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John Dewey and Democratic Participation under Modern Conditions

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1. Introduction

Dewey's mature conception of democracy may be seen to employ resources from political as well as academic traditions. In particular, his emphasis on democratic participation may be viewed in the light of the civic republicanism of Thomas Jefferson.¹ Indeed, as Dewey suggests in *Freedom and Culture* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1939]),² Jefferson's preference for a local, communicatively based polity accords with traits of Dewey's own conception of a democratic public as originally presented in *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1927]). As both works suggest and *Freedom and Culture* explicitly shows, Dewey's mature notion of democratic participation rearticulates Jeffersonian ideals and Jefferson's concern for freedom. In the 20th century, however, such rearticulation requires a sociological sensitivity to conditions for participation in modern complex societies. In this paper I consider two ways in which Dewey analyses social conditions for democratic participation, and then I briefly compare Dewey's analysis to similar efforts in the Chicago school in sociology in the 1920s. Firstly, in works such as *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1916]), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1920]) and *Lectures in China, 1919–1920* (Dewey, 1973) Dewey points out that political participation is enabled not only through state institutions that have been developed in Western societies but through membership in voluntary associations in civil society. More specifically, he understands participation

¹ See Carreira da Silva, 2009.

² See LW 13, 175–7.

in terms of membership in social movements and in terms of cooperative, social inquiry conducted through such membership. Secondly, Dewey further problematizes participation through a notion of cultural lags that typically characterises industrial societies, and that may be related to conditions for participation at a subjective as well as at a structural level. I will end by briefly discussing Dewey's attempt to address the problem at stake through proposing a cognitive division of labour between lay agents and social scientific experts.

2. Participation: the example of social movements

In *Freedom and Culture* Dewey discusses the continuing relevance of Thomas Jefferson's political ideas. In appreciating Jefferson's democratic ideas, the transformation of America from an agrarian to an industrial society gains significance not only as an historical background of interpretation but becomes all the more important since Jefferson saw freedom in the political domain as depending on freedom in the cultural and economic domain.³ Jefferson's model of a local, town hall polity, and his preference for participation in terms of direct communication, must thus be reinterpreted and assessed in view of modern cultural and economic conditions that either enable or prohibit a communicatively based polity. Yet, not only in *The Public and Its Problems* and his political writings from the 1930s, but in several works and lectures from the years before his book on the public Dewey considers conditions for democratic participation in modern societies without, however, explicitly referring to the Jeffersonian tradition.

In works such as *Democracy and Education*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, and *Lectures in China* Dewey points out that democratic participation is based not only in local traditions: it is more extensively conditioned and enabled through voluntary associations that have arisen from the complex division of labour in modern societies. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* he argues that:

Along with the development of the larger, more inclusive and more unified organization of the state has gone the emancipation of individuals from restrictions and servitudes previously imposed by custom and class status. But the individuals freed from external and coercive bonds have not remained isolated. Social molecules have at once

³ See LW 13, 68–9; 177–8.

recombined in new associations and organizations. Compulsory associations have been replaced by voluntary ones; rigid organizations by those more amenable to human choice and purposes—more directly changeable at will. What upon one side looks like a movement toward individualism, turns out to be really a movement toward multiplying all kinds and varieties of associations: Political parties, industrial corporations, scientific and artistic organizations, trade unions, churches, schools, clubs and societies without number, for the cultivation of every conceivable interest that men have in common. MW 12, 196

Adding that “[p]luralism is well ordained in present political practice” (MW 12, 196), Dewey sees the need for a modification of political theory. As Filipe Carreira da Silva (2009) has pointed out, Dewey’s approach to democratic participation through membership in voluntary political associations draws not only on Jeffersonian sources but shows affinity to the civic republicanism expressed through Harold Laski’s theory of political pluralism that became popular in the USA in the 1920s and 30s (cf. Westbrook 1991, 245). Further, using the terminology of *The public and Its Problems*, the reference to voluntary associations at least suggests that *publics* can be empirically and historically conceived of in the plural, and that they arise under distinctively modern conditions.⁴

