

1997). In the mid-twentieth century, de jure segregation as well as de facto practices such as racist home-lending policies and restrictive covenants brought about racialized dispossession through the mechanisms of suburban home ownership and privatized domesticity (Lipsitz 1995; Oliver and Shapiro 1995). This genealogy explains why Rod Ferguson (2004) posits "queer of color critique" as the most telling intervention into the contradictions of capitalist relations within U.S. liberal democracy.

"Property" as a keyword thus marks the history of the U.S. liberal-democratic state that, in maintaining a conception of citizenship as the universal protection of property rights, must erase the ways in which those relations depend on racialized and gendered forms of dispossession. In this way, property is also an epistemology, or way of knowing; it allows for knowledge of nationalist narratives of subject formation, and disallows knowledge that attests to the ways in which propertied subjectivity is not universal. Alternative epistemologies, though occluded, rendered deviant, or erased by nationalist narratives, do emerge, often embedded in cultural forms and practices. While many definitions of culture emphasize the imaginative transcendence of the concerns of everyday life, the material histories of the propertyless emerge through culture differently. The imaginative function of literature and culture, in those instances, can reveal and intervene in the racial and gender structure of the property system. Investigations into the intersection of property and culture might productively take into consideration histories of race and gender that belie

the ostensible universality of propertied citizenship, lest such studies reproduce the mystifying effects of national culture. Further, we might look to culture for ways of articulating notions of self and community that do not buy into the universalizing tendency of possessive individualism and national belonging.

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Public

Bruce Robbins

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "public" originated from the Latin *populus*, or "people," apparently under the influence of the word *pubes*, or "adult men." The term's considerable authority, based on its claim to represent the social whole, has continued to bump up against evidence that large classes of people have been omitted from it, as women and children are omitted from *pubes*. In American studies, relevant debates have focused on the continuing applicability of this ancient notion within a specialized modern division of labor where no one has knowledge of the whole (Dewey 1927; Lippman 1927); on whether the apparent decline of public life (as in Robert Putnam's "bowling alone" thesis [2000]) might reflect the larger percentage of U.S. women now doing paid rather than voluntary work; on whether "public spaces" in the past were ever really democratically accessible to all; and on how open or universal the goals, values, and membership of so-called "identity politics"

movements ought to be. Recent critics, skeptical that such a thing as a social whole exists except at the level of ideology, have sometimes implied the desirability of removing the word from circulation. If there has been no moratorium, this is in part because current usage also acknowledges a need for the term's appeal against state despotism, a key motive for its rise in the eighteenth century, and against the free market economy, in which many see a newer, decentralized despotism.

Recoiling from the singular, putatively comprehensive usage (*the* public), cultural studies has undertaken to recognize the existence of multiple publics, especially among excluded or marginalized groups. Examples include Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's (1993) hypothesis of a proletarian public sphere, as well as the publics formed by political organizing, sexual role-playing, and diasporic affiliation on the Internet. These objects of ethnographic and sociological attention are often described as "counter-publics." The coinage is perhaps premature, for oppositionality remains to be demonstrated; to be smaller than or separate from *X* is not necessarily to oppose *X*. Nor can it be assumed that what is countered is the normative force of public-ness itself. To speak of an excluded group as a "public" is again to claim representation of a social whole (though a smaller one), and thus to invoke an authority that can be disputed on similar grounds. The multiplication of publics (the plural still causes distress to my computer's spell-checker) offers no escape from the term's onerous but alluring authority.

Empirical questions of who is and isn't included in a given public—a necessary component of cultural studies projects and one that always threatens to unsettle the term's authority—thus cannot overthrow it completely. Normativity seems to be hard-wired into usage. As Michael Warner (2002) suggests, speech is public only when it is addressed, beyond any already-existing group of members, to an indefinite number of strangers. As a result, the public is always open to the charge of being merely a wishful fiction, but by the same token it is immune to merely empirical verification, perpetually in excess of any delimited membership. This excessiveness, which is honored far beyond those responding to the works of Jürgen Habermas (1999), helps explain the term's tolerance for near-redundancy. "Public" can be added as an adjective to a noun that would already seem to *be* public. The events of September 11, 2001, Judith Butler (2004a) writes, "led public intellectuals to waver in their public commitment to principles of justice." There is no such thing as a *private* intellectual; "intellectual" already implies a concern for more than the (presumed) privacy of academic, field-specific knowledge. Similarly, a commitment that was kept secret would hardly deserve to be called a (true) commitment. Yet usage supports the supplement, which exhorts intellectuals and commitments to become, by strenuous effort, more fully and passionately that which they already are.

In addition to the distracting discrepancy between empirical reference and normative exhortation, "public" lends itself to other sorts of confusion. As a sin-

gular noun, it hesitates between social wholes of different scale and nature: between a collective organized as a body and an unorganized, unselfconscious aggregate; between the opinions of the empirically existing members and their conjectural long-term interest or welfare; between the inhabitants of a nation, and—in a sense that has recently returned from obsolescence—the world at large, all of humankind. If the public is what *pertains* to the social whole, other important ambiguities result from the distinct relations to that whole hidden away in *pertain*: that which is *potentially accessible* to the community, that which is *already visible to* and *viewed by* the community, that which *belongs to* or *is controlled by* the community, that which *affects* or *is of significance to* the community, that which is *authorized by* the community, and that which is done *in the service* or *on behalf of* the community.

In this context “community,” which seems indispensable to the definition of “public,” also provides an important contrast to it. Like “culture,” another contiguous and overlapping term, “community” seems less tolerant of universal ethical principles, warmer to its members, and more hostile to strangers and self-estrangement. Public’s referential indefiniteness leaves it more open, if also cooler and more abstract. But both “community” and “culture” also have senses that are closer to “public.”

