

Reception-in-Action in a Panel Interview: The Interactional Production of Several Kinds of “Public in Relation with a Problem”

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Democratic societies have given to themselves many means of depicting in a realistic manner the state of their public opinion about recurrent societal issues and current affairs. Ethnographic inquiries - the interviews, surveys and quantitative studies - are tools and techniques that allow, either separately or in combination and for each issue investigated, a broad picture to be painted, a picture of the opposing positions and of the balance of power between them. These inquiries, be they qualitative or quantitative, share the assumption that members of a community have individual opinions on issues of general interest, which they share with others. Their assimilation to particular classification standards transforms them into social objects that both opinion inquiries and polls and the methodologies of social sciences have to elaborate so as to deliver results significant on the scale of the community concerned. The complex and varied operations that extend from the definition of an issue to data collection and analysis are not themselves accessible in the published results. In other words, we cannot expect going from the final research results back to the operations through which the results have been produced. In other words, the local and temporal organisation of the analytic process vanishes in its final object. This absolutely does not invalidate research results or their interpretation by their recipients (professional commentators and general audience). On the contrary, those results are commonly taken to be a genuine

representation of the state of the public opinion on a particular topic.

But the quest for knowledge on the state of the opinion regarding a topic may take on other, more interactional shapes, after the fashion of panel discussions, to which the present study will be devoted. This situation exhibits significant differences from those mentioned previously. I will mention two of these. Firstly, if the panellists of a televised debate are supposed to talk on the topic of the broadcast to the exclusion of any other topic, the methods and the precise way they do so consist in conversational and interactional practices that are locally accomplished, accountable and acknowledged for all practical purposes by the persons taking part to the broadcast, as well as by the TV viewers, without the mediation of any external interpretative devices. Secondly, these operations through which the persons taking part in a televised discussion come to specify their stand on a given issue and possibly do so on the basis of their membership in a community affected by the situation concerned, are not distinct from the methodical and coordinated ways they take part in the discussion. The speakers are their own practical analysts and their analyses are immediately available to the audience to which they are directed.¹

¹ Naturally, the sequential resources that spread from the operations relative to the unfolding of the broadcast are not available on the same mode to the speakers; to them they constitute resources to act at the right time and contribute, by the same token, through their action to give shape and meaning to

The present study intends to develop an approach to the public opinion of a community as it appears and can be acknowledged in and through the accomplishment of discursive activities. The phenomenon gains its objectification as a broadcast program unfolds through the different sorts of public concerned with the topic at hand. Panellists talk on behalf of these publics, treat them as having an independent existence and this is acknowledged by themselves or identified by others.

My paper will be focused neither on Arab media nor Arab public opinion. Nevertheless the core of it will meet the thematic of this issue. It is relative to the interactional production of interrelated kinds of public of an international political problem – the war in Iraq - that has created a strain in the relationship between two countries, The United-States and France. More specifically, the question I will address is concerned with the way in which persons, who are French speaking Americans, who participate in a panel interview on a French broadcast, render mutually available the kind of public they belong to and on behalf of whom they express themselves in relation to the topic of the broadcast and their different stances toward it.

The aim of this study is to analyse in detail the endogenous interactional work through which speakers identify themselves and are identified by the others as taking such and such stand on the topic at stake, through the activation of different kinds of public in order to make their standpoint explicit. This analytic approach is based on the description of the practical methods routinely used by members in order to understand each other

their concerted activity, and to the television viewers, to whom they are common sense tools and methods for understanding which are mixed in the setting and grasped in its unfolding.

in the course of their activity. Within this framework, the panel interview under study appears as an instance of a “reception-in-action” concerning a topic abundantly addressed by media in this period of time, June 2003 which gave rise to divergent, even opposed views from the media themselves and from commentators and audiences as well. Our main focus will be the way in which the broadcast’s guests show their concern with the media and political aspects of the topic, not just as a personal interest, but as members of a public they outline in the way they take part in the sequential and topical organization of the panel interview.

Overall presentation of the program

The data are excerpts of a French weekly programme entitled “Arrêt sur Images” (“Freeze frame”). This was broadcast at that time on Sundays afternoons on France 5, a cultural public channel². Beside its founder, Daniel Schneidermann (DaS) and his collaborator, Candice Mahout (CM), external journalists occasionally appear on the programme. A different topic is investigated every week. This programme aims to present, in a way understandable for the general audience, a critical analysis of the way in which media address news items.

It is a recorded programme on which guests, who may be professionals of the media, academic commentators, politicians, journalists, spin doctors, etc., are confronted with television programme excerpts, and these then fuel a discussion on the topic of the day.