Yet, how are voluntary associations to become organised as publics to effectively enable political participation, and how does a public interact with existing institutional structures such that sometimes, as Dewey points out, “to form itself, the public has to break existing political forms” (LW 2, 255)? To approach these questions we turn to Dewey’s *Lectures in China* where we may find exemplifications of social and historical processes through which publics develop and instigate institutional and legal reform. Taking the fresh example of how suffrage for women was achieved in the USA in 1919 through the women’s rights movement, Dewey instructively suggests how democratic participation defines the end, and to some extent the means, through which a modern public is organised and become politically significant. Extending his exemplification to include the labour movement Dewey’s account further suggests that the development of publics is rooted in economic and industrial conditions (LC 76–9). Women, “as wage-earning participants in an expanding industrial milieu” (LC 77), and workers generally, developing “concepts

⁴ Yet, in *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey concludes by favouring the local community as a model for how a public is to be integrated (see LW 2, 369–72). See also James Bohman’s recent criticism of Dewey’s notion of a “unitary public” as the solution of the problem of integration (Bohman, 2010, 63).

of the dignity of labour, and of equality of treatment, and of opportunity" (LC 78), understand themselves in the light of their contributions to the welfare of the whole society. Such self-understanding, together with raised awareness of the injustice they have suffered, motivates the organisation of social movements through which moral claims become politically effective.

The example of modern social movements shows that Dewey's thought on democratic participation, like that of Jefferson, is motivated by an overarching normative concern: *freedom from domination*.⁵ While the historical and political context of Jefferson's civic republicanism is the resistance to British colonial domination, Dewey makes generalisations on the basis of European as well as American history to the effect of showing that Western democracies have developed through resistance to certain institutionalised forms of legitimisation, and to political, economic, and cultural domination inherent in such legitimisation (LW 13, 175; LC 65–70, 73–4). Through what we may see as a Left-Hegelian approach Dewey here adopts Hegel's notion of *recognition* to analyse how social movements have emerged through the struggle for public recognition of demands made on behalf of suppressed groups, and how such groups have finally achieved recognition, such as in the cases of women's suffrage and legislations for improved work conditions in industry (Midtgarden, 2011). This Left-Hegelian approach thus suggests a close connection between democratic participation and freedom. While the mature Dewey often explicates the concept of freedom in terms of a notion of "growth" or self-realisation, the example of social movements suggests that the value of social and political participation is not only the self-realisation of individuals (e.g. MW 12, 186, 198; LW 7, 305–6). Participation enabled through social movements contributes to resisting various forms of domination that undermine one's capacity to engage in changing actual political practices and institutions,⁶ such as was the situation for women through centuries of European and American history.

In addition to serving the task of articulating a conceptual relation between participation and freedom, the example of social movements sheds

⁵ In *Freedom and Culture* Dewey emphasises Jefferson's concern for freedom from domination, and he thinks that it would not be against Jeffersonian principles to hold that economically conditioned domination in civil society would legitimate interference on part of the state: "[i]t is sheer perversion to hold that there is anything in Jeffersonian democracy that forbids political action to bring about equalization of economic conditions in order that the equal right of all to free choice and free action be maintained" (LW 13, 178).

⁶ Melvin Rogers makes a similar claim based on different textual material (see Rogers 2009, 220–1).

