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To cite this article: Robert Asen (2017) Neoliberalism, the public sphere, and a public good, Quarterly Journal of Speech, 103:4, 329-349, DOI: [10.1080/00335630.2017.1360507](https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2017.1360507)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2017.1360507>



Published online: 16 Aug 2017.



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Neoliberalism, the public sphere, and a public good

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ABSTRACT

This essay considers the challenges that neoliberalism raises for conceptual models and practices of a multiple public sphere. Engaging difference and attending to inequality, a multiple public sphere facilitates the circulation of a dynamic public good that may articulate mutual standing and relationships among people to enable the construction of a collective “we” for coordinated action. Weakening relationships among people and devaluing coordinated action, neoliberalism envisions a public of atomistic individuals who compete with one another for comparative advantage. Flattening difference and obscuring inequality, a neoliberal public presumes a universal subject that obscures its own particularity and discounts the uneven burdens faced by those who cannot seamlessly identify with its mode of subjectivity. Further, for a neoliberal public, inequality serves as the condition and end of competition. Resistance to neoliberalism may arise in the networked locals of a multiple public sphere, as advocates reclaim connections that neoliberalism seeks to deny.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 June 2016

Accepted 25 December 2016

KEYWORDS

Networked public;
multiplicity; counterpublic;
education; networked local

Multiplicity constitutes a key quality of contemporary scholarship on the public sphere. Networks of publics and counterpublics arising asynchronously and exhibiting diverse and changing relationships form the basis of contemporary models of publicity. Gerard Hauser, for instance, writes that “the contemporary Public Sphere has become a web of discursive arenas, spread across society and even in some cases across national borders.”¹ Seyla Benhabib argues that public discourse involves participants situated across various networks, whose engagement with interlocutors builds something beyond their specific interactions: “*it is through the interlocking net of these multiple forms of associations, networks, and organizations that an anonymous ‘public conversation’ results.*”² Within this networked public sphere, actors may participate in various publics in different places, at different moments, and through different modes.³ Moreover, from alternative vantage points in a network, a public may appear as mainstream or marginal. A counterpublic conceived through one set of relations may elicit counterpublicity from others in a network, as Thomas Dunn illustrates in his critical comparison of LGBT and queer counterpublic practices of memory.⁴ Multiplicity signals direct and indirect, near and distant relations among publics, demonstrating, as Phaedra Pezzullo suggests,

that “public dialogues reflect a multi-faceted negotiation of power.”⁵ Across the nodes of a network, people do not necessarily engage each other on equal terms.

The conceptual model of a multiple public sphere developed in response to a unitary model drawn from the bourgeois public sphere as well as critical attention to the practices of people excluded from particular publics, who have worked together to overcome exclusions and circulate alternative interpretations of their needs, interests, and identities. In her famous critique of the bourgeois public sphere, Nancy Fraser outlined this position, noting that the singular focus of the bourgeois public sphere obscured difference and occluded inequality. She urged instead the exploration of multiple publics, including counterpublics.⁶ Scholars in rhetoric and communication have responded enthusiastically to this call, appreciating, as Catherine Squires explains, that

the move away from the ideal of a single public sphere is important in that it allows recognition of the public struggles and political innovations of marginalized groups outside traditional or state-sanctioned public spaces and mainstream discourses dominated by white bourgeois males.⁷

Further, as Daniel Brouwer suggests, a multiple public sphere recognizes the complexity of people’s lives by “*forcing recognition that human actors participate in multiple publics.*”⁸ People do not only engage in one mode of publicity. Even Jürgen Habermas, whose historical account of the bourgeois public sphere precipitated Fraser’s critique, has engaged her work and developed a model of a public sphere as a “network.”⁹

In our contemporary era, conceptual frameworks and critical practices of multiplicity face a challenge from the rise of the market as a model for human relationships, politics, and society. Referred to as neoliberalism by scholars and some of its champions, this market regime of governance has received widespread interest in contemporary political and social theory. As Wendy Brown notes, “neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus.*”¹⁰ As Brown’s observation implies, neoliberalism holds implications for policy as well as agency and subjectivity. Neoliberal policy initiatives circulate in the seemingly ubiquitous calls to privatize public institutions and services, lower taxes, deregulate industry, and remove social safety nets. All of these actions presumably would instill competition as an ameliorative social principle. Neoliberalism also carries a human dimension that reconstitutes subjects as self-sufficient capitalists—Brown calls them “little capitals”¹¹—who compete to enhance their financial value and attract investors. With the market as the guiding model for human relationships and society, “the foundation vanishes for citizenship concerned with public things and the common good.”¹² Not even the public sphere lies outside of the market’s reach.

Just as public sphere scholars critiqued the limits of the bourgeois public sphere and developed alternatives, we must investigate neoliberalism, for it, too, poses threats to critical publicity by undermining multiple modes of publicity. Whereas the bourgeois public sphere imagined a single, universal forum populated by educated and propertied white males as the basis for public engagement, neoliberalism upholds a market populated by atomistic individuals as a singular and universal sphere of activity. This vision carries important implications for how scholars may consider issues of equality and diversity, as well as the means for redressing public problems in the pursuit of justice. Neoliberalism

operates with the assumption that the market treats all actors equally; differences of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and more presumably play no role in the behavior of market actors and their successes and failures. Incorporated into a neoliberal model of publicity, this assumption makes inequality invisible, threatening the very “recognition of public struggles and political innovations” that Squires and other scholars affirm. Further, neoliberalism imposes a homogeneity on market actors, ascribing to them uniform motivations and goals, namely, enhancing their competitiveness and market advantage. This ascription discounts the productive power of diversity and difference in the public sphere, which benefits people and polities as they engage a wide range of perspectives.

Neoliberalism also obfuscates the means for redressing inequality and mobilizing diversity by weakening relations among people and devaluing coordinated action. For publics and counterpublics alike, the prospect of efficacious public engagement has long depended on bolstering interpersonal relations and empowering coordinated action. John Dewey regarded perceptions of mutual implication in the conduct and consequences of human affairs as forming the basis of a public. When perceived, consequences do not exert a mechanistic pull on the formation of publics, but facilitate transformative action by individuals, who “reflect upon” their connections with one another: “Each acts, in so far as the connection is known, in view of the connection.”¹³ Public engagement draws importantly on ideas and practices of mutual standing and connection, suggesting, for example, that people may jointly benefit from the alleviation of a problem. Or that people may work together to address issues and concerns in the name of fairness and justice. Or that people may work together to achieve shared goals that improve collective well-being. Plainly put, public engagement draws on the promise of a public good, which neoliberalism disavows through its strict reliance on a narrow individualism. As I argue in this essay, this notion of a public good does not refer to specific, bounded content; it does not demand shared experiences; it does not aim for consensus. Rather, this public good constitutes a practice of articulating mutual standing and connection, recognizing that people can solve problems and achieve goals—and struggle for justice—through coordinated action. In a networked public sphere, there is no singular, universal public good, but multiple articulations of a public good. Both the bourgeois public sphere and neoliberalism seek to promote singularity over multiplicity: the former by asserting the supposedly unique capacity of the bourgeoisie to discern a public good, and the latter by disaggregating a public good into individuals who can only act alone. In these ways, both the bourgeois public sphere and neoliberalism privilege established interests and raise obstacles for a vibrant critical publicity.