The case in point, the broadcast of June 2003, is entitled “Lafayette: there we are again?”. It is composed of several short reportages where several French speaking

² Since 2007 this programme has moved on Internet at <http://www.arretsurimages.net/index.php>

people of Louisiana are interviewed about their opinions about the war in Iraq, and the conflict it has created between the US and France. We will focus on the last part of this broadcast, which consists of a panel interview. It brought together the team of programme journalists and three guests from Louisiana.³ They examined the way American and French media addressed the issue of the disagreement between their countries.⁴

This paper is divided into three parts, each of which focuses on the way in which each guest elaborates his stance on the topic. In particular, we will focus on the modalities through which the guests come to express and maintain in the broadcast divergent or alternative categories of a “public” as part of their concerted activity in the debate on the topic of the day. We will first analyse the way in which one of the guests was led to take a stand representing the citizens of the United States and for whom the French government’s attitude toward the United States on the war has indeed strained the relationship between the two countries. Secondly, we will address the modalities and resources the second guest used to set up the conditions of an acknowledgment of existing divergent views on the same issue among the American people. We will conclude by examining the stance of the third guest who suggested an alternative solution to allow participants to transcend the bilateral and bipartite opposition the two other participants imposed on the debate.

³ These persons are : Elmo Authement (EA), Earlene Broussard (EB) and Barry Ancelet (BA).

⁴ A previous issue gathered D. Schneidermann, C. Mahout and two guests, B. Ancelet and E. Lafleur, a Louisiana MP from the Democrat Party. They mainly addressed issues relative to the French-speaking world and on the threats that press on it, particularly by the reduction of the time allotted to French-language Programmes on New-Orleans local broadcasts.

First then, we consider the initial sequence of the TV programme in which D. Schneidermann introduces the main topic of the debate. Subsequently we will examine the sequence in which C. Mahout introduces the two new guests on this part of the broadcast.

The introduction of the main topic of the programme

Excerpt 1⁵

1. DaS: Good morning:\ For the last broadcast of the season “Arrêt Sur Images”
2. has RELOCATED . We- we wished to go to the UNITED-STATES to CONFRONT our
3. views with some Americans\ to SEE with them how THEIR media THEIR
4. television channels talked about France to their audience the pictures of France they displayed and
5. to show them the pictures that THEY/OUR media OUR television channels er have shown us
6. about the: United-States and we’ll see that it’s not ALWAYS er necessarily going
7. to please:/ them so in the United-States and more precisely in LOUISIANA in Lafayette/ Louisiana
8. which is the most FRENCH-SPEAKING state in the United-States as everybody knows\ but not
9. necessarily the most FRANCOPHILE\ We’ll also see that during the broadcast (...)

This introduction underlines at least four main issues. First, it specifies two “unusual” audiences for the media concerned. The “Americans” are forming an occasional audience for the French media, an audience

⁵ *Conversation transcript symbols*

- [] overlapping (more than one speaker at a time)
- & quick sequence of words between two speakers, or continuing talk of the same speaker
- . pause
- : prolongation of the sound preceding colons
- truncating, interruption inside a word
- Capital Letter accentuation
- / raising intonation
- \ falling intonation

constituted by the broadcast and for the practical ends of dealing with the topic at hand. Similarly, it composes the audience of the French TV viewers, the usual audience of the broadcast, as a fortuitous audience for the US television broadcasts. The difference between these two audiences convoked by ASI's staff lies in the fact that only the American guests on the broadcast have the opportunity to express their feelings, comments and criticisms with regard to the excerpts of a selection of French TV programmes. In his introduction the anchor underlines the topic to which the broadcast is devoted, that is the interactional work of reacting to and investigating selected pieces of news done collaboratively by the host and his guests.

The second aspect concerns the definition of the "public" to which the persons interviewed belong. They are members of the public of the media, TV viewers, and so in the first place they are ordinary people and citizens. As such, they are informed by the media of the happenings in the world and build up their own opinion on the basis of those news items. Thirdly, this public is named using its national membership category: "Americans". Those two last features are relevant in that they determine the persons who, in this broadcast, are going to be called upon to express a view on a topic of foreign affairs. These people are guests who are invited to express a view on an item of current affairs or on an issue of public interest, on the ground of their belonging to a national community and not according to a specific expertise or specialty. The fourth point is Americans' rather negative judgment of France, which expresses itself in two ways. First, in the unfavourable reception by the Americans of the picture of the United-States that French broadcasts displayed to the French audience. Second, in the mixed picture that France enjoys in the State described as the most

French-speaking one of the United-States, (and the one where this broadcast took place). A final point worth mentioning which is missing in the introduction but transparent to the viewers of the broadcast, at the time of its broadcasting (June 2003), and which relates clearly to its topic: the strained relationships between the governments of France and the United States concerning the war led by the latter in Iraq and contested by the former.