further light on the relation between *participation* and *inquiry*. Here, too, the Hegelian notion of recognition is helpful to the task at hand: Dewey requests members, and particularly leaders, of social movements to “adopt an attitude of inquiry” to determine “which needs of their society are not being reasonably met” and who “are not being afforded opportunity to develop themselves so as to contribute to enrichment of the total society” (LC 80). In other words, the task is to find out what individuals and groups are not yet publicly recognised as to their legitimate needs, as well as to their actual or possible contribution to society. Yet, Dewey further suggests that inquiry through inclusion of representatives of relevant groups in society, the dominating, as well as the dominated ones, may increase the possibility for a peaceful, non-violent resolution of social conflicts. “If the people on one side of the issue adopt an attitude of calm inquiry”, he thinks, “it becomes less difficult for those who hold opposing views also to adopt a rational approach to the problems” (LC 80). Dewey’s ideal notion of participation as cooperative inquiry no doubt reflects his hopes for the situation in China during his visit where he met leaders of Chinese reform movements. Yet, it is tempting to extend the application of the notion of participation as cooperative inquiry to his contemporary America, with its multiethnic composition and mass immigration. In fact, around the same time, shortly after World War I, prominent American sociologists develop a similar, and in some respects more articulated, notion of participation in terms of inquiry, and among these are Dewey’s former student at the University of Michigan, Robert E. Park (1864–1944), and Dewey’s former colleague at the University of Chicago, William I. Thomas (1863–1947).⁷ By appealing to the “Founding Fathers” for legitimating their concern for participation, Park and Thomas suggest a model of inquiry for grappling peacefully with conflicts that may arise in times of mass immigration, rapid industrialization and urbanization, and that demand “a new definition of the situation” (Park and Burgess 1921, 765–6). Like Dewey, these sociologists are driven by a concern for inclu-

⁷ The context of this suggestion is a sociological discussion of the assimilation of new immigrants in America to which Thomas and Park contributed in *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1921). Although Thomas was the main contributor to the book, Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller were in fact officially recognized as the authors of the first edition of this work. For the intriguing circumstances behind this recognition of authorship, see Rauschenbusch (1979, 92–3). Yet, in Park’s and Ernest W. Burgess’s classical sociological textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), there is an edited version of the same discussion to which I refer below.

sive social participation beyond the sphere of institutionalised politics,⁸ but more distinctively than Dewey they suggest an *action theoretical* basis for a notion of cooperative social inquiry. While stressing language as a medium of coordination of action, and that new immigrants would need a sufficient mastery of the language in their new country, they argue that the inclusion and participation of members of new immigrant groups would provide cultural resources for facing social issues through "constant redefinitions of the situation".

The ability to participate productively implies [...] a diversity of attitudes and values in the participants, but a diversity not so great as to lower the morals of the community and to prevent effective cooperation. It is important to have ready definitions for all immediate situations, but progress is dependent on the constant redefinitions for all immediate situations, and the ideal condition for this is the presence of individuals with divergent definitions, who contribute, in part consciously and in part unconsciously, through their individualism and labors to a common task and a common end.

Park and Burgess, 1921, 767

Like Dewey they emphasise the open-ended experimental character of such cooperative efforts and that "it is only through their consequences that words get their meanings or that situations become defined" (Park and Burgess, 1921, 768). Yet, they provide no account of how such cooperative inquiry may become institutionalized, or how it may interact with institutions of the state.

3. Obstacles to democratic participation: cultural lags

Dewey's ideal notion of inquiry as conducted through membership in social movements must be seen in the light of the social transformations of industrialisation that had taken place in Western societies and America in particular by the early 20th century. In his *Lectures in China* Dewey admits that the emergence of the women's rights movement was largely due to economic factors: "[e]conomic factors were primarily responsible for the change in women's status; political action served chiefly to ratify

⁸ "The founders of America defined the situation in terms of participation, but this has actually taken too exclusively the form of 'political participation'. The present tendency is to define the situation in terms of social participation, including demand for the improvement of social conditions to a degree which will enable all to participate" (Park and Burgess, 1921, 767).

what economics had already accomplished' (LC 109). This suggests that an assessment of the social conditions for democratic participation must take further account of the socially transformative character of economic and industrial processes. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey famously adopts Graham Wallas's term "The Great Society" to stress the extent to which economic activities, involving the implementation and use of new technologies, have transformed social conditions for politics and political participation (Wallas, 1914; LW 22, 95–6, 301–2). Here, however, his analysis is more pessimistic, pointing out how economic activities and new transportation and communication technologies undermine established political institutions and practices, without giving rise to new ones.

