do not shortcut the difficulties of negotiating how new problematic objects can become part of a collective life marked by oppositions and transformations.

While this is a research agenda that is interesting in its audacity, it could also seem that controversy mapping has been absorbed in the deployment of issue multiplicity to an extent where the efforts have not asked questions about the politics of their own methods. Most importantly, there seems to be a question of how controversy mapping relates to the methods of the media that such mapping draws on, including social media and news media (Marres 2015). In their conclusion, Latour et al. (2012:612) add a caveat: "We are well aware that those data bases are full of defects, that they themselves embody a rather crude definition of society, that they are marked by strong asymmetries of power, and above all that they mark only a passing moment in the traceability of the social connections." But the authors are more interested in reinventing sociology than investigating these media devices and data bases that are supposed to make the reinvention possible. This approach carries with it the risk that media are understood as techniques that deliver the social, or the public, as discussed in the previous section on hybrid forums and cosmopolitics.

Issue politics enabled by publicity

Recent work by Noortje Marres offers a slightly different take on what an ANT-inspired interest in issue politics can learn from Dewey and Lippmann, which could guide the development of a more nuanced role for media. Of particular relevance here is the argument that media devices may have to be foregrounded in a Deweyan understanding of democratic politics, at least insofar as the media deliver what Marres refers to as publicity (Marres 2010). This argument can be contrasted with the Latourian arguments above, which use Dewey as a source of inspiration for developing new and more issue-oriented political procedures, but left the role of specific media devices quite underdeveloped. Dewey (1927) himself attached great importance to information and communication technologies in his theory of issue-oriented politics, although he ends his book with a preference for face-to-face relationships in local communities. Consider these statements:

> The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. (Dewey 1927:184)

> Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public. (Dewey 1927:218)

For Marres (2010), Dewey's emphasis on the need for media for the generation of public inquiry around issues may hold the key to what she thinks is an unsolved problem in research on technical politics. On the one hand, Marres argues that the political significance of objects and technologies has been explained by the fact that objects are not seen as politically active (Latour 1992; Winner 1980). This positions the political role of objects on a sub-political level that is different from explicit politics, which occur through political institutions and discourse. Marres (2012) points to a Foucauldian influence that tends to position objects as playing a sub-political role that needs to be revealed and is alien to public participation. One

example of this can be found in the work of Flyvbjerg (1998), who argues that there is a hidden politics at work through the materialities and infrastructures of urban planning. One the other hand, Marres argues that even when material politics are brought forward, as in the attempts by Latour and Callon discussed above, there is a risk of suddenly seeing politics everywhere and losing the specificity of politics (de Vries 2007), which again makes a retreat to politics as a specific domain likely to happen.

In other words, Marres sees a problem in the relationship between material politics and publicity; she argues that reading John Dewey in a particular way may be key to overcoming this problem. She finds in Dewey's political philosophy a way to define publics as "sparked into being" by material objects (Marres 2005a). In other words, in Dewey's thinking the public is from the outset more than a discursive domain. However, even more importantly, Marres (2010) finds that this does not lead Dewey to diminish the role of discourse for publics. To the contrary, Dewey maintains that as new technologies and problematic objects proliferate, more publicity will be required for public participation in politics to be possible.

The key to this argument, following Marres (2010), is to stick to Dewey's definition of the public as the result of indirect consequences of actions. Defining the public as consisting of those implicated by harmful consequences of actions beyond their control cuts across the divide public and private as separate domains. Instead, what delineates publics, following Marres's reading of Dewey, is whether everyday life continues habitually or is disrupted by indirect consequences. In the latter event, a public may form with personal attachments as the vantage point. But the formation of a public is only a potentiality unless publicity makes the problem understandable to those affected.

This Deweyan understanding of public participation in politics, Marres argues, is far removed from the notion that material politics belong to a sub-political domain. By focusing on Dewey's public as defined by simultaneously being an insider and outsider relative to issues (in the sense of being both affected and removed from the source), she seeks to redefine public participation and make material entanglement

integral to it. Contrary to Latour's broader notion of issues as matters of concern, Marres (2007, 2010) claims to have specified what is distinctive about publics from a materialist perspective. Being a member of a public is to struggle with a particular "problem of relevance" that comes with the insider/outsider relationship to an issue (Marres 2012a). She further argues that publicity media must be assumed to be key to articulating and sustaining such relationships (Marres 2010), something which places media at the absolute center of democratic politics.

Nevertheless, Marres goes on to suggest that the key to placing her reading of Dewey into research practice is to focus on a broader category of material devices, since "objects may have crucial enabling features" for performing and making productive the special state of affectedness that is characteristic of publics (Marres 2010:30). In her empirical work, Marres has focused not least on domestic technologies as "devices of affectedness" that are productive of public engagement (ibid.:33, Marres 2012a), but always in situated ways that depend not least on the articulation of issues with publicity media.

In other words, while Marres suggests that Lippmann and Dewey "both argued that the presentation of complex issues in the media must be understood as an *enabling* condition for democracy" (Marres 2007:767), she does not make this particular category of devices her primary object of study. There remains a question of how to rethink publicity "along materialist lines" (Marres 2010:26). She asks:

> …whether the commitment to recognize nonhumans as constitutive elements of social and political worlds does not require some kind of commitment to publicity as one of the principal instruments to bring such recognition about; that is, one can ask whether a positive appreciation of heterogeneous polities, on theoretical grounds, does or should not imply an appreciation of the practical means by which the "coming out" of heterogeneous assemblages can be realized, that is, publicity media?" (Marres 2010:15).

By adopting Marres's reading of Dewey (and Lippmann), it is possible to assign a different kind of significance to media publicity. What is at stake in such public speech is whether issues are "opened up for outside involvement or not" (Marres 2007:772) in the sense of demonstrating that an issue "overspills" existing institutional arrangements and requires the intervention of outsiders. What is key is whether those outsider relationships are articulated, something which Marres (2007) refers to as the "public-ization" of an issue in a controversy to contrast with media framings that may render outsider relationships more obscure, just as likely as they may explicate them.

In one sense, Marres's argument is not so far from C. Wright Mills's (1959) "sociological imagination", which could also be seen as an operationalization of Dewey's notion of publics. With the notion of a sociological imagination, Mills seeks to capture how problems that people are personally affected by are imagined as related to causes and dynamics beyond their immediate situation. But following Latour rather than Mills, Marres (2012a) insists on the variability of publics as crucial, as expressed in her formulation of a problem of relevance. She goes on to locate the source of such variability in material devices that facilitate experiments in participation.

We can now see that Marres points to the role of publicity as crucial to the coordination of publics in the first place, while she maintains a materialist argument that the relationships of simultaneously being an insider and outsider to issues must be articulated and circulated in order for an issue public to organize. Marres's (2012a:145) question of articulations and relationships invites a Latourian focus on publics and issues as coming into being together, but adds the devices that take part in articulating and "relevancing." Here is a conceptualization of the relationship between issues, publics and media that formulates all three to be dependent on each other. What Marres proposes is to trace the heterogeneity of spaces of participation empirically by focusing on "the space-making capacities of devices" rather than by projecting the metaphor of debate onto them (ibid.:149). Thus, there is not one forum or procedure in relation to which publics are struggling with the problem of relevance, but several techniques or devices for staging such problems.

These ideas also raise questions for the controversy mapping efforts mentioned above. Following Marres (2015), the efforts to perform controversy mapping with digital tools stand at a crossroads, where the question of whether to focus on controversy effects or media effects has become too urgent to ignore. Marres suggests that this question should be answered empirically. The methodological question this raises is how to extend the notion of participation to media in the specific sense of being participants among others in an interplay that may or may not "add up" in various ways. As Marres (2015) puts it, this is an extension of the commitment in STS to study knowledge controversies in a way in which no one, however expert or distanced, is given the privilege of being assumed to be impartial. This commitment also removes the corresponding event that they can turn out to be "biased," which is one way in which media have typically been approached:

> [D]iscursivists posit a social ontology of controversy stipulating actors, positions, and societal domains. Empiricists, however, seek to minimize ontological assumptions, arguing that controversy in digital settings is heterogeneously composed in ways that can't, and shouldn't, be predetermined by the analyst. Instead, they ask are the issues enacted through policy reports or in situ protests? Communicated through pdfs or tweets? (Marres 2015:663)

These are not "media frames" but specific publicity formats that make it possible to investigate how such formats translate into specific issue articulations:

> All sites of publicity come with biases. They pose important problems both for the conduct of public controversy and for controversy analysis, and they deserve to be investigated rather than bracketed. (Marres 2015:677)

This can be related to Marres's (2007) argument that it follows from her reading of Lippmann and Dewey that the empirical task is not so much to critique a lack of

inclusiveness in processes of issue articulation, but to examine settings marked by a lack of procedure:

> From their pragmatist vantage point it is crucial to *positively* value the production of issue definitions under conditions of procedural underdeterminacy. The role of the public is to articulate issues that have insufficient institutional support, while also requiring political settlement. (Marres 2007:771, italics in the original)

As such, it is a given in issue politics that there are uncertainties about what formats to use and how. For Marres, this makes public participation an inherently difficult task, since we must expect the challenge of distinguishing public involvement from lobbying, advocacy, and so on. The question cannot be settled theoretically, but must be approached as something that is at stake in public controversies. Publics must be approached as "practical achievements," not grounded in either an "objective" or "social" definition (ibid.).

A Marres-inspired shift towards issues thus resonates with a pragmatist conceptualization of publics as revolving around problematic objects insofar as they have been dramatized as issues. Mapping issues here means to map not just multiple knowledges, but also the multiple settings that allow for the dramatization of uncertain situations as relevant for the formation of publics.

Media publicity as an unstable ally

The intervention by Marres is useful for developing further Latour's claim that politics must be understood as a regime of enunciation that is inherently lacking and problematic. With Marres's reading of Dewey and Lippmann, issue politics can be conceptualized as a democratic politics, because problematic objects and their unforeseen and indirect consequences raise a question of participation. This question of how to participate in complicated affairs beyond one's immediate sphere of influence, Marres proposes, is the hallmark of publics. Publics are defined by a struggle with a problem of relevance, which makes them dependent on devices with which affectedness can be reconfigured and made public. Here, Marres points to

publicity media as a key enabling mechanism, as Dewey and Lippmann did before her.

Placing an emphasis on publicity, however, raises a question of what exactly can be expected from publicity media. Here it is noteworthy that both Dewey and Lippmann are quite cautious of the publicity media of their time, even when they attach a great importance to communication technologies. In an earlier work called *Liberty and the News*, Lippmann (1920) formulates the problem with direct reference to news media:

> …where all news comes at second-hand, where all the testimony is uncertain, men cease to respond to truths, and respond simply to opinions. The environment in which they act is not the realities themselves, but the pseudo-environment of reports, rumors, and guesses.(Lippmann 1920:55)

Lippmann casts the environments constructed with media in a negative light, yet he also argues that they are inescapable in technologically advanced societies. He says that the problem is "the intricate result of a civilization too extensive for any man's personal observation" (ibid.:14). For Lippmann, these two observations – that news is key in complex societies and at the same time bound to generate pseudo-environments – make the media the center of modern democracy. This because democracy is defined by public involvement in politics, and such involvement is only possible through media, whose influence is then key: "It is clear that in a society where public opinion has become decisive, nothing that counts in the formation of it can really be a matter of indifference" (ibid.:36).

In a sense, Lippmann's problem seems impossible to solve. Media news is by definition imperfect and second-hand in complex societies, yet it is the only thing that can format public opinion. His solution is "to try and make opinion increasingly responsible to the facts" (ibid.:64). Here is an appeal to a more scientific democracy. Lippmann talks of "the disciplined experiment" as the "only kind of unity possible" (ibid.:67) for a modern democracy. At the same time, he famously points out how the public cannot be expected to take facts into account in any straightforward way, as

also expressed in the quote in Chapter 1, where Lippmann (1927:55) says that "events have to be melodramatized as a conflict" for public participation to come about. Such remarks resemble Dewey's regrets:

> It is not that there is no public. There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics. (Dewey 1927:137)

Dewey (1927), too, critiques the news media of his time vehemently and asks for a much closer public engagement with relevant facts through the circulation of inquiry. In a similar vein as Lippmann, Dewey hopes that facts can be disseminated in more effective and unifying ways that might make possible a new "great community." He argues for a state of "full publicity" where all consequences of actions are known and dealt with: "There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it" (ibid.:167).

Here, Dewey contradicts his own statement about "too many publics" quoted above. Instead, he seems to propose a rule of "no full publicity, no public." In sum, Lippmann and Dewey both argue that publicity media have a special task to ensure ongoing public inquiry. The circulation of facts by news media is associated with a capacity of the public to find direction and update the questions with which it seeks to organize itself and settle the issues at hand. But at the same time, both Lippmann and Dewey also argue that advanced technological societies are marked by the impossibility of any straightforward, fact-driven organization of public participation, because there are too many complicated consequences of actions at work. As Dewey puts it, the main condition for democracy is "a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist" (Dewey 1927:166). Thus, taking inspiration from Dewey and Lippmann to rethink politics also means importing the problem of publicity, which so far seems largely unexplored in STS.

The uncertain status of publicity is not only a problem for STS interests in issue politics: it has also been thematized in democracy theory and media studies for a long time. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Habermas (1989), drawing on Kant's

philosophy (Kant 1963, see also Chambers 2000), famously understands publicity as rationalizing force. It is what makes it possible for morality and politics to become the same, because of the "forceless force" of the better argument (Dryzek 2000:70). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, his influential book on the public, Habermas (1989) sought to turn Kant's principle into sociology, which led him to ask where such publicity could be located in society. Habermas points to the bourgeois public sphere of the 19th century as a potential place where publicity as a rationalizing force was put into practice.

Habermas notes that the bourgeois public sphere was historically contingent. For instance, it was only accessible to property-owning men. These limitations have sparked an interest in alternative public spheres, such as Negt's and Kluge's (1993) argument for the relevance of a proletarian public sphere, and Fraser's (1992) suggestion to consider subaltern counter-publics that are marginalized in a bourgeois public sphere. While Habermas emphasizes the principle of inclusiveness, i.e., the coffee houses and salons of 19th century Paris and London were accessible to any bourgeois man interested in engaging with others about public issues, these other scholars argue that the principle of inclusivity was never put into practice in a convincing way.

In response to these critiques of Habermas's argument, media scholars have weakened the normative claim that the public sphere works as a rationalizing and moral force, but maintained the notions of publics and publicity (Dahlgren 2013). For example, Warner (2002:90) offers a more practical definition of a public, which asserts that it is a "social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse." Warner further foregrounds how publics are self-organized, while also stressing that publics are relationships among strangers united as audience to the same discourse. In this definition, publicity is still central to publics, but it is not automatically beneficial.

Warner's account is interesting because it focuses on publics as a practical activity and relaxes Habermas's normative claims about the rationalizing potential of the public sphere. For Warner, a public is characterized by speech that is simultaneously personal and impersonal. When speaking "in public," people talk to us while also

talking to others we do not know. According to Warner (2002:77), "the benefit in this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life." The normative claim here is much weaker than the one offered by Habermas.

The critiques of Habermas's public sphere concept and the more practical arguments about publics and counter-publics in the plural raise a question about the distinctiveness of the notion of publics. Once the concept is disconnected from the privileged position of superior morality and rationality that it has in Habermas's account, it becomes difficult to uphold a distinction between the notion of a public and the general and common-sense notions of public space as something accessible to everyone (in principle) and the public in the sense of a national or continental population (Birkbak 2013).

It does not seem a good option to stick to Habermas's definition in order to specify what is distinctive about publics. As Warner (2002) observes, the Habermasian ideal of inclusive critical discussions over the common good seems to lead to an oft-repeated rediscovery that this is not what takes place in practice. A widely cited recent example of this is offered by Eliasoph (1998), but Warner sees it as only the last one in a long list:

> The endlessly repeated discovery that public politics does not in fact conform to the idealized self-understanding that makes it work – a discovery made by the Romantics, by Marx, by Lippmann, by Adorno, by Habermas, by Foucault, and *de novo* by Eliasoph – can never generate enough moral passion to force politics into conformity. The image of discussion writ large is necessary to the public sphere as a self-understanding but not as an empirical reality (Warner 2002:146).

This characterization of the public sphere as something that tells itself it is something that it is not in order to remain relevant begs a reconceptualization of the notion of publics. Warner certainly takes steps in this direction with his definition of publics in the plural as self-organized and reflexive discourse among strangers (see also Kelty

2008). However, Warner does not say much about what difference such publicity makes for democratic politics. Here, he seems to still leave us with the Habermasian project, except perhaps for the idea that publicness has an "embodied creativity and world-making" ability (Warner 2002:54). But what is at stake in such an iteration of publicness if it is not associated with morality and rationality, and also not just visibility and accessibility?

Thompson (2011) argues that contemporary media technologies make possible ongoing reconfigurations of the relationships between public and private, due to shifts in what can be brought into public visibility. Such a formulation of the contribution of media publicity suggests why publicity media are important for issue politics, because relationships between personal troubles and public issues may be made visible by publicity media. At the same time, discussions of how news media reorganize public visibility continue to turn around the distinction between public and private domains that Marres (2010) argues is made redundant with Dewey's theory of the public discussed above.

For instance, for Bakardjieva (2009), the key question is how hidden but foundational practices of "mundane citizenship" can come to have an impact on formal politics. Here, she hypothesizes that social media can make a significant difference because everyday events are now made publicly visible in new ways. In a similar vein, Dahlgren (2013:3) wants to find "alternative paths to democracy" and recognize "the social character of political activity" via the role played by "interactive digital media." Some authors talk about a "cultural turn" in politically sensitive strands of media studies, suggesting that these are all attempts to grasp the political significance of those "fuzzy or ambiguous phenomena, grounded in civil society and the lifeworld, that fascinate empirical researchers" (Bakardjieva 2009:92 citing; Livingstone 2005:32).

These assertions about the role that new kinds of media publicity can play suggest that there is a pre-existing and hitherto private sphere of everyday sociality that social media in particular can now tap into and make politically significant. At the same time, there is an insistence that social media also transform everyday sociality. As van

Dijck (2013:5) puts it, social media has "profoundly affected – if not driven – our experience of sociality." More specifically, social media make "casual speech acts" into "formalized inscriptions" (ibid.:7). Social media automate sociality, which makes it more relevant to talk about "connective media."

Papacharissi (2010:17) makes a similar argument when she suggests that "convergent online technologies afford the social spaces upon which newer civic habits are tested out." A special significance is attached to the way in which new digital media allow for more people to produce content and also modify their media experiences. Silverman (2007) proposes that "it is the participation of the audience as actor in the process of mediation that ensures, in principle, that the mediapolis can fulfill its role in the creation of a global civic society" (Silverstone 2007:52). And Papacharissi talks of a "digitally equipped private sphere" that enables publicly oriented activities like blogging, and argues that this reconfiguration of the public sphere is different from earlier versions of democracy. She observes a current "dislike for past public models of civic engagement" (Papacharissi 2010:22).

These claims about new digital media as an opening for a politics that is more directly connected to everyday situations are interesting from a Deweyan perspective. Marres argues that Dewey sees public participation as rooted in the disturbance of everyday routines. At the same time, it is not unproblematic to understand new digital media as revealing an inherent political significance of everyday sociality because such a conceptualization sees social media as unlocking a hidden political layer. This is not so different from the notion of material politics as a specific domain that has gone under the radar of institutionalized politics, which Marres argues above is exactly the kind of division into separate domains that she claims Dewey's political philosophy can be used to undo.

To be fair, the ANT-inspired reading is far from the only possible reading of Dewey in relation to media and politics (see e.g. Carey 1989), which Marres (2010) also recognizes. One might also find passages in Dewey's philosophy where he seems to assume that "the social" can be taken for granted. For instance, Dewey claims that "associated activity needs no explanation; things are made that way" (Dewey

1927:151). Such an assertion may do more to support a media studies interest in how new media technologies mediate pre-existing associations than an ANT interest in questioning all associations without discrimination.[3]

Still, Couldry (2004, 2008) identifies a certain functionalism that he claims is widespread in media studies. For Couldry, "the issue is the tendency in both academic and popular writing about media to speak as if media were the social, as if media were the natural channels of social life and social engagement, rather than highly specific and institutionally focused means for representing social life and channeling social participation" (Couldry 2008:96). As Couldry (2008) observes, the tendency in media studies to treat media *as society* is incompatible with ANT, insofar as an important part of the ANT project is to insist on keeping mediation in view *as mediation* rather than accepting modernist narratives about society (Couldry 2008 based on Latour 1993b)

Couldry concludes that ANT is worth engaging with as one of the most effective antidotes to functionalism available, because ANT insists that if media are easy to confuse with society, it is only due to power asymmetries that can be traced to the effect of not naturalizing media sociality. At the same time, he argues that ANT cannot be a candidate for a general theory of media, because it is "much more interested in the establishment of networks than in their later dynamics" (Couldry 2008:101). This limitation is summarized by Couldry as a "neglect of time" and how some media organizations become entrenched strongholds over the years (ibid.)

[3] This is also to say that Dewey's thinking sometimes raises more questions than it answers, something which is also evident in the many contributions that set out to interpret his work (Hickman 1998; Hildebrand 2008). My aim is not to provide an overview here, just to note that we should probably strive to make Dewey's thinking the beginning rather than the end of inquiry, as he would likely have recommended himself.

Conclusion

Even though one might argue that Couldry's critique of ANT does not take into account newer developments (as I discuss in the next chapter), his brief observations about the problems and potentials of taking an ANT-inspired interest in publicity media offers a good occasion to summarize the discussions in this chapter. I have demonstrated that when ANT-inspired researchers ask questions that have to do with democratic politics, the role of publicity media, while deemed significant, is underexplored (Marres and Rogers 2008).

Scholars such as Callon and Latour come close to assuming some kind of public space in which issues can be deployed and "play themselves out" through new and more object-oriented democratic procedures. These efforts are inspired not least by the thinking of Dewey and Lippmann, who are taken to suggest that problematic objects are at the center rather than the periphery of democratic politics. Here, Marres has intervened recently with a reading of Dewey and Lippmann that emphasizes the inherently problematic nature of publics that are defined by problems beyond their control. The "struggle for relevance" that follows points towards publicity media as a decisive factor.

However, there is no straightforward way to point to publicity as an enabling or constraining activity for publics because research in media studies has demonstrated time and again that it is unclear what can be expected of media publicity. These observations raise the question of how to study publicity media while maintaining an ANT-inspired interest in issue politics. As scholars such as Latour and Marres emphasize, issue politics calls into question any reference to "society" as a whole, and also to any stable "spheres." Here, media studies are less useful because much of its work has focused on media publicity as affording a "coming out" of everyday sociality into public life, or the realization of a public domain of discourse that is devoid of private interests.

Instead, the pragmatist conceptualization of publics suggests is that if publics must be understood as inherently problematic formations struggling with the problem of

relevance, then publicity may be not only an enabling activity, but also equally problematic. This raises the question of how to analyze the role of publicity media in a way where they are not expected to solve or improve public participation, but are seen as contributing to the rendering problematic of participation and the transformation of publics in relation to issues. In the next chapter, I propose the notion of devices that can provide some methodological guidance for this purpose, while I also deal with some of the limitations of ANT-inspired device analysis.

3. Studying media as democracy devices

The aim of this chapter is to discuss some of the key analytical challenges to a study of media contributions to issue politics and find ways to work through them. As I argue at the end of Chapter 2, we need to devise a way to study media that does not position them as external to issues and publics. I begin this chapter by proposing the notion of devices as used in current STS work as a way to approach media not as technologies with particular effects, whether determined materially or socially, but as heterogeneous arrangements. A related advantage of the notion of devices is that it captures how politics and issues are co-articulated together with the work of such heterogeneous arrangements.

I also discuss in this chapter that the notion of devices also has its limitations, in that it can make the arrangements that are traced seem all-powerful (Callon 2002). In the case of an issue-oriented interest in media, it is especially important to resist any tendency towards technological determinism, which can be done by attending to how media are several things in practice and how they themselves require fragile coordination between many actors to work. The notion of care, as recently picked up by Mol (2008) and others, may prove useful here by drawing attention to the often mundane or even overlooked work of maintaining media publicity in practice.

As Mol (2002) argues in the case of the body and an illness such as atherosclerosis, attending to worlds and complexities in the plural does not have to mean that a plurality of choices exists. This assumption would also simplify matters too quickly because in practice different versions of complexity or different worlds interfere with each other all the time. Law and Mol (2002:11) argue that "we need to think about what it is to be more than one and less than many." The value of this question, according to the two scholars, is that it takes us beyond questions about whether we should simplify or not, or for the purposes here, whether to construct or not. The alternative questions are: which media constructions to study and create? What simplifications and complexities do they take part in?

I argue that the notion of care makes it possible to specify the normative agenda of the present project that does not seek to describe any kind of media practices from an STS-informed perspective, but to focus on practices where some kind of issue-oriented publicity is brought about. The project here is itself a project of "caring for publics", i.e., bringing specific events into focus could change how we study and appreciate publicity media. This objective raises methodological questions for the study of publicity, because there is both a need to draw in the specific devices with which publicity gets done in practice and a need to remain focused on publicity as a problem that is not solved by media devices. I bring this challenge with me into the empirical strategy, as will be developed in the last part of this chapter.

Devices and their co-articulations

Media research often expresses a strong interest in the relationship between media technologies and public participation in politics (Carpentier 2011; Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2007; Jenkins and Thorburn 2003). However, as noted in the previous chapter, there is a tendency in media research to stay within a conventional understanding of democratic politics as unfolding in a landscape of public and private domains. The argument does not always follow Habermas's contention that these domains must be kept separate in order for democratic politics to work (Bohman 2004; Habermas 1989). To the contrary, a substantial amount of media research on new digital media focuses on how the public and private gets blurred with such technologies (Bakardjieva 2009; Baym and Boyd 2012; Boyd 2010; Thompson 2011). Still, focusing on the blurring of a divide also reproduces that divide (Law and Mol 2002).

Shifting boundaries between the public and private with contemporary media technologies is also interesting from an ANT perspective on politics, where public participation revolves around problematic issues that implicate people's personal attachments (Marres 2012a). Yet, the conceptualization of democratic politics in relation to the public and the private as stable domains that the media can then influence or not is also at odds with the issue politics argument that such categories of public and private are exactly what is at stake in controversial issues. Here, the

primary question is not whether a blurring between public and private is beneficial to democratic politics, but rather what gets to count as blurrings and what does not.

Such a shift in interest raises a question of how publicity media should be approached analytically. Stating an interest in the influence of contemporary media technologies on the boundaries between public and private risks reproducing a distinction between media and politics as separate phenomena. To be sure, media research has queried how media and politics shape each other in different ways, not least under the banner of the political economy of media (Golding and Murdock 1991; Herman and Chomsky 1988). But the distinction between media and politics also has to be reified to some extent in order to ask these questions. The question for this chapter is what can be done differently with inspiration from STS and ANT? What alternatives are there to conceptualizing media as separate from politics or society, which comes with the risk that media accounts are approached as overly simplified representations the political and the social rather than parts of these things?

Law and Mol (2002) suggest that if we are to move on from regretting simplifications of complexity in the abstract, we need to attend to complexity in practice. This means attending to complexities in the plural, and to be open to how complexity and simplicity are not just opposite, but also generative of each other or sometimes ignorant of each other. The recommendation to study complexities and simplifications in the plural is an invitation to move beyond denouncing simplification. The recommendation could also be taken as an invitation to move beyond pointing out and denouncing media constructions. The alternative would be to examine media constructions as offering different complexities and simplifications, i.e., different media world*s*, as recent developments in media anthropology has it (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002) without assuming that these worlds are either separate or the same.

We need to explore an alternative approach that focuses more on how publics, politics and society as categories are also at stake in media practices. I look to the literature on material devices in STS that focuses on how such grand entities as the market, science and politics are co-articulated in practice with concrete arrangements that are

neither human nor technological, social or material, but fundamentally heterogeneous (Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007; Cochoy and Grandclément-Chaffy 2005). This is a step towards studying media arrangements by describing and constructing politics *as they operate*, rather than by studying media as technologies that have an effect on a politics that is assumed to be fundamentally human.

In the everyday use of the word, a device is an artifact whose materiality can be examined. There are "things" that can be taken into account, according to whether they are heavy or light, rare or common, complex or simple, and so on. There is another use of the word device in STS that is associated with notions such as Foucault's "dispositif" and Deleuze's "assemblage." Here, the notion of device is supposed to capture a system of relationships among heterogeneous entities rather than concrete artifacts (Lury and Wakeford 2012). Marres suggests that a device-oriented approach involves recognizing "the traffic between method, theory and setting as constitutive of the phenomenon in question" (Marres 2012a:162). As such, the notion of devices may help overcome a division of roles where, for instance, media are technologies, issues are empirical facts, and the public and private are domains given by theory. Instead, the aim is to analyze how media publicity comes about through a mix of methods and theories and is constrained by specific settings.

If the notion of device is useful for thinking about an empirical strategy that understands methods, theories and settings as interactive, it is because a device perspective "explores the interplay between technicity, actors, practices and experience" (Weltevrede et al. 2014:130). A device perspective, then, does not give primacy to something that is *a priori* "technological" or "human" or "political," but asks how these ideas are operative in practice as relational effects. It is these relationships that ANT seeks to equip us to trace. As such, it is no coincidence that Latour and Woolgar (1979) talk about "inscription devices" instead of inscription machines or inscription techniques in their classic study of a scientific laboratory. What Latour and Woolgar were after was not just the presence of machines with written output in scientific laboratories, but a system of relationships between equipment, experimental substances, researchers, routines, diagrams, publications, and so on. Taken in this way, the notion of devices can also be understood as part of

an effort to go beyond technological determinism in the study of media and other technologies (Suchman 2014).

At the same time, the notion of devices also expresses an ANT goal to avoid reverting to a social determinism instead. Studying media as devices means to study media not as something that fits into pre-given orderings, such as an order of "public debate" as opposed to state action or commercial interest, but as entities that also produce orderings (Law 1994). Studying media as ordering devices can be understood more specifically as paying "particular attention to the trials in which actors test the resistance that defines the reality of the world surrounding them" (Callon et al. 2007:1). The empirical question is: what specific trials devices deploy in order to make the world knowable?

In a study of the role played by work manuals in a Parisian tour boat company, Callon (2002) asks what problems such writing devices solve for the service firm, whose personnel he interviews. Callon's conclusion is that the written manuals of how to carry out the work on tour boats on the Seine objectify otherwise intangible work routines and make them transportable. He puts special emphasis on how the writing devices construct the services offered: in the case of providing a tour boat experience, there is not so much a material product as a system of actions. He highlights how individual actors become protagonists in a narrative circulated with writing devices, which demonstrates that devices both describe and format reality.

Appreciating this, Callon argues, allows the analyst to see how devices are both constraining and enabling of agency because they coordinate agencies. Writing both frames actions and allows actors to overflow the narrative (Callon 1998). This is the relationship between collective and individual action in practice: "The extraordinary effectiveness of writing devices derives from the fact that they solve a theoretical question – in practice" (Callon 2002:200). There is no back-and-forth between "constraints" and "resources" – the framing and the action happen together, it is one thing: "Writing is action" (ibid.:201).

The full significance of writing devices for Callon lies in their ability to rewrite:

> To redefine their identity, agents do not have to resist or try to break free from the framing or formatting imposed on them. Instead, they participate in their own reconfiguration on the process of writing. It is not that there are actors on the one hand and a writing device for accounting for them and shaping them on the other. In rewriting, both collective and individual actors are reconfigured. (ibid.:204)

In the case of the Parisian tour boat companies, however, the writing and rewriting is distributed asymmetrically. But this, Callon seems to suggest, does not have to be taken as a relationship of dominance. For instance, it is the writing by the experienced that allows for the actions of the inexperienced. In fact, Callon argues that it would be more precise to say that the author is a highly distributed actor, since the tour company's stewards and customers also "write" in the sense that they are taken into account by the work manuals. Callon suggests that the writing can best be understood as "a device for coordinating different actors" (ibid.:207). This may sound trivial, but Callon suggests that here is a chance to observe the ongoing solution to the problem of collective action in practice. There is "collective and individual learning in the same movement" (ibid.).

To appreciate this, Callon suggests we need to avoid two pitfalls that he exemplifies by focusing on the consumers of boat tours in Paris. The pitfalls are 1) to assume that tour boat customers are manipulated, or 2) that tour boat customers know exactly what they want. In practice, there is a constant operation of techniques for relating individual customers to an abstract population of customers in a back-and-forth fashion. According to Callon, there is no "pre-existing" demand outside of such techniques, because the demand is only articulated through the test of ordering, in this case a cruise, which raises all the questions. The demand is "*both* real *and* constructed" (ibid.:210, italics in the original) in the sense that it is relatively stable (real) but cannot be distinguished from the way it is produced in the test situation (constructed).

That is what Callon tries to capture with the notion of device, something that "preforms and performs a demand that is both structured and emergent, set in regularities and open to singularities" (Callon 2002:210). These devices are experimental trials of what can be taken as given and what may be redefined. Thus, the question for social research is not to what extent something like customer demand is pre-structured, i.e., often treated as a theoretical question of agency versus structure, but "to explore the mechanisms by which participants perform this demand" (ibid.:211). This is an important part of what can be referred to as device analysis.

For Callon (2002), then, devices are performative mediators in the sense that they produce new hybrid objects that mediate between the macrosocial and the microsocial. Devices solve in practice that which seems to be an insurmountable problem in social theory. The notion of devices, then, may inform a study of publicity media as arrangements that come with theoretical ideas about public and private, but also include techniques for overcoming such oppositions in practice. As such, publicity media do not intervene in a problem of democratic politics from an outside; media devices simultaneously raise specific questions and find ways to overcome these questions.

Contrary to some of the emerging STS-inspired analyses of media technologies (Gillespie et al. 2014), Callon's focus is not so much on the technicity or materiality of devices as it is on their ability to make worlds by coordinating heterogeneous elements in particular ways. He has explicated his project as an argument for an understanding of devices as performative (Callon 2007). What this means is that devices such as financial algorithms (Mackenzie 2008; Muniesa 2014) make the worlds they assume, i.e. markets. Devices are not trying to represent the world as it is, they are trying to bring it into being as they go along. As such, one consequence of the performativity argument is that it takes us beyond representationalism (Pickering 1995), which is one of the main engines of media critique (as noted above, and discussed further in relation to social media in Chapter 5). Another word that has been proposed to capture the duality of description and performance is "enactment." Mol says the following about what this means:

> Causality tends to take a determinist form. Causal explanations usually remove activity from what is "being caused." In a network, by contrast, actors, while being enacted by what is around them, are still active. The actorship implied is not a matter of freedom, of escaping from a causal force. Instead, actors are afforded by their very ability to act by what is around them. If the network in which they are embedded falters, the actors may falter too. If they are not being enacted, actors are no longer able to do all that much themselves. They stop "working." (Mol 2010:257-8)

With Mol and Callon, then, ANT may be understood as an anti-causalist project. This resonates with Latour's (2005b) objective to bypass the actor/structure problem in sociology. ANT does not claim that something was really caused by actor *x* or structure *y*. But ANT does aim to determine how x and y are crucial for the performance of each other.

Democracy devices

Based on these discussions of the use of the notion of device in ANT-driven research, Marres's (2012a) call for empiricizing public participation can be understood as a call to focus on the various devices that make publics possible, i.e., to study publics as practical achievements instead of the outcomes of pre-given individual interests or external media manipulation. Such an interest builds on the ANT argument that we need to "consider democracy as the outcome of processes that need to be studied in their own right" (Laurent, Lezaun, and Marres 2010, cited in Marres 2012a). This shifts the role of technologies from add-ons to part of the constitution of democracy.