Excerpt 2

10. **DaS** : And two more guests have joined us Candice\
11. yes so first Elmo\ in fact Elmo Authement/Well: the thing that makes us
12. happy/ is that we have also the SECOND GREAT star of the local French speaking communities
13. because Elmo Each week you present a tv programme in which you
14. try to make the televiewers learn new words You have a guest you
15. host a guest you teach new words the viewers call and
16. that's it/ and we learn some more things in French\ So accessorially you are
17. a Republican a fervent Republican you are going to tell us a bit what did you think about
18. the stance of France these latest months in the Iraqi conflict and then we also have with
19. us Earlene Broussard so Earlene knows Elmo pretty well hum they are they
20. know each other but nevertheless they do not always agree with each other all the time but it's
21. not serious
22. **DaS**: they never agree because Earlene belongs to the opposite side
23. **CM**: OK so we'll say never I didn't want to start too hard but OK we are going
24. to say never because you are rather a Democrat and a great pacifist and also
25. accessorially you are a great militant of the French speaking cause of the preservation
26. of the Cajun culture and you teach at the University of Bâton-Rouge the Cajun culture
27. this Cajun culture that's it

Introducing the guests and their divergent opinions

C. Mahout introduces Elmo A. first, by mentioning his profession as a presenter of a television programme concerned with French language, and then by noting his political affiliation. It is in pursuance of this twofold membership, that is, first, the fact of being a French speaking person and working for the development of the French culture in Louisiana and, second, his political affiliation, that he is going to be interviewed on his opinion about “the stance of France” on the war in Iraq. From the first membership we can infer that Elmo is pro French. From the second membership, we can anticipate an opposite standpoint congruent with that of the American (Republican) administration. Any other particular authority or competence of his own in relation with the subject is not mentioned. So, the panel interview will probably not be a debate between specialists. Then C. Mahout introduces Earlene B., in relation to Elmo and to the fact that, in general, they do not share the same opinions on things they happen to discuss together (lines 18-21). D. Schneidermann’s comment (line 22) clarifies and strengthens the point on which Elmo and Earlene disagree - political matters. It makes us think that this tendency to disagree is also going to be the case for the topic of the broadcast that C. Mahout previously mentioned (line 18).

The precise source of the divergence on the topic of the broadcast between EA and EB is divided into three stages in a cooperative way by the two journalists of “Arrêt sur Images”, C. Mahout and D. Schneidermann, rather than the guests themselves.

Firstly, Elmo’s political membership (“*a fervent Republican*”; “*what you’ve thought about France’s stance*”); secondly, the political nature of the issue on which those

two people disagree (“*they never agree because Earlene belongs to the opposite side*”); finally, the locally accomplished linkage between political membership and the dissent on the issue of the military intervention in Iraq.

Thus, “*rather a Democrat and a great pacifist*” are identifying features of one of the guests. These may be true characterisations of this person, but their relevance here is locally established by the topic of the broadcast and contrastively with the opposite stance which is represented by the other guest. Each stance can be examined in order to define better its opposite. Thus, if Earlene is explicitly portrayed as “*a Democrat and a pacifist*”, whereas Elmo is described as a “*Republican*”, then we could infer from that that Elmo is probably in favor of the American military intervention in Iraq. On the other hand, in so far as Earlene is opposed to it, then she is closer to the official French stance.

As a result, on the ground of this unambiguous bipolarity, we can expect to be faced with divergent points of view from the guests on the issue of the dissent between the USA and France, in spite of the fact that all of them are American citizens. In the framework of this investigation we will examine the issue of the mutual elaboration of those two dimensions – the national and the political bipolarities – and the modalities of their relationship in the unfolding of the debate.

We will start with an excerpt of a sequence that took place before the debate began. The excerpt is from an interview with the French ambassador in the USA on ABC. It contains relevant information for understanding what the first question of the forthcoming discussion is about:

Excerpt 3

(The opinion of the French ambassador in the United States concerning anti-French jokes - interview excerpts with the French ambassador in the United States, on ABC, 310503)

- **3a:**

Ambassador: When I first saw at the cafeteria of the House of Representatives signposts on which was written “Freedom Fries” instead of “French fries” or “Freedom toast” instead of “French toast” I said well: stop/

- **3b:**

Ambassador: When you insult French people simply because they are French well it’s a racist campaign

- **3c:**

Journalist: What do you feel when watching the television you come upon Jay Leno or David Lettermann who make some jokes on the French/

(an extract of a Jay Leno’s program is displayed while he is making fun of the stance of the French government at the UNO by describing it as the expression of their support to Saddam Hussein)

Ambassador: It is not funny because it fuels resentment people in France who happen to watch this say they don’t understand how such a big democracy as the United States are can use so absurd and petty attacks we can have divergent views on war and peace but for pity’s sake French fries are French fries

Now we can have a look at the first question of the panel interview:

Excerpt 4

(The French-American controversy)

28. **DaS:** So we’ve just heard the French ambassador telling his feeling to the

29. anti-French jokes on the American television the Jay Leno the Lettermann

30. who these last weeks have truly treated us us the French roughly

31. do you feel like the French ambassador are you offended

32. do you think that this is that these are jokes that badly affects the quality of the relationship

33. between the two countries or do you say that or first does it quite

34. simply make you laugh

35. **EA:** {under his picture there’s a caption mentioning: Republican militant} Well hum

36. I am I am not offended I know this is the Americans who does their things er

37. who do their things er this has started that er with a person named er O’Reilly

