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# Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications

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Social network sites have gained tremendous traction recently as a popular online hangout spaces for both youth and adults. People flock to them to socialize with their friends and acquaintances, to share information with interested others, and to see and be seen. While networking socially or for professional purposes is not the predominant practice, there are those who use these sites to flirt with friends-of-friends, make business acquaintances, and occasionally even rally others for a political cause. I have been examining different aspects of social network sites, primarily from an ethnographic perspective, for over six years. In making sense of the practices that unfold on and through these sites, I have come to understand social network sites as a genre of “networked publics.”

*Networked publics* are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. Networked publics serve many of the same functions as other types of publics – they allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family. While networked publics share much in common with other types of publics, the ways in which technology structures them introduces distinct affordances that shape how people engage with these environments. The properties of bits – as distinct from atoms – introduce new possibilities for interaction. As a result, new dynamics emerge that shape participation.

Analytically, the value of constructing social network sites as networked publics is to see the practices that unfold there as being informed by the affordances of networked publics and the resultant common dynamics. Networked publics’ affordances do not dictate participants’ behavior, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants’ engagement. In essence, the architecture of a particular environment matters and the architecture of networked publics is shaped by their affordances. The common dynamics fall out from these affordances and showcase salient issues that participants must regularly contend with when engaging in these environments. Understanding the properties, affordances, and dynamics common to networked publics provides a valuable framework for working out the logic of social practices.

The purpose of this article is to map out the architecture of networked publics, beginning with the bits-based nature of digital environments and then moving on to show how the affordances of networked publics are informed by the properties of bits and highlighting common dynamics that emerge from those affordances. Before examining

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these various properties, affordances, and dynamics, I will begin with a discussion of what constitutes publics in order to account for the conceptualization of networked publics. In introducing the notion of architecture, I will also map out some of the critical features of social network sites as a type of networked public.

### Publics and Networked Publics

Networked publics must be understood in terms of “publics,” a contested and messy term with multiple meanings that is used across different disciplines to signal different concepts. One approach is to construct “public” as a collection of people who share “a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 9). In this sense, a public may refer to a local collection of people (e.g., one’s peers) or a much broader collection of people (e.g., members of a nation-state). Those invested in the civic functioning of publics often concern themselves with the potential accessibility of spaces and information to wide audiences – “the public” – and the creation of a shared “public sphere” (Habermas, 1991). Yet, as Benedict Anderson (2006) argues, the notion of a public is in many ways an “imagined community.” Some scholars contend that there is no single public, but many publics to which some people are included and others excluded (Warner, 2002).

Cultural and media studies offer a different perspective on the notion of what constitutes a public. In locating the term “public” as synonymous with “audience,” Sonia Livingstone (2005) uses the term to refer to a group bounded by a shared text, whether a worldview or a performance. The audience produced by media is often by its very nature a public, but not necessarily a passive one. For example, Michel de Certeau (2002) argues that consumption and production of cultural objects are intimately connected and Henry Jenkins (2006) applies these ideas to the creation and dissemination of media. Mizuko Ito extends this line of thinking to argue that “publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception” (Ito, 2008, p. 3).

It is precisely this use of public that upsets political theorists like Jurgen Habermas who challenge the legitimacy of any depoliticized public preoccupied “with consumption of culture” (Habermas, 1991, p. 177). Of course, not all political scholars agree with Habermas’ objection to the cultural significance of publics. Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser argues that publics are not only a site of discourse and opinion but “arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities” (Fraser, 1992) while Craig Calhoun argues that one of Habermas’s weaknesses is his naive view that “identities and interests [are] settled within the private world and then brought fully formed into the public sphere” (Calhoun, 1992, p. 35).

Networked publics exist against this backdrop. Mizuko Ito introduces the notion of networked publics to “reference a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked

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media” (Ito, 2008, p.2). Ito emphasizes the networked media, but I believe we must also focus on the ways in which this shapes publics – both in terms of space and collectives. In short, I contend that networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies; they are simultaneously a space and a collection of people.