Laurent (2011) proposes that we turn our attention to studying how democracy is brought about in practice with "technologies of democracy." In the literature on technologies of democracy, technologies are not opposed to something social, but are always conceptualized as sociotechnical assemblages. In other words, we are not asked to turn to an "overlooked material side" of things, but to appreciate how

specific heterogeneous arrangements make democracy come about in situated ways. As such, the technologies of democracy are approached as devices of democracy.

Laurent (2011) shows how four different technologies of democracy can be studied with sensitivities found in science studies towards experiments and demonstrations (Shapin and Schaffer 1985). He argues that each of them has to silence some voices, but also must be understood as fragile arrangements that are contested and require careful alignments of materials and social science methods in order to work. For example, some technologies of democracy, such as citizen conferences, are invested in making sure that "neutral" citizens are recruited in order for them to make balanced and sensible recommendations. Other more experimental formats assume that citizens are already implicated in the substance of the questions at hand as interested or even concerned users of particular services or products.

Laurent focuses on techniques such as citizen hearings and participatory design workshops. Lezaun (2007) has studied the focus group as a "laboratory polity" that brings about a specific version of democracy with emphasis on eliciting opinions that have market value because they have been uttered by the right kind of individuals in an adequate experimental situation. Other studies have focused on surveys (Law 2009; Osborne and Rose 1999), interviews (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2004) and consensus conferences (Blok 2007a; Laurent 2009; Ureta 2015).

An important advantage of such studies of technologies of democracy, or democracy devices, is that they do not assume that some kind of public space is pre-given or can be designed in ideal terms with reference to hybrid forums or a "parliament of nature" (Latour 2004). Instead, close attention is paid to how existing devices "enact" public participation in practice, including various trade-offs, silencings and unforeseen consequences of such arrangements.

There seems to be a risk, however, of investing in empirical details to an extent where the orienting concern of contributing to a more issue-oriented politics gets lost. Most of the technologies of democracy that perform public participation in practice draw on social science methods that understand the public as an entity somewhere "out

there" that must be known in order for legitimate political action to take place (Lezaun and Soneryd 2007). Studies of such techniques demonstrate their many contingencies, but they also reproduce an understanding of public participation that is quite different from the pragmatist version introduced above. Social science methods do not have it as an integrated part of their practice to generate publicity, but following Marres (2010), it is exactly publicity that stages encounters between publics and issues and allow for their co-constitution.

Noting this risk points to a difficulty associated with adopting a device perspective, which is how to decide which performative devices should be placed in the foreground and which in the background. Drawing on the work of Callon (2009), Marres (2012a) elaborates the role of devices such as smart meters as part of a politics of "co-articulation," where participation is given a specific role in relation to other spheres such as the economy and science that are co-articulated together with participation. Marres emphasizes how devices like smart meters that are explicitly publicized as devices of participation (in environmental issues) affords an engagement not just with co-articulation, but with a politics of different co-articulations:

> Everyday technology of carbon accounting, I will argue, represents an "experimental" device of sorts – a device that is designed and taken up in many different ways. As such, they can be said to materialize participation according to a number of different logics, and for this reason they offer an especially useful case for exploring what becomes of the technological politics of participation – and of the participatory politics of technology – under conditions of their materialization. These devices allow for multiple, diverging co-articulations of economy, politics and innovation, enacting the politics of contestation in a material modality. (Marres 2012a:63)

Similarly, one might ask how media as democracy devices raise particular, yet multiple co-articulations of issues and publics. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is something about media publicity that seems to open up issues to public scrutiny in

ways that are important for issues to unfold and for marginalized actors to express the relevance of their concerns. Media participation may then be more interesting from an issue politics perspective than participation through voting, for example, which tends to assume that the list of relevant actors is settled and that issues can be reduced to a clear choice.

At the same time, there is a question of how such "opening" of issues with media devices is understood to take place more exactly. Turner (2013) has recently demonstrated how what he calls "democratic surrounds" were invented in the US in the 1940s and 1950s in order to strengthen American liberal democracy in the face of totalitarian regimes, not least that of the Soviet Union, in other parts of the world. In exhibitions, such as *Family of Man*, set up at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the middle of the 20th century , Turner identifies a "cafeteria style" of media arrangements that were explicitly designed to reinforce a citizen accustomed to navigating complexity and making independent choices – in other words, a citizen who is "appropriate" for liberal democracies (see also Mol 1999). Turner (2013) suggests that a specific combination of institutionalized US politics, German émigré designers of the Bauhaus school and a group of American intellectuals including Margaret Mead, gave rise to these new media formats. It could also be observed, however, that newspapers have long seemed to offer a similar kind of "cafeteria style" arrangements, where readers are asked to navigate a large number of pages of assorted news articles and letters and find their individual paths through current events (Schudson 2003; Tuchman 1978).

For instance, news media are sometimes dedicated to generating publicity *about* politics, as when a newspaper devotes a number of pages each day to "Politics" (as opposed to, e.g. a Culture section, which follows later on in the newspaper), or when a social media site like Facebook seeks to contribute to politics by encouraging people to post status updates if they have voted in a national election so that others may be inspired to do the same (Facebook 2010). These examples illustrate how today's media may be partaking in the reproduction of politics as a separate domain related to institutions of liberal representative democracy.

The contribution of Turner makes it easier to appreciate how different media arrangements, whether museum exhibits or newspapers, come with specific assumptions about the relationship between citizens and issues. Media, in Turner's sense of surrounds, are designed to enact a citizen who is exposed to a plurality of inputs, which forces an individual choice of what to pay attention to, which, in turn, constitutes the staging of a degree of freedom. Based on the arguments about issues discussed in the previous chapter, this is not necessarily the best or only way in which media can help put democracy into practice. Following the pragmatist argument, citizens are not free to select what issues they care about; rather, they are expected to be intimately implicated by some issues and untouched by others. As Callon's (2002) device perspective helps clarify, freedom here is not necessarily to have a choice, but to have formats and resources available to act on one's concerns or having them taken into account.

This observation raises the question of how to study media devices in a way that captures commitments to certain kinds of politics while addressing how other, perhaps more issue-oriented kinds of politics may also benefit from the intervention of publicity media. Some of the work currently being conducted under the banner of digital methods is relevant here, since it asks specific questions about how existing media devices may be re-appropriated for social research on issues (Marres 2012b, Marres and Rogers 2008, Rogers 2013). But there is also a more general question of how to take into account the "ontological politics" related to multiple media devices, each of which have their own co-articulations of issues and publics.

Device analysis and the multiplicity argument

As Marres emphasizes, the argument that devices put particular categories and techniques into practical circulation also means there is a politics to which articulations we as researchers, as well as those we research, choose to focus on and extend. This complication of device analysis touches upon developments in ANT toward an appreciation of multiple and marginalized realities (Star 1991, Mol 2002). Indeed, Callon (2002) ends his analysis of writing devices with a comment that even if the Parisian work manuals have been shown to solve a problem of collective action

in practice, there are still overflows, asymmetries and other devices at work that he has not taken into account.

Callon's (2002) analysis of French work manuals could be read as providing a benevolent account of the work done by writing devices to simultaneously describe and produce a collective. In other words, Callon foregrounds how the work manuals and other documents he analyses are both instigators and results of processes of co-production. Following Callon's account, it is too simple to say that a manager sits at his desk and dictates what his staff will be doing down to the most minute details, and then uses writing devices to disseminate his orders and put them into practice. While this is part of what is happening, Callon also registers movements in other directions, not least because the formulation of work rules starts from the existing practitioners. As such, those working the tables on a tour boat or greeting guests as they board also co-produce their own work manuals, inventing and reinventing their work routines in practice. As already mentioned, what Callon seeks to foreground about writing devices is exactly how they seem to overcome the classic theoretical problem between bottom-up and top-down, or between individual agency and social structure.

Such an analysis is an example of how an ANT perspective can seem "democratic" in the specific sense that agency is not grounded in one actor, but redistributed by showing how all entities are active in networks (Callon 1986). The argument can also be turned on its head, suggesting that nobody is "free" in the conventional sense of acting independently. Callon (2002) seems keen on maintaining this tension when he notes that the structuring work done by writing devices must also be understood as enabling of individual actors. At the same time, he remarks that "collective action is always tyranny" (2002:214).

A key part of what makes ANT useful is this ability to retain an ambiguity with respect to who is acting on whom. Nevertheless, such analyses also raise the question of how, more specifically, "collective action is tyranny" in any given case, and whether there are alternatives that are being written out of the account (Mol 2002). From a device analysis perspective, this is also a question of how not to upheave the tests and trials

deployed by specific devices to free-floating metaphysical logics, which is a problem that has to do with the politics of devices and methods in the plural, as noted by Marres (2012a). When Marres argues for the need to study publicity devices to understand public participation in issue politics, the questions of which devices and how to study them arise. Laurent (2011) makes a similar argument about technologies of democracy:

> Studying public engagement—and the conduct of democratic life—through the lens of technologies of democracy has implications for policy-making as well. It means that technologies of democracy are not ready-made instruments that can be unproblematically applied from one issue to the next, but part and parcel of the political choices that define legitimate public problems and acceptable ways to deal with them. Thus, the separation between technologies of democracy and the issues to which they are applied is an outcome of a process that needs to be analyzed. (Laurent 2011: 644)

In my case, my studying the biggest newspaper and the biggest social media site in Denmark may seem like a good way to make sure the empirical work is relevant. But it could also be argued that studying the already powerful is a way to extend their reach. Doing so may not make for the most interesting contribution if the kind of politics that I am interested in is a politics that tends to be misunderstood by mainstream perspectives and institutions, as Latour (2003) was referenced saying in the previous chapter.

Realizing this raises a question of to what extent ANT is useful, because it may not be a helpful methodological guideline to unpack already dominant devices. In her review of Latour's (1987) book *Science in Action*, Amsterdamska (1990) warns against the trap of assuming something is true just because it is believed by many. In my case, the risk would be to argue that because *Politiken* and Facebook are prominent media in Denmark, they also represent the "right" way that publicity should be done, because these media have evidently managed to enroll many allies and continuously sustain their own existence.

Amsterdamska also points out that Latour does not seem to follow his own definition of science. Latour interprets science as an activity marked by the enrollment of allies until you have enough to win the war and establish a scientific fact through strength (Latour 1987). However, Latour himself recommends that ANT researchers should not be mustering for battle, but "telling stories" (Latour 1987:164, cited in Amsterdamska 1990:503). What seems to be implied here, Amsterdamska argues, is that some stories will be innocent enough to not be regarded as partaking in struggles over the dominant position, which aggravates the problem of risking to naturalize the dominance of some actors with ANT.

The critique by Amsterdamska is written in a polemical tone that seems fair given Latour's own writing style, but she also raises methodological issues with Latour's network approach that are hard to ignore. Her argument that Latour risks falling into a social constructivist trap when he argues that something is true if only enough allies believe it seems overstated given that Latour wanted to stress the need to enroll both human and nonhuman allies alike. For Latour, this is not just a question of discourse – or rather, discourse is not opposed to materiality, as his account of inscription devices also suggests (Latour and Woolgar 1979).

Still, Amsterdamska's arguments raise questions about how to do ANT and device analysis in practice. Most urgently perhaps, there is a question of how to delineate a study. For instance, one might be interested in offering an account that is different from the one already put in place by the dominant network of allies (Star 1991). As Asdal and Moser (2012) put it, arguing against contexts in theory does not solve the problem in practice. Because there is always a need for researchers to do "contexting" of their own work, it is here that the question arises as to what extent we allow the devices under scrutiny to guide us. In the case of media technologies, the researcher is dealing with devices that are themselves busy proposing contextualizing categories such as politics, society or the public. These are methods that are already operative, whether we choose to see them as such or not. If such media methods and contexts become part of research, there is a redistribution of inquiry taking place that can only be productive if it is recognized (Marres 2012b).

As Holmes and Marcus (2008) argue, ethnographers are rarely the only analysts in the field today. Drawing on this argument, one may ask how publicity media are themselves "para-ethnographers" of publics. Allowing them this role may be a way to not just avoid naturalizing the dominance of some media, but to also render publicity media practices more interesting, insofar as it assigns to those we study a reflexive intelligence and future orientation that we also expect ourselves to have as researchers (Holmes and Marcus 2008).

The related question of how to write such an account in a way that does not claim to be an innocent story that is "unaware" of its own alliance-making potential also deserves some attention. As argued by Haraway, research is an activity conducted in the world that cannot claim some kind of privileged outside position (Haraway 1997). This raises the question of how to consider the consequences of the associational work done with ANT methods. Feminist STS scholars have argued convincingly that even when ANT seeks to explain otherwise foundational concepts such as "facts" and "society" as relational effects, there is the risk of cleaning up the world according to the logics under study. This would result in removing more marginalized perspectives simply because they do not seem to have clear effects (Star 1991).

One way in which ANT research has tried to compensate for the problem is by turning to the study not just of agency as a relational effect, but also of multiplicity (Mol 2002). The concept captures an effort to appreciate how there are multiple agencies at work in relation to the same object at the same time, some of which may very well generate their effects at the expense of others. Mol's (2002) provides example of how an object such as atherosclerosis is "done" in multiple ways in medical practice: note, for instance, how surgery often takes precedence over clinical practice. This is not just a question of medical knowledge; it also invokes a politics of backgrounding the everyday lives of patients with arthritis. The work of Mol and others on the notions of multiplicity and ontological politics marks an important development in ANT, which is sometimes even referred to as post-ANT (Gad and Jensen 2010).

In the study of democratic politics and not least in mediated controversies, there are already many analytical devices at work before the ANT-inspired researcher arrives with her own research methods. These other devices operate their own methods and theories and have effects in the world, such as when surveys circulate the stance of the public on an issue (Law 2009). It follows that there is a question of how to appreciate this multiplicity of methods and their politics while remembering that there is also the question of exactly what kind of intervention is worthwhile in such a complicated setting. In this case, ANT research could end up lifting one logic up above the others, lending it more coherence than it has in practice (Asdal 2014).

Following these critiques and qualifications of ANT and device analysis, it may not be enough to pursue an "empiricist" agenda (Marres 2012a), because such an agenda could end up taking over existing arrangements too readily (Jensen and Morita 2015). It may be helpful to also think of empirical engagement as "empirical philosophy" in the sense of focusing analytical efforts on a comparative study of sites of special significance to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about media and politics. The notion of empirical philosophy has been proposed by STS researchers in order to capture an interest in the workings of knowledge in practice as opposed to knowledge grounded in a reference to a world outside practices (Blok 2013; Latour 2005b, 2013; Mol 2002). Doing empirical philosophy thus involves challenging theoretical ideas by studying practices, while maintaining a theoretical interest in why this matters.

A praxiographic approach

One way to think about this empirical work is to understand it as a contribution to a praxiography of contemporary publicity media. Praxiography is not to be understood as a way to "get closer" to reality. Such a claim is sometimes found in media accounts that produce a distinction between a macro level of big events and the lived realities of individuals (Seale et al. 2007). Contrary to such media accounts that claim, for instance, to convey a "personal perspective," a praxiography can be thought of as a way to question dividing the world into levels by studying practices that are obscured by such narratives.

Mol (2002) proposed the notion of praxiography to describe a method that focuses on overlooked practices. The term invites contrasting praxiography with anthropological approaches that focus on human collectives and the meaning-making that is native to them. Praxiography could also be contrasted with the analysis of technological systems, which would focus on the infrastructures and black boxes that are normally taken for granted. In the case of praxiography, however, the project is to inquire into "the specificities of activities that informants tend to take for granted" (Heuts and Mol 2013:128), not least in order to see how seemingly intractable philosophical dilemmas are constantly overcome in practice (Mol 2009, Callon 2002) .

The idea of praxiography as empirical philosophy resonates with Dewey's (1927) argument in *The Public and its Problems* that the proper construction of the state is not a philosophical question, but a practical one (Latour and Callon 1981; Passoth and Rowland 2010). In fact, he argues that any attempt to settle the question of what is a good state and what is a bad state will likely have harmful consequences, since attempting to resolve the question will hinder the ongoing practical task of finding out what the state needs to look like in a given situation. If political elites are equipped with philosophical reasons why they should remain in power, it will make them all the more resistant even when the operations of the state have become clearly outdated by new issues (Dewey 1927).

On a more general note, the merit of pragmatist thinking, as exemplified by Dewey's argument about the state, is that pragmatism assumes a world where change is a fundamental condition, and pragmatist thinking seeks to equip us for living in such a world (Bernstein 2010). Dewey argues that the nature of the good state cannot be settled once and for all, but he makes the argument on *normative* grounds. If we settle the question of the state theoretically, we will not be good practitioners.

As such, pragmatism can be taken as a plea for a more humble philosophy that makes itself useful for practical action instead of precluding the significance of action through metaphysical distinctions. The project is not to abandon philosophy or theory, but to connect more closely with practice. As Heuts and Mol argue:

> For crafting a rich theoretical repertoire, or so we contend, does not work by laying out solid abstracting generalizations, but rather by adding together ever shifting cases and learning from their specificities. (Heuts and Mol 2013:127)

While the point is not to settle what counts as a good public or to critique those who undertake this endeavor, this project is still normatively informed, since it approaches the valuation of publics as a practical achievement that is related to the unfolding of concrete issues. As such, I try to contribute to turning the question of "the good public" into an empirical rather than a theoretical problem. This makes a normative difference, because publics need to be able to adjust to a changing world if democratic politics is to be a practice and not just a theory. So the aim is not to reveal the hidden procedures that are actually at work, as Mol (2008) comes close to with her "logic" of care, but rather to learn how uncertainties generated with media devices can offer ways to care for issue politics in practice.

Even if they do not frame their work as praxiographies, Latour's and Marres's discussions of politics do seem to share important affinities with Mol's methodology. As discussed above, Latour (2003) argues that politicians do a lot of work in practice to formulate and reformulate collectives. He argues that this work is gravely misunderstood by the taken-for-granted ideas about politics as a matter of representation. Latour (2004) and Callon et al. (2011) also argue that the formations of political ecology and hybrid forums that they are after must be understood as already happening to a large extent, although these practices are not recognized as such by institutionalized politics.

Marres (2007), too, argues with Dewey and Lippmann that issue politics must be understood as inherently participatory, and thus in a specific sense democratic, because problematic issues are defined by how they implicate actors in new ways that require new kinds of involvement. Marres (2012a) locates in material objects an experimental quality when it comes to public participation, such as the aforementioned smart electricity meters and the various ways in which such devices

enact energy consumption in relation to climate change. However, it is largely up to Marres to appreciate and explicate such experiments as experiments that lend participation the variability that (Marres theorizes with Dewey) it requires.

Following Mol's advice, the praxiographic alternative is to ask which practices tend to be taken for granted in relation to issues politics, which led me to turn to media at the end of Chapter 2. The general praxiographic aim here is to show the complications and interferences that happen in practice with publicity media (Mol 2002). But there is also the more specific goal to demonstrate some of the consequences of complexity and multiplicity in order to point to good and bad interferences, which raises a question of good and bad in relation to what? One thing that seems to concern Mol is to avoid a separation of bodies and minds in healthcare, where bodies are something that surgeons cut and minds are making "free" choices. In facing such practices, Mol (2002) foregrounds how clinical medicine treats the mind and body as connected.

Similarly, one might draw on the Deweyan understanding of democratic politics as revolving around issues to say that what is of general concern is the separation of publics from issues. What is of interest then is not to decide whether "the media" make an overall positive or negative contribution to democracy, just as Mol (2002, 2008) is not out to decide whether healthcare as such is a good idea or not. Instead, what must be attended to are media-related practices where issues and publics are treated together, as mutually constituting each other. Equally important, there is the question of attending to how such practices get silenced, overlooked or taken for granted.

In the following, I propose that the notion of care may offer a fruitful vantage point for conceptualizing the relationship between publicity and issue publics. There are several reasons for this, including Mol's (2008) contrast between a logic of care and a logic of choice. This may be particularly appropriate for developing an alternative account of media devices not only as staging individual choice, but also as caring for publics in the sense of articulating concerns. Latour claims that politics must be understood as "fragile, contradictory, meticulous" (Latour 2003:160). If this is the case, there is reason to develop an account of the equipment with which political

participation happens not just as a matter of presenting choices, but as a matter of care.

The notion of caring for publics also offers a way to delineate the object of study without resorting to the delineations of existing media devices. Rather than making a newspaper or a social media the object of study, with the aforementioned risks of reifying or rejecting these devices too quickly, the notion of caring for publics points to practices where personal concerns are cultivated as issues by bringing them into contact with strangers through publicity media. After the discussion of the notion of caring for publics, I then turn to the empirical material of this thesis and demonstrate how it offers a chance to study such dynamics in practice.

Caring for publics

Latour suggests that his version of politics requires care: "Invaluable and fragile, [politics] survives only with meticulous care by a culture as delicate as it is artificial" (Latour 2003:162). This is an interesting proposition, because it challenges the idea that politics is something that is happening elsewhere that media practices can plug into or not. Instead, Latour suggests that an artificial culture is required, something that offers a different role for media that is crucial for the coming about of politics in the first place.

The notion that an artificial culture supports the development of publics is not necessarily new. For instance, Habermas (1989) argues in the more historical parts of his analysis that the emergence of the novel and the newspaper as new media technologies contributed in crucial ways to the constitution of the public sphere he identifies in the 19th century salons of Paris and the coffee houses of London. At the same time, the notion of communication as a technological affair continues to disturb deliberative perspectives on democracy today. As Cavanagh (2007:149–150) comments from a Habermasian perspective that distinguishes between communicative and instrumental action, the very notion of "communication technologies" is challenging, because "they are both orientated to instrumental ends and the end of human understanding and cultural meaning." Even if Habermas points to modern

publics as inherently mediated, there continues to be an ideal at work where communication is not instrumentalized (Peters 1999).

Here is the first reason why Mol's notion of care seems useful for a study of media publics, insofar as her work on care practices is an example of how to rethink something that has been understood conventionally as residing in the domain of human relationships (Mol et al. 2010). This is something that the notion of publics shares with the notion of care. As Marres and Lezaun (2011) also note, the public is an entity that has often been disassociated from the "fleshiness and fragility of life" that Mol (2008:13) says is the starting point for her logic of care. This analogy of care practices is useful for capturing how publics, like human bodies and plants, do not just exist, but require care in the form of ongoing work that articulates public affairs. This work includes material devices in the shape of the media, which is a useful complication of deliberative perspectives in media studies that assign legitimate political agency to humans only, while all media can do is facilitate or distort (Thompson 2011, Bohman 2004).

The notion of care seems apt for capturing activities oriented toward something that has the qualities of being "delicate" and "artificial." Crucially, Mol et al. (2010) argue that care in practice is full of artificial remedies, but these technologies do not make care any less delicate. Rather, they enter into the ongoing tinkering that giving care requires. Following care in practice, Mol and her colleagues argue that care may be better understood if it is not understood as a "warm" human practice as opposed to "cold" technologies. Technological artifacts and instruments may be just as fundamental to care as human hands. If we can avoid assigning primacy to human activities, it becomes easier to appreciate how these things mix in practice.

The alternative developed, not least in the study of care practices, is a perspective where it becomes impossible to disentangle the activities of "evaluating" and "adding value." This is implied in the notion of "valuing" as an activity currently being foregrounded in the emerging field of valuation studies (Helgesson and Muniesa 2013). As Heuts and Mol (2013) point out, the mixing of ascribing value and making value is central to care practices. Care suggests that something of value is both

something we need to care about, to evaluate positively, and care for in the sense of adding or at least maintaining value. This dual meaning of care is congruent with the observation that devices both "know" and "do" the world in specific ways. As such, the notion of care helps operationalize the device-oriented perspective discussed above.

The notion of care is thus useful for capturing the combination of knowing and doing that is central to devices that both make the world accessible and redistribute the world. With the notion of care, it becomes possible to thematize how publicity media construct publics, and also how media devices need to know publics and adapt to them in order to continue to be relevant. Positioning media in this way relieves some of the pressure found in critical approaches in order to identify media bias and make sure they are controlled for in order to clean up the substance of the issues at stake (Marres 2015). By focusing on care, and more specifically on publicity media as caring for publics, it becomes possible to appreciate the organization of a public as a practical achievement that requires ongoing tinkering, something which does not automatically squander the value of the human communication in question, but might just as well increase or protect the value.

With inspiration from the accounts of care practices by Mol and colleagues, however, it is just as important not to treat media technologies as something that have predetermined effects and guarantee particular results. In fact, the case of care shows that technologies may not be thoroughly understood if we expect them to have an effect in and of themselves. Indeed, one of the advantages of the notion of care is that studying media as engaged in a caring for publics offers the opportunity to specify what publicity media care about without assuming that they are automatically successful doing so. The notion of care has been used to refer to ongoing practices of tinkering that can easily fail (Heuts and Mol 2013), or have adverse effects (Giraud and Hollin 2016). Here is a way, then, to approach media devices without assuming or expecting one specific effect, but as parts of a repertoire of techniques that are used or ignored in specific cases, and that must be expected to have various situated consequences.

More specifically, the notion of care captures how valuating is not simply a question of making up one's mind about the value of something, but a question of ongoing work that requires various sociotechnical resources and can fail. As Heuts and Mol (2013:138) observe in the case of tomatoes, caring for them is "not a matter of taking control." On the contrary, tomatoes need to be tinkered with following various ideas about what a good tomato is and what a good tomato requires. The notion of tinkering without taking control suggests that experimenting is a key part of what it means to care for something. You have to try to do what you think is best for the object of care, and at the same time try to find out on an ongoing basis what is particularly important for any given object of care.

As such, the notion of care relieves the researcher of the task of deciding once and for all what a good public is. From the perspective of care, there are no absolutes with which to decide what is good – it depends on the situation, skills and experiences that are embodied rather than explicated as philosophical principles (Mol et al. 2010). The notion of care might thus be useful for approaching publicity media not as guarantors of "good" politics, even when media are staged as such by themselves and others, while at the same time not missing the chance to study how publics are cared for with publicity media in specific instances.

This is particular relevant for an interest in issue-oriented politics, where procedures must be expected to always require situated adaptation. The notion of tinkering can be used to capture how neither media nor publics are in control, but nevertheless try on an ongoing basis to the organize and articulate concrete issues. Here, studying media practices becomes a way to turn the question of good democratic politics into an empirical question, which is to take democracy not as a thing that can be turned on and off, but as something that is performed differently in practice with the result of several "goods" and "bads." The quest here is not so much to argue that publics need to be done better as it is to investigate what it took, in concrete events, to achieve "good enough" (Mol et al. 2010:13).

At the same time, Mol et al. (2010:13, italics in the original) argue that care practices are not just anything that calls itself care, but a specific "*modality* of handling

questions to do with the good." What is specific about this modality is that it is not looking to identify principles, as in a discipline like medical ethics, but to develop "local solutions to specific problems" (ibid.). General principles are rarely useful in practice, not least because there will always seem to be conflicts between different principles. Approaching problems without general principles is to start from the assumption that specific difficulties always require more effort than simply applying a rule. Instead, Mol and her colleagues argue, care in practice is a question of tinkering, compromising and experimenting. The good here is not a principle, but something to be done.

These observations about tinkering in care practices are also useful when we consider public participation in politics as a question of being implicated in issues rather than a question of making independent choices. Mol contrasts her logic of care with a logic of choice, which is useful since politics is conventionally understood as turning around moments of choosing – in the voting booth, in parliament, and in legislation that seeks to stage "situations of choice" (Mol 2008:8). What is particular about a logic of choice in contrast to a logic of care, Mol (2008) argues, is that following a logic of choice, those who choose can be blamed when anything goes wrong. Arguing that the Danish public "turned out" to not want congestion charges in Copenhagen despite having voted a government into power that proposed such a policy is to frame the payment ring issue in a logic of choice, something which the then-prime minister came close to, as discussed in Chapter 1. Based on a logic of care, on the other hand, things must be expected to shift once a media controversy raises questions about what the issue is about and what consequences a payment ring might have.

Applying a logic of care also offers a way to understand voters not as making abstract choices about the future of Copenhagen, but as people "in the flesh" with everyday lives that could be cast as rather fragile when a payment ring was proposed. As such, the notion of care has special significance in relation to entities like publics that have been taken to consist of rationally deliberating and choice-making minds. Drawing on a logic of care when studying publics is a way to reconnect publics with the objects that concern them in ways that are not just relevant for debate over the common good, but in ways that have to do with bodies and everyday routines.

In relation to this, Mol et al. (2010) point out how care is about many non-verbal actions. Here is inspiration for an analysis of publics as something that may be sparked not by fully-fledged discursive framings of issues and affairs, but by situations of ontological uncertainty that require non-verbal navigation and exploration, and raise concerns that are not easily put into words. These kinds of material constraints as constituting the beginnings of public participation are highlighted by a pragmatist understanding of publics, as reviewed in Chapter 2.

What these observations about care suggest for an analysis of publicity media and issue politics is that it may be overrated to insist on media "debate" and underrated to focus on articulations of experiences that others have a hard time putting into words. The notion of care, then, may be used to stick to a specificity of publicity media that gets lost in metaphors of public debate. But this requires rethinking both care and technology, which can build on the notion of tinkering (Mol et al. 2010), but also involves a problematization of knowledge and expertise. These things are not simply applied in care practices, they also need to be constantly adapted to bodies and technologies. Mol's characterizations of care practices suggest that both patients and caregivers are active, that things are ongoing and involve technologies in non-deterministic ways, and that care practices can and will fail at some point.

The notion of care is methodologically relevant here in the sense that it invites the analyst to start from the assumption that publics may be more problematic than we think. In other words, people breaking with their everyday routines to bring problems that affect them to the attention of a wider set of actors does not happen automatically. Even if this happens, it cannot be expected to happen in a straightforward way. The purpose of the notion of caring for publics is to suggest that publics may be approached more productively as often quite fragile and still require a considerable investment of effort to come about. If publics are taken for granted, it is only because the work of caring for publics is disregarded.

To some extent we are accustomed to thinking of democracy as a happy ending (Dunn 1979; Latour 2003), as something towards which the world progresses, which

is by definition good. If publics are inherently problematic, such an understanding will need to be revised; the logic of care offers resources here, because it provides room for failure. As Mol et al. (2010:14) put it, care "does not dream up a world without lack." It follows that failure is not a moral horror, but a reason to "try again, try something a bit different, be attentive" (ibid.). Good care is persistent tinkering, and this may also be what is required of media devices if publics are issue-oriented and thus inherently problematic.

The reason why this argument matters is that it offers a different position for media vis-à-vis public participation. If publics cannot be taken for granted, but instead are fragile and demanding, mediated publics are no longer shallow imitations of the public that should exist in principle. Mediated publics are all we have. This is not to say that publicity media and media professionals are heroes that lift regular people out of the narrow perspectives they have on the challenges they face. One might just as well argue the other way around – that journalists, editors and social media streams bombard people with concerns that they do not need and perhaps do not even have. The notion of care underlines how there are no final answers with respect to how to do mediated publics well. Rather, what I wish to highlight is how publics are co-produced by regular people, publicity technologies and professionals. Here, care work emerges as a source of inspiration.

To return to the theme of issue politics, Marres finds in Dewey and Lippmann reason to appreciate the public as a specific "mode of material entanglement" (Marres 2012a:49). Here is a shift from the public that reflects principles of inclusiveness and rationality towards seeing it as a modality with specific attributes, such as care practices. What Marres argues is specific about publics as a mode that has to do with being implicated as an outsider, which raises a problem of relevance. The formulation lends itself well to the thinking that Mol offers about care, because problems of relevance also point towards the necessity of compromising, experimenting and tinkering. If there were a general principle of publics, such as consultation with all relevant actors, there would not be a problem of relevance.

Empirical strategy and materials

If the notion of caring for publics can be taken to describe the ongoing tinkering required in order to deal with problems of relevance, there is a question of *how* to study media as caring for publics. The challenge here is not least how to evaluate "positively" when uncertainties about issues and publics are created, because this is what allows problems of relevance to shift (Marres 2007:771). In other words, there is a question of how to study the potentially productive "disorders" that media may make accessible. At the same time, the notion of devices also raises a question of how such media "orderings of disorder" disturb and interact with each other.

Engaging with two different research sites can be very useful when pursuing a praxiographic study, since two very different ways of doing things can "rob each other of any potential self-evidence" (Heuts and Mol 2013:129). The media commentary about the role of the media in the payment ring controversy, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, suggests that when it comes to issue politics, relationships and asymmetries between different kinds of publicity media are not just reproduced, they are at stake. As described in Chapter 1, one journalist critiqued the news media for not adequately representing public opinion on the payment ring issue (Meilstrup 2012b). He then moved on to mobilize social media as an alternative representation of which way the Danish public was leaning on the issue. In doing this, he distributed quite particular roles to different kinds of media. His critique of the news media, for instance, betrays an assumption that if there was a public controversy, it was going on elsewhere, while the news media gave a wrong impression of it. This assumption fits an understanding of news media as addressing an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) of ideal citizens that does not exist in practice (Lippmann 1927). The critique seems to suggest that the news editors tried to generate a critical debate about the payment ring, but by doing so created a phantom public. In such a critique, there is a representationalist assumption at work that publicity media are supposed to mirror public sentiment, not construct it.

Social media, on the other hand, were articulated by the journalist as actual mirrors of the level of public discontent. Here is an assumption of a convenient technical

infrastructure, in this case Facebook, that allows one to quickly gauge public opinion in order to challenge assertions made by journalists in the news media. Again, the journalist is not alone in making assumptions. As discussed in the previous chapter, a part of the hype about new digital media is exactly that they could end up containing such complete and fine-grained data that social research will change fundamentally (Latour et al. 2012), or even be put out of business (Savage and Burrows 2007). Such an analysis reduces Facebook to a tool for identifying publics by quantitative means, something that happened not just in the payment ring case, but seems to be the primary way in which Facebook is understood to have a more-than sub-political impact.

However, what I discovered along the way was that these two apparently distinct types of publicity media also point to each other in important ways. News media editors at *Politiken* seemed strongly oriented towards the rise of social media and their capacity for engagement of the public. In a recent overhaul of the *Politiken* website, for instance, the newspaper included a personalized news feed very much inspired by how Facebook works (Raabæk 2015). Moreover, on Facebook, attempts to engage people in the payment ring issue turned out to revolve around links to online news articles. These observations raise the issue of how to study, on the one hand, how specific media devices come to perform "critical debate" or "actual public opinion," and on the other hand, how the operations of different devices are entangled in practice.

There is a question of what specific Facebook practices add to an issue, rather than understanding Facebook simply as a running opinion poll. With newspapers, there is a question of what their contributions to the organization of publics, beyond offering a critical outlook on issues. In other words, the problem seems to be almost opposite to that of how to approach Facebook. This raises the question of how to study news media as tools for identifying publics and not just as partakers in issues. There is a need to appreciate how newspapers do practical work to tweak their operations to be better able to identify relevant publics, a capacity that tends to be ascribed to social media.

These observations suggest that in order to make the question of publicity media in mediated controversies into more than one of media effects in relation to an external public, I would need to focus not just on any kind of practice, but intervene strategically to avoid approaching different kinds of media in an asymmetrical way. If I focused only on the effect of publicity media on the payment ring issue, for instance, I would have to conclude fairly quickly that news media were important participants, whereas social media were bystanders and add-ons. Such a study would not contribute to a better understanding of publicity media as contributing to the caring for publics in practice.

One alternative would be to adopt a more media-oriented approach and frame the study as a comparison of how the payment ring controversy was articulated in news media and social media respectively. Yet, such an approach would not satisfy the research question either, because it would assume that there already was a public issue in relation to which different media could then have different effect. Furthermore, as already mentioned, my initial observations of Facebook suggest that these different kinds of media work in a much more entangled way than a media-oriented approach would capture.