38. **DaS:** Bill O’Reilly a Fox News’s anchorman yes

39. **EA:** [from Fox News] he get angry with Chirac I think with good reason (laughs)

CM: [hum hum] (laughs)

41. **DaS:** According to you (laughs)

42. **EA:** And then and then he is the one who started the boycott affair all the French

43. products and he has he is at on the television all over the United States and then what

44. happened it’s that a lot of people have follo-his er what he wished to do

45. and then at the moment there are lots of people who they are they boycott the French

46. products

The first question the presenter of “Arrêt sur Images” asks his guest, and the answer the latter provides, collaboratively set up the conditions of a local configuration of a possible “reception” of the French American disagreement. I will shortly define “reception” by the set of modalities through which a “public” receives an account about a situation, how it is affected by it and reacts to it. What I call “reception” is the shape of this reaction. It includes the local production of the practical identity under which the public concerned is directly acknowledged. Hence the phrase “reception in action”.⁶ The public concerned is not a collection of people gathered on the ground of shared common features. It is more precisely related to a stand in a public controversy, which may be adapted, assumed, supported and defended by whoever subscribes to it and makes use of it to examine critically and

⁶ Adapted from Hester & Eglin (1997)

criticise the “stances” of opposing publics constituted around a topical issue that initiates and sustains a debate. This “public” is then both a stance of a patient and of an agent that shapes up in activities carried out in public ⁷ and can be assumed, in each specific occasion, even by one person only who acts in the name of a specified group or community who opposes others on the same issue. The way in which the much debated question has been constituted by its participants is particularly relevant. Their actions and motives are diversely assessed by those who are affected by the outcomes of their initiatives and constitute themselves in a public called to judge its effects⁸.

In the remainder of this article I will attempt to show how the very way the televised debate is locally, temporally and interactionally organised reflexively generates the possibility of a place for a concerned public to arise, for the practical ends of the constitution of the topic of the broadcast, a place that one of the guests is going to assume.

First of all, in the preface to his question, D. Schneidermann depicts a setting constituted by the authors of the anti-French jokes on American television. When he says “*who have treated us us the French roughly*” he designates the intended public and counts himself a member of it. Thus the scene for a dissent between the American media and their victims, the French, has been introduced through the reaction of the French ambassador.

⁷ This is congruent with the perspective that Louis Quéré, among others, promotes. An approach which tends “to favor the adverbial use (“in public”) instead of the nominal one (“the public”)” (Quéré, 2003: 129).

⁸ This is close to what Joseph Gusfield defines as the starting point of a “public problem” (Gusfield, 1981).

The question Schneidermann asks of Elmo immediately after that affords three possible answers. In the first case (A1 = “*do you feel like the French ambassador are you offended*” (line 31)), the emphasis is put on the diplomatic consequences of those jokes once their content is taken seriously. From this point of view they represent for their “victims” – those who identify themselves with them or who speak on their behalf – a deliberate mockery of their country, its inhabitants and their authorities; in this case, France is taunted by comics on the American television broadcasts.

The second possibility (A2 = “*or do you say that*” (line 33)) initiates the opportunity for expressing a stance that is opposite to the ambassador’s, as it appears to be the case in the contrast drawn between “*do you feel like the ambassador*” and “*OR do you say*”?

The first two options (A1 and A2) express mutually exclusive stances; the third one (A3 = “*or first does it quite simply make you laugh*” (lines 33, 34)) offers to the person interviewed the possibility of a safe exit out of the clear-cut choice. As a matter of fact here the issue only is to know whether these jokes achieve their aims, which is to make their audience laugh, innocently so to speak.

Elmo’s answer “*I’m not offended*” (lines 35-6) expresses a disagreement with the first stance and, as a result, shows his distance from the stance of the target who reacts to the blow endured, which is the stance represented by the French ambassador. On the contrary, Elmo aligns with the American standpoint: “*it’s the Americans who do their things*” (lines 36-7). In the absence of an answer to the third option (the laughing jokes) this answer is concerned with the task of providing a content to the second, unfinished, option: “*or do you say that*” (line 33).

The two pair parts, constituted by D. Schneidermann's question and Elmo's answer jointly work out the field of the French-American dissent. Consequently we may look at, and follow this configuration as the realisation of a cooperative activity, a concrete "thing" the speakers elaborate in a methodic and interactional way. What Elmo said gives an objective existence to it, by making of it a problematic situation created by the French administration which affects the United States. The reaction of the latter has been shaped and relayed by the American media and finally expressed in the American public opinion. In his answer, Elmo reverts the order of priorities of the responsibilities as initially stated in the question concerning the kind of thing "*that badly affects the quality of the relationship between the two countries*" (lines 32-3). By doing this, he plainly determines the second option as the American version of the overall problem. He does not use the third option through which he could have avoided the alignment with the French stance – cautiously leaving this issue undecided, without being forced to align with the American standpoint. As a matter of fact his answer locally sets up "THE American version" which had not been stated before by anybody else in the context of this broadcast.