In bringing forth the notion of networked publics, I am not seeking to resolve the different discursive threads around the notion of publics. My approach accepts the messiness and, instead, focuses on the ways in which networked technologies extend and complicate publics in all of their forms. What distinguishes networked publics from other types of publics is their underlying structure. Networked technologies reorganize how information flows and how people interact with information and each other. In essence, the architecture of networked publics differentiates them from more traditional notions of publics.

### How the Properties of Bits and Atoms Shape Architecture

While Frank Lloyd Wright defined architecture as “life” (Wright and Gutheim, 1941, p. 257), there is no broadly accepted definition (Shepherd, 1994). Yet, in the everyday sense, architecture typically evokes the image of the design of physical structures— buildings, roads, gardens, and even interstitial spaces. The product of architecture can be seen as part engineering, part art, and part socially configuring, as structures are often designed to be variably functional, aesthetically pleasing, and influential in shaping how people interact with one another. The word architecture is also used in technical circles to refer to the organization of code that produces digital environments. Drawing on all of these uses, architecture can also serve as an important conceptual lens through which to understand structural differences in technologies in relation to practice (Papacharissi, 2009).

Physical structures are a collection of atoms while digital structures are built out of bits. The underlying properties of bits and atoms fundamentally distinguish these two types of environments, define what types of interactions are possible, and shape how people engage in these spaces. Both William Mitchell (1995, p. 111) and Lawrence Lessig (2006, pp. 1-8) have argued that “code is law” because code regulates the structures that emerge. James Grimmelman argues that Lessig’s use of this phrase is “shorthand for the subtler idea that code does the work of law, but does it in an architectural way” (Grimmelman, 2004, p. 1721). In looking at how code configures digital environments, both Mitchell and Lessig highlight the ways in which digital architectures are structural forces.

The difference between bits and atoms as architectural building blocks is central to the ways in which networked publics are constructed differently than other publics. More than a decade ago, Nicholas Negroponte (1995) mapped out some core differences between bits and atoms to argue that digitization would fundamentally alter the landscape of information and media. He pointed out that bits could be easily duplicated, compressed, and transmitted through wires; media that is built out of bits could be more

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easily and more quickly disseminated than that which comprises atoms. During that same period, Mitchell (1995) argued that bits do not simply change the flow of information, but they alter the very architecture of everyday life. Through networked technology, people are no longer shaped just by their dwellings but by their networks (Mitchell, 1995, p. 49). The city of bits that Mitchell lays out is not configured just by the properties of bits but by the connections between them.

The affordances of networked publics are fundamentally shaped by the properties of bits, the connections between bits, and the way that bits and networks link people in new ways. Networked publics are not just publics networked together, but they are publics that have been transformed by networked media, its properties, and its potential. The properties of bits regulate the structure of networked publics, which, in turn, introduces new possible practices and shapes the interactions that take place. These can be seen in the architecture of all networked publics, including social network sites.

### Features of Social Network Sites

Social network sites are similar to many other genres of social media and online communities that support computer-mediated communication, but what defines this particular category of websites is the combination of features that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Features and functionality vary across different social network sites, providing a variety of different public and private communication channels, but I want to focus on four types of features that play a salient role in constructing social network sites as networked publics – profiles, Friends lists, public commenting tools, and stream-based updates. These different features showcase how bits are integrated into the architecture of networked publics.

### Profiles

Profiles are not unique to social network sites, but they are central to them. Profiles both represent the individual and serve as the locus of interaction. Because of the inherent social – and often public or semi-public – nature of profiles, participants actively and consciously craft their profiles to be seen by others. Profile generation is an explicit act of writing oneself into being in a digital environment (boyd, 2006) and participants must determine how they want to present themselves to those who may view their self-representation or those who they wish might. Because of this, issues of fashion and style play a central role in participants' approach to their profiles.