What seems crucial from an issue-oriented perspective is to foreground uncertainties about what role media can play vis-à-vis issues and publics, because the assumption of a problem of relevance raises the general question of how to study media devices as more than representational tools. An issue-oriented delineation of the object of study would thus require that attention be paid both to how publicity media contribute to the assembling of publics in practice *and* to how publicity media simultaneously work as media settings that contribute actively to substantive issue dynamics.

The initial observations about the role of publicity media in the payment ring controversy distributed the roles: social media were understood to assemble publics in practice, while news media were understood to contribute to issue dynamics. These characterizations point to a need to investigate how news media also assemble publics in practice, and how social media also contribute to substantive issue dynamics, while

at the same time questioning how such an asymmetry was able to form in the first place.

One way to think about this is to say that each of my two research sites "double" when they are allowed to ask questions of each other. News media ask questions of social media about issue interference, while social media ask questions of news media about the construction of publics. From an issue-oriented perspective, both these questions are highly relevant, and part of their contribution is thus also to unsettle a division of work between "news" media and "social" media by asking what is social about news media, and what is news-like about social media. In line with this double agenda, it might be helpful to think of my research process as following a two-step empirical strategy.

First, I trace the contributions that news media and social media already arguably make, while situating these contributions in relation to issue politics and to other media. For news media, I show how new aspects of issues are articulated when the discussion moves from a policy setting to a news media setting (Chapter 4). At the same time, I observe that distinctions between public and private interests found in the policy setting also constrain how issues are deployed in a news media setting, using the payment ring controversy as a case in point. For social media, I show how a site like Facebook seems to offer a new and more issue-centric approach to the organization of publics through its pages (Chapter 5). However, I also observe that these issue-oriented publics continue to be interpreted in relation to notions of a general public agenda and a general public debate.

In the second step, I deploy a more praxiographic approach to the two media sites in order to analyze and write forward some of the contributions that tend to be overlooked. For social media, I show how issue-oriented Facebook pages also contribute to issue politics by raising questions of what media devices are useful and what understandings of issues are relevant (Chapter 6). As such, the focus is on how Facebook becomes part of the transformation of issues and publics, rather than how social media methods are mobilized to account for public opinion as something external to it. For news media, I show how the newspaper *Politiken* contributes to the

”socialization” of public debate and the generation of new issues with its School of Debate and Critique (Chapter 7). Here is a way to show how news media do not just assume that there is a general public debate that they can then ”mediate,”” but also invest in the construction of publics and issues in practice.

One way to think about this empirical strategy is to say that I spend the two first empirical chapters demonstrating how news media are associated with an ongoing public debate and how social media do not play a pivotal role in relation to this idea. In the last two empirical chapters, I focus on news media and social media practices where public debate is not assumed, but relevant public participation is a problem that has to be worked on. Understood in this way, the design first substantiates the claim that there are overlooked practices of interest in relation to media devices, and then moves on to a strategic intervention inspired by praxiography based on an interest in issue politics. The result is a shift from media as offering citizens choices between options towards media as integrated parts of how people are affected by problems that can be activated and qualified and taken up – or not. As such, the aim of the two-step empirical strategy is to answer the research questions, motivated by the pragmatist theory of issue-oriented public engagement and by how publicity media are assigned particular roles in democratic politics, while at the same time become part of “doing” publics and issues in multiple ways.

The juxtaposition of the two critical sites is not a straightforward comparative study, but it is nevertheless motivated both empirically and theoretically. The aim is not to reduce the two sites to “cases” of the same thing, because they are not. There are other ways to think of comparative research, however, including the notion of “thick comparisons” that allow cases to be less orderly and contain non-comparable elements (Scheffer and Niewöhner 2010; Winthereik and Langstrup 2010). The four empirical chapters presented here do not follow a plan laid out before the empirical work, but rather reflect ideas and findings that grew into chapters more organically.

The primary Facebook material consists of all the posts and comments from seven payment ring-related Facebook pages that attracted a substantial number of contributions in the forms of posts and comments. There are a total of 4,543 entries,

all saved in pdf files directly from Facebook and also extracted in a more structured way through the Netvizz application for Facebook research (Rieder 2013). The Facebook material about the payment ring controversy is situated with three qualitative interviews with 1) a Facebook page administrator, 2) a politician who was close to the government at the time the decisions about the payment ring were made, and 3) a journalist who wrote about the issue in the press.

As for the other critical site, *Politiken*'s School of Debate and Critique is of special interest because it revolves around the practical challenges of constructing newspaper publics. The school is an interesting event, given how it seems to explicitly handle the public as an entity that could not be assumed to exist "out there." With the launch of the school, a major news media seemed to open a space of practical work on constructing and maintaining a public.

If *Politiken*'s school can be used to develop an understanding of how issues matter in a newspaper setting, then there will also be new resources available for understanding the mediations of the payment ring issue. So while useful ethnographic work has already been done in newspaper settings (Plesner 2009; Tuchman 1978), the specific focus I wish to bring to *Politiken* is on public participation and issues. The reason why the school of debate is particularly useful is that it speaks directly to how participation is imagined and practiced by a newspaper, including the role that issues can play, which is quite different from a focus on how news is produced.

The main empirical material consists of six months of participant observation as a student in the School. In total, I spent about 43 hours at *Politiken* distributed over 10 different dates in 2013, plus more than 10 hours doing school assignments, resulting in hundreds of pages of field notes. The fieldwork material is also situated with qualitative interviews, two with organizers of the *Politiken* school, and two with participants. Finally, I read the printed newspaper every day for a year and collected examples of how *Politiken* conducts public debate, including that of the payment ring controversy in 2011-2012.

The empirical contribution of the thesis lies primarily in the study of these two critical sites, whose selection is motivated by the observations about how the role of media was perceived in the payment ring controversy. As such, the study uses the payment ring controversy as a way to generate new questions about media as actors in uncertain situations rather than as platforms that are interesting in and of themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the suggestion that a device-oriented perspective is useful for guiding an analysis of publicity media, because the notion of devices as used in STS seeks to capture heterogeneous arrangements that perform the realities they assume. As such, a study of media devices offers a way to avoid positioning media as external to politics. This is important from an issue-oriented perspective, where publics must be expected to depend on publicity to organize, which means that publicity media become an integrated part of the reorganizations of what counts as politics that defines problematic issues. Studying media as devices here means to study media as something that is continuously being made and remade, and to understand issues as part of what is at stake in this process, just as media are also at stake in issues.

Acknowledging some of the critiques that have been raised of ANT approaches, I argued that it is important to be able to deal analytically with how multiple media devices are at work at the same time. Based on a classic ANT approach of simply "telling stories" about how actors are stabilized, there could be a risk of reinforcing already dominant media devices and marginalizing alternatives. This is especially risky given that the notions of media publicity that are currently mainstream are not particularly issue-oriented. Such a demand to pay attention to potentially marginalized perspectives and practices, however, raises a new question of how to delineate the empirical work if not through a tracing of devices on their own terms.

In order to specify these normative and empirical commitments, I turned to the work by Mol and colleagues on care practices. I found in the logic of care a resource for talking about publicity media as part of a caring for publics, where neither technologies or humans are in control, but where an ongoing socio-technical tinkering

seeks to develop publics according to situated ideas of what is needed and how publics are done well. I noted both a need to keep the empirical study open to what good media participation looks like, but also noted a need to maintain some theoretical direction.

Based on the notion of devices as situated heterogeneous arrangements, I developed a comparative approach where two different media devices are examined in order not disturb each other and ask questions about each other so the analysis is not taken over by a single ordering device. More specifically, I noted how social media and news media seemed to be activated and problematized in different ways in the payment ring controversy, while also being clearly entangled with each other. In that controversy, news media were understood to add something to the issue substance, whereas social media were understood simply to report on some kind of naturally occurring public opinion. At the same time, it seemed to be taken for granted that each media device was able to exercise a hold on a relevant public.

These observations inspired a two-step empirical investigation. The first investigation centers on the question of how news media are understood as an influential setting of public debate that has the capacity to "inflect" the trajectory of issues, and how social media become understood in relation to this setting rather than on their own terms. These questions are explored in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

The second investigation centers on the question of how both types of media devices are able to exert some kind of hold on a relevant public. The focus here is on what is done to make this happen in practice, drawing on the praxiographical interest in things that are taken for granted. These questions are explored in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, using a more detailed study of issue-oriented mobilization on Facebook as the social media case and the newspaper *Politiken*'s training of new participants in newspaper debate as the news media case.

Taken together, these two empirical steps offer a way to situate media devices in relation to each other and issue politics more generally (Chapters 4 and 5), while also challenging taken- for-granted understandings of what each kind of media device can

deliver in practice. As such, my aim is to offer both an empirically driven critique of the contribution of media to politics, and an insight into two experiments that suggest new questions and potentials of publicity media from an issue-oriented perspective.

Ultimately, the hypothesis is that if we need to learn to talk about publicity media not in a logic of choice, but in a logic of care, we have to study how such media "do" publics rather than how they inform publics. We may have to learn from ongoing media practices what publicity means, rather than assume that it is there as a resource for issue politics, or other things.

In the next chapter, I pursue the empirical strategy developed in this chapter. I begin with a chapter that focuses on the "news media method" by examining what happened when the payment ring issue shifted from a policy setting to a news media setting in 2011. The chapter is thus also an opportunity to explain the payment ring controversy in more detail.

4. Some limitations of “paternoster politics”: The Copenhagen payment ring controversy

It takes a few moments before I notice the constant whirring sound in the background. The source of the sound is invisible to me, but it is hard to ignore in the silence that settles after we enter the room, which is the office of a member of the Danish parliament. It is a large room for one person, and it is remarkably quiet, given that we are in the heart of a busy parliament building. This should be a good setting to talk in private about controversial issues. But there is this regular, whirring noise, not loud, but constant over the course of our conversation.

”Yes, it is a nice office, and centrally located,” the owner of the office – let us call him Robert – agrees with me. ”But,” he continues, “you will notice the sound of the elevators, of course. I have gotten used to it now, but it took some time.”

I am puzzled at first. Elevators do not normally produce a whir, do they? Then I realize that we are not talking about normal elevators, but the famous paternoster that is one of the rarer features of the parliament building. A paternoster is an elevator, but a curious one that never stops and has no doors. Wikipedia tells me that there are paternoster lifts in operation in many places in Europe, especially in public buildings, but also that their popularity peaked in the first half of the 20th century (Wikipedia 2015 citing Strakosch 1998).

Here is how a paternoster works: you walk in and out of one of several human-sized boxes as the elevator passes by on its way up or down. Doing this can be quite intimidating, and it takes careful timing and balance. But the small jump can very possibly turn into an everyday habit, in the same way as it is possible to get used to the whirring sound in Robert’s office.

Why do I mention this mechanism at all? I had come to the parliament not to study old elevators, but to interview Robert about the controversy that came to surround the so-called “payment ring” back in 2011 and 2012. The payment ring became the

popular name for an object that was supposed to charge drivers a fee every time they passed in or out of the Copenhagen city center. As a member of parliament for one of the political parties that had proposed and supported this policy, Robert had been close to the controversial events. I was interested in what happens when an object like a payment ring becomes a public issue, including not least how the payment ring first figured in parliamentary politics and then later became a controversial object in a mediated controversy.

I realized, however, that even though it seems to have made an important difference that the payment ring and its possible consequences became a center of attention in the media, there are also continuities between the "policy setting" and the "media setting" that should be accounted for. The whir of the paternoster that continued in the background as I discussed the payment ring with Robert prompted me to think that this particular kind of elevator offers a useful way to think about this continuity. Both in the setting of parliamentary politics, and in the news media setting, I locate variations of what could be called a "paternoster politics," which is marked by an assumption of the constant rise and fall of public issues as a key constraint on democratic politics. Identifying paternoster politics is useful for understanding how an issue is embedded in the usual institutions of politics like political parties, elections and news media. More specifically, I argue that understanding paternoster politics, i.e., the constant rise and fall of public issues, is useful for understanding the unfolding of the payment ring controversy.

I begin with the observation that the controversy is now understood as a political mistake. This is the view of Robert, who backed the project, and is also the view of supposedly neutral political analysts. In addition to that, right-wing politicians opposed to the payment ring project also came to see the controversy as a political mistake in the sense of something that could be exploited in the election campaign, which is substantiated below.

I then unsettle this consensus by contrasting two ways in which to understand the role of issues in democratic politics. In Chapter 2, I discussed how the notion of issues has become central for attempts in STS to rethink democratic politics along more

object-oriented and pragmatist lines. In the present chapter, I observe that the relationship between issues and public engagement has previously been conceptualized in political science. In a classic political science understanding, public attention is argued to be a key constraint on the unfolding of issues (Downs 1972). The so-called issue-attention cycle theory formulated by Downs (1972) is useful for explicating some of the assumptions about issues and publics that are at work in both policy and news media settings. But it also differs from the more pragmatist version elaborated upon in Chapter 2, where issues are not just objects of public attention, but also occasions to reorganize publics. One of the consequence of this STS understanding of issue politics is that specific settings become a key constraint on democratic politics, since there is no singular definition of issues available (Marres 2005b). Pursuing the STS argument, I return to the payment ring controversy to show that it can be understood partly as an effect of the displacement of the issue from a policy setting to a news media setting. Here is a way, then, to specify how a news media setting interferes with an issue, while at the same time acknowledging how the settings of institutionalized politics and the press are not independent of each other.

I specify the policy setting first, which provides a bit more background about the payment ring controversy and where the proposal came from. Then I introduce the media controversy and unpack what news media add as an alternative setting to the policy one. As such, this first empirical chapter follows up on the challenge raised in Chapter 3 to find ways to situate media devices in relation to issues and other means of doing public engagement.

How not to do politics

To begin, let us go back to Robert’s office, where I ask him to recount the payment ring controversy for me:

> If we need to go all the way back to where the idea started, then it is in the process of negotiations between the Social Democrats [S] and the Socialist People’s Party [SF] in relation to their common political program in advance of the 2011 elections. Before that, the

> municipality of Copenhagen has had different opinions about a payment ring, but SF takes it up in the discussions between SF and S. (”Robert”. Interview by author. Tape recording. Copenhagen, Denmark, November 28, 2014.)

I will return to some of these pre-controversy opinions below. For now, what is important is how the S-SF negotiations were first made public in 2009 in a common proposal for a tax reform called “Fair Forandring” (which could be translated as “Fair Change,” with no pun intended). This document mentions the construction of a payment ring in Copenhagen (S-SF 2009), but does not elaborate on precisely where the ring would be placed in the city, nor how motorists would be charged. It seems that as long as the project is “merely” a figure in a budget, it does not generate much controversy. Indeed, Robert notes that for the first couple of years, there was not much fuss about the plan: “It actually goes well in the beginning, after [the payment ring] has gone pretty much under the radar.” My conversation with Robert then fast forwards two years, to the election year 2011.

> When the elections draw closer, [the payment ring] becomes a hell of a debate – a massive debate. And the parties [S and SF] are of course asked to explain where this ring is to be drawn. And then come all the problems with people who live on the other side of it, and all the negative consequences start to pop up. Questions are raised about the economic viability of doing it, and thus also about the financing of those things that are promised based on the income from a payment ring. So [the uncertainties about the payment ring] challenge the trustworthiness of the whole political program, and it squeezes the popularity of the idea [of a payment ring] itself, and thus also the parties in the lead-up to the election campaign. And in the election campaign it also becomes a big issue. (”Robert”. Interview by author 2014.)

We talk about how this “hell of a debate” did not end with the elections in September 2011. The controversy continued for six months more, into the beginning of 2012,

until the newly elected prime minister, a Social Democrat (S), announced the government’s decision to drop the payment ring plan. The decision came to be seen by political commentators as a major defeat for the new government. Robert talked about the chain of events as a political “scar” that can still hurt but will hopefully also make him and the two political parties wiser.

For Robert, part of becoming wiser in this case means learning and remembering the need to do more to prevent new policy proposals from turning into controversies. As Robert puts it, the parties should have “primed” the issue through “a much deeper working of public opinion” well in advance of the elections:

> Seen in retrospect, it was a grave mistake that the issue was not primed much better. What is the actual need for [the payment ring]? How to talk about it in a way so that the discourse benefits oneself? Maybe the word “payment ring” is fine for those that want to be tough on the motorists, but it does not appeal to the marginal voters that you fight with the right-wing parties over. (”Robert”. Interview by author 2014.)

It is noteworthy that Robert focuses on how the S-SF party alliance did not handle the issue well instead of regretting the way his opponents dramatized the payment ring issue during the election campaign in order to mobilize voters against the S-SF alliance. Robert ended up questioning whether the payment ring should have been part of the political program of S-SF at all. One reason is that as far as he sees it, there has been no punishment for not building it: “There are no demonstrations down on the parliament square stating that now is the time for a payment ring.” It is off the public agenda again. The question for Robert is whether it was worth trying at all, since the plan was used to mobilize people against S-SF’s more general claim to governmental power.

Here, Robert is aligned with political analyses published in the news media after the payment ring had been dropped. On 22 February 2012, the day after the payment ring was dropped, Jens Ringberg, the political analyst of the Danish public service

broadcaster (DR), wrote a political analysis about the issue on the DR website. He summed up the events in a way that is not so different from Robert's account:

> The short version is that the payment ring has been handled more or less by the book the last 24 hours – and that the handling has failed completely in the more than 24 months that came before. Actually, not much happened at first. Nobody – not the media, nor the right-wing parties that were in government – held on to the issue and demanded answers to what were quite reasonable questions: What will it cost to drive through that thing that over time got the name payment ring? And where would the ring be placed? Maybe S and SF were dulled by the lack of interest. In any case, they never got around to answer these questions themselves (…). Then the election campaign came – and suddenly Henrik Sass Larsen [an S politician] stood on TV in an intersection – incapable of answering the two simple questions. The right-wing smelled blood and made the payment ring an important theme in the election campaign. Of course." (Ringberg 2012)

Ringberg concluded that: "it confirms that in politics, everything that can go wrong will go wrong – especially if you do not try to prevent it. For example by doing your homework" (Ringberg 2012). The notion of homework refers to how S-SF could have prepared themselves better before the payment ring came on the public agenda during the elections. In the headline of his analysis, he sums up his focus on incompetence by referring to the payment ring events as a case of "how not to do politics" (ibid.). The payment ring controversy is now understood as a negative political event, seen not just from the office of one of the politicians involved, but also from the desk of a journalist employed at a public service broadcaster.

This version of the controversy as a negative event only partly applies to the right-wing opponents of the project. One of the most active adversaries of the payment ring, Martin Geersten, the Liberal Party's spokesperson for traffic, spoke to the news agency Ritzau about the events as victory for the Danish people:

> I think it is the large public resistance to the payment ring that has seeped all the way into Christiansborg and the Prime Minister’s Office, which has made the government drop the plan (Ritzau 2012).

In this right-wing narrative, the controversy was perhaps a political mistake, but it was not a tragedy for democracy. On the contrary, the Liberal politician refers to the events as a process where the center-left finally had to give in to the better argument, which is a good thing: “There is no shame in becoming wiser and yield to the arguments.” What all these accounts have in common, however, is that they try to establish after the fact that the controversy was a clear mistake or a clear victory, which is not compatible with the pragmatist insight that public participation in issue politics must be understood as inherently problematic. This again raises a question of how issues are understood to be at work in mainstream politics.

Public attention to issues

Instead of pursuing questions of whether the payment ring project was realistic or not, and whether it deserved to become a controversy or not, what is of interest from an issue-oriented perspective is how politicians and journalists adopt a specific understanding of the role of issues in democratic politics. Issues like the payment ring come and go on the public agenda, and the basic “homework” that politicians must do is to prepare themselves as best they can for handling these ups and downs. There is a craft, it seems, to handling public issues.

This understanding of issues in democracy resonates with a specific way of conceptualizing the relationship between issues and publics. The idea is that public involvement in issues is constrained by the attention capacities of the public. One of the consequences of this way of theorizing the relationship between issue and publics is that media also can come to play a specific role of influencing what issues “consume” the limited attention space of the public. This understanding of the role of media in relation to issues and publics has given rise to the notion of agenda setting

as a research topic in social science and as a strategy among policy makers (Shaw and McCombs 1977).

These conceptualizations of issues, publics and publicity media allow for a slightly different set of interactions between the three concepts than the conceptualizations developed in Chapter 2. In order to unpack these differences, it is necessary to examine the premise that the public has a limited attention span in relation to issues. The agenda-setting literature seems to accept this premise and turns to the study of media on that basis. In a classic article in political science, however, Downs (1972) proposes the notion of the "issue-attention cycle" in order to conceptualize the assumption of a relationship between issues and the public in terms of a limited public attention span.

In order to understand better the mainstream analysis of the payment ring issue as a political mistake, it is useful to look a bit closer at the "issue-attention cycle" argument. Downs proposes a general model of five stages in an issue-attention cycle, where a problem can remain dormant despite being severe (Stage 1) until dramatic events forces it on to the public agenda (Stage 2). Early enthusiasm about the prospects of solving the problem is quickly replaced by a realization that real progress will have significant costs (Stage 3), because the problem is most likely tied to other processes that are beneficial for many. Once this sort of realization sets in, public interest declines gradually (Stage 4) and a final "post-problem" stage is reached (Stage 5) where some of the institutions established to act on the issue continue to exist, but public attention only returns to the problem sporadically when activated by other issues.

Downs observes how this cycle seems to be independent from the gravity of an issue, since public interest in an issue often shifts much quicker than the issue itself. The example he uses is the broad issue of the environment, understood as a 1970s concern for "ecology." He notes that at his time of writing, environmental issues suddenly seem to be high on the public agenda, although this rise in public attention does not coincide with sudden alterations in the state of the environment. Here is a

challenge to Marres’s Dewey-inspired proposition that issues spark publics into being, to which I return below (Marres 2005a).

The issue-attention cycle argument is exemplary of what could be called a quantitative understanding of issue politics in the sense that it determines a general public agenda based on what issues are mentioned most often in the media. This understanding goes together with a conception of the public as an audience that consumes news as one out of several forms of entertainment. As Downs (1972:42) puts it: “A problem must be dramatic and exciting to maintain public interest because news is ‘consumed’ by much of the American public (and by publics everywhere) largely as a form of entertainment.” Downs himself points out that this view of the public as a news-consuming audience conforms with McLuhan’s idea of the public as the entity that “manages the news” (ibid.).

Downs ends his article by advising that those who really want to act on environmental issues must act fast while it is still on the public agenda. Here, the paternoster in the Danish parliament becomes a useful metaphor, because the issue-attention cycle argument implies a politics where issues are constantly on the way up and down, and all politicians and other hopeful change-makers can do is to try to learn how to jump on and off at the right moments. Here is the craft of managing public attention to issues that both Robert and the DR journalist described above. For Robert, who had to defend the payment ring, there was nothing surprising about the way his political opponents related in opportunistic ways to the payment ring issue. On the contrary, he took it as a sign of political craftsmanship: “The Liberals and the other [payment ring] opponents were smart, because they could see where it was heading with the payment ring.” These observations also break with Downs’s theory to some extent, because the issue is here made part of a politics of spin, removing focus further from the problems, not least the environmental ones, that the payment ring was supposed to help address.

Issue displacement

Despite these contradictions, Downs's theory of the issue-attention cycle is useful for explicating how issues are understood to be part of the struggle over governmental power. Since the public has a limited attention span when it comes to issues, politicians face an important challenge to choose the right issues to submit to the issue-attention cycle and when to jump on the political paternoster themselves by vouching for or against specific policies. Following the issue-attention cycle argument, the "public agenda" is understood as a central constraint in democratic politics, and a key part of the craft of politicians is knowing how to handle this constraint.

Here is one way, then, to understand issues as central to contemporary democratic politics. It is an understanding that cannot be ignored since it is present in the way actors in the payment ring controversy talk about the need for politicians to do their "homework" and "prime" the public and the issue so that public attention to it can be handled well. Such an understanding can be challenged by the perspective developed in Chapter 2, where I argue that issues are not just related to public attention in important ways, but should be seen as constitutive of publics in the first place. This role of issues is left out in the public attention-orientation. As Marres puts it, in the understanding of politics as about the rise and fall of public attention, issues are ultimately are treated as "instruments in struggles for power" (Marres 2005b:28).

Marres's alternative is that it is possible to give issue-attention a different democratic dynamic if the public is conceptualized as a flexible entity. Based on the work of Schattschneider (1960), another political scientist, Marres argues that agenda setting is central to democratic politics for a different reason – because the shifting of issues on the agenda comes with shifts in the boundaries of the relevant political community. It follows that "the proliferation of conflict … is a democratizing movement" (Marres 2005a:27). In this conception of issue-attention, controversy is not just good for opportunistic politicians, it is also a democratic good; to promote political democracy is to put issues on the political agenda in a way that facilitates conflict and thus makes the relevant political community expand.

To be fair, Downs (1972) already hinted at this potential of public attention when he said that issues that are high on the public agenda indicate that now is the time to act on them. But he did not explain what this has to do with democracy, which is why it is still possible to conclude that the payment ring controversy was a defeat not only for S-SF, but for political democracy more generally. Marres’s (2005a) alternative interpretation of agenda setting stands in stark contrast to the analysis of the payment ring as “politics gone wrong.” Through this contrast, it becomes possible to see that in the mainstream agenda setting analysis, the focus is not on the fate of the payment ring, but on how the issue was displaced on and off the public agenda. There is no focus on the potential agency of the issue itself, only on how politicians make the most of it or not, in their struggles over institutionalized power. The alternative understanding proposed by Marres is that the displacement of issues should be understood as constitutive to politics rather than something that happens to it; what is at stake is whether politics are constituted in a democratic, community-expanding way or not.

Following the pragmatist approach to publics, issue-attention cycle analysis does not satisfy because of its assumption of a stable public capable of giving issues only so much attention. The problem is not just theoretical, because focusing on the constraints of public attention does not leave much hope for the ability of democratic politics to address issues, insofar as the public-as-audience becomes associated with a tendency to move on before problems have been solved (Downs 1972). The pragmatist problem becomes one of how to make the most of controversies as situations where collectives are reformulated (Latour 2003). Here, “attention” does not capture the significance of the relationship between publics and issues, because issues also transform publics.

It follows that from this perspective, it is not opportunistic to use the payment ring in a straightforward, self-serving way as an issue with which to mobilize voters. Dramatizing an issue is also a democratic move in the specific sense of generating a conflict that could draw new actors into the political community. The difficulty that the payment ring controversy illustrates is that the controversialization of the issue was not understood as democratically valuable; rather, the controversy was taken to

confirm the importance of the craft of managing public attention to issues. With inspiration from Marres (2005a), we might say that there was a displacement of the payment ring issue from a relatively closed policy setting to a publicity-oriented media setting, but the shift was not allowed to reconstitute politics. This proposition turns attention to the specificity of the settings among which issues are displaced. The question is how the relevant political community is determined in each setting, and whether this method allows for flexibility according to the unfolding of not just the issue, but also the public.

What happened when the payment ring issue was displaced from the setting of policy proposals to the news media? In exploring this question, I do not take a conventional agenda setting approach to try to determine the rise of the payment ring issue in the news media vis-à-vis other issues, and the leaning of press coverage towards a negative or positive understanding of the issue (Infomedia 2012; Thaysen 2012). Instead, I focus on how the issue *and* its public was transformed as it was displaced from policy documents to news media articles, because this is what is at stake in issue displacement according to the pragmatist understanding of democratic politics developed in Chapter 2.

The policy setting

Following Robert's account, the setting where the payment ring issue "came from" was the political alliance between the Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party, referred to in short as the S-SF alliance. In this setting, the payment ring was made public through the publication of a series of three official political programs. The first, "Fair Change," was made public in 2009, the second and expanded version called "Fair Solution" in 2010, and the final program, "Fair Solution 2020,", was published in May 2011, an election year (S-SF 2009, 2010, 2011). The general aim of these documents was not to specify the payment ring as a policy and make a case for its successful implementation, but to present a set of reforms that a new S-SF government would introduce. In these documents, the payment ring was mentioned in only few lines of text that described how it would generate an annual income of 2 billion DKK.

In this policy setting, the payment ring was thus not an issue in the sense of being a contentious public affair. It was not even an issue in the political arena of the S-SF negotiations, because after brief discussions in 2009 the parties agreed to treat the payment ring as a source of income in their common tax reform package. The problem that S-SF was dealing with was not how to get the payment ring on the public agenda, it was much more general: how to show political agency and financial responsibility at the same time. To quote Robert, the aim of the common policy documents was to demonstrate that there existed “a clear alternative to the sitting government.” Indeed, the series of “Fair” documents presented a set of reforms that were supposed to make Denmark a better place to live while also being self-financing. In other words, taxes would not increase; instead, they would be distributed more intelligently (ibid.). Such policies can also be understood and related in part to a more general shift in environmental policy towards a regime of “ecological modernization,” where economics becomes the key discipline with which the environment is known and acted on by politicians (Blok 2007b).

It is in this policy setting that the payment ring proposal that later sparked the “hell of a debate” was born. It is noteworthy that even if the payment ring could be seen as being primarily about making Copenhagen a less polluted place to live, it was never treated as just a solution to environmental problems. From the very beginning, the payment ring was also part of a policy of financial responsibility. As such, it was not treated as an object that could implicate people’s lives in unforeseen and potentially antagonizing ways, but as part of a reform program aimed at the Danish population in general.

It is not so difficult to see where S-SF found their ideas. At least since 1990, a payment ring had been understood as a potential solution to the issue of automotive congestion in Copenhagen (Jensen 1990). It was seen as a particularly attractive solution, because it would generate considerable income for the state or the municipality. This income was the key concern when the state-funded Danish Economic Councils (DEC) mentioned the idea of a Copenhagen payment ring in their 2006 report. As they saw it, reducing traffic could be a costly affair for the Danish

economy, since heavy traffic was understood to be closely tied to a prosperous national economy, thus presenting a real dilemma:

> Traffic increases with economic growth. Traffic has both advantages and disadvantages. We are happy when we can transport ourselves fast and easy to pastime activities, and transport is an indispensable part of the production in a modern society. But at the same time, increasing traffic does result in more pollution, noise, accidents and congestion – it is called externalities. There are thus two opposing concerns that must be balanced." (Sørensen, Skaksen, and Rosholm 2006)

DEC was clear about its focus: "Our analyses indicate that the general economic effects are of outmost importance" (ibid.). In order to determine how best to design a system of road charges that would be economically sound, DEC ran an economic model called ASTRA (Pilegaard, Bjørner, and Hauch 2006), whose primary emphasis was not congestion or pollution, but the amount of labor available in the Danish labor market (Sørensen et al. 2006). The introduction of road charges, the economists argued, was likely to decrease labor availability by making it more expensive to get to work. However, the model showed that this could be compensated for by using the revenue from the payment ring to lower income taxes, which would then increase the amount of available labor by making it more attractive to work. DEC emphasized that they recommended spending the revenue this way instead of on the transport sector.

DEC concluded that it was only a question of when and how to build a payment ring, not whether to build it at all. They did note that there were several approaches to modeling the economic effects of road charges and recommended that more research be conducted before a specific plan could be produced. But this was regarded as a technical question about calibration, and was not expected to call the desirability of a payment ring into question. Other expert bodies argued for a payment ring based on different arguments and with somewhat different recommendations (Wrang, Nielsen, and Kohl 2006), but the point stands that in the policy expert setting, there was no great controversy about the payment ring. It was understood as a technical problem

to be solved. This conclusion is further underpinned by news coverage demonstrating that back in 2008, the Ministry of Finance recommended a payment ring as the “only solution” to the problems of congestion and pollution in Copenhagen, even though a right-wing coalition held governmental power at the time (Gräs 2011).

Perhaps the payment ring could have remained within this policy setting, where it was seen as a technical challenge rather than a controversial matter. The payment ring policy can be understood as an example of technical politics that is not supposed to become the object of controversy, but rather is devised to contain externalities in order to avoid controversy (Barry 2002). In this case, the payment ring could be seen as the establishing of a system to deal with some of the externalities related to driving around as one pleases so that congestion does not become too controversial a matter. This is important to point out in order to understand that in the policy setting described here, the payment ring was understood as a solution to a problem, not a problem in itself.

Of course, such technical politics can still be called democratic, in the specific sense that citizens have elected representatives to make complex decisions for them. To paraphrase Marres, the institutions of representative democracy are normally understood as attempts to “nullify” the distance between politics and democracy (Marres 2005a:32), i.e., to make sure that there is something democratic (the elected politician) close to the politics of policy making. According to this ideal, there was nothing undemocratic about the payment ring policy, since it was proposed by two political parties well before an election. The link between policy and democracy thus seems to be well established.

The two parties won the elections, so from the perspective of conventional representative democracy, voters had already lent their support to the parties that had proposed to build a payment ring. Interfering with this mechanism of representative democracy would only cause confusion, or even be undemocratic. This way of thinking about democratic politics was certainly operative in the payment ring controversy, where it became a common phrase to talk about the payment ring as an “election promise” in the sense of a policy that the newly elected government had

committed themselves to implementing via the mandate to power they received through the elections. Here is an explanation, then, for how the mediated controversy that ensued could be cast as unwarranted, not just by a politician who supported the payment ring policy, but also by journalists who are supposed to be politically neutral.

The notion of policy setting is useful for capturing this view of payment ring politics as a question of experts and elected politicians acting on a mandate given them by a general public that is not equipped to interfere in the technical details of complicated policies. This positions the role of publics in a specific way. The comments made by the prime minister when she publicly defended her decision to drop the payment ring policy are revealing here. She gave variating explanations, some of which highlighted the role played by experts and their calculations:

> We received calculations all the time, which showed that the congestion ring generated a smaller income than we would have liked. But things take time, and I am glad that we made the decision (*Politiken* 2012b).

This conclusion became the headline of a *Politiken* news story. In its explanation of the discontinuation of the payment ring plan, the newspaper said that the proposed method for reducing congestion in Copenhagen was not desirable after all, because bureaucrats had suddenly told the government that the solution would not work as they had first thought. This explanation focused on technical and economic expertise as the decisive factor, something which implies a specific role for the public in democratic politics as an electorate that chooses representatives who can then make informed decisions. It was not the only explanation offered, however. Three days earlier, the prime minister said the following to a journalist from DR, as mentioned in Chapter 1:

> What hit the nail on the head was that those who use public transportation suddenly also opposed the payment ring, even though they were the ones that would benefit from it. That made it clear to me that it was not just the motorists and the surrounding

> municipalities, but broad parts of the population, who did not find it a good idea (Vester 2012).

In this statement, the prime minister refers to an alleged complication that shifting large amounts of commuters from cars to public transportation might result in longer travel times. (Rasmussen 2012). The statement, however, could also be seen as a realization that the general public opinion about the payment ring was perceived by Helle Thorning-Schmidt to have somehow turned. In any case, what is noteworthy about this statement is how the prime minister emphasizes something other than technical expertise, namely the role played by “the population.” Her explanation expands further on the implied role of the public in technical politics. While groups with vested interests, in this case the motorists and those living close to the planned payment ring, could not be the source of legitimate political agency, the broader population can be the decisive factor, especially when some people are against a policy that would benefit them personally. The decisive factor of payment ring politics here is not only the experts, but also signals from the public that it is against the policy. The public is perceived as capable of problem-solving intelligence itself, as long as such problem-solving is not the result of special interests, but due to a concern for the general good.

What these two official explanations have in common is that the public cannot emerge together with an issue. Either it leaves issue dynamics to experts and representatives entirely (explanation 1) or the public only intervenes in the negative sense of not wanting a policy even though it would benefit from it (explanation 2). There is no room in these understandings of democratic politics for those who are implicated in negative ways by the payment ring, as the last quote underlines. Such explanations move in the direction of an understanding of the payment ring project as either an always-already good idea or an always-already bad idea, which obscures the many grey zones of partial benefit and partial harm introduced by such a project. For instance, one letter to the editor in *Politiken* expressed the dilemma of a voter who was normally loyal to the center-left in Danish politics, and was willing to sacrifice something to achieve less congestion in Copenhagen. Nevertheless, the voter feared

that her car repair shop would go bankrupt because of its potentially unfavorable physical location right outside the projected payment ring (Ejlertsen 2011).