Now let us consider the reply D. Schneidermann offers to Elmo's answer:

Excerpt 5

47. **DaS:** but is there really a big boycott or could it be the media who

48. have exaggerated because David Abiker reported us but I can testify myself we go

49. to any restaurant and we order "French fries" because fries

50. in America are called like that "French fries" I mean al al we

51. always have had fries [never]

52. **EA:** [but]

53. **DaS:** nobody has told us "wow we do not serve French fries"

54. **EA:** But here it is it is a French speaking country Lafayette

55. **DaS:** yes

D. Schneidermann's argument, that follows Elmo's answer, emphasizes a possible "exaggeration" from the media regarding the seriousness of the boycott. A noticeable consequence of this critique of the media is that it amounts to contest the reality of the large number of people supposedly committed in this retaliation movement against France and reported by Elmo. The point raised by Schneidermann makes Elmo potentially appear not as reporting an objective fact, but as acting like the spokesman of a possible dubious version produced and spread by the media and spontaneously taken by the general public as a faithful description of the situation. This remark by Schneidermann incriminates, not Elmo's sincerity, but the appropriateness of his description with, if not the reality of the collective anti-French movement in the United States, at least, its scope.

Notice that the case Schneidermann has chosen in support of his objection, does not mention the boycott itself but refers to a former issue, that was mentioned just before the debate starts. Which was the substitution of the designation of "French fries" by "Freedom fries" as reprisals against France. The point is based on the investigation made by David Abiker in the "Lafayette's restaurants" and the outcome of which he mentioned previously. Schneidermann prefaces his own testimony with it. He presents it in general terms, as an empirical rule which gives a high level of generality to it: "*we go to any restaurant and we order "French fries"*" (48-9); "*we always have had fries*" (50-1); "nobody has never told us: "*wow we do not serve French fries*" (51-3).

The relationship Schneidermann has implicitly set up between the case of the

boycott at a national scale and the “French fries” case, is relevant only if the place where the reported observation done by Abiker and Schneidermann in Louisiana, the city of Lafayette, can be heard as a place like any other place in the United States. This implies that this experience could be reproduced elsewhere, in any other State of the US.

In his reply, “*But here it is it is a French speaking country Lafayette*” (54) Elmo provides a local signification to the journalists’ account. It singles out the place where they had their experience. Its effect is to restrictively delimit the strength of the objection raised by Schneidermann regarding the actual scope of the anti-French movement in the US, expressed here by the change in the way “fries” are designated in restaurants. He does so by formulating the particular geographic, cultural and linguistic context within which the reported event possibly makes sense. Thus, this account can be heard as a way of saying that this area, characterized by its cultural and linguistic specificities, is an exception in the United States.

This sequence makes visible the relevance for the debate of the issue of “which context are we talking about”, through the topicalization of the local/global distinction and its use, be it for establishing a standpoint or to undermine it.

Now, in the second part of this study, we are going to look at the way Earlene B. expresses her own point of view:

Excerpt 6

(The constitution of a divergence of opinion between the American interviewees)

57. **EA:** er I myself have friends in France a lot and then hum mhm more or less we

58. we like French people we don’t like the French government at the moment but

59. we like French people and I believe that it is this

60. **DaS:** OK and in any case Leno and Lettermann they make you laugh when they laugh at

61. France

62. **EA:** Well yes yes

63. **DaS:** the French who lose every war in which they are engaged the French who are

64. cowards they make you laugh

65. **EA:** Well yes

66. **DaS:** and you too Earlene

67. **EB:** Well yes it’s yes the the aim is to make people laugh that’s the point they rather

68. are comedians in a way mhm but that is to say that I don’t totally agree with the fact that

69. the people of Louisiana the French speaking people of Louisiana dislike the French government

70. most of the French speaking people of Louisiana don’t even know what is the French

71. administration, but as a matter of fact I am myself a person who is completely happy with

72. France and Mr Chirac having decided to talk against war because me I am against

73. the war and I thought there was no other there were not many heads of state

74. who committed themselves to express the ideas that, for instance, I had myself so

75. **DaS:** Right, you you are a Chirac sympathizer of Lafayette

(laughs)

76. **EA:** That’s it (laughs)

In that sequence, in a collective judgment made by an indexical “we” to whom he affiliates himself (that is, in “*I have friends in France*” (line 57) followed by “*we like French people*” (lines 58-59)), Elmo distinguishes a positive part (the French people) from a negative one (the French government).