In addition to being a site of self-representation, profiles are a place where people gather to converse and share. Conversations happen *on* profiles and a person's profile reflects their engagement with the site. As a result, participants do not have complete control over their self-representation. Although features may allow participants to restrict

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others' contributions to their profile, most participants welcome the contribution of images and comments.

Profiles are also a site of control, allowing participants to determine who can see what and how. While social network site profiles can be accessible to anyone – “truly public” – it is common for participants to limit the visibility of their profiles, making them “semi-public.” Semi-public profiles are still typically available to a broad audience, comprised of friends, acquaintances, peers, and interesting peripheral ties. In this way, profiles are where the potential audience is fixed, creating a narrower public shaped by explicit connection or affiliation.

### Friends Lists

On social network sites, participants articulate who they wish to connect with and confirm ties to those who wish to connect with them. Most social network sites require connections to be mutually confirmed before being displayed. Each individual's Friends list is visible to anyone who has permission to view that person's profile.

The public articulation of Friends on a social network site is not simply an act of social accounting. These Friends are rarely only one's closest and dearest friends. The listing of Friends is both political and social. In choosing who to include as Friends, participants more frequently consider the implications of excluding or explicitly rejecting a person as opposed to the benefits of including them. While there are participants who will strictly curtail their list of Friends and participants who gregariously seek to add anyone, the majority of participants simply include all who they consider a part of their social world. This might include current and past friends and acquaintances as well as peripheral ties, or people that the participant barely knows but feels compelled to include. The most controversial actors are those who hold power over the participant, such as parents, bosses, and teachers. For many participants, it is more socially costly to include these individuals than it is to include less intimate ties.

One way of interpreting the public articulation of connections on social networks is to see it as the articulation of a public. These Friends are the people with whom the participants see themselves connecting en masse. For some participants, it is important to make certain that these individuals are all part of the same social context; for others, mixing different social contexts is acceptable and desirable. How a participant approaches the issue of social contexts shapes who they may or may not include as Friends.

In theory, truly public profiles can be accessed by anyone. In reality, an individual's audience is typically much smaller than all people across all space and all time. Even when participants choose to make their profiles widely accessible or seek broad audiences, very few people are likely to look. In determining who to account for as viewers when interacting in networked publics, few participants consider every possible person to be their audience. Instead, they imagine an audience that is usually more constrained by who they wish to reach and how they wish to present themselves

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(Marwick and boyd, in press). On social network sites, people's imagined – or at least intended – audience is the list of Friends that they have chosen to connect with on the site. This is who participants expect to be accessing their content and interacting with them. And these are the people to whom a participant is directing their expressions. By serving as the imagined audience, the list of Friends serves as the intended public. Of course, just because this collection of people is the intended public does not mean that it is the actual public. Yet, the value of imagining the audience or public is to adjust one's behavior and self-presentation to fit the intended norms of that collective.

### Tools for Public Communication

Most social network sites provide various tools to support public or semi-public interactions between participants. Group features allow participants to gather around shared interests. A more commonly used tool for public encounters are the commenting features that display conversations on a person's profile (a.k.a. "The Wall" on Facebook and "Comments" on MySpace). Comments are visible to anyone who has access to that person's profile and participants use this space to interact with individuals and cohorts. Looking at the content, one might argue that there is little value to the conversations that take place, especially since teen conversations can often be boiled down to, "Yo! Wazzup?" "Not much... how you?" "Good... whatcha doing?" "Nothing... you?" "Nothing.. I'm bored." "Me too." While this typed conversation may appear to have little communicative efficacy, the ritual of checking in is a form of social grooming. Through mundane comments, participants are acknowledging one another in a public setting, similar to the way in which they may greet each other if they were to bump into one another on the street. Comments are not simply a dialogue between two interlocutors, but a performance of social connection before a broader audience.