Such complications seem to be backgrounded in the policy setting. Instead, the official explanations demonstrate how the public is split in two here. The first public consists of people with concrete transportation needs, which means that each individual is understood to be motivated by personal interests. It follows that politicians can intervene in their behavior by implementing a tax. It also follows that this particular public must be expected to be difficult to convince to agree to such a policy, since those with cars will not appreciate having to pay a fee to drive. Because the first public can be understood to be partisan in nature, it is not a legitimate ground for democratic decision making. The scheme of congestion charges thus "affords the citizen rather limited political agency" (Huse 2015:49).

The second public is a public of citizens who vote in elections. It is possible to convince this public if policies like the payment ring are made part of larger reform packages that are both progressive and financially responsible. The second public is not partisan in nature, something which can be ensured by consulting only those parts of the populations that speak up against a policy "even though they were the ones that would benefit from it," as the prime minister put it. If a protest happens despite personal interest, it is understood as concerned with the common good and thus as a legitimate force in democratic politics.

Following this two-level understanding of the public, the payment ring policy proposal worked as expected. The motorists got angry, but the citizens voted for the reform package. It could actually seem that the politicians had done their job well, not only in terms of identifying and launching a device for reconfiguring car-relations in Copenhagen, but also in terms of finding ways to relate the device to the public through a successful election platform, thus making sure it was not just politics, but democratic politics. However, the payment ring issue did not stay within this setting of policy making by experts and elected representatives. On the contrary, it became a controversy that unfolded also in the setting of the news media.

Having identified how the payment ring issue and the public were understood in the policy setting, I now move on to explore how they were formatted in the news media setting, focusing on how concerns were allowed to proliferate.

The news media setting

A search in the Infomedia database of Danish news stories confirms that media coverage of proposals to build a payment ring in Copenhagen predates the 2011-2012 controversy I explore here. The idea has been mentioned in the newspapers every year at least since 1990, when the so-called Würtzer Committee mentioned the possibility of a payment ring after it had been appointed by the government to develop new scenarios for traffic in the capital region (Jensen 1990). That said, the use of the term payment ring (“betalingsring”) in the newspapers was relatively stable until 2011, with 50 or less articles mentioning a payment ring annually. In 2011, that number exploded with no less than 988 articles in the national Danish newspapers mentioning a payment ring. In 2012, the number was exactly the same – 988. After that, the number of news stories mentioning a payment ring dropped to 190 in 2013 and 79 in 2014 – almost back to the pre-2011 level of interest. Based on these numbers, it makes sense to explore how the payment ring issue was partly displaced from a policy setting to a news media setting in 2011-2012.

How was the payment ring issue transformed in its new setting? First and foremost, a lot more text was written about it, not least in comparison with the S-SF policy documents, and the media texts were more widely circulated than these earlier texts. One does not have to read all the news stories in order to notice that various potential consequences of a payment ring was the focus of these texts. I focus on a few early examples in order to substantiate this claim and explore some of the stakes of the payment ring debate in the media.

Using only the years 2011-2012, the media controversy about the payment ring began in the debate section of the newspaper *Politiken* on 23 January 2011. Two of the mayors of Copenhagen, who represented the Social Democrats (S) and the Socialist People’s Party (SF), advocated for a payment ring by pointing both to existing

negative consequences of congestion in the Danish capital and future positive consequences of a payment ring (Jensen and Kjeldgaard 2011). The discussion primarily centered on economics. It had been calculated that current congestion levels came at a price of around 10 billion DKK annually in terms of lost productivity in the Danish economy due to the time wasted in traffic. A payment ring would lower the congestion level by more than 20 per cent, meaning that less money would be lost to congestion. On top of that, a payment ring would generate 2 billion DKK annually that could then be spent on improving public transportation without having to increase other taxes.

The figure of 2 billion in annual income was also mentioned in the policy setting, but that was all. Now, in a newspaper setting, we are told by the S-SF politicians that a "payment ring will benefit everyone," to quote the heading of their letter to the editor in *Politiken*. As just described, in the policy setting, the payment ring figured primarily as a source of income in a general political program. Appearing here in a newspaper setting, the payment ring is now placed at the center of attention and referred to as an initiative that stands on its own, with no reference to a general reform package.

The pro-payment ring arguments were not left unchallenged for long. Three days after the S-SF text, another letter to the editor was published in *Politiken*, arguing that a payment ring would not "solve the traffic issues, only harm the poorest motorists, those with children, etc." (Jørgensen 2011). This letter was given the title "Asocial Payment Ring." In hindsight, it is possible to see how both of these letters in *Politiken* in January 2011 were indicative of the controversy to come. Some worked hard to publish widely about the positive consequences of a payment ring, while others worked hard to make public the negative consequences of a payment ring (cf. Chapter 6).

The most intense part of the newspaper-mediated controversy about the payment ring took off on 17 May 2011, the day after both the sitting government and the S-SF alliance presented their political programs in advance of the upcoming national elections. From then on, the payment ring was mentioned in a national newspaper

almost every day until the elections on 15 September 2011, making the payment ring a central theme in the media during the election campaign.

From a mainstream agenda setting perspective, one might say that the payment ring controversy was a classic example of how politicians use specific issues to set the public agenda in terms they believe will be to their advantage. The S-SF alliance used the payment ring as a concrete example of how they would improve the Danish economy and make Denmark a better place to live if people voted for them. The sitting right-wing government used the payment ring as a concrete example of why a left-wing government would make life worse, by claiming, for instance, that it would be more expensive to live in Copenhagen for no good reason, since the beneficial effects of a payment ring were continuously called into question.[4] From this perspective, what was at stake in the news media debate was that those who could set the payment ring agenda would also be more likely to win the elections.

In this agenda setting perspective, it is not surprising that S-SF politicians would publish letters to the editor arguing that "the payment ring will benefit everyone." Nor is it surprising that they would be countered by other letters arguing that the payment ring plan was "asocial." These strong claims could be explained as different ways of trying to frame the understanding of the payment ring plans. Following this line of analysis, it is entirely possible to conclude later that "the media angled the payment ring to death," as the weekly political analysis magazine *Monday Morning* said in February 2012 (Thaysen 2012). The conclusion suggests that the payment ring adversaries won the struggle over the public agenda, understood here as the news media agenda (see also Infomedia 2012).

What is missing from this analysis, however, is how the issue itself might have been transformed during the media controversy. When one reads the news articles

[4] Top right-wing politicians campaigned in 2011 with claims that were widely publicised in the news media that living with a payment ring would cost inhabitants in Copenhagen thousands of kroner each year, while at the same time arguing that the policy would only serve to harm the economy overall (see e.g. Jensen 2011).

published about the payment ring in 2011-2012, it becomes clear that the contours of the payment ring issue are not stable at all. On the contrary, there is an ongoing proliferation of possible consequences that cause concern and conflict, something which activates new actors and expands the relevant political community.

For instance, it was argued that in many cases, it would take longer for people to get to work using public transportation than by using their cars (Rasmussen 2012). This created uncertainty about the argument that reducing congestion with a payment ring would save Denmark money overall, because more people would be at work instead of in transit. This again made it much harder for people to accept that they would have to pay to use their cars. The argument about long public transportation times was met with counter-arguments, including that the travel times had been calculated based on unfair assumptions, such as people walking to the train station instead of riding a bike. Another counter-argument was that the calculations of travel times did not take into account the positive effects of the improvements that a payment ring would finance. This last argument was tied to the larger argument about whether a payment ring should be understood as an expense or as income for the Danish economy.

Because these concerns and arguments were published by the news media, relationships between different actors and the payment ring also proliferated. With inspiration from Dewey (1927), these relationships can be understood as articulations of the various harmful indirect consequences that could be associated with a payment ring (cf. Chapter 2). Some of these actors were individuals, such as "those with children" and "the poorest motorists," as argued above. Others were nonhuman actors. In the argument just referenced, not just cars, but also bikes and trains, become part of the issue, as did organizations. When critics of the payment ring said that it was an open question whether the national railway service DSB could carry all the passengers that were supposed to shift from cars to public transport, it activated DSB as part of the political community that had to be consulted on the issue (Østergaard 2011).

As these payment ring associations multiplied in the news media, more and more uncertainties were articulated relating to the consequences of implementing the payment ring policy. Based on the pragmatist perspective on publics as sparked into being by the ontological trouble of uncertain situations (Marres 2005b), one might say that the news media is a more democratically interesting setting than the policy setting, since it seems to allow for a much more experimental way to determine the relevant issues and the relevant publics than the policy setting. But as already noted, the controversy was not exactly celebrated as a democratic success, even though the prime minister tried to argue that she had simply listened to the people when she decided to drop the payment ring (Vester 2012). Quite the contrary, as I demonstrated at the outset, the media controversy was emphasized as an example of how *not* to do politics, by both analysts and politicians, and the media were blamed for giving the payment ring too much negative press.

No doubt, controversies are partly defined by the way in which there is a lack of agreement about how to proceed in a productive way. Still, there is a question of how to value such uncertainty. While it might be possible to trace more of an issue-oriented approach to the delineation of publics in the news media setting, this is not what seems to be valued here. Instead, it seems that the displacement of the payment ring issue from the policy setting to the media setting resulted in a shift from an *economy*-oriented approach to a *politics*-oriented approach to the issue.

As the discussions about the news media having "angled" the payment ring to death suggests, the news media understand their role as one of facilitating a "debate" about the payment ring (Nielsen 2010; Schudson 2003). Instead of being situated within a general concern for the Danish economy, as in the policy setting, the displacement to the media setting meant that the payment ring became situated in a general concern for public debate in Denmark. *Politiken* is illustrative of this news media concern for public debate, as I explore further in Chapter 7. Here is a "signature" letter to the editor published by one of *Politiken*'s own editors during the election campaign:

> Our debate about the environment and the climate has become both embarrassing, petty and provincial. Because a meaningless premise

> has spread, namely that new environmental policies cannot hurt anyone's wallets. And if it happens anyway, then it is the policy makers who have a problem of explaining themselves, while those who defend their private interests per definition have a good cause. (Jespersen 2011)

This is written by someone who is in favor of a payment ring; however, the *Politiken* editor does not go into detailed arguments for why a payment ring is a good idea. He calls the payment ring a plan that makes sense "on all levels" (ibid.). What is emphasized instead in this letter is a public debate that has become corrupted, because it gives weight to opinions that just reflect predictable, private interests. In the editor's eyes, the payment ring is only a small step in the direction of a sustainable society, but the public debate could "not handle" even that:

> The idea is so obvious and necessary that several European capitals such as Stockholm and London already have practiced it for years. A tiny step in the right direction, but a step at least. But then the "you hurt my wallet"-moaning starts last week. It starts with the Liberal Party and the Conservatives, who turn the pocket money that it will cost a motorist to drive into Copenhagen into big politics by leading a campaign that appeals to the poor, poor motorists who might have to cough up with a twenty-kroner coin or more. That is what can be expected. But the depressing part is that it only takes a few hours before the S-SF mayors in the municipalities west of Copenhagen jump on and put the payment ring under pressure (Jespersen 2011).

The editor has no patience for local politicians who protect the private interests of their electorate instead of supporting a progressive policy that will make society better overall. This division between private and public interests that the editor enforces in his letter is revelatory of a logic that is central to the news media setting: There needs to be a way to serve the general public without confusing it with private interests. This ideal about the craft of journalism frames the payment ring issue as a question of keeping petty private concerns out of the way of necessary "green" reforms of Danish

society. So even when there is supposed to be a debate about an issue, in the sense of letters to the editor being printed on dedicated pages in a newspaper and where it is permissible to use subjective language and scold politicians, there is nevertheless a strong distinction between public and private interests at work. When public debate “fails” in the eyes of the newspaper editor, it is not only because he has a special affection for a payment ring that he calls “a tiny step,” but because private interests are influential.

Here is a specification of the news media setting that makes it possible to understand why issues and publics are not treated as a flexible entity here either. In the news media setting, it might be that many of the potential consequences of the payment ring plan were explored with the purpose of engaging more people in the issue. But the contours of the public as a singular national public was never allowed to change much. The relevant public remains the general public that newspapers try to make themselves relevant to by facilitating a general public debate over the common good for Danish society. Coming back to the aforementioned letter to the editor written by the owner of a car repair shop, it is telling how the concern about the shop having to close is not a legitimate concern in itself, but something that has to be qualified by the person being normally a center-left voter (Ejlertsen 2011). The dilemma is presented as a matter of whether the person can “afford” to vote for the Social Democrats, staging a clear separation between private and public interests.

The news media setting is different from the policy setting in terms of how it facilitates a multiplication of possible consequences of a policy, i.e., as something that can fuel controversy. But the media setting is also similar in the way it adopts a split between personal interests and public interests when performing a controversy. What is at stake in the *Politiken* editor’s letter is whether public debate is able to handle difficult issues in the face of influential vested interests. The *Politiken* analysis is not so different from the issue-attention cycle analysis, in that it also focuses on the public agenda as a key constraint on democratic politics. One of the consequences is a division between the “real” issues and those that make it onto the public agenda, something that Downs (1972) points to when he notes how public attention for

environmental issues did not seem to shift together with changes in substantive parts of environmental issues.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by arguing that the payment ring controversy has come to be seen primarily as a negative event in contemporary Danish politics, i.e., a political mistake. It is seen as a missed opportunity for some that was exploited by others. I mobilized a classic article from political science in order to explain this understanding of the controversy a bit further. Following Downs (1972), the public has a limited attention span when it comes to issues, something that is arguably a key constraint on contemporary democratic politics. In the agenda setting literature, this constraint has also been perceived of as an opportunity for politicians to intervene and "set the agenda" in a way that favors themselves.

The focus on public attention to issues and on the shaping of public attention with media is quite mainstream today. The conclusion of the weekly political analysis magazine *Monday Morning* that the media coverage contributed to the payment ring being understood in a negative light testifies to this (Thaysen 2012). There is a sense among politicians and journalists of the payment ring event as a missed opportunity to act on real problems of congestion due to a lack of political craftsmanship in handling the issue vis-à-vis mediated public attention to it. As the DR analyst said, politicians should have done their "homework," and as Robert said, the issue should have been "primed" better.

Based on the theoretical perspectives developed in Chapter 2, this analysis can be problematized for not allowing the public itself to be at stake in the contingencies of issue dynamics. In the focus on public attention to issues exemplified by the "issue-attention cycle" argument, the notion of the public continues to be that of a stable entity that is external to issues. Drawing on Marres (2005a), this is a missed opportunity to understand a controversy as a democratic event in the sense of facilitating an expansion of the relevant political community. Following this pragmatist argument, where the public is understood as a flexible entity, there is a

need to examine how publics and issues are configured in specific settings, rather than referring to an external idealized form such as the public as population or the issue as the misunderstood “real issue” that there was no space for in the limited attention span of the public.

I moved on to an examination of two key settings for the payment ring controversy, the setting of institutionalized politics in which the object emerged, and the setting of news media in which it became a heated controversy. I found two different activities taking place. In the policy setting, the details of a payment ring were not made relevant: the object only figured as a source of income in a larger reform package and an election platform. In the news media setting, on the other hand, the primary activity was the publishing of a long list of different positive and negative consequences of a payment ring.

The two settings and the activities taking place there imply two different roles for the public in relation to an issue like a payment ring. In the policy setting, the payment ring was understood as a technical problem to be solved by experts. In institutionalized politics, the payment ring was framed as a clear question of the common good (Latour 2007). The public was thus only understood to participate as vote-casting citizens: it was not invited into the discussion of the difficulties of implementing a payment ring (Gomart and Hajer 2003). By contrast, the public in the news media was understood quite differently; it was supposed to be having a debate about important environmental issues. For this purpose, news media published both news articles about the payment ring and letters to the editor. The consequence was the articulation of many different possible consequences of a payment ring, which led to a heated controversy in the media setting.

Following Marres (2005a), the displacement of an issue from one setting to another is an opportunity for public involvement in the specific sense that an issue and its public can be transformed. In one sense, the displacement did transform the payment ring as an issue by rendering it controversial. This raises the question of whether alternative settings can be imagined, as reviewed in Chapter 2, but also the problem of how media settings work. Is it possible to move beyond the idea that media angled the

project to death by asking questions about how media also reinvent publics and not just issues?

As demonstrated, the two settings differ, but they are also similar in that they valuate issues in relation to standards external to them. The policy setting values the "good population" in the sense of an economically efficient nation state and the ability of voters to be civic-minded. The news media setting values "good public debate" in the sense of treating issues in a balanced and critical way that is not influenced by vested interests. There is a trace here from the assumption that Downs (1972) exemplifies – that issues can be treated as coming and going in relation to a general public external to them.

The payment ring controversy also points to some of the limitations of this understanding of democratic politics as "paternoster politics," where issues can only travel up and down in relation to an external public. One important limitation is the split between the "real" issues and the issues that make it onto the public agenda. This division has been demonstrated to be at work both in the policy setting and in the news media setting. In the policy setting, there were a lot of "real" issues that S-SF wanted to address by working together, but these had to be framed in a political reform package that focused on an issue that they thought would be most likely to survive on the public agenda: financial responsibility. In the news media setting, there was a "real" issue of creating a more sustainable society, according to the *Politiken* editor, but public debate could only focus on the issue of having to pay to drive into Copenhagen.

The paternoster metaphor may be particularly useful here, since it not only illustrates the notion of a permanent rise and fall as an external constraint of public involvement in issues, but also invites us to think about how issues have to travel in ready-made boxes. The notion of paternoster politics also captures the sense that issues are not able to unfold in underdetermined ways. They must fit into pre-given boxes in order to gain or lose public attention, and not just any kind of boxes, but human-sized ones that are suggestive of the kind of human-centered understanding of the public that is at work.

As long as we operate in a paternoster politics, even media that make issue associations proliferate are not asked to facilitate the formation of issue publics. The understanding of mediated controversies as negative events points to this limitation. As Robert’s remarks demonstrate, the ability of issues to disturb the identification of the proper public and its proper constitution are understood as deeply problematic, but this “problematicness” is not appreciated as inherent to public-formations, as the issue publics theory would have it. This raises a question of what more issue-oriented media publicity could look like, something which is part of the promise of social media settings, where a public debate or agenda is not implied, but users are understood as sometimes engaging with single issues. In the following two chapters, I pursue the question of how a Facebook setting also came in play during the payment ring controversy and ask questions about to what extent there is an alternative and more issue-oriented and experimental media publicity to be found here.

A more experimental approach to issues and publics seems important, because what has become clear in this chapter is that the payment ring was embedded in multiple concerns, which also means that it is not straightforward to point to a single setting as the “most proper” for sorting it out. The issue was both environmental and economic, for example. It remains an open question whether S-SF’s “Fair Solution” reform package should be understood as an ambitious policy that should have been allowed to stay in the policy setting, or whether it was good that a media controversy prevented it from being implemented. These open questions underscore that both the setting and the issue must be allowed agency in the analysis. As such, it is possible to also see the payment ring event as an empirical challenge to paternoster politics and its idea of the public agenda as the central constraint on democratic politics that is detached from issue-oriented developments.

In the following chapters, I explore how the payment ring issue fared in a setting where the notion of a common public agenda did not act as a constraint in the same way: the social media setting. In the next chapter, I make the case that it might be worthwhile to analyze the content of payment ring-related Facebook pages by addressing the multiple ways in which the metaphor of public debate is used to direct

attention *away* from the content of social media. This work, then, is also about exploring the role of the interplay of different settings for the fate of issue-oriented politics. In the chapter that follows, I analyze the content of the Facebook pages with respect to their capacities as experiments in a more issue-oriented and less publicity-oriented democratic politics.

5. Unscrewing social media twice: Seven issue-oriented Facebook pages

Social media are currently generating a strong interest as new participatory technologies. As noted in the introductory chapter, this interest is marked by hopes that social media may offer new techniques for public participation in politics. Simultaneously, social media have for some time now been associated with a particular and contested version of such public engagement that many argue revolves around single issues (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). One prominent criticism of issue-oriented mobilizations with social media is that such media facilitate the development of so-called "echo chambers," where people group together with people they agree with and only receive information that confirms their existing views on an issue (Pariser 2011). Such effects are hard to trace empirically, and Facebook has done its own research to problematize and to some extent even reject the claims (Bakshy et al. 2012). What is of interest here, however, is not to ascribe any singular effect to a site like Facebook, but to note how the rise of social media seems to have become a practical occasion for dealing with some of the challenges related to issue politics.

As discussed in the previous chapter, social media may offer an interesting alternative setting to a news media setting, whose contributions to issue politics are constrained by the idea of a general public agenda and a general public debate in relation to which issues and issue advocates must operate. In this chapter, I begin by observing how social media are currently associated with the displacement of democratic politics away from the usual settings of parliamentary politics and news media agendas. I note that the claims are marked by references to a more authentic version of publics and their concerns. I also argue that such arguments – that social media somehow represent "the social" or "the people" better – seem to come with critiques formulated in the same representational register.

Rather than sticking with this "either-or" problem of correspondence, I move on to an investigation of how more exactly social media offer ways to make claims about public engagement in relation to an issue. I argue that several such techniques can be

identified. With a data set consisting of seven openly accessible Facebook pages established in relation to the payment ring issue, I explore three ways in which social media can become methods for enacting publics. More specifically, I trace the use of Facebook pages in the payment ring controversy by three different methods: counting, networking and reading. Along the way, I pay attention to how I am not the only one deploying these methods, and note how social media activity that is approached methodologically also has consequences for how an issue like the payment ring issue is understood. Most importantly, I argue that none of the three methods seem to lend themselves to shifts in the issue substance.

The introduction of the Facebook material and the methodological discussions in this chapter clear the way for the following chapter, where I pursue an alternative analysis of the Facebook pages on the level of the payment ring issue. The question in the next chapter is: how does Facebook contribute more substantially to the payment ring issue? What is there to find here besides online petitions, echo chambers, or uncomfortable insights into the depths of public ignorance and egoism? The present chapter paves the way for these questions by examining some of the existing understandings of social media participation and demonstrating how they each appear highly situated and partial when they are surveyed together. The point is to trace both how social media can play specific roles in controversies vis-à-vis other media, and to pave the way for a more issue-oriented approach to social media settings.

Social media as an emerging site for politics

Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly seen by politicians and journalists as political forces to be reckoned with. Some of the main events of the so-called Arab Spring have been associated with the political thrust of social media in iconic ways. Most prominently, a single Facebook page called “We are all Khaled Said” has been widely celebrated for having connected thousands of strangers and mobilized opposition to the Egyptian government. (Khamis and Vaughn 2012). The story is illustrative of how social media is associated with an ability to connect people in relation to problems in ways that the news media do not seem to be able to. Many

other cases exist where sites like Facebook are claimed to facilitate new kinds of public participation in politics. Consider this quote from the journalist Therese Rekling writing for the Danish newspaper *Berlingske*, which includes the payment ring controversy as one example of the new political significance of social media:

> The payment ring, ear-marked paternal leave and the propulsion reform are (…) examples of issues, where the political agenda seem to have been strongly influenced by opposition from groups in the population that have started their protests on social media, and where the protests have been picked up by the large media companies in the country – and in the end by the politicians, who have turned on a dime after media storms lasting days or weeks. (Rekling 2014)

The specific understanding of social media as participatory, which the famous Egyptian example and the quote above invoke, is a sense that the critical role that the free press perhaps once played in democratic societies is being taken over by new social media. Such an idea is expressed in the notion of the Internet and not least social media as the "fifth estate" of modern democracies, as the Internet scholar Bill Dutton has proposed (Dutton 2009). Social media is associated with an ability to generate public pressure that is hard to ignore. Consider this claim, which stems from another issue of the weekly political analysis magazine cited in previous chapter:

> The political centers of power are moving away from the parliaments and out to social media. It is especially so in crises, where the digital reality poses entirely new challenges to political leadership (*Mandag Morgen* 2015:1).

The notion of a digital "reality" used here is suggestive. One reason why social media should be taken as a force to be reckoned with by decision makers, the notion could be taken to suggest, is that it is not always possible to impose a certain version of reality on social media platforms. On the contrary, social media seem to facilitate the organization of large groups of people who understand things differently from those

in power. Once this happens, it does not matter so much who is right and who is wrong, because these social media assemblies are themselves a "digital reality" that must be taken into account.

While social media are celebrated as a new critical check on those in power, journalists and political analysts also raise concerns about the state of the public sphere after the rise of social media. Whereas media such as newspapers and public service television have been associated with an ability to unite nations through the enactment of an imagined community (Anderson 1983), social media seem to cater to much more fragmented and "networked" publics (boyd 2010; Ito 2008). Social media also raise questions, then, about the role of publics in contemporary societies, and the relevance of the distinction between public and private (Birkbak 2013).

One way to probe the idea that social media are a new political force is to follow an early call made in actor-network theory to unscrew those entities that are assume to be "large" or "macro" actors (Latour and Callon 1981). The notion of networked publics, however, suggests an interesting difficulty with "unscrewing" social media, however, because it suggests that the strength of these media is already explicitly understood to rely on networks of micro-actors. The analysis (and critique) of social media as facilitating processes where many are united despite their differences into some kind of larger force is already operative.

Most prominent, perhaps, is a range of critiques of social media participation as "not whole enough" (Hendricks and Hansen 2014; Pariser 2012; Sunstein 2006). The argument is inspired by Habermasian ideals of a public sphere of inclusive and rational deliberations (Habermas 1989). What authors such as Pariser and Sunstein claim is that social media are prone to facilitate the enclosure of such public debate, since they organize people according to their social networks rather than according to the information they need. Such general claims can be problematized, for instance, by noticing how a social media site like Twitter has algorithms that prioritize interaction among strangers, while Facebook does the opposite (Birkbak and Carlsen 2016a). But the critique is relevant here as an example of some of the criticism that comes with the claims that social media somehow invoke a new digital reality.

One way to proceed is to understand the echo chamber critique as pointing to methodological limitations of social media. Treating Facebook pages as online petitions in a quantitative perspective, for example, ignores the understandings that could be developed with network analysis and qualitative analysis. But, as I demonstrate, the limitations that appear from unscrewing social media into micro actors are not necessarily solely methodological. In the following, I move from quantitative analysis via network analysis to qualitative analysis, noting how in each case, Facebook pages are critiqued as "not whole enough." It seems that no matter how Facebook pages are unscrewed, they continue to be screwed in the sense of being "in serious trouble" (Oxford Dictionary of English 2013).

If these troubles persist despite different methodologies, something more than method could be at stake. Based on the analyses in this chapter, I propose that what is at stake is the question of whether social media are examined as representing "the public" or not. There is a tendency to talk in such terms in the popular discourse, as when an editorial in *Politiken* asserts that "social media are a seismograph of the state of society" and that "social media are our new public sphere" (*Politiken* 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of issue publics offers a way to move out of a game of representation and into a world of struggle over relevance. In this conceptualization, the Facebook pages are still screwed, or at least twisted, but their troubles are now potentially productive of participation, rather than (mis)representing it. More specifically, social media is no longer assumed to be able to represent and misrepresent public participation in politics, but seen as an integrated part of it, something that the activity on the Facebook pages that I examine testifies to (see Chapter 6). In order to find a way to talk about this, I will briefly revisit some of the classic ANT arguments about macro actors such as "the public."

ANT as sociology of translation – and its critics

Callon's and Latour's actor-network theory takes off from Thomas Hobbes's social contract theory, which they see as the first formulation of a relationship between

micro- and macro-actors where all differences in size are the results of transactions (Callon and Latour 1981). There are no *a priori* "larger" or "smaller" social actors. But in Hobbes's political philosophy, humans unite through a social contract to create a sovereign, making each individual into a micro-actor and the sovereign into a macro-actor. As Callon and Latour formulate it: "The sovereign is not *above* the people, either by nature or by function, nor is he higher, or greater, or of different substance. He is the people itself in another state – as we speak of a gaseous or a solid state" (Callon and Latour 1981:278, italics in the original).

Callon and Latour do not believe that Hobbes's social contract theory is a good description of reality. But they see his formulation of the relationship between micro and macro in society as valuable because it speaks to the notion of translation. This is a key concept in ANT, which captures the work and sometimes violence it takes to transform several actors into a single will. Contrary to Hobbes's thinking, this is not a primordial ceremony of society that happens once and for all, but something that happens all the time and in several ways at once in everyday life.

The methodology that Callon and Latour propose for doing a sociology of translation is to think of actors as networks (cf. Chapter 2). There is an important difference here between the radical position of thinking of actors *as* networks and the more superficial understanding of actors *in* networks. Thinking of actors *as* networks is to take the consequence of the role of translation in social life: to insist that differences in size (or better, perhaps, "reach") of actors as the result of "net-work," in the sense of translation work (Latour 2005b).

As argued in Chapter 3, one thing at stake in this methodology is whether sociological descriptions reproduce existing power relations or not (Star 1991). If we treat existing macro actors as a special class of social actors, then we contribute to their extension and size. Similarly, if we treat micro actors as a special category of individuals, we actively limit their power by cutting off their associations and separating their agency from their net-work.

Callon and Latour (1981) use the opening created for a new kind of explanation of social order to point to the role of nonhumans in stabilizing macro actors. It is not enough to enroll other human actors in alliances in order to become a macro actor. In order for this to persist longer than the interaction that establishes the association, there is a need for instruments such as legal contracts or objects such as walls to solidify the new ordering of the social world into micro and macro actors. Such nonhuman entities are important parts of actors-as-networks because they stabilize asymmetrical relationships by "black-boxing" them (Latour 1990).

While the research agenda on the agency of nonhumans in society has proven to be very productive, the sociology of translation proposed by Callon and Latour has been met with lasting criticism. Coming from a feminist perspective on technoscience, authors such as Star (1991) have argued that the early version of ANT maintains a focus on the already powerful despite its attempt to trace macro actors as networks. For instance, when Latour (1993a) describes how the French scientist Pasteur linked together heterogeneous actors and interests through screwed translations of himself and others, including nonhumans, there is still an organizing actor in the middle whose powers and networks are being extended at the expense of others. The consequence is that ANT risks ignoring marginalized perspectives and some of the more unpredictable consequences of associations in practice. As such, early ANT makes itself vulnerable to its own critique of sociological work that reproduces existing power relations by tracing the power of the already powerful.

Both the original formulation of ANT as a sociology of translation and the ontological politics critique is useful for a study of social media participation. With the work of Callon and Latour, social media can be understood as technologies for translating micro actors into macro actors. In fact, social media seem to foreground these translations. A tweet is arguably only as "large" as the number of actors who choose to retweet it and thus make the tweet appear among their own tweets. The number of retweets is emphasized by the Twitter interface, and its significance is ensured by the algorithms that select tweets for extra exposure based on retweet popularity. Facebook posts and Facebook pages grow in size in the same way by associating itself with more people (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013).

But although social media seems to operationalize and explicate processes where micro actors are translated into macro actors, the significance of social media assemblages is not readily accepted in practice. Problematizations include how social media associations seem to require very little investment, which means they cannot be expected to hold. This is expressed in popular notions such as "clicktivism" (White 2010), but also resonates with the ANT argument that an association is only as strong as the work it takes to undo it (Latour 1987).

There are multiple ways of approaching social media assemblages as political macro actors; each approach also makes possible a critique of social media that tries to undermine its political agency. With inspiration from Mol's (2002) praxiographical work, there is not only a politics of building macro actors with social media, but also an ontological politics of how these social media assemblages are traced and imbued with agency (or not) in different ways. Here is a shift based on the discussions in Chapter 3 from an understanding of Facebook as a technology with certain effect on politics towards an understanding of Facebook as a device whose effects appear as a result of shifting heterogeneous arrangements, including politics.

In the following, I begin to unscrew the payment ring-related Facebook pages by analyzing some of the elements they are composed of. I first simply foreground their net-work, but I also simultaneously note how the Facebook pages exist in a world where social media are met with specific critiques based on specific methods for accounting for social media that draws on explicit or implicit theories of democratic politics. Instead of positioning the Facebook pages as powerful examples of networked agency that can be unscrewed, whether with ANT or with very different ideas about how public debate is supposed to work, I also note how they continue to be fundamentally screwed when they are treated in politics-related practices.

Quantitative analysis and the petition critique

There were many posts, groups, events and pages about the payment ring issue on Facebook when it was a hot topic in the media in 2011-2012. For practical reasons,

and in order to respect that some posts and groups are perhaps not intended for public viewing, I limit my analysis to those Facebook pages that were accessible to all Facebook users.[5] As a second criteria, I only focus on pages that managed to attract a substantial amount of user activity, meaning, in this case pages where more than five different users are posting or commenting. This way of discriminating reflects an observation that there seems to be two quite different classes of Facebook pages: Those that never "took off," in terms of becoming hosts to interactions among several users, and those that did. In total, I found seven pages that "took off" in relation to the payment ring issue. These included pages that argued against the payment ring and pages that supported the plan. Nevertheless, most of the pages and most of the activity focused on generating resistance to the payment ring. A total of five pages were positioned against the project, while only two were pro-payment ring pages.

How to describe these pages? One of the most intuitive ways of doing so might be to do some counting. This is an easy way to describe the pages, because Facebook does a lot of counting automatically. Here is an overview based on numbers from September 2013:

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[5] A note on research ethics: It has been argued that researching protests on Facebook pages raises an ethical issue of how to protect the anonymity of participants, even when all the data is public in the sense that Facebook pages are open for any web user, including those without a Facebook login (Zimmer 2010). In this thesis I draw on an approach advocated by Reilly and Trevisan (2016) in a recent article in *Information, Communication and Society*, where the issue under discussion is how to handle the ethical dilemma of studying protest pages on Facebook. The authors argue that trying to obtain some kind of informed consent from users of such Facebook pages before reproducing their statements is both unrealistic and undesirable, since it might cool down the protests being voiced. What can be done instead is to ensure that quotes cannot be traced back to individual users through basic online search strategies. While Reilly and Trevisan develops an approach that ensures such non-retraceability while still maintaining the use of some direct quotations in the English language, the approach taken in this thesis relies on translation instead. Thus, I only offer direct quotations from unknowing Facebook users in a form where they have been translated by me from Danish to English, which makes it very difficult if not impossible to trace the statements back to their original authors even in a time of sophisticated online search engines. To further protect the anonymity of individual Facebook users, I do not provide information about exactly which page a given quotation comes from, nor the exact time when it was posted.

Table 1: Seven payment ring-related Facebook pages and numbers of supporters

Page name	Supporters
Contra payment ring pages	
"15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring"	2231
"Motorists against the payment ring"	1254
"No thanks to the payment ring"	638
"No to the payment ring"	2452
"I believe all motorists should be able to drive in and out of Copenhagen for free"	1496
Pro payment ring pages	
"Congestion ring now"	241
"I am for a payment ring"	1624
TOTAL	**9936**

The number of supporters, which is the same as the number of "likes" that a page has received, is automatically counted and published by Facebook on the top of each page, which is a way of analyzing the pages that I share with Facebook. The question that numbers invite is: Are these large or small numbers? Fortunately, I am not the only one who has to deal with this question. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one particular journalist found several of these Facebook pages and used them to argue that the opposition against the payment ring was not very impressive (Meilstrup 2012b). He stressed the fact that more than half of all Danes have a Facebook account, and that there are other protest pages that have managed to attract supporters in the tens of thousands. The journalist also noted that even though there was Facebook support against the payment ring, there was also at least one page of substantial size in favor of the project. So, according to him, the answer could at best be inconclusive.