Now, in her answer to Schneidermann’s question, Earlene considers at first the issue of the jokes. After that, she undertakes to specify the referent of the pronoun (“we”) formerly used by Elmo, by giving it a noun (“*the people of Louisiana the French speaking people of Louisiana*” - line 69). It

describes it in relation to a geographic, cultural, and linguistic area circumscribed on a strictly local scale. By tying the pronoun “we” to the category “French speaking people of Louisiana”, Earlene blocks the inference that this deictic term could refer to “the Americans”. This was a possible understanding of the term in Elmo’s account, especially since D. Schneidermann has asked him his opinion on particular programs broadcast on American TV networks CBS and NBC – and not on local TV – that taunted France and the French (lines 61; 63). Thus, the preferred tacit a priori opposition made relevant by this question is between France and United States (and not Louisiana only) on the one hand, and French and Americans (excluding the people of Louisiana), on the other. Earlene therefore, disambiguates the pronoun locally by replacing it with an objective expression and through this method she refutes the point made by Elmo. (Elmo asserted a global negative feeling toward the French government felt by a collective left unspecified by this pronoun (“*most of the French speaking people of Louisiana don’t even know what is the French administration*” - lines 70-1). It is obvious that the same operation could not be done with the collective “the Americans”, supposed to be predominantly hostile to the stance taken by France on the war in Iraq. But the local perspective of Earlene’s talk is itself grounded on Elmo’s former talk, who was the first to establish a local standpoint in contrast with a broader point of view (when he argued: “*but here it’s a French speaking country Lafayette*”). However, there is a noticeable difference between the two.

Elmo used this contrast at a national scale in order to secure his argument from an objection that has been raised against it.

Earlene, on the other hand, focuses on the part she has first circumscribed – “*the people*

of Louisiana the French speaking people of Louisiana” – before transforming this part into the whole. She considers it then, in retrospect, as the population to which Elmo also referred in the last part of his talk. Thus, “we” designates the “French speaking people of Louisiana” as being the type of “people of Louisiana” in regard to whom it is adequate to say that “Lafayette” is a “French speaking country” in proportion to the linguistic and cultural specificity of this population on the ground of which Elmo explained its alleged benevolence to France (line 59: “*and I believe that it is this*”). Earlene’s account establishes then a link between the categorization of the place, and the categorization of the population living in this place. She adds to this depiction a categorization of the speakers, that is Elmo and herself, in order to determine the appropriate scale and context of the topic they are just talking about in relation with their membership to this community. Thus, in the circumstances of the talk, according to Earlene, “we” is accountable as the indexical way through which a French speaking inhabitant of Louisiana indicates that he or she is talking on behalf of all those who share the same linguistic specificity. This certainly does not refer to the American people in general.

As a matter of fact, Earlene borrows part of the same material that was used by Elmo, that is Louisiana’s cultural particularism, in view to transforming it and to adjusting it for the setting up of her own perspective within this framework. She then presents her point of view as an alternative to the perspective which is built, in Elmo’s view, on the basis of the desire to see a frontal opposition on this political issue between France and the United States, between French people and Americans and between their respective governments. The alternative is realised through the focus on “I”: “*But as a matter of fact I am myself a person who...*” (line 71),

that we can understand as a self-categorization by Earlene as a member of the subgroup of these French speaking people of Louisiana who not only “*know what is the French administration*” (lines 70-71), but moreover approve its action and share its view of things. This contributes to ruin even more the scope of Elmo’s argument: “*we don’t like the French government*” (line 58). Earlene’s account has the consequence that “we” could only be understood, from then on, as a synonym of “some” (Americans, Louisiana people, French speaking people of Louisiana, etc.) whatever their number was; they could even be a majority – but, even so, not “all of us” could be part of it, seeing that one “I” rises up against this inclusion. According to Earlene there is no incompatibility nor hostility between her point of view on the war in Iraq and France’s on the same topic. On the contrary, the two of them are concordant in their shared disagreement with the stance of the American administration and those who support them. However, this opinion is presented by her as her own, even if it is the stance of a French speaking woman of Louisiana who disagree with another French speaking person of Louisiana. At last, Schneidermann’s formulation : “*the Chirac sympathizer of Louisiana*” (line 77) glosses this particular local *and* international dimension Earlene reached in the end of her turn. Then the anchor gives the floor to Barry Ancelet. The latter evades a direct affiliation by focusing back on the former topic Earlene talked about:

Excerpt 7

77. **DaS:** THE Chirac sympathiser of Louisiana or er: may be two/ including you\ Barry Ancelet\
 78. **BA** {a caption under his name reads: Head of the Linguistic Department University of Lafayette}; Me I would er the er . say a couple of things\ . it is obvious that
 80. David Lettermann and Jay Leno are jokers

The third and last part of this paper will be devoted to the study of the way in which the third guest makes his own stance accountable.