I develop my argument over three main sections in this essay. In the first section, I explicate how a networked public sphere draws on a dynamic public good that calls attention to relationships and connects people in different ways as a force for public engagement. Enlivened through relationships, a networked public sphere may enable the productive power of difference and create opportunities for addressing inequalities. In the second section, I critique a neoliberal public built around the atomistic individual and guided by the principle of competition. Flattening difference and discounting inequality, a neoliberal public assumes that everyone can adopt the position of *homo oeconomicus*. In the third section, I discuss the prospects for resistance to a neoliberal public through the coordinated action of networked locals. Using the example of public education, I discuss

how local advocates may work together to rebuild and expand connections across difference in a networked public sphere.

A networked public sphere and a public good

Defying an essentialist and static framework, a public good is dynamic and mobile, operating at different levels of society, and open to contestation and reformulation. A public good does not function as a container that holds a particular set of values, principles, and issues, although some publics may seek to define a public good in exclusionary terms. A public good does not refer to a discrete body of knowledge, an established group of institutions, or a coherent synthesis of public opinion. Rather, a public good circulates in society, connecting people's perceptions and actions to their relationships with each other and the worlds they inhabit. It informs the ways that people make engagement meaningful. It is a network of discursive, embodied, and material relationships.

Affirming this dynamism, public sphere scholars may productively conceptualize a public good as a *practice* that draws on *relationships* within and among publics and counterpublics to connect people in different ways. When advocates articulate a public good, they appeal to people to imagine their connections with others in particular ways, to perceive connections that may facilitate coordinated action towards addressing problems, issues, and goals. Insofar as publics do not reference naturally occurring associations, relationships within and among publics have to be constructed. People must perceive themselves as members of a community, allies in a struggle for justice, citizens implicated in the actions of their governments. Along these lines, Dewey distinguishes between the brute fact of human association and the consciously cultivated bonds of community. Humans are born and live among others, but community "is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained." Coordinated action implies a collective subject, a "we" who should do something. Dewey holds that "'we' and 'our' exist only when the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an object of desire and effort."¹⁴ Publics must recognize themselves as such; they appear as the constructions of the people who populate them.¹⁵

A public good operates in a networked public sphere by explicitly or implicitly calling attention to relationships, constructing or reconstructing relationships, and drawing on these relationships as a force for public engagement. The operation of a public good informs both publicity and counterpublicity. On this point, Fraser observes that counterpublics often direct their public engagement to "the appropriate boundaries of the public sphere," namely, shared perceptions of what constitutes public and private issues. She cites as an example the efforts of counterpublic actors to reframe domestic violence as a public issue. In this discussion, Fraser does not reject public appeals, but "naturally given, a priori boundaries." Indeed, she underscores the value of appealing to a public good in writing that "democratic publicity requires ... opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so."¹⁶ Note Fraser's reference to "convinc[ing] others," which suggests an effort by counterpublic actors to make connections and emphasize mutual standing. This discursive move resists the assumption that domestic violence is an issue that only concerns its victims. In this case and others, the prospects for social change encourage

advocates to engage others who may not have seen themselves as implicated in an issue or problem so that they may see its wider import.

In another case, focusing on the contemporary issue of state-condoned racial violence in the United States and the civil rights movements that have emerged to counteract this violence, Sarah Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles argue that counterpublics have operated with “the express goals of both legitimizing and communicating their lived realities *and* pushing the mainstream public sphere to acknowledge and respond to these realities.”¹⁷ Legitimation, communication, and acknowledgement all draw on relationships—relationships among participants in counterpublics as well as relations among publics and counterpublics. For counterpublic actors, these relationships may redirect otherwise isolating experiences to connect people who have suffered police brutality. Engaging with like-minded others, counterpublic actors may better understand their experiences, refashion identities from passive victim to capable agent, and push for social change. Among publics and counterpublics, legitimation, communication, and acknowledgment place a responsibility on wider publics to see their connections to places like Ferguson and people like Michael Brown. In this sense, counterpublic actors rejected assertions that the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson constituted a confined incident. They instead connected the shooting in Ferguson to issues of race in the United States, in which all citizens hold a stake.

Demonstrating dynamism and mobility, actors in a networked public sphere may articulate a public good variously through multiple modes of engagement. This variety indicates that multiplicity does not attenuate the productive power of a public good, but may facilitate its functioning in ways that resonate with the perspectives of actors within and across publics and counterpublics. For example, as he explicates a vibrant mode of dissent for democratic deliberation, Robert Ivie discerns a “topos of complementary differences” that enables dissenters to express “relations of interdependence” with the people and societies they critique to sustain interaction and forestall violence. In maintaining relationships amidst disagreement, dissent “enhances democratic pluralism” by questioning “that which is taken for granted” as well as bridging “differences to generate constructive dialogue and deliberation.”¹⁸ Beyond deliberation, people may employ various forms of rhetoric and communication to recognize mutual standing and facilitate coordinated action.¹⁹ Perhaps through creativity born of struggle, counterpublicity may lend itself to discursive innovation. Addressing its generative potential, Brouwer writes that counterpublicity may emerge through “unruly, passionate, enfolded, ironic” and other modes of engagement.²⁰ Illustrating this point, Yvonne Slosarski considers how participants in labor protests in Wisconsin in 2011 enacted alternatives to policymakers’ market-oriented efforts to disempower public employee unions by revoking their rights to collective bargaining. Although they did not defeat the legislation, protestors articulated visions of a public good in diverse ways. Besides traditional means like testifying at public committee hearings, protestors commenced a weeks-long occupation of the state capitol that “enacted a vision of communal, participatory democracy.”²¹ Slosarski maintains that the occupation emphasized themes of “self-governance, solidarity, and respect” in the ways that protestors treated, cared for, and supported each other.²² By constructing and cultivating these connections, protestors presented alternatives to neoliberal views of self and society.

While neoliberalism emphasizes individuals, the relationships articulated in a public good facilitate complementary engagements of “I” and “we,” of individual and community. On this basis, individual identity and agency do not arise as autonomous achievements, but through practices of social construction. One’s sense of self and capacity for action arises in part through interaction with others. Gerard Hauser discerns in public discourse an intersubjective relation through which individuals understand their engagement from the perspective of a shared “we” while maintaining their distinctive contributions.²³ Reciprocally, development of a collective identity and agency draws on the spirit of individuals to align with others, to recognize connections that may enable mutually valued action. From particular exchanges to broader engagements, Dewey identifies the mediation of individual and community as a key dynamic of democracy. He holds that from the standpoint of the individual, democratic practices and norms facilitate individuals’ equitable participation in the groups to which they belong. From the standpoint of the community, democracy demands “the liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are in common.” Yet this “common” does not admit to a transparent and singular reading, since individuals belong to many groups, and notions of potentiality and common interests and goods arise when “different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups.”²⁴ Shared purpose arises through people’s engagement with difference, and the same person may commit themselves to multiple shared purposes through their membership in and interaction with various groups.