The particular Facebook method employed here is that of seeing Facebook as a sort of inconclusive petition. Indeed, the aforementioned *Monday Morning* journalist places the Facebook numbers side by side with numbers taken from online petitions (ibid.). He then focuses on the number of supporters, and argues that this is not representative of the Danish public (ibid.). By doing so, he implies that Facebook activity *can be* representative of the Danish public, or at least that it can be more representative than the analyses provided in the news media. This quantitative petition-like approach is the first of three methods for accounting for social media participation that I present in this chapter. It comes with a corresponding critique of social media participation as something that can be insufficiently populated. Social media participation with Facebook pages can thus be ignored in the same way as a petition with only a few signatures can be ignored.

Sometimes the analysis stops here, as was the case with this particular journalist. But the petition-oriented analysis of the Facebook pages can also be problematized. One way is to ask in relation to what population these pages count as petitions. But what I focus on here is how the main content of the pages is a stream of activity. Even if we stay within a quantitative approach, there seems to be much more counting of comments, posts, likes, and shares to be done. Treating Facebook pages as petitions ignores such activity that takes place on the pages:

Table 2: Activity levels on the seven Facebook pages

Page	Supporters	Posts total	Comments	All acts of engagement
"15 good reasons…"	2231	163	306	2116
"Motorists against the…"	1254	186	269	1288
"No thanks to payment…"	638	212	216	1540
"No to the payment ring…"	2452	470	1069	6604
"I think all motorists…"	1496	373	985	4531
"Congestion charges now"	241	66	22	333
"I am for a payment ring"	1624	111	95	685
TOTAL	**9936**	**1581**	**2962**	**17097**

These other counts were only a little bit more difficult to come by than that of supporters, because the Facebook Application Programming Interface (API) allows the export of all the interactions on a page into a spread-sheet format that makes it relatively easy to add them up. Learning how to program the Facebook API is not a requirement, because a tool called Netvizz is available for academic research, which allows you to export Facebook pages as spread-sheet files (Rieder 2013). The page activity numbers shown in Table 2 were retrieved with Netvizz[6].

There are a total of almost 3000 comments on the seven pages. As becomes clear when reading them, these comments are not auto-generated by bots, they are written by actual Facebook users. Running counter to the petition critique, the numbers could be taken to suggest a considerably higher level of engagement. This is not least interesting for the purpose of challenging the "clicktivism" accusation that social media associations are very light, ephemeral relationships. However, when some users write one or several comments, it indicates that it is more complicated than that.

One way to specify this activity a bit further is to ask about the issue of the authorship of comments. For example, the page on the top of the list, called "15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring," gathered 2231 users. Out of these, 169, or less than 10%, made comments. Of the 169, only 45 made more than one comment, and only two users made more than seven comments. These two users were very active, however – both made more than 20 comments. In total, the comments of these two users constitute 16% of the total number of 306 comments on the page.

This distribution of comment authorship might seem very uneven, but it is a well-known distribution of participation on the web, which resembles a power law distribution (Shirky 2008). What is characteristic about this distribution is that there is a long tail of fairly passive users or sites that can then be contrasted with a tall peak

[6] "All acts of engagement" include not only posts and comments, but also likes and shares of posts and comments.

of a few very active users or sites. This observation suggests that the Facebook pages cannot be understood as deliberative spaces in an idealized sense where all participants have an equal say and are heard equally, as the ideal of public debate has it.

At the same time, the number is not so different from the "hundred-to-one ratio between readers and writers" that Nielsen (2010:25) finds for letter writers to *Politiken* based on data from 2006. In other words, there is not necessarily a reason to ascribe some sort of digital exceptionalism to the proportion of "active" supporters on social media.

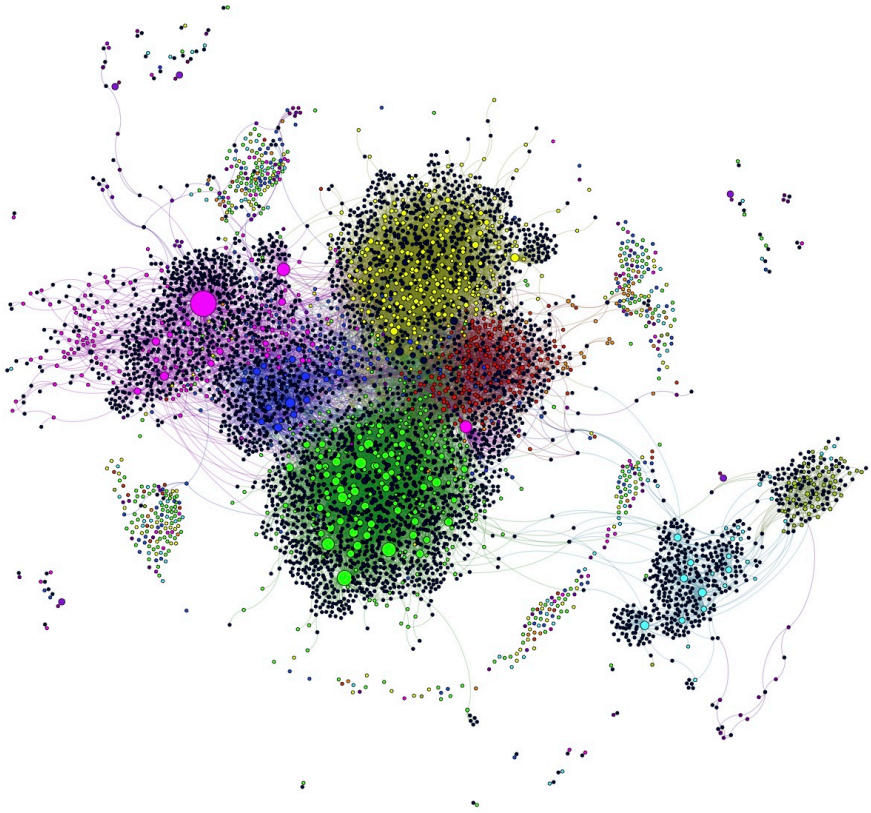
The main thing to notice is that while the pages lend themselves to be understood and critiqued as petitions, at the same time they are clearly different, both in terms of the investments of time and energy made by some users and because members can join multiple pages if they want, which makes it problematic to interpret support as some kind of vote. In the next chapter, I consider the consequence of these observations and examine more closely what happened in all these comments, and how the payment ring issue was articulated on the Facebook pages. But for now, I move on to a second method for accounting for social media participation and a critique that is specific to it.

Network analysis and the echo chamber critique

An alternative understanding of the payment ring-related social media activity could start by appreciating how Facebook pages are explicitly networked spaces in the sense that what goes on there is actively linked up with other sites. A user who likes a page, but otherwise remains passive, for instance, is likely to be quite active on other parts of the Facebook platform, such as personal profiles, messaging, events and so on. And a user who is very active on a particular Facebook page might also be very active on other pages. Such an analysis implies locating Facebook users in networks of pages, where they are active together with other users. As such, it is very different from the petition-oriented approach observed above, which implies that each user casts a vote in one place only.

Just like the total number of like counts was readily available on the Facebook pages, the more networked way of understanding users and pages as constituted through a distributed range of activities is also native to Facebook. It is also possible to export graph files with Netvizz and map the pages as networks of interactions between users and posts:

Figure 1: A Gephi visualization of user-post interaction on the seven Facebook pages



This is a quite different way of approaching the Facebook pages than the previous counting approach. What is visualized here are clusters of activity. Each colored node is a Facebook post on one of the seven pages about the payment ring, and each black

node is a Facebook user. Each time a Facebook user has engaged with a specific post, a tie is created between the user and the post, which pulls the two nodes closer together in the visualization, which is based on the ForceAtlas2 algorithm (Jacomy et al. 2014). Some of the colored nodes – the posts – are larger than others, which means that users have engaged with these posts more than other posts. I have assigned a specific color to each of the seven Facebook pages. This means, for instance, that all green nodes represent posts from the same Facebook page.

If we ignore the "satellite nodes" in the periphery for now – posts that have been interacted with very little, or not at all – the network graph seems to be made up of two components. In the center, there is the main component, which consists of five Facebook pages. Each page is clearly visible as a nicely delineated cluster of posts and users. At the same time, the five pages also form a larger component together. This closeness is a product of the specific visualization algorithm, and does not say much in and of itself. But it can be interpreted in relation to the smaller component in the lower right corner of the visualization. Here are the two last pages, which cluster quite nicely around themselves, but also, to some extent, with one another.

The distance between the two components in the graph – the main one in the center and the smaller one to the right – proves to be analytically meaningful, because the five pages in the main cluster are all opposed to the payment ring project, while the two pages to the right are both supportive of the project. What we have here, then, is one way to represent the distance between pro and con in the payment ring issue on Facebook.

If the analysis ended here, it could speak to a particular critique of social media participation concerned with the formation of echo chambers, where users are shielded from those they do not agree with (Pariser 2011, Sunstein 2006, Hendricks and Hansen 2014). The network approach, then, is the second method with which to account for social media participation, and the echo chamber critique is specific to it. In my case, the echo chamber critique would highlight that there are only about ten ties between the two clusters in the network, meaning that only about ten users out of ten thousand have been active across the pro and con divide.

However, the echo chamber critique must also be problematized. The notion of echo chambers assumes that there is an open space of public deliberation that the echo chambers are shutting users out of – some kind of public agora. This is exactly what cannot be expected to be available from an issue-oriented perspective, as Marres (2012a) argues (see Chapter 2). Also, the quantitative analysis of the Facebook pages indicated that they are not sites of equal deliberation in any straightforward way. Most users are completely passive when it comes to taking part in the more "deliberative" aspects of posting and commenting. A few users get to dominate the space by posting and commenting much more than others. Instead of arguing that there should have been an open dialogue among equals, which is unlikely to exist anywhere in practice, one could thus begin by asking questions about who these users are and why some are more active than others, which I explore further in the next chapter. For now, what should be noticed is how the two different Facebook methods for assessing publics discussed so far problematize each other and render uncertain not just what the political value of the pages is, but also how to account for this value at all. These are two ways of understanding Facebook activity as a politically relevant expression of sociality, but when examined next to each other in some detail, they also rob each other of any self-evidence.

Qualitative analysis and the flaming critique

A third method with which social media participation is analyzed and critiqued here is more qualitative. In the case of the payment ring-related Facebook pages, one of the first things that a more qualitative analysis has to deal with is that what primarily seems to be going on the Facebook pages is a sharing of links that point *outside* of Facebook. Again, this problematizes the two methods deployed above by suggesting that Facebook activity cannot necessarily be understood as a neatly delineated phenomenon. One of the two very active users mentioned above, for instance, kept posting a link to an online petition against the payment ring located on another website. But most of the links point to news media websites and specific news stories about the payment ring issue. The page examined in some quantitative detail earlier – "15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring" – in fact offers a collection of links

already in the description of the page. The collection is then continuously expanded by the administrator(s), as they add posts with new links to news articles that they think contain good reasons to oppose the payment ring. These link-posts are then responded to by the page supporters, who like and comment on them.

In a more qualitative mode of analysis, one has to deal with the question of what kind of participation this is. If it were just an online petition, there would be no need for a continuous flow of updates; once a signature has been submitted for a petition, that would be enough. By contrast, the link dynamic resembles the activity of a social movement that seeks to frame a problem in order to act on it collectively. But the Facebook pages are not marked by an attempt to build a collective identity and organizational continuity, as a social movement would be inclined to do. Instead, what is foregrounded is a circulation of various possible consequences of a payment ring. A similar dynamic was observed in the news media analysis in the last chapter, with one significant difference. In the newspapers, payment ring articles are mixed with other news stories and sections in order to cater to the general public. On the Facebook pages, there are only news stories related to the payment ring. One might say that there is a "mapping" of the payment ring issue going on. At the same time, however, the pages have taken a clear stance on the payment ring issue from the very beginning, as stated very clearly with page names such as "No to the payment ring" (see Table 1). So what do all the links, posts, and comments add?

When examined qualitatively, it can be unclear what the many comments add except for anger and slander. Here is one of the longer comments that is representative in tone of many of the other comments:

> [I] find it interesting to see some people expose publicly how little intelligence they actually have… (…) opinion editor Michael Jespersen is the second stupidest person to listen to in this issue. Why is it sad that all the mayors of the environing municipalities immediately raises the point that it will take tremendous investments in parking facilities, so that it will be technically/practically possible to actually leaving the car behind…??? Why would you have

> preferred that all the motorists clapped their hands and paid with a smile…? Why the hell would that help the environment that you are rambling about !????? – but do not know anything about whatsoever !!???
>
> …but Mr. Per Michael Jespersen (sorry I forgot the fool's name above) is however COMPLETELY RIGHT, when he calls the Danish environmental debate embarrassing…! But he could contribute quite a lot himself to repair that! – by stopping to participate in it… There is clearly no reason or coherence in what he is writing…[7]

As it reads here, the comment expresses a high level of frustration and defamation of another person. It is clear that the comment requires more context to be fully understood, but as it stands, the needed context is not immediately accessible on the Facebook page where the comment is found. The result is that the comment comes across primarily as a misplaced burst of anger, not only as it is reprinted here, but even in the setting to which it was first submitted. As such, it is illustrative of the critique that often comes with this third and more qualitative method of accounting for social media participation, which is how unfair, egoistic and even hateful social media users appear to be. The observation is often referred to as a tendency towards "flaming" on the web, something which researchers have long argued has to do with a decontextualization, whose effect is then ascribed to the medium (Lea et al. 1992).

The flaming critique of social media participation is still widespread, and there are certainly reasons for that, which the above example illustrates. However, one thing that aggravates the impression that social media are prone to unfair and inappropriate commentary is that newspapers sometimes select the most outrageous comments from a Facebook page and reproduce them out of context in order to

[7] As mentioned in the previous footnote, for the sake of protecting the anonymity of the Facebook users, I do not provide references to the specific Facebook page or the specific time comments were submitted. As with other quotes from Danish, all Facebook quotes are translated to English by me.

demonstrate the anger that seems to exist on social media. Here is an example from the front page of *Politiken*'s debate section on 28 February 2015:


POLITIKEN 2

Lørdag 28. februar 2015

DEBAT

Kathrine Lilleør: 3F's grådighed presser ufaglærte ud i arbejdsløshed. Bagsiden

KRONIK | DEBAT | ANALYSE | NAVNE | TV

"I jøder er mestre i at lyve og manipulerer dog ser det ud til at folk har lært at gennemskue jeres manipulationer.. tak for det
Maj, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

"Det man gør mod jødiske babyer der omskæres uden bedøvelse er en tortur som [Auschwitz-lægen, red.] Doctor Mengele kunne have fundet på
Helene, Facebook, 21.12.2014

"Begynder efterhånden at forstå HVORFOR jøden har været forfuldt gennem århundreder... F***cking svin!
Lars, Facebook, 26.11.2014

"Så rejs hjem til lorte Israel
John, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

"Skal jøder beskyttes, så må de sq selv hoste op med pengene til private vagter... Jeg er sq træt af at hører på deres evige klynken
Brian, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

"Væk med det utøj!
Thorkild, Facebook, 4.-5.. 2014

"Min pointe var at Jøderne langt hen ad vejen havde nogle af de samme synspunkter som Nazisterne havde ... Jøderne har altid været mestre i at gøre sig selv til ofre
Rolf, Facebook, 31.3.2014

"Så længe vore politikere ligger i lommen på det folk, så sker der intet
Vibe, Facebook, 21.12.2014

"Jeg tror godt vi kan klare os uden børne mishandlere. I gas ovnen med jer ... Jeg har intet problem med at henrette børnemishandlere
Toke , Facebook 4.-5.2. 2015

"Det er zionistisk politik, åh de stakkels jøder, altid så forfulgte og aldrig gjort nogen noget. Think Im gonna cry
Anders, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

"Den jødiske lobby er magtfuld
Hanne, Facebook, 5.11. 2014

"Hvis jøderne vil prioteres højre kan de sgu bare rejse hjem til jødeland
Allan, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

"Hvorfor skulle vi passe på dem? Jøderne er selv med i dette plot! Vores banker drives af Jøder (Rothschild) og som har finansieret Zionismen som laver folkemord og fylder medierne med løgn og propaganda de har ødelagt al politik i diverse lande for at skjule de har snydt med pengene ...
Lars, Facebook, 20.-22.2. 2015

Citaterne er taget fra Facebook-debatter om omskæring og om attentater i København. Jens-André Herbener har sendt ca. 200 citater til Politiken. Debattørernes efternavne er fjernet, men er redaktionen bekendt. De grammatiske fejl er skribenternes egne.

Gammeldanskere hader også jøder

Nu er det ikke kun radikaliserede muslimer, men også helt almindelige melhvide gammel-danskere, der truer jøderne. På Facebook vrimler det med hadefulde udfald, skriver Jens-André

BLÅ BOG
JENS-ANDRÉ HERBENER

All the quotes in the black square originated on Facebook, but are removed from their setting in or on whatever page, group, profile, or thread that they belong to. The quotes are carefully selected by the editor as exemplifying extreme comments about Jews in Denmark,[8] thereby creating the impression that what goes on on Facebook tends to have this general tone. This emphasis is highlighted by the layout that uses the Facebook logo as a black background. Again, this critique of social media

[8] The *Politiken* page is included here primarily for illustrative purposes. To give the reader an idea about what it says, here is a translation of the first of the Facebook comments: ”You Jews are masters of lying and manipulating, though it seems that people have learnt to see through your manipulations. Thanks for that” (Herbener 2015). The collection was made in response to a news story about anti-Muslim comments on Facebook, which featured a similar illustration (Vangkilde and Raabæk 2015).

participation can be problematized. A bit of network analysis would make it possible to situate apparently outrageous comments in the context of specific links and specific groups of interlocutors.

To give an example: a greater sense of meaning can be restored to the comment about the payment ring issue quoted above by following a few links. The comment is clearly a response to something, although it is not entirely clear what. The first step is to note that the comment appears below a specific post. The post is a link posted by the page administrator. The link points to a letter to the editor published online by *Politiken*. The chain of links does not stop here, however, because the letter is also not the text that the Facebook comment reacts to. But if one continues the analysis beyond Facebook, it appears that on the *Politiken* website, there are links to other letters to the editor inside the text that the link on Facebook points to. One of these other letters is the one written by Per Michael Jespersen, the editor of debate at *Politiken*, who is the person under attack in the Facebook comment.

The letter was referenced in the previous chapter as an example of how a news media professional is concerned with the state of public debate. In this Facebook example, however, the letter is drawn into the details of the payment ring issue. To briefly reiterate, the *Politiken* editor sees a payment ring as a small, non-controversial task:

> The payment ring is a tiny beginning, a small corner of the total trouble that we will have to deal with in the years to come if we want to better the climate and the environment and reconfigure our economy (Jespersen 2011).

The *Politiken* editor argues that the payment ring is really only a small nuisance, and that it would be a shame and a merely symbolic gesture to allow the motorists in Copenhagen not to pay to drive in and out of the city. Having read this text, it becomes much easier to understand why the Facebook user disagrees so strongly with the *Politiken* editor. The Facebook user is convinced that there are serious practical problems with the payment ring, including the lack of parking space for those who are supposed to leave their cars outside the city when they travel into Copenhagen.

When the user sees a person in the relatively powerful position of a newspaper editor using his privileged speaking time to belittle these practical problems with the payment ring, the Facebook user gets angry and retorts. With a little bit of clicking through hyperlinks, then, it is possible to re-establish some of the sanity and meaning of what at first seems like another unproductive outburst on social media.

Unscrewing the Facebook pages in two ways

In this chapter, I have moved among three mainstream methods to analyze social media participation. Each of the analyses, of course, could be expanded upon. But my aim has not been to produce a thorough quantitative analysis of the payment ring-related Facebook pages, nor a complete network analysis or an adequate qualitative analysis. The purpose of this quick methodological tour has instead been to unscrew the Facebook pages in two senses of the word.

The first sense of "unscrewing" is the ANT sense (Callon and Latour 1981). In this perspective, the three different analyses have each contributed to an unpacking of some of the net-work that happens each time a social media assembly comes across as a powerful political force. For example, we have seen that there are many Facebook users involved, some of which are much more active than others. This suggests that what was taken by some as a poll of the Danish population given the widespread use of Facebook is also the work of a few industrious activists. We have also seen how social media activity is networked, which means that the same users can support several Facebook pages, making each of them look larger than they are if treated as petitions in the mode of "one vote per head." Finally, we have seen how the activity on the Facebook pages for the most part revolves around content from outside Facebook. This goes against the notion of a separate "social media reality" and raises questions instead about the interplay between old and new media. Together, all these observations help explain how social media can be seen as a macro actor in democratic politics.

In observing these Facebook-oriented methods at work, I have suggested that they come with connections to ideas and concepts found elsewhere, such as petitions,

inclusive public debate, and rational argumentation. As such, Facebook publicity is enacted with the help of quite conventional understandings of publicity. To recapitulate, social media was accounted for and critiqued as 1) a sort of online petition with sufficiently few participants to prove that the public had no clear stance on the issue, 2) a trap that leads users into echo chambers and robs them of the capacity of rational deliberation they are assumed to have, and 3) an uncomfortable insight into the anger and lack of coherence that resides in the arguments of lay people on the web.

Following these conclusions, the Facebook activity may have been unscrewed quite a bit, but it is nevertheless still screwed in the second sense of being in trouble. More specifically, none of the three accounts invites us to take social media participation seriously: it is understood as fundamentally deficient. The way the pattern of critique is reproduced across different methodological approaches suggests that this is more than a technical problem with social science methods that cannot account for the new developments in digital media. For each of the three critiques, I tried to unscrew the Facebook activity in the second way of making it less screwed by adding a bit more empirical nuance. However, we still need to ask what a qualitative examination of these Facebook pages can reveal, which is the topic of the next chapter.

The question that my second unscrewing raises is why the critical accounts continue to circulate widely if they are so clearly methodologically flawed? If we do not accept that this is simply a technical problem that testifies to a lack of methods competence among commentators and journalists, the question is what more substantial interest exists in circulating critical accounts of social media participation? Drawing on the theoretical perspectives developed in Chapter 2, the representation of public participation is not a neutral or technical task of mirroring the true leanings of general public opinion, but a question of formatting participation that has substantive consequences for the relevance of issues in democracy. As such, the above analyses of social media participation can be examined not only as a tracing of a general democratic deficiency of social media, but also as substantive interventions in controversial issues.

Conclusion

What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that it matters how social media participation is analyzed. This is related to what method is used, which is also to say that it is related to what social media are understood to be methods for. Are social media an on-going polling of the Danish population, a tracing of vested interests, or a source of banalities and defamation?

What is at stake is what the word "social" in "social media" means. This is not only a methodological problem, but also part of issue formation, insofar as Facebook is enrolled in specific ways or entirely ignored in mediated controversies. In particular, if Facebook is taken to mean something "social" as opposed to something "political" or "technical," then it is very easy to overlook how concrete practical concerns are voiced and qualified through the specific dynamics of liking, commenting and posting.

The analysis is this chapter suggests that an opposition between something technical and something social is too simple when it comes to social media participation. In this chapter, I used three methods to introduce the Facebook material while at the same time noting how these methods are also operative on Facebook as a participatory device. The analysis could be taken to suggest that rather than opposing the "social" Facebook with a "technical" payment ring, the Facebook pages should also be appreciated as offering technical ways of getting at the social. The different understandings of Facebook as a method for understanding the social come into being together with specific ways of understanding public participation in the payment ring issue.

This observation raises the question of how issues and Facebook come into being together. The advantage of this question is that it does not posit social media as a technology that is external to public participation, i.e., as something that can have a "media effect" on a public. As Marres and Moats (2015) argue, there may be a need to extend the principle of symmetry found in studies of scientific controversies in STS to the distinction between media and content. In so far as "each attempt by actors to articulate the controversy changes the controversy" (ibid.:5), it is important not to

decide *a priori* what belongs to the category of media effects and what belongs to the substance of a controversy.

In this chapter, I have pursued this idea by demonstrating how it is possible to mobilize Facebook pages in multiple ways in relation to issue politics. The purpose has been to unsettle the approach where social media like Facebook are understood as tools for confirming or rejecting the existence of a public in relation to an issue. This matters, because if social media have contributions to offer for a more issue-oriented politics, these contributions are removed from view by such a representationalist approach. In the payment ring controversy, there was a substantial amount of activity of Facebook, but these Facebook pages were only taken up by other media to either reject the existence of a true public uproar, as the *Monday Morning* journalist did, or to confirm claims made by right-wing politicians that the general public was strongly opposed to the project.
From an issue politics perspective, however, social media like Facebook may have things to offer other than performing the general public or the general state of society, because issues call such generalizations into question. Here, a contrast may be drawn between social networks and issue networks (Marres 2006), which raises the question of what the payment ring-related Facebook pages have to offer if they are not approached as stand-ins for some sort of extra authentic social version of public opinion, but as groupings that break with social networks to organize around issues. The question here is how such an organization does work to transform issues and raise publics, not in a general sense, but in a more issue-specific sense. This provides a new role for social media, not as "seismographs" of public opinion or as producing a new reality, but as techniques that are enrolled in issue politics.

The analysis in this chapter took a first step in this direction by showing how different assumptions about social media participation shape the approach to social media as a method for understanding public participation in an issue. What has been absent in the analyses are issue dynamics, which suggests that the mainstream or popular approaches to social media participation run on the conventional understanding of the public as external to individual issues. In the next chapter, I raise the question of

how Facebook dynamics and issue dynamics also interfere with each other on the payment ring-related Facebook pages.

6. An asocial payment ring: "Everyday publicity" on Facebook

In the previous chapter, I introduced the payment ring-related Facebook pages by situating them to concerns about public debate that are mainly external to Facebook. These critiques of social media that appear not least in the press are interesting insofar as they reveal some of the ideals, including a well-behaved public debate and a coherent public opinion, that journalists and media analysts rely on. At the same time, there is the outstanding question of what is specific about Facebook, because contrary to a newspaper like *Politiken* (see the next chapter), the social media platform does not have it as a primary ambition to deliver public debate or public opinion. As is well known, Facebook started in a US college setting, where one of the main concerns was how to scout for dates. Seen in this light, it is quite surprising that Facebook is now increasingly understood to be central to politics, as referenced in the last chapter.

When associated, for instance, with "media storms" (Rekling 2014), social media like Facebook are attributed a certain effect of bringing out volatile publics. Such claims warrant an examination of how public participation in politics and social media mutually shape each other. Public debate critiques only make this more important, because approaching Facebook activity with external standards and formats, such as opinion polls and rational debate, can easily end up treating Facebook as a more coherent actor than it is. This happens, for instance, when Facebook activity is treated as an indicator of the leaning of the general public, which leaves out how more exactly such Facebook activity comes about and who participates.

Keeping this in mind raises a question of what makes it possible to talk about some sort of "social media effect" or "Facebook effect" in relation to public issues in the first place. In this chapter, I unpack some of these dynamics, and argue that the case of payment ring-related Facebook pages suggests that quite fragile arrangements were put in place, based on the work of pages administrators and users, as well as a reflexive repurposing of the Facebook platform. Pursuing these questions are part of

the praxiographic approach advocated in Chapter 3, which seeks to re-describe media devices by focusing on otherwise overlooked practices and entanglements. Ultimately, the aim of doing so is to come closer to an understanding of what contributions a social media platform like Facebook can make to issue politics instead of public sphere debates.

I began exploring some of these questions in the previous chapter, where I showed how some users are much more active than others on the Facebook pages, how some users overlap between different pages, and how some statements can only be understood if Facebook is appreciated as closely intertwined with other websites. I demonstrated how three methodological approaches to the Facebook pages – quantitative, qualitative and network analysis – were used to approach Facebook by other media analysts.

I also took steps to problematize each of these approaches, suggesting that they, each in their own way, position Facebook as representative of an authentic "social" related to the payment ring issue. This leads to a media effects problem where "the social" is either already corrupted or corrupted by media. The problem changes, however, if media are understood as necessarily a part of the formatting of issues and the inherently problematic "socialities" that relate to such issues (cf. Chapter 2).

One result of the analysis in the previous chapter was that each of the three approaches to Facebook analysis that are already in use do not deal much with substantive issue dynamics. In this chapter, I pursue a different approach, which is to partly "re-distribute" the task of accounting for what Facebook is and what the payment ring issue is to the Facebook material (Marres 2012b). In other words, if the previous chapter traced and discussed three external critiques of the Facebook practices, this chapter takes a more internal approach to these practices.

The empirical basis is a reading of all the posts and comments on the Facebook pages related to the payment ring. These discursive exchanges are quite rich, both in terms of offering discussions about what Facebook is and what it is good for, and in terms of how the payment ring issue should be understood and what is relevant to it. In my

analysis, I focus on the five pages opposing the payment ring, because these contain most of the activity. In the next section, I first explore how the payment ring issue was articulated with Facebook posts and comments. Then I move on to a discussion of how Facebook itself was also a topic in the posts and comments. Third, I focus on the relationship between page administrators and page supporters.

From an issue-oriented perspective, the material is fascinating, since the Facebook comments take both Facebook and the payment ring issue to be underdetermined entities. This capacity of the Facebook material, however, must also be understood as partly due to the way I, as a researcher, "read across" posts, comments and pages on Facebook. There is a methodological challenge here of not reading a significance into the Facebook content that is not there in the practices of actual users, while at the same time avoiding the wholesale rejection of the relevance of individual comments and posts that I traced in the previous chapter. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the empirical richness found on the Facebook pages. As such, the methodological challenge is handled by deliberately reading some degree of significance into the Facebook material, with inspiration from Mol's argument for the need to write forward otherwise under-articulated care practices (Mol 2008).

Another part of the response to the methodological challenge is to note that there is a re-assembling of Facebook and the payment ring issue going on that can only be traced by taking seriously the work done with comments and posts. In order to describe this work, I use the concept of "captation," borrowed from Cochoy (2007) and defined below. This notion is useful for analyzing Facebook as an "ad hoc device" through which politicians and issue advocates can come to "exert a hold over" a public through issue engagement (ibid.). One advantage of the concept of captation is that it makes it possible to appreciate the Facebook material not as existing in a vacuum, which is a risk associated with treating the Facebook pages as free-floating documents, but also not as a result of external manipulation by political strategists. Instead, it points to an analysis of a fragile dynamic of "reciprocal manipulation" at play between page administrators and users through Facebook as a device (cf. Callon 2002).

To foreshadow the results a bit, I find that in this specific case, the process of captation revolves around an understanding of citizens as disposed to engage in issues that impact on their everyday lives, and that this is what makes Facebook a relevant ad hoc device for the captation of publics. Here is a specification of how Facebook activity is connected with the formation of issue-oriented publics, which invites an engagement with Facebook as a site of a kind of "everyday publicity" that is especially relevant for the formation of such publics. At the same time, these processes come with a fragility and variability due to the Facebook platform's constant shifts in focus toward what is new and engaging (Birkbak and Carlsen 2016a). Before getting to these discussions, however, let me turn to a basic question of what seems to be happening at the Facebook pages in question.

Payment ring concerns

As already noted, the content that takes up the most space on the Facebook pages are links to news articles posted by the page administrators. To take a particularly clear example, the page called "15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring" has as its admin-authored description a collection of 15 harmful consequences of the payment ring. Each claim is summarized in a sentence and accompanied by a link to its source, which is most often a newspaper article.

The first of the "good reasons" reads, "The payment ring harms those with a low income." This is a statement about what the future with a payment ring would be like: those who are not well off will be most affected by the project. This economic argument is arguably especially significant since the payment ring was proposed by a center-left political alliance that would normally be understood as representing the interests of those with low incomes. The same point was made in one of the newspaper letters to the editor cited in Chapter 4. This suggests that there is no clear boundary between how the payment ring was qualified as an issue in social media and how it was articulated as an issue in news media. Issue politics as inflected by social media may then not be well understood if social media are approached as an alternative "reality" (Chapter 5).

The second and third reasons of the "15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring" state that "motorists in Copenhagen already pay the highest parking fees in the world" and "Denmark has by far the most expensive taxes and levies in Europe." These statements focus on the present situation rather than on imagining a payment ring future. They highlight the vulnerability of another group in relation to the payment ring project; this time it is not those with low incomes, but Danish motorists, who are understood as already persecuted by fees and taxes, a pressure to which the payment ring would supposedly only add. These reasons are followed by a fourth, which states, "The payment ring will make property prices decrease." This is another statement about potential future consequences of the payment ring project that suggests that yet another group might be worse off in a payment ring future: home owners whose property will lose value.

The list goes on, but these first four claims suffice to show how the page establishes multiple relationships to describe how the payment ring project will harm specific groups. The "15 good reasons" page is a good example of the work done by the admins of the Facebook pages under consideration, namely that of curating a collection of news stories that underpins a position either for or against the payment ring. It is worth noting that there is no attempt to group resistance around one particular interest group that existed prior to the payment ring controversy. People with low incomes are appealed to on the same page as well-off property owners. Facebook is used to build issue-specific networks of opposition to the payment ring that unites otherwise distinct social groupings and social networks (Marres 2006).

The links to news stories posted by page administrators are often liked and commented upon by supporters of the page. With these posts and comments, which are submitted by regular users, payment ring-related concerns proliferate further. Such proliferation was already noted with respect to the news media in Chapter 4. This raises a question of what is different about these Facebook pages: comments also appear below many online newspaper articles today. In one instance, the newspaper *Politiken* even launched an online call for comments about whether it was the right decision to drop the payment ring. The question generated 79 comments from readers on *Politiken*'s website (Politiken.dk 2012). At other newspaper websites, the

comments are even integrated directly with Facebook, as in the case of the other major Danish daily, *Jyllands-Posten*.

It follows that it may not be enough to list the various concerns ignited by the payment ring and made public through Facebook in order to grasp how these issue-oriented Facebook pages contribute to issue politics in this case. Such a list will not necessarily look different from what happens in the news media, especially not in a time of digital news with open online commentary (Reagle 2015). However, there can be important differences with regard to comparison of the ways social media structure their content, which is indeed something digital methods for controversy mapping make use of (Rogers 2013).

Specifying the interference of social media publicity with the payment ring issue is not done simply by focusing on the issue but must also take into account how publics are specifically organized by/in relation to social media. In order to do so, I now move to a discussion of content concerned with the assembly of a public around the issue. I then move on to argue that we might have to understand the issue, the public, and the Facebook "media effect" as coming into being simultaneously.

Facebook as a mobilizing technology

Some activity on the Facebook pages focuses directly on the efforts to mobilize in relation to the payment ring. Paying special attention to this part of the Facebook material is important, because it provides hints about the practical challenges of issue-oriented Facebook mobilizations. Drawing on the method of praxiography discussed in Chapter 3, the study of practical work is a key strategy to unpack taken-for-granted understandings of the phenomena in question (Mol 2002, Heuts and Mol 2013). These include the understanding of social media as mirrors that reflect how apathetic, uninformed or ego-centric the public can be (as traced in the previous chapter).

The activity on the Facebook pages that discusses issue-oriented mobilization does not fit into a singular mode of "Facebook activism" (Iskander 2011). Some posts on the Facebook pages suggest that the main thing to do with Facebook is to assemble a

crowd in the sense of a large amount of people that can impress due to sheer size. As one administrator puts it in two separate comments:

> Let us together make this page the biggest about the payment ring. Share preferably with your friends today.

> The group grows day by day. Today we have grown by more than 30 persons. But we can grow even more. Remember to invite your friends so we can prove how large the opposition is against the payment ring.

Such calls for sharing the page with one's friends and inviting them to also support the page are common; they are most often made by the page administrators. This understanding of Facebook organizing could be called mainstream in the sense that it takes the pages to be a kind of "socially enhanced" online petition where people's personal networks can be easily activated (see e.g. Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2005). This observation also underpins the claim in the previous chapter that this is one way in which Facebook pages tend to be approached in relation to issues. Further to this point, a few comments discuss the technical details of how to operate Facebook better when it comes to assembling a crowd:

> Many have asked how to invite their friends. We would love to have many members so we can show S and SF that we don't want a payment ring through Copenhagen. Is there anyone, who knows how to do this[?] Or is it only an administrator right[?]