The following excerpt is worthwhile mentioning inasmuch as it shows a direct confrontation between EA on the one hand, and EB and BA, on the other hand. It also permits to examine the principle upon which BA elaborates a public who differs from EB’s and is alternative to EA’s:

Excerpt 8

357. **DaS:** there is one inhabitant in the city of Scot who wishes to stop all the relations with its French
 358. city partner and there is a news item on this at the local television and there are 500 demonstrators
 359. in New-Orleans and there’s no news item on it. well then is it censorship
 360. **EA:** But I doubt I doubt they were 500 what must be understood is that the persons
 361. who share the same opinion as madam and also mister but madam is one of my
 362. good friends mhm in the United States I’ll say there perhaps among the 300 million of
 363. people in the United States there are perhaps three four millions who share their
 364. who agree with them
 365. **DaS:** well yes but it’s a lot three four millions
 366. **EB:** Oh no
 367. **EA:** Not in a country of 300 millions it’s not
 368. **DaS:** yes but one inhabitant of Scot who wants to stop any relation with
 369. **BA:** as for me I don’t accept his count
 370. **EB:** I don’t accept his count either
 371. **BA:** I don’t accept the count
 372. **EB:** (laughs)
 373. **DaS:** yes
 374. **BA:** no that this is that this a count of Fox News
 (laughs)
 375. **EB:** that’s it and as for me and I beware of it
 376. **DaS:** Well it’s normal he’s watching Fox News

377. EB: and I beware of it
 378. BA: If we ask if we asked the question more generally I think there will be more
 379. people than that but as for me I'd also like to know when is it the case that the discourse
 380. that examines that that questions has necessarily become an anti-patriotic one I have
 381. the right of expressing myself of asking to myself why the President does such and such thing
 382. EB: Exactly
 383. BA: why the congress does such and such thing our country is based on that
 384. EA: It is what Bill O'Reilly does yes
 385. BA: from the principles established by the Conservatives anyway

The sequence above first makes observable the modes of definition of the problem and the related population from the positions of each of the panellists, both dimensions (the definition of the problem and the stance of the speaker) being mutually and interactionally worked out.

In that sequence EA considers the issue of the differences in the points of view concerning the opportunity of the military intervention in Iraq in terms of the countable populations who are for or against this operation. According to him the issue is settled by the overwhelming majority in favor of the intervention. This argument, the format of which is considered at the scale of the United States, establishes a continuum with the former one. The former opposed the local media covering offered to a single inhabitant of the city of Scot suggesting to break their ties with their correspondent, a French city, to the absence of media covering of a demonstration that gathered 500 opponents to the war in New Orleans. Compared with the populations configured at this local stage, by EB and BA, the national scale in which Elmo's comparison is located contributes to reducing the significance of the peace demonstration with

respect to the representativeness of such a peace movement within the United States as a whole.

Elmo's stance in that sequence has to be compared with the one adopted in a previous stage of the panel discussion, in which the topic of the demonstration was introduced. I quote it for information:

Excerpt 9

- => 320. EB: Yes but there were a lot of other Americans here in the United States who didn't want
 => 321. to have a war either\ {emphatic gesture of denial by Elmo} and all those people there
 322. even those who took part to the demonstration they haven't- they haven't had a lot of
 323. they haven't had a lot of seconds of minutes at the at the TV
 => 324. BA: You can do this but there is one here {he points at him} there is another there
 325. {he points at Earlene}
 326. EA: I know that
 => 327. EB: and there had had a peace demonstration in the New-Orleans/ there was there was no
 => 328. media that DARED to broadcast this here in Lafayette/ I mean . it's [that is]

It is also in the same sequence that Barry explicitly tells which "camp" he supports: the war opponents's (lines 324-5). We will notice that Earlene initiates this part of the discussion on the basis of a consideration on a federal scope (lines 320-1) before she quotes a case pertaining to Louisiana, that is a local scale example (lines 327-8).

Barry and the constitution of an alternative public to the majority principle

Reacting to Elmo's figures, Barry first indicates his refusal (line 369) and justifies it afterwards in mentioning the name of the TV channel (line 374) where, according to him, those figures come from. This is the

channel where the presentator who initiated the boycott of the French products, and who was first mentioned by Elmo, works. Thus, assessing the majority/minority ratio on the issue of the war in Iraq on the basis of the figures reported by a channel in favor of the war provides enough ground to contest them. We will notice in passing that the identification of the TV channel as having a pro-republican and therefore pro-governmental orientation is fully afforded here by the features made available in the talk.

According to Barry (lines 378-9) the results would be different if they came from other sources. Immediately after having said this, he initiates (lines 379-85) a way of considering the issue that differs from the one which consists in the confrontation between two partisan groups constituted by countable populations. He proceeds to suggest an argument that delimits another kind of public whose legitimacy emanates from a superior principle grounded in a fundamental right acknowledged by the founding texts of the United States that have established it as a political community. In the framework of the debate it is an argument that aims to contest the one used by Elmo. The difference is expressed in the fact that, according to Elmo, the legitimacy of a political standpoint against another is settled by the majority principle and the actual balance of power on a particular issue.