Related ambiguities result from a sliding set of oppositions between “public” and the diverse meanings of “private,” a term that derives from the Latin *privatus*, or “withdrawn from public life.” Shades of differ-

ence in “private” correspond to comparable differences in “public”; for example, the demand for citizen participation (which is asserted against private apathy) differs from the demand for scrutiny and debate (which is asserted against governmental restriction of access). Along with capitalist globalization and the revolution in digital technology, another major factor influencing usage of both terms has been the drive for gender equality. Here the clear movement has been toward an expansion of sites and occasions deemed public. For men, both the family and the workplace had seemed to belong to the domain of privacy, hence deserving protection from state interference. The women’s movement refused this public/private distinction, redescribing the family as a domain of patriarchal injustice that must be opened up to public scrutiny and rectified by means of state action. With women adding salaried work outside the home to their unpaid work within it, the workplace too has been added to the public. Yet feminists have also questioned the seeming limitlessness of this enlargement. To what extent should sex be subject to scrutiny and regulation? As Jean Cohen (2002) notes, issues like reproductive rights, gays in the military, and sexual harassment in the workplace seem to demand a reworking, rather than an abolition, of the public/private distinction.

“Private” has come to signify both the domain of capitalist economics and the domain of personal freedom and domestic intimacy. To allow the deeply cherished emotions associated with intimacy to extend to the world market is to bestow a handsome gift of

friendly propaganda upon defenders of large corporations and international finance. Any demand for public regulation of the economy thus becomes an unwanted and unwarranted intrusion into one's most personal space. Relevant cultural studies projects include the critical analysis of intellectual property, copyright law, file-sharing, and digital sampling, all of which investigate the fate of public access to cultural products and scientific knowledge, incursions into the public domain by private ownership, and movements to restore public rights (open access) to research results produced with the help of public funding.

But capitalism's effects on usage of "public" and "private" have been paradoxical. On the one hand, capitalism is associated with privatization and the shrinkage of the public. On the other, market-fueled digitalization is celebrated for democratically multiplying the shapes, rhythms, and vectors of publicness, and for allowing people to socialize with minimal interference from their spatially tethered and symbolically coded bodies or from the usual gatekeepers controlling for social status and professional expertise. (The same divide structures debates in architecture and urban studies over the fate of public space.) Yet digital technologies are also blamed for overextending the domain of the public. The degree of invisible nonstop surveillance made possible by new techniques of data retrieval, ranging from information on buying habits collected by retailers and marketers to governmental assaults on privacy and civil liberties, has intensified the term's further connotation of shaming exposure.

Like "private," "public" derives ideological force from the confusing of distinct senses and situations. The term switches between what is owned, decided upon, and managed by the community and what is merely observed by and relevant to the community—that is, between the public as active participant (modeled on the organized political group) and the public as passive spectator (modeled on the theatrical audience and reading public). "Public" thus can imply that the active, participatory aspects of politics are present within the more passive, aestheticized context of spectatorship. This switch encourages a tendency to inflate the degree and significance of agency available in the act of cultural consumption—the suggestion, say, that shopping and striking are comparable practices. Yet this ambiguity also raises such productive questions as how distinct the two sorts of publicness are and what role theatricality and symbolism can play within politics. The same ambiguity drives media research into how, when, and whether what is public in the minimal sense of *visibility* (celebrity, publicity) translates into what is public in a weightier sense like *sociability* or *organized political will* (activism, collaboration).

A closely related distinction helps clarify the ever-more-interesting issue of the public's *scale*. The word has been used most frequently about various collectivities up to the scale of the nation, but not about international or multinational entities. This fits its association with zones of actual conversation and self-consciously shared destiny, which have historically been limited. Yet there is increasing consensus among students of both American studies and cultural studies

that this limitation is intellectually and politically unacceptable. The concept of the public as a zone of causal connectedness—those actions relevant to or significant for the welfare of a given group, whether or not the group is in conversation with itself or with the begetters of the actions—is much vaster. In the era of the world market, not to speak of official and unofficial violence across borders, this zone has become increasingly international. Thus the restrictively national scale of public (in the sense of conversation and control) is seen to be stretching, and at the same time to need *further* stretching. Enlarging the scale of international attention, conversation, and opinion so as to match the scale of international causal connectedness—that is, bringing these two senses of public into congruence with each other—means resetting the boundaries of the relevant moral community so that those likely to be affected by a course of action, wherever they live, are among those invited to debate it. The United Nations, so-called Non-Governmental Organizations, transnational television stations like CNN and Al-Jazeera, and the Internet are among the socio-technical institutions whose impact on the possible constituting of a global public now ought to be under hopeful and suspicious examination.

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Queer

Siobhan B. Somerville

“Queer” causes confusion, perhaps because two of its current meanings seem to be at odds. In both popular and academic usage in the United States, “queer” is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms “gay” and “lesbian” or occasionally “transgender” and “bisexual.” In this sense, it is understood as an umbrella term that refers to a range of sexual identities that are “not straight.” But in some political and theoretical contexts, “queer” is used in a seemingly contradictory way: as a term that calls into question the stability of any categories of identity based on sexual orientation. In this second sense, “queer” is a *critique* of the tendency to organize political or theoretical questions around sexual orientation *per se*. To “queer” becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “straight” and “heterosexual”), revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal.”

Fittingly, the word “queer” itself has refused to leave a clear trace of its own origins; its etymology is unknown. It may have been derived from the German word *quer* or the Middle High German *twer*, which meant “cross,” “oblique,” “squint,” “perverse,” or “wrongheaded,” but these origins have been contested. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that, while “queer” seems to have entered English in the sixteenth