In conjunction with the comments section, both Facebook and MySpace have implemented features that allow participants to broadcast content to Friends on the sites. MySpace initially did this with a feature called "bulletins" which allowed for blog-esque messages to be distributed. After Facebook implemented "status updates" to encourage the sharing of pithy messages, MySpace introduced a similar feature. All of these features allow individuals to contribute content, which is then broadcast to Friends primarily via a stream of updates from all of their Friends. In some cases, these updates are then re-displayed on a person's profile and available for comments. While individual updates are arguably mundane, the running stream of content gives participants a general sense of those around them. In doing so, participants get the sense of the public constructed by those with whom they connect.

Together, profiles, Friends lists, and various public communication channels set the stage for the ways in which social network sites can be understood as publics. In short, social network sites are publics both because of the ways in which they connect people en masse and because of the space they provide for interactions and information. They are networked publics because of the ways in which networked technologies shape and configure them.

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### Structural Affordances of Networked Publics

Networked technologies introduce new affordances for amplifying, recording, and spreading information and social acts. These affordances can shape publics and how people negotiate them. While such affordances do not determine social practice, they can destabilize core assumptions people make when engaging in social life. As such, they can reshape publics both directly and through the practices that people develop to account for the affordances. When left unchecked, networked technologies can play a powerful role in controlling information and configuring interactions. This is one fault line that prompts resistance to and demonization of new technologies. Much of the concern stems from how the technology's affordances inflect understood practices.

The content of networked publics is made out of bits. Both self-expressions and interactions between people produce bit-based content in networked publics. Because of properties of bits, bits are easier to store, distribute, and search than atoms. Four affordances that emerge out of the properties of bits play a significant role in configuring networked publics:

- *Persistence*: online expressions are automatically recorded and archived.
- *Replicability*: content made out of bits can be duplicated.
- *Scalability*: the potential visibility of content in networked publics is great.
- *Searchability*: content in networked publics can be accessed through search.

To account for the structure of networked publics, I want to map out these different elements, situate them in a broader discussion of media, and suggest how they shape networked publics and people's participation. Although these affordances are intertwined and codependent, I want to begin by looking at each one differently and considering what it contributes to the structure of networked publics.

#### Persistence: What one says sticks around

While spoken conversations are ephemeral, countless technologies and techniques have been developed to capture moments and make them persistent. The introduction of writing allowed people to create records of events and photography provided a tool for capturing a fleeting moment. Yet, as Walter Ong (2002) has argued, the introduction of literacy did more than provide a record; it transformed how people thought and communicated. Furthermore, as Walter Benjamin (1969) has argued, what is captured by photography has a different essence than the experienced moment. Both writing and photography provide persistence, but they also transform the acts they are capturing.

Internet technologies follow a long line of other innovations in this area. What is captured and recorded are the bytes that are created and exchanged across the network. Many systems make bits persistent by default and, thus, the text that one produces

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becomes persistent. Yet, do people interpret the content in the same way as they did when it was first produced? This is quite unlikely. The text and the multimedia may be persistent but what sticks around may lose its essence when consumed outside of the context in which it was created. The persistence of conversations in networked publics is ideal for asynchronous conversations, but it also raises new concerns when it can be consumed outside of its original context.

While recording devices allow people to record specific acts in publics, the default is typically that unmediated acts are ephemeral. Networked technology inverted these defaults, making recording a common practice. This is partially due to the architecture of the Internet where dissemination requires copies and records for transmission and processing. Of course, while original records and duplicated records can in theory be deleted (or, technically, overwritten) at any point in the process, the “persistent-by-default, ephemeral-when-necessary” dynamic is relatively pervasive, rendering tracking down and deleting content once it is contributed to networked publics futile.

### Replicability: What’s the original and what’s the duplicate?

The printing press transformed writing because it allowed for easy reproduction of news and information, increasing the potential circulation of such content (Eisenstein, 1980). Technology has introduced a series of tools to help people duplicate text, images, video, and other media. Because bits can be replicated more easily than atoms and because bits are replicated as they are shared across the network, the content produced in networked publics is easily replicable. Copies are inherent to these systems.

In a world of bits, there is no way to differentiate the original bit from its duplicate. And, because bits can be easily modified, content can be transformed in ways that make it hard to tell which is the source and which is the alteration. The replicable nature of content in networked publics means that what is replicated may be altered in ways that people do not easily realize.