By emphasizing relationships, the operation of a public good in a networked public sphere may serve to bolster attention to (in)equality and difference by facilitating contestation among publics and counterpublics. Equality and difference themselves invite relational judgments. We can assess neither in isolation: the isolated individual imagined in neoliberalism presumably has no connection to others, thereby rendering moot considerations of equality and difference. In contrast, calling on relationships and making connections encourages people to think about their relations to others and to discuss differences that may appear as productive and unproductive, just and unjust. Relationality serves as the basis for a contested, agonistic spirit and practice in a networked public sphere. As publics and counterpublics engage, they emphasize different relationships and construct alternative connections among people, advancing potentially competing visions of a public good and invigorating the agonism that Chantal Mouffe identifies as the “very condition of existence” of democratic public engagement.²⁵ Engagement does not only circulate the perspectives of publics and counterpublics. Even in disagreement, it may shift the perspectives of people who engage each other by raising awareness and situating their views in wider contexts.

Relationality and contestation recognize difference not as a set of essential categories or individual or group attributes but as varying engagements with others to offer multiple perspectives on public issues and concerns. Iris Marion Young explains that “because of their social locations, people are attuned to particular kinds of social meanings and relationships to which others are less attuned.”²⁶ Engaging diverse perspectives, difference contributes productively to public discourse, admitting various ways of looking at issues that would be foreclosed by an emphasis on sameness. Moreover, conceived in this way, difference neither fragments nor finishes public engagement among diverse social actors. Young observes that “social perspective consists in a set of questions, kinds of

experience, and assumptions with which reasoning begins, rather than the conclusions drawn.”²⁷ This framework underscores the productive power of difference and coordinated action for a networked public sphere, which generates more perspectives and tests these perspectives through contestation in ways that are unavailable to the isolated individual. Further, this framework underscores that individuals as individuals do not rely on singular perspectives: “since individuals are multiply positioned in complexly structured societies, individuals interpret the society from a multiplicity of social group perspectives.”²⁸ In these ways, a dynamic public good sustains the vibrancy of a networked public sphere.

My conceptualization of a public good has explicated its dynamism as a practice that, in drawing on relationships and making connections, also informs people’s perceptions of themselves and others. Yet, structural conditions in society may enable and constrain this practice, and this practice may reshape structural conditions. Seeking to draw greater attention to this aspect of publicity, Brouwer urges scholarship on counterpublics to attend to resource disparities among actors. Connecting perception, practice, and structure, he writes

if we take the view that counterpublics emerge from perceptions of oppositionality to dominant forces, then we should remain attentive to the ways in which both perceptual and actual disparities of resources inflect counterpublic activities and counterpublics’ relations with other publics.²⁹

As Brouwer suggests, in direct and indirect ways, resources mediated through institutions and social arrangements may provide a basis for action in the public sphere. For instance, people who perceive their positions in society as precarious—depending, perhaps, on insecure and low-wage employment for their sustenance or fearful of government surveillance because of their immigration status—may express reluctance to engage in modes of publicity that draw the attention of corporate or governing institutions. Yet engagement may call attention to oppressive structures, and some publics may rely on alternative structures to change oppressive ones. In developing her definition of counterpublics, for example, Fraser references institutions that facilitated feminist counterpublic engagement: “journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places.”³⁰ In their explication of a proletarian public sphere, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge address the structures of capitalism and workers’ efforts to change these structures.³¹

Although a public good may be conceptualized and practiced to affirm and bolster multiplicity, some publics and scholars have practiced and conceptualized a public good to assert singularity. As Young observes, “under conditions of structural social and economic inequality, the relative power of some groups often allows them to dominate the definition of a common good in ways compatible with their experience, perspective, and priorities.”³² Historically, an invocation of universality stood as the constitutive exclusion of the bourgeois public sphere. As Habermas observed, the bourgeoisie perpetuated a basic conflation of human being and property owner:

the fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on the fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple.³³

The bourgeoisie wrongly believed that property owners had achieved an economic autonomy and freedom that gave them an exclusive perspective on society as a whole. The bourgeoisie thought that they had obtained a vantage point on society that could vouchsafe everyone's interests. Critiques of the bourgeois public sphere have revealed its legitimating discourses as particularity masquerading as universality.³⁴ From this view, to call attention to one's own particularity, when this particularity does not comport with the "universal" bourgeois subject, is to call attention to oneself as less than a fully autonomous agent.

Conceptually, some scholars have sought to ground a public good in a common content, a shared set of procedures, or a consensus-driven outcome. For instance, in his model of deliberative democracy, Joshua Cohen regards the role of a public good, which he refers to as a common good, as focusing deliberation on "ways of advancing the aims of each party" to achieving consensus. A common good thus informs people's motivations and orients their engagement, since everyone "seeks to arrive at decisions that are acceptable to all who share the commitment to deliberation." To do this, people must focus on "appeals to the common good," which implies a discrete object of discourse.³⁵ Deliberation functions to sort reasons by separating those that carry general appeal from those that only warrant particular assent. This model dampens public deliberation and admits difference only to the extent that it serves an ultimate consensus. Further, this model attributes a universal motivation to diverse participants.³⁶

While Cohen subordinates difference to the goal of consensus, John Rawls fixes lines of public and private by promoting the idea of public reason as a means of mediating difference in a pluralistic society. To do so, he effectively distinguishes questions of justice and the good life. People may answer questions of the good life by invoking culturally specific worldviews, through which citizens weigh and organize different values so that "they are compatible with one another and express an intelligible view of the world."³⁷ Questions of the good life concern only those individuals and cultures to whom they are addressed. In contrast, questions of justice concern all members of a polity and, as such, demand deliberative procedures accessible to all. On these occasions, Rawls argues, citizens must draw on "public reason," which consists of "substantive principles of justice" and commonly recognized "guidelines of inquiry." Rawls insists that a "duty of civility" calls on citizens "to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason."³⁸ For Rawls, citizens may fulfill this duty because public reason and its conception of justice constitute a part of everyone's belief systems, functioning as a "module" that people may present separately from their wider beliefs. In articulating his idea of public reason, Rawls draws strict and impermeable lines between public and private—or, less "public"—discourse. Further, he ascribes an internally differentiated reason to citizens and demands that they maintain this division. In the form of public reason, Rawls imposes a universalized public good, which contains a discrete content, on a pluralistic society. This is precisely what a conceptualization of a public good in a networked public sphere must avoid.