New technology undercuts the authority of political and legal institutions on a national level since, Dewey points out, "[g]reen and red lines, marking out political boundaries, are on the maps and affect legislation and jurisdiction of courts, but railways, mails and telegraph-wires disregard them. The consequences of the latter influence more profoundly those living within the legal local units than do boundary lines" (LW 2 301–2).⁹ Dewey is concerned about the poor conditions and capacities at hand for responding politically and legally to social and moral issues arising through the consequences of modern industrial activities. Like Robert Park he sometimes refers to "the cultural lag thesis" of the American sociologist William F. Ogburn (1922) who accounts for social change by distinguishing between "material" or technological culture, the driving force of social change, and "immaterial culture", such as morality and politics, which typically lags behind, failing to adapt swiftly and adequately to the new situation established through modern technologies.¹⁰

Dewey is particularly concerned with how the new situation deeply affects capacities for participating in politics in a reasoned way. The impact of a cultural lag may be seen on several levels: on a *subjective* level a certain inconsistency or "insincerity" arises when agents adapt to tech-

⁹ Dewey's observations interestingly parallel the efforts of prominent Chicago sociologists to conceptualise the social consequences of the implementation and use of modern technology. In particular, in their outlines of a Human Ecology, Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie emphasize how modern transportation and communication technology enable an ever more extensive physical and economic integration, not only of the North American continent, but of territories and continents across the globe, without a corresponding moral integration. See in particular McKenzie 1924; 1927, and Park and Burgess 1921, 162, 556; and Park 1936.

¹⁰ As for Dewey's direct reference to William F. Ogburn's book (1922), see MW 15, 259; for Park's reference, see Park 1926, 6.

nological and economical conditions through their professional and everyday habits, but fail to adjust their deeper moral commitments and to rearticulate these as publicly acceptable reasons for action.

Insincerities of this sort are much more frequent than deliberate hypocrisies and more injurious. They exist on a wide scale when there has been a period of rapid change in environment accompanied by change in what men do in response and by a change in overt habits, but without corresponding readjustment of the basic emotional and moral attitudes formed in the period prior to change of environment. This "cultural lag" is everywhere in evidence at the present time [. . .] Not merely individuals here and there but large numbers of people habitually respond to conditions about them by means of actions having no connection with their familiar verbal responses. And yet the latter express dispositions saturated with emotions that find an outlet in words but not in acts. No estimate of the effects of culture upon the elements that now make up freedom begins to be adequate that does not take into account the moral and religious splits that are found in our very make-up as persons. LW 13, 97-8

One example of such inconsistency or "insincerity" is when American citizens in the Southern states through the 1920s appeal to traditional democratic ideals, such as the Jeffersonian principle of local self-government, but immediately face the incapacity of local governments to deal with illegal import of liquor enabled by new means of transportation, and they are thus forced to recognise, against their own principles, the practical need for amendments on a national level (LW 2, 317-8).

Yet, besides such inconsistencies on a subjective level, a cultural lag would further concern certain *structural* conditions that affect the possibility of organising and participating through what Dewey calls a public.¹¹ Let us first briefly recall Dewey's definition: the public "consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (LW 2, 245-6). Dewey stresses "the far-reaching character of consequences, whether in space or time; their settled, uniform and recurrent nature, and their irreparableness" (LW 2, 275). In a modern "Great Society" such far-reaching and recurrent consequences arise on certain structural conditions of action: corporations come into being as powerful economical agents through national legislation;¹² and new technological

¹¹ See also chapter 7 ("Publics as Products") in Hickman 1990.

¹² See MW 15, 254, 259, 261; LW 2, 354. See also Dewey's comment in *Freedom and Culture*: "Modern industry could not have reached its present development without legalization of

infrastructure enables their range of action to be vastly extended in space and time. Such structural conditions suggest a cultural lag that motivates the conceptual strategy of introducing the notion of the public in the first place: the economic activities that are legally and technologically enabled have indirect social consequences that were foreseen neither by law givers and industrial entrepreneurs nor by scientists and engineers; and politics and legislation lag behind in dealing with such consequences. At the same time, structural conditions that enable powerful economic agents to act undermine the ability of those who are affected negatively by consequences of these activities to organise themselves and to make their claims effective.¹³ Yet, as the example of social movements above suggests, at certain points in recent Western history, those affected by unforeseen consequences of modern economical activities have in fact managed to organise themselves to the effect of instigating legal and social reforms.