### Scalability: What spreads may not be ideal

Technology enables broader distribution, either by enhancing who can access the real-time event or widening access to reproductions of the moment. Broadcast media like TV and radio made it possible for events to be simultaneously experienced across great distances, radically scaling the potential visibility of a given act and reshaping the public sphere (Starr, 2005). While such outlets allow content to scale, distribution outlets are frequently regulated (although this did not stop “pirates” from creating their own broadcast publics [Walker, 2004]). The Internet introduced new possibilities for distribution; blogging alone allowed for the rise of grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2004) and a channel for anyone to espouse opinions (Rettberg, 2008).

The Internet may enable many to broadcast content and create publics, but it does not guarantee an audience. What scales in networked publics may not be what everyone wishes to scale. Furthermore, while a niche group may achieve visibility that resembles



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“micro-celebrity” (Senft, 2008), only a small fraction receives mass attention while many more receive very small, localized attention. Scalability in networked publics is about the *possibility* of tremendous visibility, not the guarantee of it.

Habermas’s frustration with broadcast media was rooted in the ways that broadcast media was, in his mind, scaling the wrong kinds of content (Habermas, 1991). The same argument can be made concerning networked media, as what scales in networked publics is often the funny, the crude, the embarrassing, the mean, and the bizarre, “ranging from the quirky and offbeat, to potty humor, to the bizarrely funny, to parodies, through to the acerbically ironic” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007). Those seeking broad attention, like politicians and wannabe celebrities, may have the ability to share their thoughts in networked publics, but they may not achieve the scale they wish. The property of scalability does not necessarily scale what individuals want to have scaled or what they think should be scaled, but what the collective chooses to amplify.

### Searchability: Seek and you shall find

Librarians and other information specialists have long developed techniques to make accessing information easier and more effective. Metadata schemes and other strategies for organizing content have been central to these efforts. Yet, the introduction of search engines has radically reworked the ways in which information can be accessed. Search has become a commonplace activity among Internet users.

As people use technologies that leave traces, search takes on a new role. While being able to stand in a park and vocalize “find” to locate a person or object may seem like an element of a science fiction story, such actions are increasingly viable in networked publics. Search makes finding people in networked publics possible and, as GPS-enabled mobile devices are deployed, we will see such practices be part of other aspects of everyday life.

### Central Dynamics in Networked Publics

The affordances of networked publics introduce new dynamics with which participants must contend. Many of these dynamics are not new, but they were never so generally experienced. Analyzing how broadcast media transformed culture, Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) articulated that the properties of media change social environments and, thus, influence people and their behavior. He examined how broadcast media’s ability to rework scale reconfigured publics, altered the roles that people play in society, complicated the boundaries between public and private, collapsed distinct social contexts, and ruptured the salience of physical place in circumscribing publics. Just as many of the affordances of networked media parallel those of broadcast media, many of the dynamics that play out in networked publics are an amplification of those Meyrowitz astutely recognized resulting from broadcast media. Three dynamics play a central role in shaping networked publics:

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- *Invisible audiences:* not all audiences are visible when a person is contributing online, nor are they necessarily co-present.
- *Collapsed contexts:* the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts.
- *The blurring of public and private:* without control over context, public and private become meaningless binaries, are scaled in new ways, and are difficult to maintain as distinct.

As people engage with networked publics, they are frequently forced to contend with the ways in which these dynamics shape the social environment. While such dynamics have long been part of some people's lives, they take on a new salience in networked publics because of their broad reach and their pervasiveness in everyday life. Let's briefly consider each dynamic.

### Invisible audiences: To whom should one speak?

In unmediated spaces, it is common to have a sense for who is present and can witness a particular performance. The affordances of networked publics change this. In theory, people can access content that is persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable across broad swaths of space and time. Lurkers who share the same space but are not visible are one potential audience. But so are those who go back to read archives or who are searching for content on a particular topic.