Neoliberalism and the public sphere

Even as it raises serious challenges for models and practices of a multiple public sphere, neoliberalism does not dispense with publicity. Indeed, neoliberalism in its various

forms circulates among the nodes of a networked public sphere. Neoliberalism challenges modes of critical publicity by aligning publics with its own vision of individuals and their interactions. Recalling the presumption of a bourgeois public, a neoliberal public disregards difference and discounts inequality to reassert a singular and universal model of publicity. To the degree to which it exerts force across a network, a neoliberal public obfuscates the diversity of the network in which it circulates. A neoliberal public exhibits distinct qualities and assumes alternative functions than a networked public sphere operating with a dynamic public good.

To understand this neoliberal public, we first must recognize that scholars have used the term neoliberalism to refer to related but multiple developments and objects. Engaging the wide-ranging contemporary scholarship on the topic, Simon Springer observes that four prominent versions of neoliberalism circulate in the literature: neoliberalism as dominant ideology; neoliberalism as policy framework; neoliberalism as state form; and neoliberalism as mode of self-governance.³⁹ As Springer notes, these versions may overlap. If we understand ideology as a set of political beliefs and principles, then we may discern a form of neoliberalism in the discourse of advocates who champion the superiority of markets. Yet, this very example lends itself to a policy program of privatization, and it reimagines the state through a market model. While the qualities and functions of a neoliberal public link to these variations, public sphere scholars may offer a distinctive contribution by considering how neoliberalism, as a dominant social force, shapes the subjectivities of people who act in the public sphere as well as their perceived and enacted relations to one another.⁴⁰

The figure of an atomized individual stands at the center of a neoliberal public. In his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom*, Milton Friedman opened with an unequivocal assertion of the place of the individual:

To the free man, the country is the collection of individuals who compose it, not something over and above them. ... He recognizes no national purpose except as it is the consensus of the purposes for which the citizens severally strive.⁴¹

In rebuking “something over and above” individuals, in denying shared purpose, Friedman gainsaid the existence of coordinated action as anything other than an infringement on individual prerogative. Whereas public sphere scholars like Hannah Arendt have discerned a power in human relationships that “springs up between [people] when they act together,”⁴² Friedman denied this potentiality. Elected officials, too, have voiced this individualist orientation. In his first inaugural address, President Ronald Reagan recast the progressive narrative of the American Dream “to privilege the individual as the hero, rather than the community.”⁴³ Like Friedman, Reagan grounded his view of the nation in individuals, and he did so in celebratory terms. At other times, censure has replaced celebration when individuals fail to reach their economic goals, or even economic survivability, since individuals alone bear the responsibility for their actions. Writing about the circulation of the “mortgage delinquent” in the 2008 housing market crisis in the United States, Megan Foley explains that this figure enforced neoliberal self-discipline by scolding debtors to “grow up, take responsibility, and repay their loans.” At the same time, this figure “minimized the scope of the mortgage crisis by pinning the blame on ‘irresponsible’ individuals who made ‘risky’ financial decisions.”⁴⁴ Just as an emphasis on an atomized individual denies coordinated action, it occludes structural deficiencies.

In a neoliberal public sphere, individuals may exercise the fundamental value of freedom, defined generally as the ability of individuals to act as they please without coercion or constraint, but narrowly imagined as the freedom of market actors. Recalling a lineage of classical liberalism, Friedman upheld “freedom as the ultimate goal and the individual as the ultimate entity in society.”⁴⁵ Freedom supposedly brought limitless possibilities—individuals could decide best how they would live their lives; what they valued; with whom they would interact and how. However, in flattening society in the image of the market, Friedman and other neoliberals restricted freedom to the freedom of market actors.⁴⁶ Democratic connotations of freedom as self-rule or “participation in rule by the demos,” notes Brown, gave “way to comportment with a market instrumental rationality that radically constrains both choices and ambitions. ... No longer is there an open question of how to craft the self.”⁴⁷ In this shift, freedom also dissociates from other democratic values like equality and justice. Illuminating the implications of this move, Friedman contrasted the virtuous action of the free individual against the paternalistic and coercive actions of the state. Any effort by governing institutions to seek equality and pursue justice could never be genuine because it required the imposition of state control on the free will of individuals. As Paul Turpin notes, Friedman presented a stark choice: either citizens could defend freedom or submit to state control and, ultimately, totalitarianism.⁴⁸ However, as I discuss below, Friedman and other neoliberals supported state action when they regarded it as serving the market.

Unable to draw on coordinated action for social change, the neoliberal public subject only may act as an individual to change oneself in the image of the market. In this manner, neoliberalism redirects social concerns inward. Operating as a competitive market actor does not occur naturally; rather, individuals must develop their competitiveness. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval explain that the neoliberal subject must work on oneself constantly “to survive competition.” Success requires consideration of one’s activities as “an investment, a cost calculation. The economy becomes a personal discipline.”⁴⁹ Dardot and Laval maintain that the self-improvement of the neoliberal subject does not constitute an exercise in delayed gratification; one does not mold oneself as a market actor to accumulate the financial means for self-fulfillment in a non-market activity later in life. Work appears as its own end. Neoliberalism “makes work the privileged vehicle of self-realization: it is by succeeding professionally that one makes a ‘success’ of one’s life.”⁵⁰ Neoliberalism subsumes other motivations and goals, such as obtaining an education or cultivating a friendship, under the singular framework of maximizing one’s competitive advantage.

An individual economic actor, the neoliberal public subject appears as a “universal” that obfuscates its own particularity as well as the challenges faced by those who cannot seamlessly identify with its mode of subjectivity. On the question of gender, as Brown suggests, neoliberalism both ignores and exacerbates the difficulties that women face in adopting the position of *homo oeconomicus*, since women remain disproportionately responsible for the familial activities that neoliberalism regards as outside of the market. In this way, neoliberalism both intensifies and transforms a gendered division of labor. Intensification appears in the privatization of public infrastructures that support families and children. Transformation occurs through erasure of a public language for identifying and addressing the unequal impact of neoliberal policy change. As Brown writes, “women both *require* the visible social infrastructure that neoliberalism

aims to dismantle through privatization and *are* the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals.⁵¹ For Nancy Fraser, this subjugation appears in the language of emancipation, as neoliberal policy co-opts the feminist critique of the traditional roles of breadwinner and homemaker. Supplanting the gendered “family wage” of the post-World War II era in Western economies, neoliberal policy romanticizes “female advancement and social justice” but undermines the very conditions and infrastructure necessary for advancement and justice.⁵² On a global scale, observes Rebecca Dingo, neoliberalism sets “women on a path toward formal market activities without recognizing the wide-reaching vectors of oppression and exploitation that impoverish women.”⁵³ In these ways, policymakers have championed markets as a universal prescription for national and international development without regard to context and conditions of exploitation.