However, an *unorganised* public would not only consist of those who have suffered unhealthy work conditions, low payments, and unemployment, but those who in their capacities as *consumers* are becoming increasingly economically dependent on available and affordable goods in an ever expanding, international market. Particularly in his lectures on social philosophy at Columbia University in the mid-1920s Dewey focuses on a certain lag in the economic cycle of production and consumption: whereas individuals and groups participating in industrial production, transportation and exchange of material goods are organised through powerful economic and technological agencies and through social organizations, individuals in their role as consumers are “an undefined mass”, being “remote in space and time”, having “no mechanism for making their requirements effective” (MW 15, 262), and they are thus “not organized so as to make their wants economically effective” (MW 15, 269). In other words, consumers *qua* consumers lack social and technological means of communication for organising themselves. Such a lag is de-

the corporation. The corporation is a creature of the state: that is, of political action. It has no existence save by the action of legislatures and courts” (LW 13, 112).

¹³ Dewey here also ascribes a cultural lag thesis to Karl Marx: “[M]arx did go back of property relations to the working of the forces of production as no one before him had done. He also discriminated between the state of the forces of productivity and the actual state of production existing at a given time, pointing out the lag often found in the latter. He showed in considerable detail that the cause of the lag is subordination of productive forces to legal and political conditions holding over from a previous regime of production. Marx’s criticism of the present state of affairs from this last point of view was penetrating and possessed of enduring value” (LW 13, 119).

fined by a legislation which *de facto* favours the economic interests behind industrial mass production but which does not handle long term and irreparable consequences of industrial production for future consumers *and* producers. In particular, "[t]he time phase is seen in ruthless exploitation of natural resources without reference to conservation for future users" (MW 15, 262).¹⁴ Hence, both in their state of being socially unorganised¹⁵ and in their present or future state of suffering under market conditions unfavourable to their health, interests or developmental potentials, consumers, or rather subsets of consumers, would form a paradigm case of an unorganised public.

On Dewey's analysis, capitalist societies reproduce social conditions that disable members of a public—such as consumers—to organise themselves and make their requirements bear on politics and legislation. Such social reproduction even concerns subjective dispositions and attitudes; as Dewey learns from Thorstein Veblen, consumer habits and subjective preferences are heavily conditioned by economic conditions: "[t]he market and business determine wants, not the reverse" (MW 15, 264; see also LW 2, 299–301). In so far as processes of forming wants are conditioned by actual conditions of the market, capacities for articulating common interests and for organising collective efforts would be further undermined. In ways similar to Veblen, Dewey analyses such failing capacity in terms of "the economic-industrial activities that affect the distribution of power, and of abilities, capacities" (MW 15, 247), and in terms of "the capitalistic system" that has "restricted and deflected the direction of progress on the basis of the wants and powers of the class having the surplus" (MW 15, 266). Given such sociological sensitivity to asymmetric and structurally embedded distributions of power, one may be surprised to find that Dewey's overall approach to the problem of the public in *The Public and Its Problems* is caught in terms of a general requirement of perfecting "the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action" (LW 2, 332). Since on Dewey's account members of an unorganised public typically lack social and technological means for organising themselves through communica-

¹⁴ In his *Social Change* William F. Ogburn similarly uses the issue raised by the exploitation of the forests as a natural resource in USA as an example of cultural lag, see Ogburn 1922, 204–5.