People in certain professions have long had to contend with invisible audiences. In producing content for the camera, microphone, or printing press, journalists and actors sometimes prepare for invisible audiences by imagining the audience and presenting themselves to that imagined audience. When TV began, studio audiences were tremendously common because it helped people gauge their performances. This audience was not the complete audience, but the feedback was still valuable for the performers. Likewise, some journalists perform for those who provide explicit feedback, intentionally avoiding thinking about those who are there but invisible. Performing for imagined or partial audiences can help people handle the invisible nature of their audience. These practices became a part of life in networked publics, as those who contributed tried to find a way to locate their acts.

Knowing one's audience matters when trying to determine what is socially appropriate to say or what will be understood by those listening. In other words, audience is critical to context. Without information about audience, it is often difficult to determine how to behave, let alone to make adjustments based on assessing reactions. To accommodate this, participants in networked publics often turn to imagined audience to assess whether or not they believe their behavior is socially appropriate, interesting, or relevant.

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### Collapsed contexts: Navigating tricky social situations

Even when one knows one's audience, it can be challenging to contend with groups of people who reflect different social contexts and have different expectations as to what's appropriate. For some, the collapsing of contexts in broadcast media made expressing oneself challenging. Consider the case of Stokely Carmichael, which Meyrowitz (1985, p. 43) details in his book. Carmichael was a civil rights leader in the 1960s. He regularly gave speeches to different audiences using different rhetorical styles depending on the race of the audience. When Carmichael began addressing broad publics via television and radio, he had to make a choice. There was no neutral speaking style and Carmichael's decision to use black speaking style alienated white society. While Carmichael was able to maintain distinct styles as long as he was able to segment social groups, he ran into trouble when broadcast media collapsed those social groups and with them, the distinct contexts in which they were embedded.

Networked publics force everyday people to contend with environments in which contexts are regularly colliding. Even when the immediate audience might be understood, the potential audience can be far greater and from different contexts. Maintaining distinct contexts online is particularly tricky because of the persistent, replicable, searchable, and scalable nature of networked acts. People do try to segment contexts by discouraging unwanted audiences from participating or by trying to limit information to make searching more difficult or by using technologies that create partial walls through privacy settings. Yet a motivated individual can often circumvent any of these approaches.

Some argue that distinct contexts are unnecessary and only encourage people to be deceptive. This is the crux of the belief that only those with something to hide need privacy. What is lost in this approach is the ways in which context helps people properly contextualize their performances. Bilingual speakers choose different languages depending on context, and speakers explain concepts or describe events differently when talking to different audiences based on their assessment of the audience's knowledge. An alternative way to mark context is as that which provides the audience with a better understanding of the performer's biases and assumptions. Few people detail their life histories before telling a story, but that history is often helpful in assessing the significance of the story. While starting every statement with "as a person with X identity and Y beliefs and Z history" can provide context, most people do not speak this way, let alone account for all of the relevant background for any stranger to understand any utterance.

Networked publics both complicate traditional mechanisms for assessing and asserting context as well as collapse contexts that are traditionally segmented. This is particularly problematic because, with the audience invisible and the material persistent, it is often difficult to get a sense for what the context is or should be. Collapsing of contexts did take place before the rise of broadcast media but often in more controlled settings. For example, events like weddings, in which context collisions are common, are frequently scripted to make everyone comfortable. Unexpected collisions, like running

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into one's boss while out with friends, can create awkwardness, but since both parties are typically aware of the collision, it can often be easy to make quick adjustments to one's behavior to address the awkward situation. In networked publics, contexts often collide such that the performer is unaware of audiences from different contexts, magnifying the awkwardness and making adjustments impossible.