Neoliberalism also ignores the role of race and racism on the formation and agency of public subjectivities. A neoliberal public, as Darrel Wanzer-Serrano observes, operates “by an active suppression of ‘race’ as a legitimate topic or term of public discourse and public policy.”⁵⁴ Instead, neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual responsibility renders race as an antiquated category and racism as a problem of the past.⁵⁵ Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee explain that a neoliberal public presents a “socially progressive politics by articulating a colorblind, cosmopolitan, post-race subject, while characterizing as ‘backwards’ or ‘racist’ those who invoke racial claims.”⁵⁶ If there are only individuals, then charges of racism and sexism, which associate individuals with broader categories and implicate agency in structure, deny individual autonomy and serve only to “excuse” personal failings. Jones and Mukherjee hold that neoliberalism depoliticizes and privatizes difference, such that “culture becomes a matter of individual choice.”⁵⁷ These moves replace a dialectic of agency and structure with an exclusive focus on agency, and they bracket the relationship between subjectivity, agency, and power.

The neoliberal subject appears as a new bourgeois subject. The cases of gender and race illuminate a uniform neoliberal discounting of particularity and difference, which extends to class, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. Presuming universality, the neoliberal subject fails to recognize how particularity matters, especially for those whose differences complicate their enactment of this putative universal. This lack of recognition carries considerable weight, since, as Wendy Hesford explains, “recognition affords legibility to certain bodies and social relationships and not to others.”⁵⁸ Neoliberalism cannot see the particularity of its public subject nor the varying advantages and disadvantages that the presumed adoption of *homo oeconomicus* places on the diverse subjects of a pluralistic society. This lack of recognition propagates resource disparities for people whose particularities carry additional responsibilities and burdens that complicate the economic rationality ascribed to *homo oeconomicus*.

A neoliberal public operates by the principle of competition rather than the coordinated action of a networked public sphere operating with a dynamic public good. For a neoliberal public, competition frames social relations as a zero-sum game; one person’s success and standing appear at the expense of another. In contrast to models of the public sphere and practices that seek wider opportunities for agency, a neoliberal public presents actors with strategic advantages in limiting the agency and denying the autonomy of others. This constitutes a brutal embrace of, in Mouffe’s terms, “the potential antagonism that exists in human relations.” Mouffe recognizes the value of contestation for publicity, but she argues

that productive conflict requires a move from antagonism to agonism, which constructs an other

in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an “adversary,” that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.⁵⁹

While agonism brings together conflict and reciprocity—which intimate, as Mouffe suggests, “some common ground”—antagonism and neoliberal competition emphasize conflict without reciprocity, which appears as a corollary of turning social commitments inward. In this vein, denying another’s voice or disavowing relationships with others may remove competitive obstacles to one’s own success.

Shifting from a laissez-faire view of market and state relations, neoliberalism enjoins the state to take actions that bolster competition. As Jamie Peck explains, Friedman and other neoliberal theorists “expressly sought to transcend the ‘naïve ideology’ of laissez-faire, in favor of a ‘positive’ conception of the state as the guarantor of a competitive order.”⁶⁰ Through privatization and trade agreements, the state may create markets. Through the reduction or elimination of social safety nets, the state may compel market behavior. Through various means, notes Sanford Schram, neoliberalism “restructures the state to operate consistently with market logic in order to better promote market-compliant behavior by as many people as possible.”⁶¹ Concordant with a rise in income inequality in the United States, the contemporary disinvestment in and privatization of public institutions by state officials creates particular hardships for low-income and minority communities, who depend more on these institutions and may lack the resources, for example, to send children to well-funded private schools. Faced with few options, members of marginalized groups confront a choice: either internalize a market model or suffer as a “disposable population” that a restructured state has made “less of a burden on the rest of society.”⁶² Oftentimes, this putative choice generates both outcomes—discipline and suffering.

While articulating relationships through a public good to enable coordinated action may promote equality, inequality functions as the condition and end of competition. To win, we must become unequal to others. Inequality is not a social problem warranting redress for a neoliberal public, but a necessary part of its dynamic operation. As Maurizio Lazzarato explains, “for the neoliberals, the market can operate as regulatory principle only if competition is made the regulatory principle of society.”⁶³ Yet, as Lazzarato and others observe, markets are not natural. Markets must be constructed and maintained.⁶⁴ The disciplinary force of neoliberalism serves to compel people to act according to market logics. Towards this end, inequality serves a valuable, motivating purpose: “Only inequality has the capacity to sharpen appetites, instincts and minds, driving individuals to rivalries.”⁶⁵ Neoliberalism draws on inequality for its very existence.

Just as structural conditions may enable and constrain the practice of a dynamic public good in a networked public sphere, structural conditions may influence the practice of a neoliberal public. For instance, in *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman proposed educational vouchers to break a government “monopoly” on education and to foster competition, giving parents the freedom to choose from a range of “educational services [that] could be rendered by private enterprises operated for profit, or by non-profit institutions.”⁶⁶ Yet he issued this call in a U.S. political climate that was moving in the opposite

direction: only a few years after the publication of *Capitalism and Freedom*, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which directed federal dollars to school districts.⁶⁷ Policymakers did not implement Friedman's proposal for educational vouchers until the late 1980s and early 1990s, and these programs were limited to only a few locales.⁶⁸ In the intervening years, actions by a wide range of people like Friedman, Reagan, and others gradually shifted perceptions of people's relations to one another and structures to facilitate this significant change in public education.

The changes wrought by vouchers, in turn, have created structures that reinforce neoliberal perceptions of publics and obscure the relationships articulated by a dynamic public good. For example, the state of Wisconsin adopted a statewide voucher program in 2015.⁶⁹ A memo prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau indicated that this expansion would cost public schools between 600 and 800 million dollars over a 10-year period.⁷⁰ Facing this loss of revenue, and suffering from state budget cuts, many local districts have turned to ballot referenda simply to cover operating expenses.⁷¹ Moreover, analyses of the Wisconsin voucher program have indicated that roughly 76 percent of students using vouchers for the first time in the 2015–2016 school year attended a private school the previous year.⁷² This suggests that the benefits of the expanded voucher program disproportionately went to families who already possessed the financial means to send their children to private schools. Together, these changes have reshaped the structure of publicly funded education in Wisconsin and weakened its connection to a dynamic public good. Exacerbating inequalities, this changed structure may reinforce competition, since parents and students may believe that they can rely only on themselves to obtain a decent education.