¹⁵ See how Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems* stresses that "[i]n itself [the public] is unorganized and formless" (LW 2, 277).

tion, this ideal requirement of communication thus does not seem to take us very far. Nevertheless, by being connected to other suggestions in *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey's hopes for a communicatively organised public may be developed in ways that may appear more realistic in the internet age than in his own days. I will end this paper with some reflections on his proposal of a cognitive division of labour between lay agents and scientific experts, and on the technological infrastructure that may support such division of labour.

4. Cooperative inquiry through cognitive division of labour

Dewey's proposal of a cognitive division of labour is motivated by a consideration of the asymmetric distribution of cognitive resources among citizens. To some extent, Dewey argues, the economically conditioned asymmetric distribution of *power* can be correlated with an asymmetric distribution of *knowledge* and *information*: whereas the majority of the members of society lack knowledge that could have put them in a better position to understand how the market affects their lives, including knowledge of processes through which wants and preferences are formed, members of the economic elite "occupy strategic positions which give them advance information of forces that affect the market" (LW 2, 338–9) and by which they may influence economic processes to their own benefit.¹⁶ Such asymmetric distribution of knowledge and information, Dewey tends to think, can only be countered through "a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist" (LW 2, 339) but which he through his famous discussion with Walter Lippmann thinks of in terms of a cognitive division of labour, rather than an "intellectual aristocracy" of experts (LW2, 362).

In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey proposes that social scientific experts and lay agents should cooperate to develop the kind of knowledge that would capture the conditions under which individuals and groups become unfavourably affected by indirect consequences of economic action, and that would contribute to a shared perception of the situation. Lay agents are to enter the process of inquiry in order to assess proposals developed by the experts.¹⁷ James Bohman has emphasised that Dewey's

¹⁶ Dewey stresses the contingent and arbitrary nature of such differences between members of society (see MW 15, 238).

¹⁷ "It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations; what is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns" (LW 2, 365).

model challenges and complements the epistemic authority of scientific experts, and that it recognises and authorises the practical knowledge possessed by lay agents as being adequate for assessing expert proposals (Bohman, 1999, 465–6). Bohman further emphasises that such cooperative inquiry would reflexively involve an assessment of the very framework of cooperation; hence, what is brought to the test are not only expert proposals, but, on a second order level, the terms of the cooperation itself. Bohman uses the example of how AIDS patient groups and activists in the United States through the 1990s responded to the rather ineffective medical treatment they originally received, and how this response effectively altered the terms of the cooperation between medical experts and lay agents through affecting the authority of the norms of validity underlying the medical research at stake (Bohman, 1999, 465). Yet, in focussing on medical expertise Bohman's example is not fully adequate for understanding the role of *social* scientific expertise. Further, Bohman's interpretation focuses primarily on justificatory stages in a process of inquiry, where lay agents are to "practically verify" expert proposals (Bohman, 1999, 466, 475–7), whereas Dewey suggests that lay agents should also take part at an early stage of inquiry, when issues are detected and problems formulated. In order to come up with relevant and adequate proposals social scientists should thus be informed about issues through the agents that are affected (LW 2, 364–5). Let me briefly expand on this suggestion to complement Bohman's interpretation.

On Dewey's account lay agents would participate through initial stages of inquiry that are directly motivated by "an indeterminate" or "conflicting (social) situation" (LW 12, 108, 492–3). Lay agents would here offer their various "definitions of the situation", to borrow Park's and Thomas's terms. Such definitions would be diverging, and they would contain various implicit values and valuations, given the various social and cultural backgrounds that would be involved. One important task of the social scientists would be to make such implicit value-orientations explicit and to make the value orientations bear on alternative proposals of how issues can be addressed and grappled with. The proposals would articulate expected practical and social consequences of value-orientations when acted on through available institutional and technological means.¹⁸ Such

¹⁸ See how Dewey in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) more generally and abstractly defines social inquiry in terms of analyzing a problematic situation: "any problematic situation, when it is analyzed, presents, in connection with the idea of operations to be performed, alternative possible ends in the sense of terminating consequences" (LW 12, 495).

articulations would thus concern what Dewey famously calls “end(s)-in-view” (MW 9, 112; LW 1, 280). The proposals should be tested by lay agents re-entering the process of inquiry by performing what Bohman calls a “practical verification”. A practical verification would not only bring expert proposals to the test but would force lay agents involved to reflect on the social and practical consequences of their value commitments. Such moral reflection could disclose common values among the agents involved, or it might instigate the formation of inclusive interests and ends that would motivate collective action.¹⁹ Yet, as Melvin Rogers has pointed out, on Dewey’s account, moral reflection could also make agents realise the tragic dimension of moral conflicts and the incommensurability of moral values (Rogers, 2009, 183–9).