Comments like this also suggest that it is not always straightforward to use Facebook as a simple "click and forward" opinion poll. There are many functionalities and layers on the Facebook platform, including the distinction between being an administrator of a page and being a regular supporter. Several other comments take such technical concerns a step further and question whether Facebook is the appropriate tool at all:

> Can we organize a proper petition here on Facebook?
>
> Had not seen that this was more than a Facebook protest. Cool!

These comments illustrate how part of the activity on Facebook has to do with the limitations of Facebook as a protest tool. The last comment refers to a "Facebook protest" as a limited form of protest action. In a similar vein, the first comment calls for a "real" petition instead of the Facebook page. Far from being a convenient tool for gauging popular opinion, Facebook is explicitly contested as to what is to be expected of such pages as platforms for issue-oriented mobilization. As such, there is also a critical reflexivity at work among Facebook users about the fact that they are using Facebook.

Other comments problematize that trying to mobilize people in a petition-like manner is the right strategy when acting through Facebook:

> Without relating to the subject itself (because I am against!), Facebook groups are not an opinion in themselves. Not yet at least. It is easy to press "like" without relating to the essence, and without participating actively.

Here, Facebook groups and pages are problematized not as deficient or socially enhanced online petitions, but with regard to their capacities for building a more engaged, social movement-like activism. Interestingly, the comment's author uses the notion of "opinion" as something that takes more than clicking "like." According to the user, opinion requires an in-depth engagement with the issue. The comment hints at an alternative project, which is not to mobilize a crowd, but to construct public opinion in a way that builds public pressure, not through numbers, but through engagement. The comment continues:

> That said – what Facebook groups are good for are as support and discussion groups for a more concrete opposition. Make an impartial, politically independent website with a clear political message. Then

> use the Facebook page for debate and staying in touch. (…) It is a bit like saying "like" to The Danish Cancer Society, but reject them or not open [the door], when they do their fundraising campaigns.

Here is another version of why Facebook pages can be useful for issue-oriented mobilization: they offer a place to stay in touch for those engaged in an issue, a place that can be used to launch other efforts directed at wider publicity. Indeed, at one point a politician used one of the pages to advertise a physical demonstration he was organizing to protest the payment ring. Some comments suggest that the support role played by Facebook groups and pages is key to establishing continuity of engagement that is important in maintaining a level of public pressure. The following three comments follow each other in the same thread:

> Prepare yourself for changing the group name to the next imbecile policy that [S and SF] will try to force upon us.
>
> What Edward, is this not an issue page? It is supposedly not for sale for any purpose?
>
> The proposal to keep alive this Stop the Payment Ring group is good. We could call ourselves the government's "congestion friends" because we will keep an eye on how well and how fast the work with removing the primary causes of the congestion, as described above, proceeds – and thus help the government get rid of their "burdensome worry."

Taken together, these comments illustrate an understanding (and problematization) of the Facebook pages that is markedly different from the "press like and share with your friends" version of the page administrators. In contrast to such an "enhanced online petition" understanding of Facebook as a protest tool, these comments point to the potential of building more lasting engagement through the establishment of some amount of collective identity.

At the same time, the comments suggest that there is an explicit uncertainty and indeterminacy in play on the Facebook pages with regard to their status as tools for protest. In last three comments quoted here, the question of how the Facebook pages should be understood even becomes entangled with the substance of the payment ring issue. One user suggests that the page could be a general protest page against the new left-wing government. This comment is immediately met with the counter-argument that the page is an "issue page" that cannot just be used for any other purpose. A third comment suggests that the payment ring protest can be understood in relation to a general concern for congestion that can form the basis of the page, which is also a controversial proposition.

This analysis of Facebook comments that explicitly discusses the question of how the technology of Facebook pages relates to issue engagement also speaks to an understanding of media effects as potentially intertwined with issue dynamics. Facebook pages afford a variability of issue articulations, which makes it possible to engage people with different concerns on the same issue-oriented page (see also Bennett and Segerberg 2012). In the comments, it is also rendered explicitly unclear what kind of organizing a Facebook page is good for.

In sum, this section has identified various collective action projects that are in play on Facebook pages. A key difference seems to exist between the tactics of gathering a crowd for a petition and maintaining some kind of more active engagement with issues. These tactics, however, are not clearly opposed to each other on the Facebook pages, but rather signal an open-endedness with respect to what Facebook is good for. The observations raise the question of the interplay between Facebook page administrators and supporters, not least because supporters seem to sometimes overspill the framing of Facebook as a tool for issue-oriented mobilization that is deployed by most administrators. If we stick to the observation that there is explicit uncertainty with regard to what Facebook can do, there is also a question of how, more specifically, the payment ring-related Facebook pages are organized (or not).

A Facebook page administrator

One of the founders and administrators of an anti-payment ring page told me in an interview what he used the Facebook page for. It turned out that he was a right-wing politician running in the 2011 national elections. Let's call him Tim. Early in the interview, he told me not to be too surprised by the existence of the Facebook pages:

> There are many pages like that. It is being used a lot. Those who understand that kind of thing see the value of it. I have many interest pages myself. ("Tim". Interview by author. Tape recording. Copenhagen, Denmark, March 30, 2015.)

The page administrator and politician Tim gave me several examples of his "interest pages," which are Facebook pages formed around a specific interest in an issue such as the payment ring. The interest pages can be contrasted with pages about people, such as individual politicians' pages. In the payment ring case there is evidence that not only the page managed by Tim, but the majority of the seven pages were set up by politicians seeking election or by advocates of green politics active outside the payment ring issue. So Tim's story is relevant beyond his own page.

As Tim explained, creating and managing interest pages takes time, money and effort. For instance, it can be necessary to "boost" the page with paid Facebook advertising in order to get the first couple of hundred participants to like the page. It is important that the page not seem completely insignificant to newcomers. Then follows the hard work of creating activity on the page by posting relevant content regularly and responding to comments from participants when appropriate. Due to these investments of time and energy, Tim explained that he always considers carefully whether it will be worth it to set up an interest page on Facebook. He uses his campaign staff and volunteers to help manage his Facebook pages, and since their time and energy are precious resources, good reasons are needed to prioritize Facebook work over other kinds of campaign work.

What makes Facebook pages worth the effort for a politician like Tim is to get in touch with new potential voters. Facebook can be good for this, but not all likes have equal worth in this regard:

> What I think about all the time is how to reach some of those that I do not otherwise communicate with. Because the others, they should already be voting for me, or they have decided not to vote for me. It is the same thing when you are canvassing by ringing doorbells on Sundays, then you need to ring the doorbells where you can move a vote. It means nothing if I attend events in my voter's association every week. Those 600 members should already be voting for me. If not, they have something against me. Then it makes no difference. I need to speak with new [people] all the time. That is also what I am thinking on Facebook. Sure it feels good to be reassured when you write something and then get 75 likes, but when you discover that they are all members of the party and live in the northern end of the country, then it kind of does not matter. So it is a problem if I have spent my time on that, and I could have spent it on calling a journalist to pitch an issue ("Tim". Interview by author 2015).

In this statement, the campaigning politician understands Facebook as one out of several ways to get publicity for his campaign. The overarching aim is to get in touch with people whose votes can be moved. One key strategy for getting to voters not already exposed to his campaign, Tim explained, is to find an issue that is close to people's everyday concerns. According to Tim, it is also possible to catch people's attention even without an issue. This strategy is about "feelings, feelings, feelings", sometimes even "sexual undertones", or what Tim calls to "play the whole spectrum." But Tim viewed this as somehow "too much," so instead he is constantly scouting for issues to be used to connect his campaign with issues people already care about:

> For me, politics is about the future and people's everyday lives. I am convinced – and all people you meet on the street confirm this – that what concerns people is what has relevance for themselves. Then

> there are some people who add the perspective that "my children should also have clean air and a proper climate," and for others it is something more close, it is about the road bump or the local school that is about to close. But for everyone it has a lot of personal meaning, and that is what engages people ("Tim". Interview by author 2015).

These ideas about politics help explain why the payment ring was a good issue for Tim: it was an object with strong potential to affect people's everyday lives. This made it useful as an issue with which to catch people's attention, and also made it worthwhile for him to invest in the launch of a Facebook page, something that he underlined is always an experimental endeavor. The belief that people have a disposition towards being concerned about "what has relevance for themselves" in this case pointed towards the payment ring issue. At the same time, Tim did not assume that such concerns were already fully formed; he actively used the issue page to raise concerns about what a payment ring would mean for people's everyday lives in Copenhagen.

Tim's story suggests that Facebook pages cannot be assumed to be bottom-up activist projects in an idealistic sense, but might just as well be launched by politicians seeking election or other kinds of advocacy groups. At the same time, the constraints that Tim describes in terms of getting "interest pages" to work suggests that they are not understood well if they are seen as the result of illegitimate concerns that have simply been invented or manipulated. There has to already be existing concerns to tap into for someone like Tim to start a Facebook page and put in the quasi-professional effort it takes to make a page successful. At the same time, part of the work that Tim and his team do is to carefully dramatize the payment ring issue through links and posts in order to attract hitherto non-exposed voters. In this sense, the issue is undergoing a transformation on Facebook.

Facebook as an ad hoc device for the captation of publics

Capturing this sort of "mutual attraction" between the politician and Facebook users makes it possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of social media publicity in the payment ring controversy. I find the idea of captation particularly useful for conceptualizing the mutuality in play. The notion of captation, borrowed from the French, has been proposed in order to understand how actors "exert a hold over" something as fleeting as a public, whose members are supposed to be able to operate freely in order to be a public (Cochoy 2007). Emphasizing the difficulty of handling something that is at the same time assumed to have freedom of movement makes the concept of captation and the approach associated with it consistent with a device-oriented approach to publics discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, which examined publics as effects rather than something that can just be tapped into (Lezaun 2007, Laurent 2011, Marres 2012a).

Cochoy primarily uses captation to discuss how markets exert a hold over consumers, focusing on how contemporary market arrangements stage "very tightly the freedom of [the] actor while at the same time respecting it deeply" (Cochoy 2007:205). But there is no strong opposition between consumption and political participation in his use of the concept. Both require the captation of publics.

One of the features of captation that makes the concept especially useful for an analysis of issue-oriented Facebook pages is that it "there is no captation without any ad hoc devices" (ibid.:207), because no single arrangement will continue forever to successfully exert a hold over a public. Here is a useful perspective on the role of Facebook in the formation of publics, since it does not assume, implicitly or explicitly, a separate sphere of Facebook politics, but rather sees Facebook pages as one ad hoc device among others that politicians today might use to "capture" (captate) publics.

In summing up his argument, Cochoy (2007:212) says: "captation is about observing the path of a target, to anticipate its trajectory, to try and join up with it, to accompany it, to encircle it and to guess it in order to then attract it or intercept it." Understood in this way, the concept of captation can guide an analysis of Facebook

publics that delineates how Facebook becomes enrolled as a device for organizing a process of mutual seduction between politicians and citizens around specific matters of concern. Tim, the right-wing politician, anticipates the trajectory of the public vis-à-vis the payment ring and tries to join up with it through the ad hoc device of a Facebook page.

Some specific features of the process of captation make the concept particularly interesting from an issue-oriented perspective. To see this, it can be useful to draw a contrast to the payment ring as a device. One might be tempted to say that the payment ring should itself be understood as an ad hoc device for the captation of a Copenhagen public, since it is trying to anticipate the dispositions of motorists in order to enroll them in its scheme. Indeed, there is a staging of the freedom of Copenhagen citizens involved insofar as the payment ring does not restrict movement as much as it tries to guide it through economic incentives (cf. Chapter 4). But this freedom is not as far reaching as the market arrangements that Cochoy describes, where it is important not only to stage freedom, but also to respect it deeply in order for captation to work:

> The punter comes more readily to market the more she feels she can emerge incognito: in shops where the seller awaits like a spider at the edge of its web, one hesitates to enter. One learns thus that the functioning of the free market supposes its scrupulous orchestration: one must vigorously supply the means to allow flight, to ensure free movement, anonymity, to reduce the importance of engagements (Cochoy 2007:205).

A difference becomes visible here between the way the payment ring allows politicians to act *on* the public and the way a Facebook page allows politicians to act *with* a public. There is no staging of an escape from the payment ring as a tax-raising infrastructure, while on a Facebook page there is always an opportunity to remain a number in the pile of "likes," just as there is always room for one more comment, or to simply leave the page and go elsewhere with a single click.

It should not be forgotten that this freedom is in no sense absolute – it is carefully staged. There can be important inequalities in the distributions of disposition and devices, as Cochoy (2007) also emphasizes. In the case of Facebook, the administrator of a page operates the device in the sense that he or she is able to frame the content of the page with a title, a photo, and a description – not to mention the ability to delete content. Even more importantly, the posts made by the page administrator(s) automatically get pride of place on the Facebook platform, which results in a division of roles where admins post something and users react to it.

While the dispositions of the admins are foregrounded on the Facebook pages, there is not an equal amount of attention paid to the dispositions of the page supporters. A politician can use Facebook pages to engage with the dispositions of citizens and test assumptions about them, but not so much the other way around. This distribution is underpinned by Facebook, which allows page administrators to remain somewhat invisible, posting content not as "themselves" but as "the page," while users must react to the content with their usernames visible. The page administrators also have access to a dashboard that is only accessible to administrators, where Facebook provides statistics to help them keep track of reactions to their posts and pages.

Taken together, admin's posts and the lumping together of what can often be several admin users into one page name that appears to be speaking in a single voice enjoy primacy on Facebook. This allows for a sort of "call and response" dynamic on the pages, where specific takes on an issue presented by the admins are tested against a multitude of individual users as it is posted.

But it is also the case that each time a post receives links and comments (or not), it performs a feedback loop between speaker and audience, which raises a question of how the payment ring issue is also mutually shaped by page admins and the users they try to attract.

Everyday publicity on Facebook

Based on the above analysis of the division of roles on a Facebook page, it would seem that we remain in a world where politicians act on publics, as with the payment ring policy. But what is special about the use of Facebook is that it is not designed for politicians to act on publics. Facebook is designed, not least with algorithms, to be a lively and engaging space (Birkbak and Carlsen 2016b). One consequence of this is that every time a user is stimulated to react, this is captured and fed back not just to admins, but also to the user herself and other users in order to generate even more engagement.

So the feedback loop is not owned by the page administrators, which is part of what makes it possible to approach the pages as performative of "everyday publicity" enacted with social media that stands in contrast to the professional publicity produced by newspapers (Bakardjieva 2009; Elmer 2010). Let me try to demonstrate this by discussing a specific example from the "15 good reasons to oppose the payment ring" page in greater detail. The page description, parts of which I analyzed earlier, was also posted on the page as a regular post. The post was liked by several users, which could be taken to suggest that the page admin has indeed managed to "join up" with a public by collecting and publishing the list of arguments against the payment ring. The post was not just liked, however, it was also commented on.

The first comment below the post merely states "good arguments." This comment seems almost superfluous, given that Facebook famously makes it possible for its users to simply press like, an action that in this particular instance could very well be interpreted as an agreement with the stated arguments. Still, a user has decided to spell it out in writing –"good arguments" – a comment that was subsequently liked by five other users, despite its apparent insignificance.

These five likes could also be seen as rather misplaced, because if users agree with the comment that the admin offer "good arguments" against the payment ring, why not just "like" the admin's post? Why like another users' comments? One single like may be misplaced unintentionally, but five not so easily, so this small curiosity could be

taken as a not-so-insignificant indication of a sensitivity among Facebook users towards not just what the admins are doing, but also what other users are doing. The like mechanism facilitates a space of reaction towards not only what the admin posts say, but also to what other users are doing, despite the uneven "call and response" dynamic noted above.

A comment further down the list of responses to the same post states that the payment ring is "asocial." The comment should be interpreted as a likely response to the first of the 15 arguments in the post, which is that the payment ring will be especially harmful to those with lower income levels. At the same time, the comment indicates that the Facebook page has removed the payment ring project from its initial policy setting quite successfully. In the policy setting, discussed in Chapter 4, the payment ring was embedded in a new government's efforts to make Copenhagen both greener and more efficient without spending extra money overall. On the anti-payment ring Facebook pages, these associations no longer hold. Instead, new associations are forged; Facebook users that are otherwise strangers to each other come together to witness and participate in the articulation of the payment ring as a problem rather than a solution. When five users like another user's comment, there is a performance of something social going on with the Facebook page: this sociality is shaped around the resistance to the payment ring, demonstrating how the project is asocial and disconnected from everyday life.

A third comment below the same post takes the opportunity to add a harmful consequence of the payment ring to the list of the "15 arguments against" posted by the page admin. The comment argues that the payment ring will not reduce the amount of time wasted by employees stuck in traffic, because they will be stuck in public transport instead. Here is arguably a further way in which the payment ring is performed as asocial. It is not only that a community of Facebook users gather and recognize each other's resistance to the project based on a list of "good reasons" provided by a page admin. These users are also capable of adding to the list themselves, thus modifying issue substance as they go along. According to this third comment, for example, public transportation is added to the list of entities that cannot be relied on to support a world with a payment ring.

The public transportation comment has also been liked by several other users, and the list of comments and corresponding likes goes on. But the definition of the payment ring issue offered by the page administrators is not final on these Facebook pages. In this example, public transportation was added to the environment that is claimed to be relevant to the payment ring. Other comments added other concerns. Drawing on the notion of captation, one might say that this is the point at which a Facebook page has become a successful ad hoc device for capturing publics, because the users now use their carefully staged freedom in ways that were partially but not entirely anticipated by the "captor" in the shape of the page admin.

What is more, the captation can be said to be directed at a public, not just in Warner's (2002) sense of circulating a text among strangers, but also in the more Deweyan sense of a gathering of strangers busy trying to articulate relationships between personal experiences and indirect consequences of things beyond their control. Indeed, this is exactly the kind of "motor" that politicians like Tim, as expressed in the quote above, are trying to get running when they set up issue-oriented Facebook pages.

When this happens, a Facebook page can generate thousands of comments, some of which are surprisingly humorous and insightful, and some of which are quite the opposite (Reagle 2015). At this point, the Facebook pages are not just tools for politicians and other professional organizers to orchestrate publics, they are also a display of publicness that can captivate politicians, organizers and analysts. Once a page starts to generate activity, Tim is willing to consider saying things he would not say elsewhere to generate more activity and "make it tick":

> What I have done is that I share some of the posts that are a bit rougher. I formulate myself differently on these pages. When I am freed from my personal page in my name, then I think I can be more direct, because it is just the issue we are talking about ("Tim". Interview by author 2015).

Here, the politician expresses how he uses Facebook pages to shift from party politics, which has certain constraints that have to do with etiquette and personal reputation, towards issue politics, which offers him a chance to be "rougher" and "more direct." Tim's remark further underpins the point made earlier that the protest pages seem to combine any argument against the payment ring with no regard to how they fit pre-existing party politics. With these Facebook pages, the issue is at the center, which flies in the face of politics as usual.

Such issue politics on Facebook comes with its own particular constraints. When party membership and similar vested interests cannot serve as the basis for continuous engagement, there is a constant need to scout for new issues that engage people. Indeed, Tim is prepared to delve into entirely new issues in order to get a lively Facebook page running:

> That is also what I am thinking about now – what issues could look like [the payment ring issue]. Which issue pages do I need to have? Which really local pages do I need? It could be the closure of a public school. Then perhaps one could have some kind of "No to school closure" page. That is, if I mean that. (…) One I have considered is education of teachers. One might make a page called "better teacher training." There are 50,000 teachers after all. Maybe they would think it was interesting. And most of them are probably on Facebook ("Tim". Interview by author 2015).

These quotes illustrate how the page administrator actively adjusts himself to the public he is interested in joining forces with. With the notion of captation, Cochoy (2007) proposes that a "mutual seduction" is taking place when ideas about what makes a public tick also exerts a hold over the politician who is trying to mobilize the public. Following this argument, it is important to note how Facebook page activity also overspills the input of administrators and acts back in more and less predictable ways. The potential for encountering new and unforeseen publics can seduce an administrator to invent new issue pages and write posts in a more pointed tone.

One example of such overspill is that it is not just the issue on the payment ring-related Facebook pages that becomes lively in the sense that a long list of everyday concerns are mentioned. The proliferation of payment ring uncertainties is accompanied by a host of comments that ridicule politicians who backed the payment ring policy. These things seem to go together on the pages, with some comments even combining the two registers:

> Yes, imagine when the kids do sports, or oneself. All that is not possible time wise with public transport options. But what does Thorning [the leader of S] know about that[?] She does not even know where the payment ring lies.

> I am so lucky to live and work inside the payment ring. But… I have 3 joint-custody children, whom I need to drive out of the ring, after which I need to return to the ring. That is double fee every time I hand over and pick up. Life becomes so extraordinarily lovely with a government that wants to pull together… and who thinks that we live in an unequal society. They deserve a beating!!

What these comments have in common is that they add everyday concerns to the payment ring issue and then move on to ridicule those behind the plan. Comments like these modify the understanding of what the prime minister understood as the predictable protests of those with cars (cf. Chapter 4). The comments do not express a personal interest as much as they express a deeply felt sense that the payment ring project as a whole makes no sense. This feeling of meaninglessness is widespread in the Facebook comments, and it is underpinned by many examples of how everyday life will not be able to hang together any more in a world with a payment ring. In many comments, the frustration is then directed at the politicians associated with the payment ring project, who are perceived to be not thinking straight.

Many of the Facebook comments are quite humorous and do not come across as uninformed, as one critique of social media publicity has it (Hendricks et al. 2014). However, the tendency to make “flaming”-like comments about politicians and other

people in positions of authority (cf. the previous chapter) raises the question of how these practices can be understood as contributing to issue politics.

One thing that must be kept in mind is that the sharing of news articles that problematize the payment ring project means that frustration is to some extent actively encouraged. This may help explain the tendency to express flaming comments. At the same time, recall Dewey's (1927) argument that indirect consequences of actions are what make publics come about in the first place. As such, articulating concerns and potential threats to everyday life that cannot be resolved by individuals themselves may be key to developing issue engagement. In this sense, "flaming" may need to be reinterpreted as not just unfair and unproductive outbursts in comments and posts, but also understood as a part of the dynamics of issue politics. This also raises the question of whether concepts other than "flaming" and "echo chambers" and so on are more relevant.

The "publicness" of issue politics on Facebook

According to Cochoy (2007), one reason why the captation of publics can be quite effective is that it plays on registers other than what he calls the usual sociological register of "habits" and the usual economic register of "interests." These two registers were arguably intertwined in the payment ring plan, which tried to change the habits of Copenhagen's motorists by appealing to their interests. When one views Facebook pages as ad hoc captation devices, one might say that politicians and other page administrators have succeeded to some extent in unlocking the opposites of habit and interest, which Cochoy (2007) claims are weariness and curiosity. These two alternative registers, Cochoy speculates, have special significance when it comes to publicity:

> The whole of modern publicity has recognized the force of these two springs of action, which has the great advantage of being inscribed in individuals while allowing their ex-centeredness (Cochoy 2007:210).

What Cochoy suggests here is that weariness and curiosity are significant registers when it comes to the production of publicity because they cause individuals to break with their ego-oriented habits and interests. Cochoy does not elaborate on this observation, but it is helpful in advancing the analysis of the Facebook pages, which, as just indicated, are marked by an often strongly expressed weariness with politicians and their technological projects. While weariness is thus an important "spring of action" for these Facebook activities, there is a question of whether it can be said to be combined with curiosity as well. Following the pragmatist understanding of politics developed in Chapter 2, it is exactly when daily habits and routines are disrupted that new publics and new problem formulations come about.

Some users do exhibit a certain level of curiosity on Facebook pages with respect to alternative solutions. Some of them are curious in the sense of wondering why the payment ring project cannot be implemented differently, and propose new ideas for doing so:

> It would be so easy to install a 500 kroner GPS in all cars. Add 100 kroner to the registration tax over 5 years, then nobody notices the expense.
>
> The small billion they lack could be partly financed by letting foreigners that drive through Denmark pay, as in Switzerland and France.

Other comments express a curiosity directed at alternative solutions to congestion in Copenhagen:

> If they lower the price significantly on monthly travel cards for public transport, then more will likely choose it. That will result in more customers, so same income for paying salaries and maintenance of equipment, and on top of that fewer cars in Cph. Win-win!

I think it is a good idea to drop the payment ring. What about moving workplaces to the rest of the country, then there will be more space for the rest of the cars, and the problem is solved.

An alternative is to build a Park and Ride system, which you can find in many large cities abroad, for instance in Germany. Parking should be free and transport tickets attractive in comparison with parking fees in the city center.

A simple way to get at the congestion and make the movement of vulnerable road users safer: Discontinue the environmental shop legislation (where shops near residential neighborhoods cannot receive goods before 7 am) and ban “heavy traffic in rush hour” instead. That will make more space in the roads for cars. You would avoid blocked roads when trucks have to unload. And the biggest plus of all, you would to a high degree almost eliminate accidents where trucks overlook cyclists as they turn right.

I have heard that in the US, cars carrying more than one person can drive in a dedicated lane. That could be done here too. If the car is filled with persons, who e.g. go together to work, the price could be lower.

Why the incessant foolish discussion about a payment ring? We can save thousands of billions if the state and companies move all or part of their tasks and work out of the capital – in avoided construction works alone. On top of that add that dead provincial towns are avoided. Unemployment outside of the capital is solved… It is damn foolish that all of Zealand and Lolland-Falster commutes to the capital on a daily basis. FORCE the state and businesses to relocate. Then the problem is solved all by itself.

There are also a few comments, such as this one, which redefine the problem as solely related to pollution and presents an alternative solution based on this premise:

> What about all the trains that not even live up to Euro 1- where all new buses and trucks must live up to Euro 5 and soon Euro 6 to be registered at all – but perhaps it means nothing with some polluting trains in Copenhagen. The trains should meet the requirements in the environmental zone – at least Euro 4 or installation of particulate filter. Only around 25% of the trains are better than Euro 2!

What all these posts have in common is not just a weariness with the proposed payment ring project and the politicians behind it, but also a willingness to speculate about better ways of rearranging life with cars in Copenhagen. As such, Facebook pages can be said to express a certain kind of curiosity in the sense of going beyond a protest focus on protecting individual economic interests. Indeed, what makes the registers of weariness and curiosity interesting is that they capture how a substantial part of the comments on the Facebook pages are very much directed at renegotiating the common good. There is an inversion going on, where the payment ring plan devised as part of a reform package that would act on the common good on a general level (cf. Chapter 4) now seems to be a deeply suspect plan that calls for rethinking:

> Bankruptcies, layoffs and unemployment will be the consequences of a payment ring. Many of the inhabitants in the surrounding municipalities will call off visits to Copenhagen, and cinemas, museums, theaters, cafés, restaurants and stores plus shops will get a severe cut in their income, with closures and bankruptcies to follow. Additionally, many will seek work outside of the city in companies and businesses in the surrounding municipalities, and firms will move outside the payment ring, so the yield that the government expects to generate is a hot air balloon.

In this comment, the Facebook user is thinking about Copenhagen in general terms, perhaps because of the perception that government does not. The inversion also

applies to politicians who were elected to represent the "will of the people," but who now, due to the payment ring intervention, seem to be doing exactly the opposite:

> I think it is remarkable that the payment ring will have its border exactly a few hundred meters from [Prime Minister] Helle Thorning's house, so that she herself avoids paying an extra 11,000 a year. The border runs right after Svanemøllen station, and she lives in Kuhlausgade right next to it.

This comment is an example of the kind of defamation or "flaming" of politicians that is often associated with social media. With the notions of weariness and curiosity as important drivers of publicity, however, is it also noteworthy how the Facebook user positions the prime minister not as a politician appropriately concerned with the common good, but as a person motivated by private interests. These inversions of the public and the private are driven by something that could in fact be called weariness of politicians and their attempts to fix everything.

As indicated, this weariness is combined with a level of curiosity when it comes to understanding technical and economic details that are perceived to be overlooked by the decision makers and proposing alternative solutions. As such, the Facebook pages could be said to be productive of an alternative form of everyday publicity that is driven not least by registers of weariness and curiosity that are the flipsides of the habits and interests on which the payment ring policy was designed to intervene.

Another register these comments share is that they seem to mobilize a common sense approach that the politicians and experts supporting the payment ring are perceived to have lost. Most significantly, perhaps, this common sense breaks with the "good sense" expressed by the payment ring policy as a smart way to intervene to make Copenhagen both more environmentally friendly and economically efficient at the same time (Latour 2013). When one reviews the payment ring plan before it became controversial, it becomes clear that its designers thought it was possible to make people "drive smarter" without their realizing that what they do is smarter, as long as they cooperate by acting as economically rational agents. In the Facebook comments,

this logic is turned on its head. The smart (city) policy operating on the level of the general efficiency of Copenhagen now appears meaningless – it is up to individual concerned motorists and Facebook users to think about efficiency and other issues instead. On the Facebook pages, then, there is a proliferation of common sense problematisations that an arrangement like a payment ring is designed to take out of the equation by acting through people's wallets.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I set out to develop an analysis of Facebook material that draws less on external standards of public debate or public opinion. I also suggested that the solution is not to try to pinpoint a specific "Facebook effect," since something more than just Facebook happens when a social media platform becomes part of issue dynamics. In order unpack this, I turned to a more detailed discussion of what happens on the anti-payment ring Facebook pages.

It becomes clear that the pages are not straightforward "bottom-up" initiatives that mirror what is actually going on in the Danish public. While there is a proliferation of problematizations of the payment ring project through the infrastructure of likes and comments, there are also ongoing discussions of the work needed to construct effective protests with Facebook. Furthermore, page administrators turned out to play a central role in determining not just a title, a photo and a page description, but also in curating a continuous stream of posts. In this case, the key seemed to be to post links, in particular to newspaper articles, that could underpin anti-payment ring arguments. This suggests that Facebook activity can operate as something on the order of an intervention on issue substance and what counts as newsworthy in relation to the issue.

In order to further understand the relationship between administrators and these Facebook pages, I turned to an interview with a conservative politician who took part in the administration of one of the pages in question. While part of the analysis in this chapter relied on a single interview, similar dynamics of politicians curating payment ring pages were present on the other pages. Several of the anti-payment ring pages

seemed to be "owned" in more or less explicated ways by one or several right-wing politicians. At least one of the two pro-payment ring pages also appeared to be managed by a person formally engaged in environmental politics as a politician and an issue advocate. These observations suggest a wider significance of the discovery, based on the interview with Tim, that "interest pages" on Facebook is a category that has become relevant to politicians seeking to get in touch with new voters.

The notion of interest pages is relevant to my purpose here because it suggests how Facebook pages become part of an issue-oriented politics. It also raised a question of how to grasp such interest pages as more than opportunistic "click bait" set up by a politician seeking election. In order to redistribute the ability to act to Facebook users and the Facebook platform – rather than just being manipulated or used – I proposed the concept of "captation" borrowed from Cochoy (2007). The notion of captation is useful because it speaks to the challenges of "joining up" with publics that can by definition not be controlled, but which at the same time are in need of direction (ibid.).

The notion of captation is also useful because it does not explain these processes with reference to some kind of social media effect, but rather positions Facebook as an ad hoc device that may or may not work in specific cases. This fits Tim's considerations about whether and when to use Facebook or not, and also the discussions among users on the Facebook pages about the same question.

The payment ring-related Facebook pages reflect a coming together of several agencies, including most notably 1) politicians and other organizers doing politics as usual but also acting as Facebook page administrators, 2) Facebook users whose everyday lives are at risk of being disrupted and 3) a Facebook platform that does not come with built-in ideals about public debate or a coherent national public. In the resulting practices, no single effect is guaranteed, but a pattern has nevertheless been identified. Facebook pages have become home to a type of issue politics that prompts politicians to do the work of setting up an open-ended space of protest and to some extent cut across ingrained political divides.

Following the ideas presented in Chapter 2, the "publicness" here lies in what counts as public and what counts as private. This was reconfigured in ways that turned the payment ring into a issue, not just in the sense of being a useful case of politicians seeking election, but also in the sense of being a problematic object that recasts the boundaries of the political. The Facebook material demonstrates that even if this did happen to some extent, it was not by some sort of virtuous procedure, but through an unlikely mix of actors and dynamics of posts, comments and likes going in many different directions.

More specifically, it can be observed on Facebook that what is normally taken as counter-productive of good politics – personal concerns and flaming of politicians – enable to some extent an issue-oriented politics. Many comments were ripe with these features. With inspiration from Cochoy, such comments can be interpreted as expressions of weariness with existing problematizations and curiosity towards alternative problematizations, which is key to publics that come together around issues they cannot solve yet.

The conclusion cannot be that there is something inherently good about social media from an issue publics perspective. To the contrary, I have shown how the Facebook pages in question contain an explicit variability both with respect to what the exact issues are, what the effect of social media is, and not least what the public is. If this variability is not to be simply reduced to some kind of unruliness thought to be inherent to social media, there is the question of how similar questions are posed in the setting of news media. This is the purpose of the final empirical chapter, which seeks to describe news media not just as a setting that has a controversializing or conservative effect on the public, but which is also engaged in the ongoing captation of publics.

7. Qualifying publics and issues: The School of Debate and Critique

In the previous chapter, I explored how a social media like Facebook can contribute to issue politics not so much by having a general effect on politics, but by being enrolled as an ad hoc device for the formation of publics in relation to specific issues. Exploring how this works in practice make it easier to go beyond the idea that social media deliver something social that can reveal what the general public opinion is on an issue. Instead, I foregrounded how Facebook pages are used to articulate how people are potentially implicated by issues and use these concerns to capture publics. Such "captation" is motivated by much more than ideals about the public sphere, including attempts to be elected to parliament, but from an issue politics perspective the work done to articulate issues and organize publics is nevertheless interesting and potentially valuable.

In this chapter, I shift focus back to news media. It seems important to also try to re-describe media devices that understand themselves as news media in order to avoid assuming that there is something inherently issue politics-friendly about social media. Accordingly, the purpose of this final empirical chapter is to avoid taking for granted that a newspaper delivers the "news" as opposed, for instance, to something "social." The opportunity to do so came when one of the major dailies in Denmark, *Politiken*, decided to not just send newspapers out into the world but to also try to fit people inside their world. This effort came in the form of *Politiken*'s so-called School of Debate and Critique, where young people learn to participate in politics through newspaper debate.

Such variability in terms of what a media device can do is important for the general aim of exploring how media contribute to issue politics, not least because issue politics is defined in part by the lack of clarity about what counts as "news" or "publicity." To begin situating these issues as something that is made and problematized with a newspaper like *Politiken*, I go back to the evening at *Politiken* described on the first pages of Chapter 1, because at the height of the claims about

the historical importance of the newspaper as a key institution of modern democracy, a peculiar event occurred at the School.

After the editor-in-chief had finished welcoming us and had left the room to take care of other business as the busy man he is, the editor of debate came on stage and greeted us as the main organizer of the school. He introduced Søren Krarup, a well-known national conservative politician as the first visiting speaker. When Krarup took the stage, he challenged the usefulness of not just the School event, but news media as such:

> As a modern country, Denmark is governed by the media with all their superficiality. This superficiality is foreign to the Danish people, who are actually decent human beings, bound together in historical and national cohesion. But this cohesion is hollowed out by the governing Denmark, especially the electronic media with *Politiken* as the ruling daily paper (Søren Krarup. *Politiken's* School of Debate and Critique. Field notes. Copenhagen, Denmark, September 4, 2013).

So it was that on the opening night of Politiken's new school, with 150 newly enrolled students attending, Krarup accused *Politiken* and the media in general of being too superficial and shallow to have much value. This was an urgent problem for Krarup, because in his eyes the media superficiality is difficult to contain. In fact, he expressed a feeling of powerlessness in the face of media.[9] Denmark, as a modern country, "is governed by the media," he said, and repeated: "We live in a world of media, where they decide."