Resisting a neoliberal public

The rise of a neoliberal public constitutes a portentous development that may, among other things, exacerbate inequality and marginalize people who do not fit the ideal of *homo oeconomicus*. Yet this development does not signal a totalizing transformation of the public sphere. A networked public sphere, composed of publics and counterpublics, holds the potential for resistance and a resurgent critical publicity. Resistance would not arise from an Archimedean point outside of a networked public sphere, but within this public sphere, countering the circulation and influence of a neoliberal public. Drawing on the mobility, flexibility, and generativity of interactions in a network, a resurgent critical publicity may emerge through new and reconfigured sites of engagement and human relationships. On issues regarding race and police brutality, for example, contemporary activists have sought to reshape public agendas and hold officials and officers accountable.⁷³ On education, local communities have pushed back against market reforms and have demanded alternatives. These examples suggest the power of the local—or, more specifically, a networked local—as a historically emergent site of resistance against a neoliberal public. While I do not have the space to articulate a fully developed theory of local resistance, in this penultimate section I sketch a model of a networked local and, using education examples from Wisconsin, indicate how it may challenge a neoliberal public.⁷⁴

In *The Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey envisioned reinvigorated public engagement through the emergence of a Great Community, a network of local communities

through which people can reclaim their agency and purposefully direct their experiences in meaningful ways. A Great Community would enact a large-scale realization of the fundamental link between democracy and community: operating with a non-institutional conception of democracy, Dewey insisted that democracy functions most powerfully through human relationships, as people work together to address shared concerns and achieve shared goals.⁷⁵ He envisioned democracy as placing individuals and communities in a reciprocal relationship such that individuals may draw upon social networks to realize their potential. Relationships—among individuals, between individuals and communities, and among communities—are key. Isolated individual action can neither build nor benefit from community: “no amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community.” Instead, people need to value, construct, and maintain relationships.⁷⁶ A Great Community may appear through coordinated action and, in turn, bolster coordinated action.

Dewey discovered in the local the resources for rebuilding democratic relationships and engaged publics, yet he also recognized the limits of the local. The local provides a basis for public engagement and regular, ongoing interactions that enable learning, through which people can improve their practices. In this way, the significance of the local does not lie in physicality as such, but in the accompanying benefits that attend proximity and familiarity: “there is no substitute for the vitality and depth of close and direct intercourse and attachment.”⁷⁷ In local communities people may come to know their interlocutors—if not by name, then through a shared sense of belonging to their community—and practice public engagement through familiar experiences. The regularity of local interaction creates opportunities for trial and error; people may reflect on past interactions, learn from what they regard as mistakes, and change their practices in subsequent interactions with one another. Local engagement can develop people’s competence, confidence, and perspective.

Nevertheless, Dewey recognized the limits of the local in its potential for insularity, which can produce provincialism, bigotry, marginalization, and exclusion. An isolated local is as limited, and as detached from critical publicity, as an isolated individual. Just as a community requires relations among individuals, a Great Community requires relations among communities: “its larger relationships will provide an inexhaustible and flowing fund of meanings upon which to draw.”⁷⁸ Scholars of rhetoric and communication, in particular, may recognize how these relationships may elicit productive tensions between the contextualized discourse of particular sites in a network and the revisions that may occur when discourse circulates across a network. With regard to the former, Hauser observes that a rhetorical model of the public sphere emphasizes “local norms” for judging discourse rather than universal standards.⁷⁹ Yet, as Hauser notes, within a multiple public sphere, norms and judgments will vary across a network. Further, the publics and counter-publics encountering any discourse will change as people participate across different nodes in a network.⁸⁰ Far from being an obstacle to engagement across a network, the contingent character of any particular node or set of relationships may engender dynamic movement and contestation that questions assumptions and explores relationships through diverse perspectives.

A networked local, which participates in a varied constellation of local communities, holds the potential to guard against the limits of the local. Dewey held that

mobility may in the end supply the means by which the spoils of remote and indirect interaction and interdependence flow back into local life, keeping it flexible, preventing the stagnancy which has attended stability in the past, and furnishing it with the elements of a variegated and many-hued experience.⁸¹

Realizing this promise requires active and purposeful attention to relationships. In a networked public, relationships themselves exert no productive force independently from the people and communities who constitute them. Relationships must be tended to—constructed, cultivated, reflected upon, reevaluated, rebuilt. Participating in a network, a local community may be more open and inclusive, incorporating various issues, identities, and modes of participation. Contributing to a network, a local community may foster more widespread change.

In the past few years, in communities across Wisconsin, people have pushed back against funding cuts for public schools, increased spending on private vouchers, expansion of charter schools, and other legislative measures that have threatened public education. These local advocates have worked within their own communities and joined together to try to change the public discourse about education in Wisconsin. For example, in Wauwatosa, home of Governor Scott Walker, local community members have formed an organization called Wauwatosa S.O.S (Support Our Schools) and have waged a multifaceted campaign consisting of websites, yard signs, t-shirts, door-to-door advocacy, and a letter-writing campaign to argue not only against budget cuts for education, but for increased funding.⁸² These have not been isolated efforts, as advocates in different communities have worked together. For instance, leaders of community groups in Milwaukee, Wauwatosa, and Lake Mills (a small town between Milwaukee and Madison) co-authored a public letter to decry the governor's and legislators' "stunning failure to support our kids." The authors—Mary Young, Marva Herndon, Gail Hicks, and Sandy Whisler—noted that in recent spring elections, more than 70 local referenda had appeared on ballots across the state to "prevent cuts and school closings." They called on policymakers to "pause the statewide expansion of voucher schools" and to "support the only school system that serves all and lifts all—public schools—before it's too late."⁸³ In their efforts, these community advocates have bridged some of the racial and ideological divides that historically have plagued Milwaukee and its surrounding suburbs.⁸⁴ Their efforts exemplify the contingency and diversity of a networked public and the local communities that comprise it—not uniformly, not homogeneously, but by working together over specific concerns.

Addressing issues like funding cuts and vouchers, these advocates have drawn on a networked public good to call attention to relationships and rebuild and expand connections threatened by a neoliberal approach to public education. In situating public schools as "the only school system that serves all and lifts all," Young, Herndon, Hicks, and Whisler underscored how serving a diverse student population, rather than employing particular screening criteria that may exclude poor and minority students, exemplifies the idea that people have a stake in the growth of children across differences, connecting people of diverse backgrounds in a mutual project. They represented schools as a site for productively engaging difference, holding that "our kids' public schools are the heart of our communities."⁸⁵ In connecting school and community, they cast education not only as a means of enhancing one's individual competitiveness, but as a way of strengthening bonds while also enabling individuals to realize their potential. Relatedly, in a public

letter to the governor and state legislature signed by 35 public school principals from Southern Wisconsin, signees decried the “competitive nature and business model schools now face.” They wrote that this competitive model has produced “segregated schools” and “haves and have nots.” The principals suggested that this model weakened relationships and divided communities. Recalling the nation’s “bold promise to freely educate all children regardless of wealth, religion, race, gender, ability or citizenship,” the principals invoked the force of coordinated action, which they enacted in their jointly signed letter, to achieve educational excellence.⁸⁶ Resisting a uniform approach, they envisioned connections through partnerships among local communities as well as local communities and the state.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that neoliberalism represents a threat to a multiple public sphere and its critical attention to difference and (in)equality. Neoliberalism takes particular aim at a dynamic public good that circulates in a networked public sphere, facilitating coordinated action by constructing and reconstructing relationships among people and articulating mutual standing. A dynamic public good underscores relationality by enabling people to perceive connections to one another, maintaining a person’s sense of self while building community, engendering judgments of productive and unproductive engagements with difference. As a practice that engages perception, a dynamic public good also may be constrained by structures and may reshape structures. Envisioning an atomistic individual who exercises economic freedom, a neoliberal public draws on competition as a principle that works through and achieves inequality. I have argued that a neoliberal public represents a return of a bourgeois public by obfuscating its particularity and the uneven burdens faced by different people as they seek to obtain the position of *homo oeconomicus*. In its operation, competition may build unequal structures that raise additional obstacles for a dynamic public good. Using the example of community advocacy for public education, I have argued that resistance to a neoliberal public may arise through the coordinated action of networked locals.