This brief elaboration on Dewey’s suggestion of a cognitive division of labour could be complemented by a few words on the role such co-operation could play in organising otherwise dispersed individuals and in forming collective identities through communication. In the era of modern information and communication technologies Dewey’s hopes for a communicatively organised public may seem less utopian than in his own days. Through Internet and computer based networks, social scientists may not only effectively reach large numbers of agents and engage in dialogue with them, but the agents themselves have a technologically enabled communicative medium through which they may articulate experiences, exchange descriptions, form identities and agendas.²⁰ Researchers may facilitate such encounters technologically; and recent examples show how social scientists have invited citizens and stakeholder to participate in online discussions about the consequences of emerging technologies

¹⁹ In the second edition of *Ethics* (1932) Dewey holds that “[t]he development of inclusive and enduring aims is the necessary condition of the application of reflection in conduct” (LW 7, 185). Later in *Ethics* he qualifies the formation of inclusive ends in terms of *sympathy* as an enabling condition, and which “consists in power to make us attend in a broad way to all the social ties which are involved in the formation and execution of policies. Regard for self and regard for others should not, in other words, be *direct* motives to overt action. They should be forces which lead us to *think* of objects and consequences that would otherwise escape notice. These objects and consequences then constitute the *interest* which is the proper motive of action. Their stuff and material are composed of the relations which men actually sustain to one another in concrete affairs” (LW 7, 300).

²⁰ Note, for example, how the organization of the transnational agrarian movement *Via Campesina*, resisting and contesting land appropriation in the South by states in the North and multinational corporations, have been enabled through information and communication technologies the last two decades (see Borrás and Franco, 2010, 134).

affecting the lives of an increasing number of people.²¹ The new possibilities opened up for citizens to engage in exchanges about how new technologies affect their lives across the globe, may perhaps be seen as a partial fulfilment of democratic hopes that Dewey had. In any case, the new historical possibility to conceive of what Bohman has called "Internet Publics" (Bohman, 2008) suggests that technological inventions are not only detrimental to democratic participation, as they may have seemed in Dewey's days. In addition, general traits of Dewey's social ontology may be seen as adaptable to the new era of information and communication technology in so far as he defines the very category of *the social* such as to include technology,²² and in so far as he stresses that *communication* has as a necessary condition mechanical *associations* of the sort that technological applications, as well as physiological processes, exemplify.²³

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²¹ I here use the example of the EU funded and now completed *TECHNOLIFE* project coordinated by the University of Bergen: *TECHNOLIFE* designed and used an open-source software to invite citizens and stakeholders to discuss ethical issues of concern related to Biometrics; Geographical Imagining Systems, and Emerging Technologies of Human Enhancement. See the website: www.technolife.no.

²² See "The Inclusive Philosophical Idea" (1928) and particularly the comment: "What would social phenomena be without the tools and machines by which physical energies are utilized?" (LW 3, 47).

²³ See *Experience and Nature* (LW 1, 138–9), *The Public and Its Problems* (LW 2, 250–1, 330), and his elaboration on the distinction between *association* and *communication* (*community*) in *Freedom and Culture*: "There is a difference between a society, in the sense of an association, and a community. Electrons, atoms and molecules are in association with one another [...] Natural associations are conditions for the existence of a community, but a community adds the function of communication in which emotions and ideas are shared as well as joint undertakings engaged in. Economic forces have immensely widened the scope of associational activities" (LW 13, 176).

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