### Blurring of public and private: Where are the boundaries?

Additionally, as networked publics enable social interactions at all levels, the effects of these dynamics are felt at much broader levels than those felt by broadcast media and the introduction of other forms of media to publics. These dynamics alter interactions among very large and broad collections of people, but they also complicate the dynamics among friend groups and collections of peers. They alter practices that are meant for broad visibility and they complicate—and often make public—interactions that were never intended to be truly public. This stems from the ways in which networked media, like broadcast media (Meyrowitz, 1985), blurs public and private in complicated ways. For those in the spotlight, broadcast media often appeared to destroy privacy. This is most visible through the way tabloid media complicated the private lives of celebrities, feeding on people's desire to get backstage access (Turner, 2004). As networked publics brought the dynamics of broadcast media to everyday people, participants have turned their social curiosity towards those who are more socially local (Solove, 2007).

Some argue that privacy is now dead (Garfinkel, 2001) and that we should learn to cope and embrace a more transparent society (Brin, 1999). That is a naive stance, both because privacy has been reshaped during other transformative moments in history (Jagodzinski, 1999) and because people have historically developed strategies for maintaining aspects of privacy even when institutions and governments seek to eliminate it (McDougall and Hansson, 2002; Toch, 1992). For these reasons, I argue that privacy is simply in a state of transition as people try to make sense of how to negotiate the structural transformations resulting from networked media.

People value privacy for diverse reasons, including the ability to have control over information about themselves and their own visibility (Rossler, 2004, pp. 6-8). Social network sites disrupt the social dynamics of privacy (Grimmelmann, 2009). Most importantly, they challenge people's sense of control. Yet, just because people are adopting tools that radically reshape their relationship to privacy does not mean they are interested in giving up their privacy.

Defining and controlling boundaries around public and private can be quite difficult in a networked society, particularly when someone is motivated to publicize something that is seemingly private or when technology complicates people's ability to control access and visibility. What remains an open question is how people can regain a sense of control in a networked society. Helen Nissenbaum (2004) argues that we need to approach privacy through the lens of contextual integrity, at least in terms of legal protections. I believe that we need to examine people's strategies for negotiating control

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in the face of structural conditions that complicate privacy and rethink our binary conceptions of public and private. While public and private are certainly in flux, it is unlikely that privacy will simply be disregarded.

### Transformation of Publics

While I have accounted for the ways in which the affordances of networked publics and the dynamics that unfold mirror those which take place due to other technologies or for distinct populations, what is significant about this stems from how such factors are more broadly transforming everyday life for broad swaths of the public at large. The affordances of networked publics rework publics more generally and the dynamics that emerge leak from being factors in specific settings to being core to everyday realities.

The changes brought on by networked technologies are more pervasive than those by earlier media. Because content and expressions contributed to networked publics is persistent and replicable by default, the possibility of acts being scaled, searchable, and thus viewed is heightened. Physical spaces are limited by space and time, but, online, people can connect to one another across great distances and engage with asynchronously produced content over extended periods. This allows people to work around physical barriers to interaction and reduces the cost of interacting with people in far-off places.

Yet, at the same time, many people are unmotivated to interact with distant strangers; their attention is focused on those around them. Andy Warhol argued that mass media would guarantee that, "in the future everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes" (Hirsch et al., 2002). As new media emerged, artists and writers countered this claim by noting, "in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen people" (Momus, 1992; Weinberger, 2002, p. 104). In networked publics, attention becomes a commodity. There are those who try to manipulate the potential scalability of these environments to reach wide audiences, including politicians and pundits. There are also those who become the object of widespread curiosity and are propelled into the spotlight by the interwoven network. There are also the countless who are not seeking nor gaining widespread attention. Yet, in an environment where following the content of one's friends involves the same technologies as observing the follies of a celebrity, individuals find themselves embedded in the attention economy, as consumers and producers. While new media can be reproduced and scaled far and wide, it does not address the ways in which attention is a limited resource.