[9] While Krarup's statements are suggestive of the political context in which *Politiken* navigates, a part of the story that Krarup left out is the fact that the political party he represents (DF) has only been rising in power over the last two decades and that it became the second largest party in Denmark in the 2015 national elections. If some kind of a trial of strength between *Politiken* and Krarup could be imagined, it is thus not straightforward who would come out on top, despite Krarup's claims of powerlessness.

It seemed strange to me that *Politiken* would invite a speaker like Krarup to come and say something like this at the kick-off of a school that was supposed to make young people interested in *Politiken*. However, I came to see that we were never supposed to take Krarup very seriously. I should perhaps have seen that coming, because he was introduced in part by means of a satirical cartoon displayed on the projector. Furthermore, Krarup was given a very limited time to speak, which he remarked made it difficult for him to get his arguments across. The way Krarup's intervention was staged by *Politiken* suggested that Krarup was *expected* to make statements that most of the people in the room, including Politiken staff, would strongly disagree with. He delivered on these expectations – to the equally expected amusement and outrage of the school participants. Despite these reactions, however, there was only a very short time for questions after Krarup had spoken. Then it was on to the next part of the program, underlining that we were never supposed to engage with the substance of his claims.

Politiken's rejection of Krarup and Krarup's rejection of *Politiken*, as staged, is both instructive and raises a challenge. It is instructive of what kind of event the *Politiken* school was. The editor of debate first spoke about Krarup in third person and then created a theatrical effect by suddenly saying: "And here he is!" Then a small door opened on the right side of the stage, and Søren Krarup entered the room. In a single stroke, we students were transformed from a gathering of strangers into an impressed audience. We learned from the beginning that literally any person in Denmark, however famous or important, could be walking through that door on Wednesday nights.

It also became clear that what happened in the school was carefully orchestrated to impress in a certain way. Krarup was introduced a one of the "arch enemies" of *Politiken* in recent years. Having him show up to speak among his "enemies" demonstrated the kind of arena that Politiken was constructing and maintaining with the school, and with the newspaper more generally. One thing that was clearly important was the ability of the format of "debate" to engage with anyone, however different their opinions. This is related to *Politiken*'s narrative about the importance of public debate, to which I return later.

The unwillingness of Krarup and *Politiken* to engage a bit more closely with each other also suggests, however, that there are limits to how far newspaper debate can go. Krarup, with his national conservative politics, clearly did not care much for the media contributions that *Politiken* saw as key to modern democracy. As such, the peculiar clash also points out how a newspaper like *Politiken* is part of a politically specific project of rational debate that can easily be taken for granted.

Krarup's critique addressed *Politiken* as not just a participant in debate, but also a sort of governor of debate. Following Krarup, *Politiken* and other media use their powers to introduce an unnecessary superficiality into the daily affairs of the nation of Denmark. The problematization is not so different from the observation in Chapter 1, where I noted that the news media are said to have a general negative take on societal change, including the specific payment ring issue.

But this understanding of the media also fits *Politiken*'s own narrative, because it captures how the newspaper is not just a collegium of editors that participate in a cultural struggle through discourse: the newspaper itself is a weapon in this struggle. The daily, ongoing publication of a mix of news and opinion is supposed to create the kind of public that a national conservative like Krarup might hate, but which is virtuous according to the founding myths of *Politiken* and similar newspapers. Krarup's attack highlights how *Politiken* is not just another political adversary, but an institution that tries to set the stage for political antagonism.

This raises a challenge for researchers to describe a news media like Politiken as engaged in bringing about a certain kind of public participation in politics. Unlike Krarup's point of view, the point should not be to reject the value of such contributions in general. But Krarup's presence at the school event nevertheless serves as a reminder of the limits and "situatedness" of newspaper projects like *Politiken*, which is useful for undertaking a more praxiographic study of newspaper debate. What is going on exactly when a news medium apparently goes out of its way to launch a school of debate? In the following, I use this event as an opportunity to learn more about what is valued by a device like *Politiken*, but also to examine what it takes

in practice to achieve this. In other words, I try to specify how a newspaper also contributes in a variety of ways to issue politics.

A newspaper experiment

I first heard about the School of Debate and Critique in spring 2013, when preparations were still ongoing for what has turned out to be the first of several instantiations of the school. Back in 2013, when I attended a preparatory meeting that Politiken hosted to test their idea with potential participants, I already knew that my goal was to do fieldwork as a participant observer at this upcoming event. Here was a chance to study news media not as an external and finished setting that adds public debate to important issues, but as a place where what the public is is at stake, as well as what the issues are, and how media can contribute.

From the very beginning, the *Politiken* staff emphasized that the School of Debate and Critique was an experiment. At the initial meeting, we were told that the point of the concept was to "hear from the young," as the organizers put it. The newspaper was interested in "what our generation wants." In order to find out, the School was supposed to attract some of the "sharpest minds and sharpest pens" to come to *Politiken* for training and to simultaneously answer that question. What was experimental about the School from the newspaper's point of view was what would come out of it in terms of new young voices, and not least, whether it would be possible to interest young people. That last uncertainty was the main focus of the discussions at the preparatory meeting.

I attended the initial meeting because I had been invited by a friend who was already in contact with *Politiken* about these topics, and who had been asked by its staff to informally recruit some prospective participants. The 25 people at this meeting were asked to participate in the upcoming school without having to go through the application process, in exchange for helping *Politiken* spread the word about the

school. After the meeting, I enrolled and did my fieldwork during the first installment of the School, which ran in the fall semester of 2013.[10]

A year later, I came back to catch up with the school experiment, as the second class was about to graduate. I interviewed the main organizer of the School in the newspaper canteen. He concluded that what started out as an experiment had become a success:

> There is a good feeling that we are on to something. We think it is interesting, they think it is interesting. And the editorial team backs us up, everybody thinks it is fun (…) Those that were skeptical before, they are hugely enthusiastic…" ("School organizer #1". Interview by author. Tape recording. Copenhagen, Denmark, December 15, 2014).

The notion of an experiment offers a useful starting point for the examination of *Politiken*'s School because it raises the question of what was at stake for the newspaper when they decided to invest in the school. Obviously, the School offered the opportunity to understand better what the world looks like from the perspective of a newspaper. At the same time, the notion of a successful experiment can make this task difficult. Research on scientific experiments in STS has demonstrated how once an experiment is understood to be successful, all the troubles and cul-de-sacs of setting it up tend to be deleted from the accounts (Latour and Woolgar 1979). This is a part of how something as uncertain as an experiment is transformed into a scientific fact. The cleaning up of the account can be misleading, however, because all the practical details and experimental detours are crucial for the making of scientific facts.

[10] My presence as a reseacher was not announced definitively in front of all school participants, but I quickly found a chance to introduce myself to the organizers, tell them about my project, and make sure that they were comfortable with it. In addition to that, I made a point of telling other students I spoke to that I was also doing fieldwork while attending the School. I did not attempt to remain a fly on the wall, but completed the assignments and participated in group work.

Being told that the *Politiken* School was a successful experiment can thus be taken as an invitation for the researcher to investigate in detail what it took to arrive at this claim. Such an investigation is of particular interest in this case, because an important part of what was at stake for *Politiken* was the reproduction of what it considers good public debate. As such, the School is a chance to study both what good public debate means and what it takes for a news medium to approximate such debate in practice. First, I will discuss what *Politiken* understands by good public debate. Then, I turn to this practical work in the second half of the chapter.

In such a re-description of news media, it is important to determine what contributions they can make to issue politics. In the previous chapter, we met a politician who invested in Facebook interest pages despite the fact that he saw them as highly experimental in the sense that the outcome of issue engagement was uncertain. I showed how not only page admins like him, but also regular Facebook users, and the Facebook platform itself all took part in the construction and maintenance of a certain kind of everyday publicity that engaged with the payment ring issue in substantive ways. Part of the outcome was that the issue was turned on its head: the payment ring no longer appeared to be a solution to a problem, but was itself an urgent problem that would require the intervention of a public to do something about it.

At the same time, the analysis in Chapter 5 suggested that such social media tends to be taken to say something about public engagement in issues rather than as devices that take part in a transformation of issues. The latter is removed from view when social media are used and critiqued as methods for saying something about a general public debate that assumes issues to be stable and external. Insofar as such ideas are partly reproduced with news media, as suggested in Chapter 4, it seems particularly relevant to examine public debate as one practice among several, rather than an idea to order practices with. Accordingly, the purpose of this final empirical chapter is to examine the production of public debate with news media in practice, and to understand how it claims to occupy the high ground and simultaneously brings these claims down to earth.

Public debate at *Politiken*

Politiken is not any kind of newspaper: that this particular paper decided to launch its School of Debate and Critique is not necessarily a random event. In fact, these notions of debate and critique are key components of *Politiken*'s self-understanding. As I was told repeatedly, both at the School and in interviews, it self-identifies as an "activist" newspaper. An important part of this activist identity lies in how the newspaper understands itself as part of a "cultural struggle" related to liberal reform. *Politiken* is known for its ties to the Danish Social Liberal Party. Today, its editorial line is independent, but until 1970 an official political alliance existed between the paper and the party. Given that position in the political landscape, it is not so surprising that a politician like Krarup can become an "arch enemy."

One way in which a newspaper like *Politiken* takes part in cultural and political struggles is through its editorials. As with many other large omnibus papers, its editors take turns writing daily editorials that take a stance on an issue that the collegium of editors deems to be current and important, and which *Politiken* can say something about from its position as a social-liberal, center-left newspaper. Here is a way to not just report on politics, but to also participate in politics. It is a classic way to be an activist newspaper, and is part of the reproduction of a conventional distinction between news and opinion in news media.

One thing that became clear at the School is that *Politiken* ascribes a special significance to the pages it dedicates to opinion and letters to the editor. This is something the newspaper takes great pride in (Nielsen 2010), and it is part of its "public identity" as an institution (Hilgartner 2000). Once a week an entire section of the printed paper is reserved for letters to the editor, "signature" editorials, and so on.

The School of Debate and Critique can be understood as part of this enthusiasm for debate and as a way to extend this commitment. As we students were told, the motivations for starting the School have to do with *Politiken*'s early beginnings as part of a rationalist and humanist intellectual movement in the last decades of the 19th

century. The movement is typically referred to as "the modern breakthrough" in Scandinavian intellectual culture. A cornerstone of this movement, we were told at the school, was the idea of public debate as key to societal wellbeing.

The group of 19th century intellectuals in Copenhagen at the time included two of *Politiken*'s co-founders, Viggo Hørup and Edvard Brandes. For them, public debate was not some sort of democratic luxury good that could finally be afforded in a time of relative peace and prosperity. On the contrary, public debate was to be defended and nourished because it had a crucial, rationalizing potential. As the editor of debate instructed us from the stage: "It is the clash of opposed opinions that makes us think." (This was his way of following up on the visit by Krarup.) Based on the belief in the clash of opinions, the editor told us, *Politiken* has always had a strong commitment to "submitting problems to debate." As a consequence of debate being highly valued, the newspaper's founders found it "appalling when people did not dare to speak their minds." Here was something that Krarup could be admired for, we were taught: He did not hesitate to speak his mind forcefully and in any public setting, as was just demonstrated live to us.

Based on these assertions about debate, it is possible to understand a bit better what the editor-in-chief meant when he said that *Politiken* "wants to be more than a newspaper" (Chapter 1). Part of *Politiken*'s founding mythology includes a commitment to both convey news and cultivate public debate. This is a dual role *Politiken* shares with many other newspapers in the world. Its main instrument to cultivate public debate is also shared with papers elsewhere: the circulation of editorials and letters to the editor and opinion letters. We were told that *Politiken* is seeking to train a new generation of people at the School who would contribute with letters to the editor in order that this technique for constructing public debate would not become a thing of the past. In line with the newspaper's founding principles, the School was to educate us in the authoring of texts that "submit problems to debate" and "generate clashes of opinion."

Practical constraints on making debate

Having indicated what good public debate means for *Politiken*, I now turn to some of the constraints on realizing good public debate in practice. Following the newspaper's ideas about what makes public debate good, a diverse number of voices must be present, and these voices must be well qualified to speak. The School tried to further these goals by recruiting members of a generation that they saw as underrepresented in the opinion pages of the newspaper, and teaching them how to write and be heard, as I explore below. Yet, when I interviewed the main organizer of the School, it became clear that the commitment to good public debate was only part of the reason why *Politiken* found it worthwhile to invest in the School.

The organizer explained that the newspaper is experiencing a decline in subscriptions, as are most large omnibus papers, and moving content online has not helped much to avoid economic decline. He also said that the School is part of a much larger effort to reconnect with key groups in society and ensure they have an active relationship with the newspaper:

> The circulation is falling, and (…) it already happened before the Internet. If we are to explain the newspaper crisis, we need to go all the way back to the partisan press, back when there were four groups. Back then you had a huge circulation. You had close ties. As soon as you loosened those ties, the circulation dropped. Those papers that actually do something, such as debate meetings, they succeed in increasing their circulation, because they maintain relationships to specific groups. It is a post-rationalization, since it was not something I thought about when we made the School of Debate and Critique, but if we look at it in the big picture, that is what we are trying to achieve here. It is just a tiny piece, this thing with a school. ("School organizer #1". Interview by author, 2014).

The School might be presented in highly idealistic enlightenment terms, but it is also potentially good business for a newspaper forced to reinvent itself in a changing

world. The organizer said that as it is now the school does not cost *Politiken* money, but it also does not generate any money. Most of the staff puts in the extra hours working on the school program without extra pay, and all participants are required to subscribe to the newspaper when they enroll. In the long-term, however, the School is seen by *Politiken* as a potentially lucrative investment due to the enrollment of a new generation of prospective customers.

There are two quite different reasons why *Politiken* experiments with hosting a school, one highly idealistic, and one much more practical. However, the two motivations are not necessarily opposed to each other. In fact, they come together quite nicely with *Politiken*'s self-understanding as a newspaper that "has always been very activist." It has a long tradition of appealing to grand ideals of public debate while also getting its hands dirty trying out new things in practice, and in commercial and community-oriented ways (Bredal 2009). These are some of the practices behind the editor-in-chief's statement on the opening night of the school that *Politiken* wants to be "more than a newspaper."

The School of Debate and Critique may thus be understood as an experiment, but it is also understood as a continuation of the newspaper's long tradition for doing more than publishing the daily paper. Part of this is to connect to specific audiences, and part is to operate as a business. The point was always to make money. When *Politiken* first began to publish, it consisted of half advertising and half journalistic copy, and it was quite profitable (Bredal 2009). While there may be perceived to be a theoretical contradiction between serving the public with news and also making a profit (Habermas 1989), newspapers like *Politiken* have probably always had to overcome such theoretical problems in practice (cf. Chapter 3).

Here was a challenge, because if it was clear to *Politiken* that it needed the young, the newspaper seemed less confident that the young needed *Politiken*. The organizers of the School were anxious that no one would be interested in it, or that if 150 young people actually showed up, they would find the whole thing boring. As a result, the organizers worked hard to create a quite intense atmosphere with lots of events and famous people as visiting speakers. Even when it turned out that the vast majority of

the 150 students were happy to show up and complete written assignments, the organizers continued to express fears that this enthusiasm would die out. *Politiken* remained convinced that it is hard to maintain the attention of young people: one of the oft-stated themes expressed by the organizers was how young people prefer social media to news media.

From the perspective of the captation argument discussed in the previous chapter, these challenges could be understood in terms of how to join up with the right publics in the right way at the right time (Cochoy 2007). *Politiken*'s staff knew what they wanted, but they also expected that if the School was to be successful, they would need to meet the younger generation halfway. There is a realization here that the newspaper cannot invent public debate from scratch: it needs to align itself with other actors. This understanding was underlined by the way the editors talked not only about generating good public debate, but also about *qualifying* the debate. In his introductory remarks, for instance, the editor-in-chief characterized the School as "a quality project" in terms of fostering debate. He saw it as a site where debate of high quality is supposed to take place in a way that generates further debate of high quality.

When engaging in the project of quality debate, *Politiken* emphasized that it is not a question of controlling or taking over public debate. It understands itself as acting on a public debate that already exists. When the editor-in-chief called the school a quality project, he immediately continued with "about the debate *out there* in our democracy." In other words, there is already a debate going on somewhere else. The role of *Politiken* and its School, then, is to "make it a little bit sharper, and more clever." Again, the project is to qualify, not to create quality out of the blue.

These statements by the editor-in-chief can be read as a critique of the general state of public debate in Denmark, leading to a bifurcation between the existing debate and the ideal debate that media like *Politiken* would like to see. However, the statements can also be read as suggesting that *Politiken* is not an all-powerful actor, but depends on a whole range of entities and beings to make public debate circulate, including monetary income and interested participants. Indeed, the existence of the School

suggests that there is work to be done to connect the newspaper to other actors, such as young people. When exploring how this took place in practice at the School, two main challenges stand out: How to recruit young people as students? And how to "qualify" them for public debate?

Recruiting students

The first requirement for being able to qualify public debate with a new school was to make sure there were students to train. As mentioned above, the organizers worried quite a lot about this. When I talked to them, and also interviewed some of the students, it became clear that what was at stake was more than assembling 150 young people. It had to be the right *kind* of young people. Another organizer of the school, one who dealt with many of its practical details, including reading all the applications, explained the selection criteria to me. She talked about two kinds of criteria, the first having to do with originality and quality, and the second having to do with diversity:

> Those who have shown an amount of creativity or an exceptional language ability, they have landed a spot, so that has actually been the first round of selection. That is not very many. Then there is a lot in the middle, where we have tried… in part, there is a gender-related balance, where we preferred fifty-fifty. Luckily that turned out not to be so difficult, because the applications have been almost fifty-fifty. Then there is the age. There have been many young who have applied that we have filtered out, because there are also others that are 29 and PhD students. It is a very wide span in age that we have permitted, since we have not set a lower limit. There is an upper limit of 30. (…) Apart from the age factor, there was a geographic factor and a demographic factor. If there is anyone, who have applied from Århus or Aalborg, then let them get in (…) If there were anyone who were not university students, but electricians or primary school teachers, then we would probably give a little more weight to their application. (…) There was also the ethnic factor, which we also took into account ("School organizer #2". Interview

> by author. Tape recording. Copenhagen, Denmark, January 19, 2015).

Together, these criteria for selecting students for the School suggest quite a balancing act. Most obviously, there is a long list of attributes: gender, geographic location, education level and ethnic background. In fact, the only classic sociological variable where *Politiken* was not trying to achieve a balance was for age: the purpose of the school was specifically to invite young people only, defined as those aged 30 years or less. The reasons for pursuing a diverse group of young people are connected to what *Politiken* is trying to achieve with its opinion pages more generally:

> There needs to be something for every taste when you make a debate section, the editor of debate cares very much about that. There needs to be something related to one agenda and something related to another agenda. There needs to be some heavy politics, but there also needs to be something lighter. Lifeworld, trends, and so on. There should also preferably be some men and some women represented, some older and some younger. It is these kinds of balancing exercises that you try to take into account all the time in order to catch the attention of different readers all the time, because Politiken has quite a lot of readers. It is the same balance we have tried to… there is a very strong connection between the debate section and the School of Debate and Critique" ("School organizer #2". Interview by author, 2015).

Since the aim of the newspaper is to appeal to a wide range of readers, the participants in the School also had to represent as many different backgrounds as possible. In practice, this turned out to be quite difficult. The problem was not so much to attract enough applicants. In 2013, there were about 300 applications, and in 2014 the number had risen to 350 applications, so the organizers could afford to be selective. But many of the applications came from what the organizers came to think of as the same group of people – social science students at the university level.

Interestingly, the main strategy for spreading the word about the School and trying to recruit applicants was to use Facebook. The staff did not have the time to put up posters or advertise in person; even though there were announcements in the printed paper, these ads were seen as unlikely to reach beyond the usual suspects of the few young people already reading *Politiken*, or worse, parents who would try to enroll their children. Facebook offered something different: it was perceived to be possible to reach vast social networks of young people from only a few select vantage points. It was partly for this reason that the initial group of 25 prospective participants came together. Nevertheless, recruiting a diverse range of applicants continued to be difficult:

> In the beginning, we were only a couple of hundred, as it was to a large extent my friends and acquaintances. It takes quite a long time on Facebook, unless you are willing to pay to get a broader reach. When I am a university student from a social science program, then those I know will often be that too. What has been difficult is to get somebody truly different to see the page ("School organizer #2". Interview by author, 2015).

Those who were different became highly cherished participants in the School, such as the student who flew to Copenhagen from Aalborg the whole semester just to participate in evening meetings lasting a few hours, and the student from a vocational school, who was able to spread the word there. This underlines the commitment to diversity despite the difficulties of ensuring it in practice.

The worries and difficulties encountered in order to ensure a diverse number of applicants is related to *Politiken's* ambition that their group of young students would generally represent their generation. This was highlighted many times at the School. One of the editors, after having read a stack of assignments written by us students, proclaimed that the documents constituted a "gold mine" for any researcher who wanted to understand our generation. Despite the difficulties with ensuring diversity in practice, we students were continuously referred to as representative of "the youth of today."

At the same time, *Politiken* had a second set of criteria for selecting applicants that had to do with what they called quality rather than diversity. The ambition was not just to have a representative sample of a new generation, but to assemble "the sharpest minds and the sharpest pens," as mentioned above. As the application-reading organizer said, what counted here was a display of creativity and writing skills. One of the participants got the impression that another key quality was to be able to draw on personal experiences in the course of writing of letters to the editor:

> They ask for personal voices. Hyper-personal. Some who speak from their own standpoints. I have an impression that they say they go for sharp opinions, but they go for the personal standpoints, a mass of experience. If you just wrote an impersonal application, that I do not at all think one would get through with. ("School participant #2". Interview by author. Tape recording. Copenhagen, Denmark, January 5, 2015).

This impression is shaped by the experiences at the School and what we were taught, which raises a question of what *Politiken* understood as quality debate, which I explore below. What the above statement suggests is that sometimes the criteria of diversity also served as a criteria of quality, because *Politiken* was looking for students that "stood out" because of their background, and were assumed to be able to produce texts that were interesting and original and suitable for publication. In sum, then, the filtering process used for admitting students resembles that of recruiting a broad composition of participants to a consensus conference, except that at *Politiken,* one might say that "obviously interested parties" were encouraged rather than excluded (Jensen 2005:226).

Training participants

We students were instructed by various journalists, editors and invited speakers to participate well and successfully in public debate. The aim of doing so, we were told several times, was first and foremost to learn to "set the agenda." We were reminded

how *Politiken* publishes an annual list of the people who have been most effective in setting the agenda for public debate in the past year. These people are the "top debaters" in Denmark, according to *Politiken*. What makes these people great is their ability to "move public opinion," as the editor of debate put it. Again, public opinion and public debate were introduced to us as entities somewhere "out there" that can then be acted on in terms of "moving" and "qualifying." As argued in Chapter 4, this results in a particular position for issues as external to the public rather than as co-constituting it.

The *Politiken* staff admitted that the project of qualifying debate is a project for an elite. When introducing themselves, the organizers of the school called themselves "consciously elitist," adding ironically: "too bad – and luckily so." The editor-in-chief extended this attitude to the newspaper in general when he said that the point was to publish opinions that clash and divide people, but also to "debate on a level where we actually get our arguments presented." What was at stake is not just participation, but also a rationalization of that participation, something which reproduces a contrast between news media and social media, as explored in Chapter 5.

In order to realize this difference, however, a new skillset had to be transferred to the future contributors to such rational debate. We had to learn two things in particular: To write and argue well, and to pick topics and perspectives that could set an agenda. Our first written assignment proved to be a stable component of the school's curriculum. Every second week, we would be asked to write an 800-word draft letter to the editor. At the next meeting, the editors would read these texts and tell us how we had performed as a group, providing good and bad examples. The best of these texts were selected for further development and eventual publication online or in print.

While writing well is a skill that can be expected to matter for a newspaper, the second requirement was more surprising. It turned out that "setting the agenda" required us to learn how to provoke. This became clear in part with the first written assignment, which turned out to be a failure in the eyes of the organizers. From a center-left perspective, their intentions were straightforward enough: we were to

write about "the lower class." However, the first batch of letters turned out to be – in the words of the *Politiken* staff – "too analytical," used "too abstract language" and lacked "originality, focus and a clear stance." The editor of debate, who provided this feedback, concluded that we would have to "interpret the task more freely," because many of the texts had created "a strong feeling of a set assignment and of trying too hard to live up to the imagined expectations of *Politiken*." This did not fit the goal of finding "new voices" that could stand out from the crowd and contribute original, personal perspectives.

The next assignment was different. Instead of being given a fixed issue to write about, such as the lower class, we were now asked to write about what the biggest issue for our generation is. In other words, there was a shift away from assuming that it can be determined in advance what constituted an important issue. When we were given collective feedback again, the editors were much more content. We were told our texts were "damn good," "sharper" and that the "level is higher" than last time. Still, we were warned that there were "many generalizations" and that we need to always "start with something concrete and end with something concrete."

The editors emphasized how several of the best letters were characterized by "kicking inwards" in the sense of deploying critiques that also applied to the author of the letter. One of the letters was a about the increasing dominance of "feminine values" in society. It talked about "castrated males," and was written by a man, which was used as an example of an opinion letter that could not easily be reduced to a "politics as usual" between men and women, nor an individual interest, since the letter seemed to critique the author as much as it denounced others. Another letter was about racism and was characterized by the editors as surprising, because it was written by an immigrant, who argued against multiculturalism. For the editor giving feedback, this was worthy of praise because it was not a predictable critique. Again, it "kicked inwards,' which we were taught is an important virtue when crafting letters to the editor.

Apparently, these letters surprise the editors with what they came to understand as new takes on well-known issues that were grounded in personal experiences. At the

next school evening, the organizers announced that they had shifted strategy, that we could now expect that the topics of assignments would be much freer in the future. “It will be the typical pattern that the topic to a higher degree is optional, so that you do not feel restrained.”

While the School turned around the rhythm of handing in an assignment and receiving collective feedback, there was a second large component that took up most of the time on Wednesday nights at *Politiken*. A long list of writers, journalists, politicians and other public figures visited to talk about what public debate is and how to participate in it. There was a balance maintained here between speakers who were invited to talk primarily about the craft of participating in public debate, and speakers who were invited primarily to talk and debate an issue that was perceived by *Politiken*’s editors to be high on the public agenda at the moment. In a sense, then, the School’s “teachers” shifted between showing us how to set an agenda in practice and talking to us as insiders about what it is like to be a public figure. This seemed to separate the craft of doing debate from the issue substance, something which was arguably part of the idea of having a school of debate in the first place.

One thing that was particularly emphasized was the theme of putting oneself at stake as a person and being exposed to public critique. The craft of public debate seemed to hinge on the ability to connect personal experiences to broader issues or “tendencies” in society. One of the most important techniques for setting the agenda and making our readers care for an issue, we were taught, is to start with a personal experience that makes it possible for the reader to identify with you and understand that you are also just another private person. Once this has been done, you move on to more general claims about why this or that personal experience is a symptom of a public issue, and why the reader should care not only about you, but about the issue.

This move between private and public is a typical characteristic of good opinion letter writing (Boltanski 2012). But at *Politiken*, the craft was also perceived to be risky, since having an impact on the public agenda also requires the courage to be very provocative. The advice to pursue “sharp arguments” was taken seriously at the School. On several occasions, speakers emphasized that if you do not have something

antagonizing to say as a participant in public debate, you might as well remain silent. The personal costs can be substantial when talking about controversial positions in public, but that is part of the game, we were told. At some points, the School almost resembled a sort of trauma group that tried to prepare us for exposure as controversial public figures by offering us the experiences of people who have already been through uncomfortable debates. Here, "the debate" was referred to with machine-like metaphors such a "mill" or a "train" that was difficult to stop or escape once it started.

The training we students received at *Politiken* about knowing how to interact well with public debate and the public agenda emphasizes the centrality of these notions for news media, as already indicated in Chapter 4. At the same time, the School's site illustrates how this public agenda is being reproduced in concrete and practical terms by a newspaper that recruits specific kinds of people to write in the paper and publishes these letters in a way that showcases a diverse public agenda.

One thing that became apparent in this regard was how *Politiken*'s editor of debate related to the speakers on a first-name basis , and how we as students were treated as new initiates into a specific tribe of people who set the public agenda. An important part of this was learning what it takes to be a public figure. At the same time, it also became clear that an insider position could not be taken for granted. Even after the selective application procedure had ended, there was a constant reference to how selective *Politiken* had to be at the School. In the end, it turned out that for various reasons, even 150 people were difficult for the newspaper to handle. This practical constraint on the School is worth exploring in a bit more detail, since it points to some of the limitations of the kind of public debate that *Politiken* is able to produce.

Tensions in the number 150

When I asked the main organizer of the School what he meant by calling the School of Debate and Critique an experiment, he provided several answers:

> Yes, it was an experiment, and it succeeded, you might say. We did not know if you would run away screaming and think "that was deadly boring." Or if it is totally controlled top down, or if we could not get anyone to show up for these evenings. That it would be one big puzzle that could not be solved. But in the end, they all came ("School organizer #1". Interview by author, 2014).

This quote suggests that at least three things were at stake for the organizers of the school experiment. First, there was the aforementioned issue of whether young people would actually be interested in such a school. Second, there was the issue of avoiding managing the school in a top-down fashion. Third, there was the issue of getting speakers to turn up. In hindsight, the last challenge turned out to be solved when the first challenge was solved, because as soon as 150 interested young people were assembled, any public figure seemed willing to come and speak, as the following quotes indicate. The second challenge of ensuring more than top-down interaction was the difficult one, according to the organizer:

> You could want more feedback and more group work, but we simply do not have the resources for that. As it is right now, we cannot do it. What we can offer right now is that we can get somebody like Helle Thorning-Schmidt [the then prime minister] to come. That is simply because it is an interesting group. If you say that there are 150 interesting opinion formers, the voices of the future, who sit here, the sharpest debaters of their generation, then generally speaking no one has said no (ibid.).

The quote suggests that a persistent difficulty for the organizers was to offer the 150 students an interactive school experience. As already mentioned, *Politiken* was so keen to make sure that their call for students was met with interest that they set up a preparatory meeting with some informally invited prospective participants. One of the points raised at this meeting was that young people would not just come to listen, they would want interaction and some concrete outcome of their efforts. The primary answer that *Politiken* provided at the meeting was that there would be written

assignments, that students would receive feedback on these, and that the best would be selected for publication in the paper.

However, the workload this required came as a surprise to the *Politiken* staff. They asked all 150 students to turn in 800-word drafts of letters to the editor every second week. Reading all these letters is a lot of work, because almost no extra hours had been set aside to run the school. As a result, it turned out to be impossible to provide individual feedback to all participants – there was more than enough work involved just in reading them. As one organizer put it:

> They are pretty demanding processes. Last year, we just needed to get things working with reading all those letters (ibid.)

Despite this workload, having less than 150 participants was never seriously considered. The organizers made it clear at the initial meeting in spring 2013 that they were aiming for 150 students. This came as a surprise for some participants, but the organizers were convinced that anything lower would make it harder to recruit speakers:

> Someone has said, why can we not just be 30-40 who really get nursed? But then we would certainly not have had Helle Thorning-Schmidt here today… or the others. When they come, when it is an attractive group for them, then it is because there are 150 (ibid.).

The number of 150 also fit the number of people that could be seated in *Politiken*'s main conference room, but this was never mentioned as a reason. Yet, the building turned out to be another practical constraint. It quickly became clear that there was an over-supply of people: the room was barely large enough to hold us. The building itself seemed to complain – its toilets could not handle all of us, its many locks could not allow smooth passage, and its prestigious location meant that we were blocking a busy road when we queued up outside every second Wednesday at 6 p.m.

A related constraint was that there was no way to organize things differently other than holding the school in a lecture theater. This made it difficult for students to interact during the Wednesday events and contribute as more than an audience. In the experience of one participant:

> You get this idea that it is simply a matter of a lack of space. That is what you think sometimes, that it is completely practical. That it would not be possible in the rooms they have. And perhaps also for security reasons it could not take place at *Politiken* at all, because you cannot have interactions among 150 people. There has clearly been some points where you had to take initiative yourself to meet people, it is not something that Politiken has given us. It has been very much about the stage. These hotshots that come in as a surprise. *Politiken* showing how they interview people, question people, relate to people ("School participant #2". Interview by author, 2015).

There were attempts to include time for participants to provide individual feedback on each other's draft letters to the editor, but it did not work so well:

> A laughable concept where you must bring your letter and discuss it with the person next to you. You have five minutes. "Because now Pia K [famous politician] will be speaking on stage." Sometimes I did not even finish reading the other persons letter before… also before people start chatting. It was useless. If you wanted to do it seriously then you would need different facilities. Because there are 75 speaking at the same time (ibid.).

These practical constraints highlight tensions between the different aims of the School. As a participant, I sometimes had the feeling of being part of an awkwardly large crowd that did not really fit in the newspaper building. This feeling was at odds with the language used by the organizers, which stressed how proud they were about the School and our attendance, and how selective the application process had been.

According to the organizers, some participants expressed that they were highly satisfied, while others expressed disappointment. Those I talked to had nuanced opinions about the value of the School, as did the organizers. However, what is of primary interest here is not whether the school was worthwhile, but to capture some of the tensions involved in trying to set up a mechanism through which a "new generation" is able to "get a voice in public debate."

What the number 150 and the practical difficulties and advantages that came with it expressed are some of the trade-offs that are in play in the making of public debate with news media. The number had to be large enough to attract public figures, but also small enough for the application process to be selective. Both these parameters were required in order to produce new issues and make sure they could be qualified as public issues, too. At the same time, this was a difficult and experimental achievement that forced buildings and people to stretch beyond their usual capacities. As such, it also became clear that there is nothing automatic or normal about reproducing public debate. For such an experiment to be successful, several transformations must be arranged. While these difficulties may not be immediately visible when the opinion pages of *Politiken* are printed and circulated as representations of public debate, they can be retraced and invoked as practical constraints on producing news media publicity.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Facebook was enrolled as a device for doing public participation in practice, including how news articles were collected and contested on Facebook pages related to the payment ring issue. In a similar vein, *Politiken*'s School was studied as one newspaper's way of doing public participation. Answering the question of what the School of Debate and Critique is about is interesting, because it is an opportunity to unpack how a newspaper like *Politiken* enacts public participation in politics. What is of special interest for my purposes here is the role of issues in *Politiken*'s way of doing participation, based on the discussion of material participation in Chapter 2, and because participation with Facebook was shown earlier to revolve not least around issue pages.

One thing that is noteworthy here is the way issues are supposed to be raised in a way that "kicks inwards," in the sense of playing on vulnerabilities that are specific to the author, such as being an immigrant or a man growing up in a society with feminine values. Boltanski (2012) makes a related observation in his study of letter writing, which he interprets as a strategy to maximize the distance between the author and the issue in order to convince readers that the author is motivated by more general interests. To speak in the language of Boltanski's and Thévenot's (2006) sociology of critique, if an author of a letter critiques something of which he is himself a part, it adds to the generality of the critique.

At *Politiken*'s School, however, a good opinion letter did not just flag a personal entanglement in order to strengthen a critique. More than that, we were actively encouraged to use ourselves and our personal experiences and concerns in order to *connect* to readers. In this case, the success of public debate in practice depends in part on the suspension of one of the central principles of public debate, namely that participants leave behind their private entanglements and participate as equals that are concerned with the public good only (Thompson 2011).