Denying the possibility of a collective “we,” a neoliberal public seeks to deny the possibility of relationality itself, or, at least, to fix relationships among people as a zero-sum battle for competitive advantage. Yet a neoliberal public itself constitutes a constellation of relations in a networked public sphere, as connections between neoliberal intellectuals like Friedman and politicians like Reagan suggest. From this perspective, the very multiplicity that neoliberalism disavows may provide resources for resistance. Because of its relationality, a networked public sphere exhibits flexibility and movement. Connections established by some advocates in a network may be joined by others in diverse ways. People may build on existing connections to strengthen their networks. While neoliberalism commands people to look within themselves to strengthen their competitive advantage, a networked public sphere informed by a dynamic public good invites people to seek connections with others. To be sure, relationships alone cannot guarantee a vibrant and just democracy, but it is difficult to imagine a democratically oriented critical publicity as a process of isolated individual activity. Nor should we imagine an efficacious critical publicity as designed and implemented in a top-down manner. Rather, it must be enacted by people themselves, and, in this process, local engagements matter.

Notes

1. Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 71.
2. Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 73–74. [emphasis in original]
3. See Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen, eds., *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).
4. Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering Matthew Shepard: Violence, Identity, and Queer Counterpublic Memories," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13 (2010): 611–52.
5. Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month': The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and Their Cultural Performances," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 349.
6. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 122–28.
7. Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12 (2002): 446.
8. Daniel C. Brouwer, "Communication as Counterpublic," in *Communication as ... Perspectives on Theory*, eds. Gregory J. Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 198. [emphasis in original]
9. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (1992; Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1996), 360.
10. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 31. [emphasis in original]
11. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 36.
12. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 38.
13. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927; Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954), 24.
14. Dewey, *Public*, 151.
15. Michael Warner offers an attenuated version of this argument in holding that "a public is constituted through mere attention." Warner's position productively draws attention to the constructed character of publics through "active intake." However, he limits this activity in at least two ways: first, Warner emphasizes identification over and against the possibility of dissociation. He writes to audience of his book: "If you are reading this, or hearing it or seeing it or present for it, you are part of this public." Yet this insistence conflates awareness and affiliation, which leaves no agency for someone who encounters something they find objectionable, or someone who may be aware of discourses that exclude them. Second, Warner discounts dialogic models of publics as placing too much emphasis on "polemic" and "argument." Instead, he privileges the circulation of texts, which appears to compel a choice among modes of communication and limits the means of constructing publics. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 87, 91.
16. Fraser, "Rethinking," 128–29.
17. Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks," *Information, Communication & Society* 19 (2016): 398. [emphasis in original]
18. Robert L. Ivie, "Enabling Democratic Dissent," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101 (2015): 54, 49. Drawing on rhetoric as an important public practice, Danielle Allen underscores the importance of relationships for addressing differences through her provocative conceptualization of the roles of trust and political friendship among members of a polity. Allen distinguishes her conception of political friendship from a quotidian understanding, noting that "political friendship is not mainly (or not only) a sentiment of fellow-feeling for other citizens. It is more importantly a way of acting in respect to them" (140). While respect is certainly

important, the positive affect of friendship may linger in this conception, potentially obscuring the crucial work that interlocutors must undertake to build and sustain relationships. Moreover, at times, Allen appears to draw back from relationships themselves to position her framework attitudinally as an orientation toward action. For example, she writes: “We might simply ask about all our encounters with others in our polity, ‘Would I treat a friend this way?’” (140). Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

19. The need to move beyond deliberation does not arise because deliberation itself necessarily operates as a restrictive practice, but because it is but one of many modes of communication. Against models of deliberation that stress disinterestedness and consensus, Ivie argues that “rhetorical deliberation is often a rowdy affair, just as politics is typically messy.” A “rowdy” view of deliberation sustains “a productive tension between cooperation and competition” and does not privilege “any single perspective to the exclusion of all others.” Robert L. Ivie, “Rhetorical Deliberation and Democratic Politics in the Here and Now,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5 (2002): 278, 279.
20. Brouwer, “Communication,” 198.
21. Yvonne Slosarski, “Jamming Market Rhetoric in Wisconsin’s 2011 Labor Protests,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 13 (2016): 258.
22. Slosarski, “Jamming,” 259.
23. Hauser, *Vernacular*, 66–67.
24. Dewey, *Public*, 147.
25. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 103. See also Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 7–9.
26. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.
27. Young, *Inclusion*, 137.
28. Young, *Inclusion*, 139.
29. Brouwer, “Communication,” 200. Similarly, Robert Danisch argues that scholars ought to attend to the “rhetorical structures” that enable and sustain discourse in the public sphere. Robert Danisch, *Building a Social Democracy: The Promise of Rhetorical Pragmatism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 189–219.
30. Fraser, “Rethinking,” 123.
31. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (1972; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
32. Young, *Inclusion*, 108.
33. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (1962; Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989), 56. [emphasis in original]
34. See, e.g., Gerard A. Hauser, “Civil Society and the Principle of the Public Sphere,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 31 (1998): 30–36; Joan B. Landes, “The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration,” in *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142–44; Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 239–40. On the standing of universals in contemporary “Habermasian” models of the public sphere, see Lincoln Dahlberg, “The Habermasian Public Sphere and Exclusion: An Engagement with Poststructuralist-Influenced Critics,” *Communication Theory* 24 (2014): 21–41.
35. Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, eds. James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1997), 75–76.
36. To account for varying motivations in public deliberation, James Bohman has developed a notion of “plural public reason.” He explains that “public reason is plural if a single norm of reasonableness is not presupposed in deliberation; thus, agents can come to an agreement