Persistence and replicability also complicate notions of "authenticity," as acts and information are not located in a particular space or time and, because of the nature of bits, it is easy to alter content, making it more challenging to assess its origins and legitimacy. This issue has long been a part of discussions about reproductions and recordings, with Walter Benjamin (1969, p. 220) suggesting that art detached from its time and space loses its "aura" and Philip Auslander (1999, p. 85) arguing that aura is in the relationship between performances and their recordings. Authenticity is at stake in networked publics because altering content in networked publics is both easy and common. Code, text,

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images, and videos are frequently modified or remixed. While remix is politically contentious, it reflects an active and creative engagement with cultural artifacts (Lessig, 2005), amplifying ongoing efforts by people to make mass culture personally relevant by obliterating the distinctions between consumers and producers. How people alter content in networked publics varies. Alterations can be functional (e.g., altering code to make it work in a new environment), aesthetic (e.g., altering images to remove red eye), political (e.g., modifying famous photos to make political statements [Jenkins, 2006]), or deceptive (e.g., altering text to make it appear as though something was said that was not). This magnifies questions of what is original, what is a copy, and when does it matter?

While there are limits to how many people can be in one physical space at a time, networked publics support the gathering of much larger groups, synchronously and asynchronously. Networked publics make one-to-many and many-to-many interactions far easier. In essence, networked media allows anyone to be a media outlet (Gillmor, 2004) and with this comes the potential of scalability. Yet an increase in people's ability to contribute to publics does not necessarily result in an increase in their ability to achieve an audience. The potentials of scalability raise questions about the possible democratizing role that networked media can play when anyone can participate and contribute to the public good (e.g., Benkler, 2006). Unfortunately, networked publics appear to reproduce many of the biases that exist in other publics—social inequalities, including social stratification around race, gender, sexuality, and age, are reproduced online (Chen and Wellman, 2005; Hargittai, 2008). Political divisions are also reproduced (Adamic and Glance, 2005) such that even when content scales in visibility, it may not cross sociopolitical divisions. Those using networked media to contribute to the dissemination of news selectively amplify stories introduced by traditional media outlets, replicating offline cultural foci (Zuckerman, 2008). Although networked publics support mass dissemination, the dynamics of “media contagion” (Marlow, 2005) show that what spreads depends on the social structure underlying the networked publics. In other words, scalability is dependent on more than just the properties of bits.

### Implications for Analysis

The affordances of networked publics and the resultant dynamics that emerge are transforming publics. While marking networked publics as a distinct genre of publics is discursively relevant at this moment, it is also important to acknowledge that the affordances of networked publics will increasingly shape publics more broadly. As social network sites and other genres of social media become increasingly widespread, the distinctions between networked publics and publics will become increasingly blurry. Thus, the dynamics mapped out here will not simply be constrained to the domain of the digital world, but will be part of everyday life.

The rise of social network sites has introduced ever-increasing populations to the trials and tribulations of navigating networked publics. Many of the struggles that take place on social network sites are shaped by the properties of bits, the affordances of

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networked publics, and the resultant dynamics. While some of the specific factors are not unique to networked publics, the prevalence of social network sites has introduced these affordances and dynamics to a much broader subset of the population.

This is not to say that what emerges in social network sites is simply determined by the technical affordances or that the dynamics described here predict practices. Rather, participants are implicitly and explicitly contending with these affordances and dynamics as a central part of their participation. In essence, people are learning to work within the constraints and possibilities of mediated architecture, just as people have always learned to navigate structures as part of their daily lives.

In my earlier analysis on American teenagers' participation in social network sites (boyd, 2008), I highlighted that teens can and do develop strategies for managing the social complexities of these environments. In some ways, teens are more prepared to embrace networked publics because many are coming of age in a time when networked affordances are a given. Adults, on the other hand, often find the shifts brought on by networked publics to be confusing and discomfiting because they are more acutely aware of the ways in which their experiences with public life are changing. Yet, even they are adjusting to these changes and developing their own approaches to reconfiguring the technology to meet their needs.

As social network sites and other emergent genres of social media become pervasive, the affordances and dynamics of networked publics can shed light on why people engage the way they do. Thus, taking the structural elements of networked publics into account when analyzing what unfolds can provide a valuable interpretive framework. Architecture shapes and is shaped by practice in mediated environments just as in physical spaces.

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