It is noteworthy that this foregrounding of personal experiences and specific private entanglements happens at a newspaper that has a strong orientation towards public debate as an ideal. Together with the observation in the previous chapter that news stories can play a central role for public participation on Facebook, this finding undermines any facile distinctions between social media as "subjective" and news media as "objective," or simply between "social" media on the one hand and "news" media on the other. What we should be looking for instead, it seems, are ways of producing things as both objective *and* subjective. On the Facebook pages, for instance, the news stories were often commented on as facts external to the debate, something that is more relaxed in the original newspaper setting, where stories are situated in a plurality of news stories that can bring different perspectives of an issue to the table (Turner 2013).

What is also noteworthy about *Politiken*'s School is that the organizers originally expected that they could ask participants to write about an issue that was hand-picked by the *Politiken* staff, but ended up realizing that they had to leave the category open in order to receive letters that fit their quality criteria. This observation highlights a tension in practice. On the one hand, we have the public debate ambition of being able to "go anywhere," i.e., being able to deal with any issue and any participant. On the other hand, we have the constraints of engaging specific participants who are not always interested in anything *Politiken* thinks is important, and are perhaps difficult make interested, which in turns makes them less interesting for Politiken.

In a sense, Politiken did not heed Lippmann's (1927) advice that even well-educated and privileged members of the public will not have the time or interest in all the issues that can be argued to have public relevance. When *Politiken* chose topics such as "the working class" or "the youth of today," they received – in their own words – generic and abstract letters that were similar to each other. In order to get letters worth publishing, according to Politiken's own criteria of broad relevance and readability, the organizers had to accept a loss of control over what issues were deemed relevant. This observation speaks to the importance of the variability of what count as public issues as highlighted by pragmatists like Dewey (1927) and suggests that there are limits to how far publics can be institutionalized if they are to remain interesting.

A third and final observation that deserves to be highlighted is how *Politiken* struggled to assemble an appropriate class of students for their School. Interviews with organizers suggest that the participants served as mediators (in an ANT sense) in at least two ways (Latour 2005b). First, the 150 participants mediated between *Politiken*'s limited time and space and the category of young people in Denmark. The School had to find participants that could fit inside the *Politiken* building and were willing to show up and spend time there. At the same time, these participants were supposed to be as representative as possible of young people in Denmark. There was a strong willingness to compromise here, not least with respect to young people living

outside of Copenhagen and young people with less education; if such people were willing to show up at the school, they were treated with great interest.

Second, the 150 participants were asked to mediate between *Politiken* and the political establishment in Denmark. I learned that the number 150 was important because it made it possible to attract almost any politician and media person to come and speak for free. Given this experience, the organizers were able to tolerate the fact that the relatively high number of participants significantly lowered the options for active participation in the school. These two observations about school participants as mediators suggest that even though *Politiken* called their event a school, the criteria for success were not so much didactic as they were to have an impact on public debate according to the newspaper's standards. This involved being able to mobilize "young people in Denmark" and "the best public figures" in order to showcase "new talent" on the opinion pages of *Politiken*.

Politiken's School of Debate and Critique is an interesting example of what it takes to reproduce public debate in practice. Even though the newspaper already had a strong idea about what public debate is, the school event suggests that in practice they had to meet the participants halfway in several respects, including who was willing to show up and what they were interested in writing about. In this sense, the *Politiken* event is also a specific demonstration of how media and issue publics come into being together in practice, even in a setting that was also shown to reproduce an assumption of a general public agenda and a general public.

8. Media contributions to issue politics

"Be prepared for the unexpected" is not advice that is easy to act on. Nevertheless, if we follow the ANT-inspired readings of Dewey and Lippmann discussed in Chapter 2 (Marres 2007, Latour 2003), this advice seems to be an important part of what the pragmatists have to offer when it comes to the question of democratic politics in technological societies. Public participation, we are told, must be understood as turning around issues that are defined by the unpredictable and problematic associations they invoke.

The proposition can be clarified a bit with Latour's argument that things unite us because they divide us (Latour 2005a). Latour uses the dual meaning of the word "thing" as referring both to an object and an assembly, and points to the old Icelandic 10th century political gathering at Thingvellir that united clans and families because problems divided them and had to be solved together. Similarly, as the pragmatist argument goes, it is the many unruly things of advanced societies, including technologies and infrastructures, that create the issues that lend urgency to the need for public participation in politics.

The unusual use of the word "thing" to describe a political assembly survives today, among other places, in the name for the Danish parliament, Folketinget, which I discussed in Chapter 4. I noticed when I visited parliament that there is a tendency in contemporary parliamentary politics to treat those things that "unite us because they divide us" as public agenda issues that are thought of as a crucial yet external opportunity for the craft of parliamentary politics. The paternoster elevator located in Folketinget helped me think about this because of its constant, noisy running up and down of boxes that one can jump on and off. In a similar fashion, I observed how controversial objects such as payment rings were treated as issues that politicians can follow up or down as they rise and fall in public attention. The accounts of the politicians Robert and Tim in Chapters 4 and 6 demonstrated this. I propose the notion of paternoster politics in order to capture the idea of a constant vertical circulation of issues that politicians can attach themselves to or not.

Paternoster politics is quite different from the sort of pragmatist politics imagined by Latour (2003), although they both seek to engage others, and they both run in circles. Following paternoster politics, issues are useful because they can be used to capture the attention of voters. Following Latour's politics, issues are key because they force us to reorganize our collectives, which is what Latour (2003) argues politicians do with their clumsy political speech that serves to circle back and reformulate who "we" are in any given instance.

However, as Marres (2012a) suggests, issues cannot necessarily be assumed to behave – not for politicians seeking election, but also not for a Latourian politics where it must be possible to clarify who and what needs revisiting through the circular movements of political speech (Latour 2003). If a payment ring can be associated with making Copenhagen greener and more economically efficient at the same time, it may be considered as the kind of policy that a political party wants to associate itself with in advance of a national election. Indeed, this is what a center-left coalition in Danish politics did in 2011. However, if a payment ring can be dissociated from such promises and associated instead with a list of potential negative consequences, then it becomes an issue that generates a host of uncertainties and concerns, and becomes a problem. Indeed, this seems to be how the political right responded to the payment ring in 2011.

This case is interesting, because it is not easy to say who did the right thing. What can be noted, however, is that issues are marked by a fundamental uncertainty with regard to what has to be taken into account. For Marres (2007), it is exactly the unruliness of issues that makes it imperative for advanced technological societies to be democratic, because it is when issues implicate people's lives in unforeseen and indirect ways that public participation takes place in practice. Hence the advice to be prepared for the unexpected, which is what Latour and Callon and their colleagues are trying to do by offering concepts such as the "parliament of nature" and "hybrid forums" (Latour 2004, Callon et al. 2011). Here, the generative capacities of issues in the sense of problematic new things that unite us because they divide us are incorporated into new political procedures.

The payment ring controversy could be taken as another example of how such new procedures are needed, because it can quite easily be interpreted as a case where the accommodation of a new hybrid object into the collective failed, with negative consequences for life in Copenhagen. However, the alternative idea I pursue in this thesis is that while we wait for procedural reform, there might also be work to do in terms of re-conceptualizing devices already in operation. Media devices played an interesting role in the payment ring controversy as a means of turning the project into an issue, but without making this a productive example of issue politics in the pragmatist sense. As shown in Chapters 4 and 6, concerns for unforeseen or uncontrolled negative consequences of the payment ring project proliferated in news media and on social media. I argued above, however, that news media sidelined the issue as one of several in the general, ongoing public debate, which implies that the relevant collective was already delineated in the sense of a general Danish public. As for social media, I showed how issue associations may have been able to proliferate, but also how there seemed to be no place to direct these concerns except to blame politicians for being egoistic and incompetent.

Revisiting publicity

Instead of rejecting the relevance of media on these bases, my goal in this thesis is to explore what media devices may still have to offer to issue politics. In order to conceptualize what is at stake, I propose the notion of caring for publics in order to start from a vantage point of public participation as something fragile that cannot be relied upon, but is nonetheless a crucial activity. These are some of the qualities of the care practices studied by Mol and colleagues (Mol 2008, Mol et al. 2010), as discussed in Chapter 3. The relevance for such thinking for a conceptualization of publics is expressed well by Lippmann, whose statement from the opening chapter is worth returning to here:

> We must assume as a theoretically fixed premise of popular government that normally men as members of a public will not be well informed, continuously interested, nonpartisan, creative or

> executive. We must assume that a public is inexpert in its curiosity, intermittent, that it discerns only gross distinctions, is slow to be aroused and quickly diverted; that, since it acts by aligning itself, it personalizes whatever it considers, and is interested only when events have been melodramatized as a conflict (Lippmann 1927:54–55).

The examinations of the payment ring controversy in the chapters above demonstrate among other things that the project was "melodramatized as a conflict" and that media played a crucial role here in making it possible for politicians and other issue advocates to articulate and circulate conflict narratives. What is much less clear, however, is whether such practices should be encouraged or condemned. As demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, it requires hard and sustained work to assemble public participation with media, and dramatizations are a key register for being successful. This is what the students at *Politiken* were taught in writing their letters, and it is what the Facebook page administrators did each time they published a new post to a payment ring page. At the same time, such dramatizations also lead to unproductive simplifications, as when the Facebook users ridiculed the politicians in favor of the payment ring as self-interested and stupid, or when students at *Politiken* were told that if they had nothing "sharp" and "divisive" to say, they might just as well remain silent.

What is beautiful about Lippmann's statement is that it embraces this tension instead of trying to escape from it. Following Lippmann, democracy is the melodramatization of conflict and the personalization of issues. Dewey (1927) is on the same page when he emphasizes the formulation of indirect consequences as the key to publics, insofar as these links are also established with the personalization of issues. The consequence is that publicity becomes key to democratic politics (Marres 2010). Lippmann makes this connection when he claims that "the present crisis of western democracy is a crisis in journalism" (Lippmann 1920:5).

However, in order to benefit from these insights about democracy, we probably need to reformulate the notion of publicity. Dewey and Lippmann may not be much help

here, insofar as they imagine an ideal state of "full publicity" (Dewey) in the sense of "circulating the facts" (Lippmann). Following their understanding of public engagement, this is exactly what is not possible. Indeed, it has been almost 100 years since Lippmann and Dewey wrote, and we have not yet seen the emergence of a superior publicity medium that can circulate facts and make them correspond to the problems faced by publics. Perhaps it is time to stop assuming that some sort of arrangement will be put in place that makes democratic politics a smooth and fact-oriented process (Ezrahi 1990).

An alternative conceptualization of publicity must also be distinguished from the kind of publicity that Habermas (1989) imported from Kant, which was thought to ensure that reason would provide a check on political power. In his famous dissertation, Habermas argued that such a publicity operated in the bourgeois public sphere of the 19th century, but that it was corrupted and became a "top-down" publicity of spin and manipulation in the 20th century (Habermas 1989). A part of Habermas's argument that is perhaps less noted, however, is that he associates the decline of the public sphere with the expansion of voting eligibility (Habermas 2009:203ff), something which he argues, with inspiration from Mill and Tocqueville, creates a diffuse public without rational, critical potential.

For Habermas and the liberal thinkers who inspired him, this was ultimately a negative development. With Marres's (2007) reading of Dewey (1927), however, the expansion of voting rights and the fact that members of the public began to live very divergent everyday lives can be understood as the beginning of a different kind of publicity. This type of publicity is about tackling problems of varying material entanglements, which, as Lippmann says in quote above, requires a "personalization" of issues. As Marres (2005b) puts it, publics are formed by the mutual implication in issues, which is often an antagonistic affair.

Marres's thinking suggests a different conceptualization of publicity as something that will be inherently problematic, because public participation is sparked by issues that are inherently problematic and unsettled. Following Lippmann's (1927) argument, there is no position available where participants in democratic politics are impartial or

well informed, but nevertheless participation still requires investment in the articulation of issues. With inspiration from Marres (2010) we can understand this statement as suggesting that some sort of partial and imperfect publicity will be crucial to democratic politics even when there is no possibility of "full publicity".

Today, the standard use of the word publicity primarily denotes advertising (Oxford Dictionary of English 2013). If there was a connection between publicity and democracy once, it has been lost in today's everyday language. With the pragmatist conceptualization of publics as sparked by issues, however, the function of advertising is no longer strictly opposed to democracy, as it was for Habermas (1989). To the contrary, advertising is necessary, because without the promotion of issues, there is no public participation in politics, and without public participation nothing happens to issues. It may be noted here that promotion means to "move forward" – without promotion, issues do not move forward. As such, Marres's slogan of "no issue, no public" may be extended to say "no publicity, no issue, no public" (Marres 2005a).

Caring for publics

However, one of the things that has become clear through the case studies in this thesis is how publicity media do not simply orient themselves towards the unfolding of issues on their own premises, however unclear they may be. Publicity media also come with ideas about how publics work and what good publics are, however minimalist these ideas may be. This point can be made most clearly with *Politiken*, a proud newspaper of the old news media tradition that identifies with the notion of the press as the "fourth estate" in democratic societies. Here is an idea not only about critical publicity as a rationalizing and morally good force in society, but also an idea about society and the public as relatively cohesive entities that are capable of having some sort of public debate.

As such, the arrow does not just point from publicity to issue to publics, because publicity media start from an idea about what publics are, which influences how they deal with issues. In Chapter 3, I proposed the notion of devices in order to capture publicity media as heterogeneous arrangements that come both with specific

technological means of generating publicity and with specific theories and methodological commitments, as exemplified by *Politiken*'s commitment to an inclusive, but qualified, public debate.

In contrast to old and proud news media such as *Politiken*, social media like Facebook have much less of a theory of democracy and public debate to offer. If there is such a theory at all, it seems to be quite minimal – that if people are connected and have a say, things tend to go better. As Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg once put it, "when you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place" (Gillis n.d.). In one sense, this lack of assumptions about publics makes social media more interesting than newspapers such as *Politiken* from an issue-oriented perspective, because social media do not force issues into ready-made arenas for public debate. At the same time, the analysis in Chapter 5 suggested that social media gets easily dragged into claims about "the public" in general due to their intricate and technologically sophisticated performance of "society."

At this point, however, the analysis of media devices does not have to be framed as a choice between a (too) strong theory of publics and a (too) weak theory. The empirical work presented in the previous chapters was undertaken in part to inquire about how contrasts between news media as strongholds and social media as betrayers of democracy blur and shift in practice.

For instance, *Politiken*'s staff was presented to compare its newspaper practices with new social media tendencies that prompted them to try to reinvent the traditional "political party press" based on interest groups and customer segments. On the other side, a social media campaigner was shown to compare his investments in setting up Facebook pages with the alternative of news media efforts. Moreover, news articles played an important role as content on the Facebook pages, something which newspaper editors are very aware of. These examples illustrate that when it comes to public engagement, news media and social media practices revolve around the similar problem of how to best bring people into relationships with others who share some of

their concerns. But there are also unintended consequences, as when issue advocates collect news stories on Facebook pages to support a specific position. This is at odds with the efforts of journalists and editors to craft presentations of many positions, if not in the same news story, then on the same newspaper page or in the same online news stream. The use of carefully handpicked news stories on Facebook pages removes them from this context.

To take a second example, it may seem that in contrast with the sort of social media publicity that I observed taking place on the Facebook pages, news media publicity is not geared to producing a new public. Yet, the *Politiken* School showed how news media is also investing in the bringing about of new publics, or at least the renewal of current publics. In both cases, my intervention of a more praxiographic approach shows how what is sometimes treated as a media effect in the sense of a proper public debate (newspaper) or a signal about the real public opinion (social media) in practice requires careful construction.

The analysis by the Monday Morning journalist in Chapter 1 can now be reinterpreted to suggest that as constructions, media publics sometimes fail. Reinterpreting this analysis, it is not so much that Facebook pages provided evidence that the public was not really concerned with the payment ring, but that those actors that mobilized publics with Facebook failed to construct a public that could not be ignored. Furthermore, it was not so much that the newspapers failed to produce a fair and balanced public debate about the payment ring, but that they failed to construct a public that was relevant to the issue.

At the same time, there is evidence that serious attempts were made in constructing payment ring publics by both news media and social media. One thing that must be noted is that in practice the concerns that go into such work are more diverse than may be handled by a theory that makes a strong distinction between communicative and instrumental action in place. For instance, I found in Chapter 6 that some of the Facebook page administrators were politicians seeking election, which is not an issue-oriented concern. Yet their work was crucial for the setting up of issue-oriented publics. I also found in Chapter 7 that *Politiken* was just as motivated by the need to

earn money by producing a newspaper as they were by an ideal of public debate. Still, their work on the School of Debate and Critique contributed to adding new participants and new issues to a public debate that was not taken for granted in practice.

In order to appreciate the contributions that publicity media make to the unfolding of issue politics, it may be necessary to appreciate these complications as part of the making of publicity in practice. In other words, it may be important to extend to media devices that sort of material entanglement that issue politics extends to citizens. The pragmatist perspective argues that citizens only become citizens when they are forced out of their daily routines and habits, which means that contrary to the republican ideal, citizenship begins with material concerns (Marres 2012a). In a similar vein, the publicity that we rely on in order to promote issue participation may have to be understood as also provoked in part by material concerns, such as being elected or making a living, or by entanglements with existing arrangements, including other media.

The notion of care is useful here: it points to situated practices that try to achieve the best possible results with the resources at hand. Drawing on Mol's work on care practices, the aim should not be to devise a formula for how to do publicity, but to study and strengthen the ongoing attempts. The case studies show clear shortcomings in both social and news media when it comes to the unfolding of issues and relating those implicated by issues. But just as importantly, the case studies also demonstrate how these arrangements are not seen as perfect. Rather, they are seen as ongoing experiments that must be corroborated with other efforts, and as experiments that have multiple aims.

The notion of care may thus be useful for cutting media "down to size" and asking not that they solve inherently difficult issues for us, as the idealist understanding of communication mentioned in the opening of this thesis has it (Peters 1999). Instead, media devices may be understood as part of the material equipment that makes an activity otherwise associated primarily with human public participation possible in practice.

Rather than saying *Politiken*'s School falls short of creating a representation of the real issues and the real public, the alternative focus I propose emphasizes the concrete difference it makes for how personal experiences and concerns get to travel. With such an emphasis, the project of public debate is not entirely abandoned, but is understood as always partial and mediated. Here is a modification of the primacy of discourse that lies in the notion of debate. As Mol (2002) shows in the case of atherosclerosis treatment, discursive statements do not have an inherent significance – in practice, they are deeply intertwined with material practices (on this point see Gad and Jensen 2010):

> If a professor of surgery tells a patient to walk, this is not necessarily effective, but if a trainer puts a lot of effort into it, walking therapy may work. Someone has to explain to patients that the pain in their legs doesn't mean that something in their bodies is being destroyed. Someone has to help them work on the numbers of steps that is best for them so that they may stop walking just before they start to feel pain and they start to lose motivation (or, alternatively, in other variants of the treatment, to talk about how to keep going even if its hurts). It is a lot easier for patients to treat themselves if someone is willing and able to answer the questions that arise during all those hours of walking (Mol 2002:229-30, cited in Gad and Jensen 2010:65-66).

With inspiration from this perspective on material semiotics, both the Facebook pages and *Politiken*'s School can be understood as arrangements that work both discursively and materially on public participation. In both settings, we find statements that could be uttered over the counter in a supermarket or between neighbors meeting each other in front of their houses. In such situations, there is not much support in place to qualify statements as public participation, even if they make a link between privately felt harmful consequences and actions elsewhere. With publicity devices, however, a "materially equipped" public emerges (Thévenot 2002), in the sense that arrangements are put in place that have as one of their main affordances the

solidification and increase of the number of links between one person's experience and the potential concerns of others.

Contrary to other devices of democracy such as focus groups, elections or surveys, there is not a singular version of the issue and the public that is being invoked with the material and discursive support of publicity media. In this sense, publicity media are of special interest for issue-oriented politics, insofar as they are material devices that lend themselves to the furnishing of variable publics rather than a national public. The analyses of Facebook and *Politiken* show how issues and publics were made as part of the participatory practices cultivated in each venue. To be able to examine this contingency, however, it was important to analyze two sites, because with only one site available it would be much harder to claim that it did not simply add a layer of publicity to an otherwise fixed issue and public. What I have tried to develop with this comparative approach is a middle ground between two shortcuts: one where public opinion is simply "revealed" with instruments such as polls or focus groups, and one where no mediation is needed because the public knows best "on its own," as a national conservative politician like Krarup would have it (see Chapter 7).

While it can be useful to consider media as instruments in an ongoing caring for publics that are no longer assumed to be exclusively human affairs, it may thus be even more interesting not to reduce media devices to instrumental effects. This is relevant in order to break with the procedural approach identified above, where some elements are identified *a priori* as "technologies of democracy," while other elements are understood as belonging to the substantive issues being addressed. To make the most of media practices, the question should be how such distributions take place with publicity media, not how to determine them in advance.

The result is a perspective on publicity media as not just as technologies, in the sense of non-human actors, but as something that both affords and undergoes open-ended rearrangements. The point is to see publics as hybrids of media, people and issues, rather than something that is being "mediatized" from the outside (Couldry and Hepp 2013). If this can be done, studying media devices can be a way to engage in an

empirical philosophy of how to value and care for the mutual constitution of publics and issues.

It follows that if studies of media are to be useful to doing democratic politics well, they need to focus on changes in media as the devices that make democratic politics happen in the first place, rather than asking how media effects influence democratic politics. Media studies may have to be read and/or written in a new way that does not try to position agency either with media or with publics. Instead, this new approach takes note when media as "inscription devices" are taken for granted and used habitually and when they are questioned and reconfigured (Latour and Woolgar 1979). This is necessary, because in the latter process publics are also reconfigured, which is when politics happen. From this perspective, the value of the empirical studies presented here is also that they make it harder to maintain an understanding of publicity media as external to publics and issues, while at the same time not expecting them to take over and solve or transform issues entirely. The purpose of the two-step empirical strategy pursued in this thesis is to capture both how media come to have a specific effect vis-à-vis issues and how they continuously work to change this effect and thus also change how issues get articulated.

The key is to allow the object of study to be not so much technical or social differences between different media, but public participation as something that is at stake in the work and interactions of various publicity media. Instead of setting up an implicit or explicit choice between whether social media or news media are preferable, for instance, the empirical work presented here has shown both kinds of media to be at work at the same time, setting up contexts for public participation in issues that do not exclude, but rather interfere with each other.

The contribution of this research lies in taking steps towards studying publicity media as devices in the sense of specific sociotechnical arrangements that both describe and make public participation. As devices, publicity media cannot be reduced to a position of being either external or internal to public participation. Their contested status, which has been an important part of the motivation and focus of this project, testifies to this unsettled position. Both social media and news media have been shown to be

ascribed participatory capacities in mediated controversies, but in both cases these capacities were also contested.

If media participate in issue articulation, and these issues are by definition contested, then publicity media must themselves be expected to be controversial objects. Disputes over whether media are participatory or not should not become occasions to critique media, but taken as indicators that media could be partaking in issue politics. Understanding media devices as key sites for a caring for publics in practice is a perspective that may be used to harness the richness of such uncertainties and experiments.

Conclusion

What I have tried to develop in this thesis is an approach where media accounts are not so easily confused with representations of issues, whether explicitly or implicitly. A key part of the argument is that the pragmatist notions of dramatization and articulation must be taken seriously in order to appreciate how publicity media are not "covering" issues, but participating in issues. It is not necessarily helpful to propose that social media offer a new way to make social theory operative (Latour et al. 2012), or to propose that digital media content can be used to achieve a second-degree objectivity (Venturini 2010). It is important to avoid extending assumptions that media are impartial, because such an ideal makes it very easy to dismiss the value of articulating issues, as the journalist in the introductory chapter did for news media and critics subscribing to an ideal of public debate did for social media in Chapter 5. If media are understood as being "in control," as is the case when proper publicity is understood to be key for democratic politics, then they will seem to be lacking as soon as they become part of issue politics.

A key STS argument holds that the circulation of facts requires careful work and is always a fragile affair (Latour 1999). One classic example is Shapin's and Schaffer's (1985) work on the technologies of witnessing that must be in place for experimental science to be able to perform facts. While Lippmann's problem of issue dramatization versus facts continues to be pertinent today, it can also be updated to take into

account these STS arguments. The update would be that it is not enough to appeal to a better circulation of facts; there is also a need to accept that this is a difficult achievement in practice. Issues "matter differently in different material settings" partly because facts only become facts through the work of specific settings (Marres 2012a:55).

Lippmann's and Dewey's critique of news as not fact-oriented enough is a first step, in the sense that it makes it clear that publicity media must always be analyzed in relation to the question of how issues are articulated. This means that we do not have news media because we have the technologies for it, we have news media because we live in technological societies where there is no other option than the mediated circulation of news. The second step, however, is to depart from Lippmann and Dewey and make the problem of publicity media about the problematic achievement of not just circulating facts, but ensuring their witnessing and effect. Insofar as publicity is an important part of issue-making, media must be understood as participants in issues rather than conveyors of facts.

Publicity media as a broad and inclusive category is particularly interesting when seen from the perspective of how media orderings tend to be orderings of disordering. STS research has often assumed that "a proper order comes with the illusion that all relations can be specified and that it is possible to gain an all-inclusive overview" (Law and Mol 2002:14). However, the facilitation of disorder that happens with publicity devices does not have to be taken in the liberal sense of staging a choice for individual citizens (Turner 2013). There is also an alternative strategy of focusing on these orderings as inherently problematic, as the work interferences between different media devices registered in this thesis suggests. This is more interesting from an issue-oriented perspective where media can never offer satisfactory orderings of issues, but are nevertheless key enablers of promoting issues. As Thompson (2002) argues, "where tensions need to be handled in practice, it may be wiser to seek interferences, to increase complexity" (Law and Mol 2002:20).

This is another way to understand the organized disorder of media participation. Here, there is a new role for the ambivalence of the value of publicity media as an

ongoing experiment in what the public is and how it can be equipped for its tasks. Interferences are of special interest here, and interestingly enough, are already pursued by media practices. I propose that the notion of care can be re-appropriated to draw up a space of multiple and partial techniques for organizing publics with publicity media.

When media come up against disruptions, they order, but also transform themselves in response, as the studies presented here show for a newspaper and a social media site. A newspaper can print an extra edition in the case of news emergencies, but they can also reinvent themselves as a school catering in new ways to consumers who are disturbingly disinclined to read newspapers. Similarly, a site like Facebook may officially be quite uninterested in issue politics and focus on ordering the world in terms of social networks. But once politicians start making personal profiles that are not about friendship, Facebook can set up a new format called a page, which orders the disorder, or rather make a disorder possible, since the page functionality is now used for all sorts of things, including issue-oriented protests. When searching Facebook for pages there is no sense of overview, and Facebook does not seem very interested in providing this.

One key challenge here is how to study the performativity of publicity media without giving *a priori* primacy to one technique over another, since this question is exactly what needs to be kept open from an issue-oriented perspective, where publicity is problematic. In relation to this, being empiricist may not be sufficient, since the understandings of politics that are at play in media practices cannot be expected to always be open for issue politics at all.

Ultimately, the understanding of publics as hybrids of media, issues and people is interesting, because it may help us avoid having to locate explanations of events such as the payment ring controversy in either a “technical reality” that the project was for some reason not feasible or in a “political reality” where the politicians were simply not skilled enough to follow through with their promises (Barry 2001). Here, publicity may be taken as an invitation to engage with mixtures of technical and political explanations, because public engagement in the payment ring case was clearly

motivated by concrete material constraints, but these concerns could not claim some sort of neutral expertise. It was more likely for the opposite to happen: that the material concerns of lay people would be ignored as illegitimate private interests. But as the payment ring case suggests, the story was not always that simple.

Such a perspective offers a way to render productive the uncertain role of publicity media in mediated controversies, because these uncertainties about what media can and should do can be understood as part of the unfolding of issues. When social media and news media are problematized, there is an opening for rethinking the role of publics vis-à-vis issues. Emerging media technologies can then be studied as practices that are inventive of new publics and issues rather than as having an external impact on such formations. The advantage of approaching publicity this way is that "the embodied creativity and world-making of publicness" (Warner 2002:54) may be understood not as a take-it-or-leave-it, but as a constellation among several, the combinations of which are not pre-given.

At the same time, although there are important differences, what could now be said to be distinct about publicity media is an engagement with the public as an issue-making, and not just a fact-consuming entity. Emphasizing publicity means to insist on an understanding of publics as populated by people with the capacity to think in publicly-minded ways, not just in the sense of thinking in terms of the common good, but in terms of combining private experiences with actions elsewhere.

This is a fact-making and issue-making capacity that does not appeal to devices such as the payment ring, whose supporters expected the public to be made up of voters and motorists motivated by individual economic interests. When a mediated controversy ensued, it was cast in terms of "too much" public participation of the wrong kind. Publics were not supposed to be engaged in the technical details of the policy, and the media were blamed for having lured the public into acting on something about which they did not have sufficient knowledge. Understanding media as participants in controversies, however, casts the notion of "too much participation" in a different light: it suggests that issues and publics are being reinvented. By the same token, the corresponding claim that there is "too little" public participation of

the right kind in publicity media can be taken to suggest that there are no issues or publics at stake.

Contrary to policies and objects like the payment ring, publicity media depend on the public as an entity to act *with* rather than something to act *on* (cf. Cochoy 2007). In this light, even though publicity media cannot be understood as guaranteeing good democratic politics, their experiments and uncertainties may still be worth tracing in the face of other devices that do not make publicity central to publics. The task could in fact seem urgent, because there is a tendency to think that media are not supposed to act *with* publics, in the sense of contributing to the making of publics and issues.

More specifically, the task that this thesis has motivated is the interrogation of publicity media as devices that value and care for the mutual constitution of publics and issues. This work is difficult to appreciate, since it can easily be taken to mean that the public is no longer the key constraint on politics, which is important in a democracy. Based on a more issue-oriented approach to democratic politics, however, publics are always in search of a form. The destabilizations of issues and publics with publicity media can here be understood not as a way to undo the public as a constraint on politics, but as a way to render the public as a constraint on what can be done much more dynamically. Here is a research agenda for studying publicity media not as either the failure of democracy or the only way to guarantee its success, but rather as devices engaged in an ongoing reinvention of democracy that should be harnessed.

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Danish Summary

Afhandlingens emner er, hvordan medierne bidrager til udfoldelsen af offentligt engagement i sags-fokuseret politik. Introduktionen beskriver de indlejrede problematikker relateret til offentligheder, medier og kontroversielle politiske sager. Jeg peger på, at medierne kan ses som afgørende for demokratisk politik såvel som en trussel for samme. Introduktionen foreslår en pragmatisk tilgang til dette problem, og trækker på John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, samt nyere forskning inden for science and technology studies (STS). Jeg argumenterer for, at den pragmatiske tilgang på den ene side hjælper med at undgå et problem med Habermasianske tilgange, der holder sig til en idealiseret og fastlåst forestilling om offentlig debat, der ikke er sags-specifik. På den anden side, argumenterer jeg også for, at den pragmatiske tilgang undgår et problem ved mediestudier, der tilskriver deterministiske effekter til medierne. Som et alternativ betyder den pragmatiske tilgang en empirisk undersøgelse af det (sags-)specifikke arbejde og bidrag fra konkrete og situerede medier. Jeg foreslår, at disse bidrag kan undersøges som en "omsorg" for offentligheder, hvor medier studeres som en del af en fortløbende ”fiflen” med at artikulere sager og organisere offentligheder i forhold til disse sager.

Med udgangspunkt i denne tilgang består den empiriske del af afhandlingen af en sammenlignende undersøgelse af to medier, en avis og et socialt medie. Valget af disse studieobjekter motiveres i kapitel 2, som hævder, at selvom Dewey og Lippmann lagde stor vægt på mediernes rolle i sags-fokuseret politik, så har nyere arbejde i STS, som er inspireret af disse forfattere, en tendens til at antage, at en form for medie-publicitet er tilgængelig, uden at undersøge den nærmere. Kapitel 3 diskuterer nogle af de vigtigste analytiske udfordringer forbundet med at studere medier i relation til sags-fokuseret politik. Der argumenteres for begrebet ”device” som nyttigt, fordi det kan fange hvordan medie-dynamikker er sammenflettede med sags-dynamikker, samt hvordan medierne ikke blot viderebringer offentligheder, men performer offentligheder og kontroversielle politiske sager. Samtidig peger kapitlet på behovet for at tage den ”ontologiske politik” i betragtning, der er forbundet med at tildele forskellige domæner og roller til forskellige medier, som i "nyhedsmedier” og "sociale

medier". Denne udfordring er særlig vigtig i forhold til kontroversielle spørgsmål, hvor hvad der tæller som socialt eller som en nyhed er en del af, hvad der er på spil. Det illustreres af en nylig kontrovers om trængselsafgifter i København. Denne sag fungerer som en empirisk case i hele afhandlingen.

For at undersøge mediernes ontologiske politik nærmere, fokuserer de to første empiriske kapitler (4 og 5) på at opridse de roller, to store og indflydelsesrige medier tildeles i forhold til sags-fokuseret politik. Kapitel 4 følger hvordan sagen om trængselsafgifter i København flyttede sig fra en politisk ramme til en nyhedsmedie-ramme. Kapitlet argumenterer for, at nyhedsmedierne ikke kun er forbundet med skabelsen af en offentlig diskussion om trængselsafgifter, men også antager, at der eksisterer en generel offentlig dagsorden uafhængigt af specifikke sager. Kapitel 5 flytter fokus til Facebook, som en interessant kontrast til de traditionelle nyhedsmedier, fordi enkeltsager på Facebook udgør et udgangspunkt for offentligt engagement. Kapitlet argumenterer samtidig for, at hvis Facebook primært forstås som et middel til at tilgå et mere "autentisk" offentligt engagement, så opstår en tendens til at overse hvordan Facebook også bidrager til artikulationen og udviklingen af kontroversielle sager.

De to sidste empiriske kapitler (6 og 7) har som mål at sætte sig ud over rollefordelingen mellem sociale medier og nyhedsmedier, der opridses i kapitel 4 og 5. Det sker ved at forfølge en mere "praxiografisk" undersøgelse af de to medier, hvor nogle af de praksisser, der ellers er oversete, artikuleres. Kapitel 6 undersøger de diskursive udvekslinger på de Facebook-sider, der blev oprettet i forbindelse med sagen om trængselsafgifter, og hævder, at hvad der foregår her, ikke bør forstås som en særlig indsigt i en slags oprindelig, social forståelse af sagen, men snarere som en omhyggelig konstruktion af en sags-specifik offentlighed, hvilket i høj grad også udgør et indgreb i sagens substans. Facebook bliver her en del af mediernes indgriben i, hvad der har nyhedsværdi, hvilket således ikke længere er de traditionelle nyhedsmedier eksklusive domæne. Kapitel 7 forfølger analysen af kontemporære medie-praksisser yderligere ved at flytte fokus til et bestemt nyhedsmedie, den danske avis *Politiken* og dens nylige lancering af en såkaldt Debattør- og Kritikerskole. Her er en mulighed for at undersøge, hvordan nyhedsmedier arbejder hårdt på at

iscenesætte socialitet og dermed bidrage til artikulation af nye sager og nye offentligheder, frem for blot at observere en offentlig debat, der antages at eksistere eksternt.

Kapitel 8 vender tilbage til de spørgsmål, der blev rejst i de tidligere kapitler. Kapitlet gør gældende, at hvis vi er interesserede i sags-fokuseret politik og offentligt engagement i politik, som noget der er tæt sammenflettet med kontroversielle politiske sager, så er vi nødt til at genoverveje mediernes rolle som afgørende dele af den fortløbende fiflen med at artikulere sager og offentligheder, som sags-fokuseret politik kræver, i stedet for at forstå medierne som teknologier, der rydder op i svære sager ved hjælp af publicitet. Jeg argumenterer for, at et komparativt perspektiv på flere forskellige mediers bidrag er vigtigt, og diskuterer begrebet om omsorg for offentligheder som en måde at nærmere sig de relevante mediepraksisser.

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