- with one another for *different* publicly accessible reasons.” James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1996), 83.
37. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (1993; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 59.
 38. Rawls, *Political*, 217, 224.
 39. Simon Springer, “Neoliberalism as Discourse: Between Foucauldian Political Economy and Marxian Poststructuralism,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 9 (2012): 136–37.
 40. As Catherine Chaput observes, “neoliberalism governs our everyday activities through an embodied habituation—a way of thinking and acting that stems from discrete but interconnected technologies all bound up within the same asymmetrical power dynamics of economic competition.” Catherine Chaput, “Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism: Neoliberalism and the Overdetermination of Affective Energy,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43 (2010): 4.
 41. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 1–2. In this book, Friedman identified himself as a classical liberal. Nevertheless, as scholars have noted, Friedman played a crucial role in the establishment of neoliberal theory and he acted as a strong proponent of neoliberal policy. See, e.g., Rob Van Horn and Philip Mirowski, “The Rise of the Chicago School of Economics and the Birth of Neoliberalism,” in *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, eds. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (2009; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 139–78.
 42. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 200.
 43. John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, “Redefining the Proper Role of Government: Ultimate Definition in Reagan’s First Inaugural,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18 (2015): 706.
 44. Megan Foley, “From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economy in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 (2012): 389.
 45. Friedman, *Capitalism*, 5. Friedman’s invocation of classical liberalism reflects what Jamie Peck has referred to as “an idealized past for the Chicagoans.” Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.
 46. Van Horn and Mirowski observe that “it was the Chicago School that innovated the idea that much of politics could be understood as if it were a market process.” Van Horn and Mirowski, “Chicago,” 162. David Harvey writes that through its commitment to markets, neoliberalism only recognizes the freedom of enterprise. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36–38.
 47. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 41.
 48. Paul Turpin, *The Moral Rhetoric of Political Economy: Justice and Modern Economic Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 67.
 49. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2013), 263.
 50. Dardot and Laval, *New Way*, 265.
 51. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 106–07. [emphasis in original] See also Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 14–17.
 52. Nancy Fraser, “Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,” in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), 220.
 53. Rebecca Dingo, *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 48.
 54. Darrel Wanzer-Serrano [published as Darrel Enck-Wanzer], “Barack Obama, the Tea Party, and the Threat of Race: On Racial Neoliberalism and Born Again Racism,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 4 (2011): 24.
 55. See J. David Cisneros, “A Nation of Immigrants and a Nation of Laws: Race, Multiculturalism, and Neoliberal Exception in Barack Obama’s Immigration Discourse,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8 (2015): 359–60; Roopali Mukherjee, “Bling Fling: Commodity

- Consumption and the Politics of the ‘Post-Racial,’” in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, eds. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 178–80.
56. Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee, “From California to Michigan: Race, Rationality, and Neoliberal Governmentality,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4 (2010): 402.
 57. Bradley and Mukherjee, “California,” 407.
 58. Wendy S. Hesford, “Surviving Recognition and Racial In/justice,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 48 (2015): 539.
 59. Mouffe, *Democratic*, 101–02.
 60. Peck, *Constructions*, 42.
 61. Sanford F. Schram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism: Neoliberalism, Precarity, Occupy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25.
 62. Schram, *Ordinary Capitalism*, 26–27.
 63. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity, and the Reconstitution of the Social,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2009): 116.
 64. Chaput, “Rhetorical Circulation,” 4–5.
 65. Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism,” 117.
 66. Friedman, *Capitalism*, 89.
 67. Through Title I of the Act, the Johnson administration developed a funding formula based on the number of poor children in a district, which eventually covered 94 percent of all school districts in the United States. See Patrick J. McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 31.
 68. See Hubert Morken and Jo Renée Formicola, *The Politics of School Choice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); John F. Witte, *The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America’s First Voucher Program* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
 69. Katherine Cierniak, Molly Stewart, and Anne-Maree Ruddy, *Mapping the Growth of State-wide Voucher Programs in the United States* (Bloomington: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University, March 2015).
 70. Christa Pugh, “Estimated Per Pupil Payments for Incoming Pupils in the Statewide Private School Choice Program, 2015–16 to 2024–25” (Legislative Fiscal Bureau Memo, Madison, WI, May 26, 2015).
 71. See, e.g., Dave Zweifel, 2016, “Property Taxpayers on Hook to Save Public Schools,” *The Capital Times*, March 9. http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/dave_zweifel/plain-talk-property-taxpayers-on-hook-to-save-public-schools/article_3f4ed36f-8589-597a-affe-f712738e1745.html.
 72. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Statewide Voucher Program Enrollment Counts,” [DPI-NR 2015-103] October 27, 2015.
 73. For analyses of contemporary activism, see, e.g., Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, “Hijacking #myNYPD: Social Media Dissent and Networked Counterpublics,” *Journal of Communication* 65 (2015): 932–52; Kashif Jerome Powell, “Making #BlackLives-Matter: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and the Specters of Black Life—Toward a Hauntology of Blackness,” *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* 16 (2016): 253–60.
 74. I offer three provisos to caution against reading my turn to the local as an essentialist, space-based conceptualization of resistance. First, in keeping with my orientation toward public sphere theory as critical theory, my turn to the networked local constitutes an effort to engage theory and practice and seek out inspiration from actual sites of resistance. The efforts by people in their own communities on a range of issues, especially race and education, have suggested to me alternatives to a neoliberal public. Second, as I explain in this section, the local is no panacea for what ails the public sphere, as it is susceptible to the shortcomings of variously situated publics and counterpublics. Third, the qualities I associate with a networked local may be reproduced through other means (although the exploration of these means lies outside the bounds of my study), as, for example, with online publics and counterpublics. On public sphere theory as critical theory, see Robert Asen, “Critical Engagement through Public Sphere Scholarship,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101 (2015): 132–44.

- On online publics and counterpublics, see, e.g., Damien Smith Pfister, *Networked Media, Networked Rhetorics: Attention and Deliberation in the Early Blogosphere* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).
75. In “Creative Democracy,” Dewey famously defines democracy as “a *personal* way of individual life ... it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life.” John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953, vol. 14, 1939–1941*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 226. [emphasis in original]
 76. Dewey, *Public*, 151.
 77. Dewey, *Public*, 213.
 78. Dewey, *Public*, 216–17.
 79. Hauser, *Vernacular*, 52.
 80. Hauser notes that “members of pluralistic societies belong to several, perhaps many, overlapping discursive arenas in which they experience the polyphony of concurrent conversations.” Hauser, *Vernacular*, 67.
 81. Dewey, *Public*, 216.
 82. Erin Richards, 2015, “Spurred by Scott Walker Budget, Parents Rally for Public School Funds,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 3. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/spurred-by-scott-walker-budget-parents-rally-for-public-school-funds-b99492322z1-302375441.html>.
 83. Mary Young, Marva Herndon, Gail Hicks, and Sandy Whisler, 2016, “Parents to Politicians: Support Our Schools,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 5. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/parents-to-politicians-support-our-public-schools-b99719549z1-378351261.html>.
 84. See Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Barbara J. Miner, *Lessons From the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City* (New York: Free Press, 2013).
 85. Young, Herndon, Hicks, and Whisler, “Parents.”
 86. Southern Wisconsin Area Principals, public letter to Governor Scott Walker and the Wisconsin Legislature, July 13, 2015. <http://archive.lakecountrynow.com/news/lakecountryreporter/principals-lament-decreased-education-funding-less-local-control-b99543098z1-320293961.html>.