The point of constructing the “public of a problem” on a different basis to the one that more or less prevailed in the debate till this moment becomes obvious in the last part of the discussion:

Excerpt 10

418. **DaS**: hadn't you got the impression even in the hardest period of the war hadn't you
419. got the feeling of watching a bit the same news everywhere

420. **BA**: There was an hesitation I noticed an hesitation of contradicting or
421. despising the government action most of all when the war began because
422. as Earlene said we didn't want we didn't want to put we didn't want to criticize
423. the war while the soldiers came to start the battle that this is this is two
424. different things but now that we see that it begins to take some
425. conclusions and resolutions we begin to ask ourselves where are the weapons where are
426. mhm we begin to ask questions
427. **EB**: that's the evidence
428. **DaS**: yes then but as Philippe said before we asked it to ourselves but we
429. ask it not as loud as we talk about Rudolph the great news it's
430. the arrest of the culprit of the Atlanta's attacks do you think it's normal in a word
431. since rain is about to fall
432. **EB**: yes it's true
433. **BA**: yes but yes but when the Watergate affair broke out it wasn't on the first
434. page

The public configured by Barry is a public separate from power and lobbies. It is a public constituted not by prior membership, but by the freely exercising their faculty of judgment on each situation that requires it (lines 423-6) and, among other things, in terms of who has a legitimacy to question the relationship between the authorities' alleged motives for their actions and the witnessable facts. An autonomous perspective such as this can lead to the incrimination of the government (lines 433-4). This public of investigators is composed by the media and by the citizens. It has been constituted in the present case through the reception of a decision taken by the government in Foreign policy (“*but now that we see that it begins to take some conclusions and resolutions we begin to ask ourselves where are the weapons where are mhm we begin to ask questions*” (lines 424-6)) and of the investigation of its outcomes.

In this framework, the French-American dissent, the core point of the “affected public” depicted by Elmo, loses its relevance. What makes Barry’s stance distinct from that of the two other guests in the panel interview appears mostly at that point. Elmo and Earlene have acted as opposite poles of one another. BA is elsewhere, even if his personal convictions are clearly asserted.

Conclusion

Two main points derive from the data analysis.

First, if we consider the sociological analysis of the notion of a “public”, and especially the study of the public of the media, first of all as a topic of theorisation and formal representations, we lose the sight of the heterogeneity of the circumstances, embodied practices in and through which the familiar accountability of a public is a members’ phenomenon. When considered this way, the “public” is the preliminary condition and the outcome of the methodic accomplishment of a local population busied with its production as a social fact. That is as a social reality provided with characteristics that are independent to those who are engaged in its production and acknowledgment “first time through”.

In this respect, what the participants of the panel interview provide lies in the constitution of various kinds of a public through their practical theorization of the media in relation to the issue of the French American disagreement, which is the topic of the broadcast. This topic takes shape while they reflexively apply it to their local activity and situation.

As a matter of fact, Elmo preserves his stance based on the majority principle all along. The two other guests demonstrate the

existence of a plurality of perspectives on the same issue within the American society and media. The consequence of this is the interactionally produced relativisation of Elmo’s stance. It appears as an opinion among other opinions, even if it is the opinion of the majority in the United States.

The final point I wish to emphasise is that this plurality of perspectives within the American public opinion on a topic of Foreign policy that divides the American and the French governments, is one of the main outcomes of the broadcast, obtained through the confrontation of different and divergent points of view that it has solicited and maintained all along. An established fact of the broadcast for its French audience to whom it is dedicated is, however, the fact that it can be considered to highlight the state of the American public opinion towards France with respect to the Iraqi affair.

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Appendix – The original French transcripts

Excerpt 1

1. **DaS** : Bonjour\ Pour cette dernière émission de la saison « Arrêt Sur Images » s'est
2. DELOCALISEE . Nous- nous avons voulu venir aux ÉTATS-UNIS pour CROISER nos
3. regards avec des Américains\ pour VOIR avec eux la manière dont LEURS médias LEURS
4. télévisions leur ont parlé de la France les images qu'ils leur ont montrées DE LA France/ et
5. pour leur apporter les images que NOUS/ NOS médias NOS télévisions euh nous ont
6. montrées des: Etats-Unis et on va voir que ça va pas TOUJOURS euh leur faire forcément
7. plaisir:/ alors aux Etats-Unis et plus précisément en LOUISIANE à Lafayette/ La Louisiane
8. qui est l'État des Etats-Unis le plus FRANCOPHONE comme chacun sait\ mais pas
9. forcément le plus FRANCOPHILE\ Ça on le verra aussi dans l'émission (...)

Excerpt 2

10. **DaS** : Et deux nouveaux invités nous ont rejoints Candice\
11. **CM** : Oui\ alors d'abord Elmo\ en fait Elmo Authement/ quand même: ce qui nous fait
12. plaisir/ c'est qu'on a aussi la DEUXIEME GRANDE star de la francophonie LOCALE\
13. parce que Elmo vous animez chaque semaine\ une émission:/ pendant laquelle vous
14. essayez d'apprendre aux téléspectateurs de nouveaux mots . vous avez un invité vous
15. recevez un invité vous apprenez de nouveaux mots les téléspectateurs vous appellent et
16. voilà/ et on en apprend un peu plus sur le français\ alors accessoirement vous êtes
17. républicain/ fervent républicain/ vous allez nous dire un peu ce que vous avez pensé des
18. positions de la France ces derniers mois: dans le conflit irakien\ et puis on a aussi avec
19. nous euh Earlene Broussard\ alors Earlene: connaît bien Elmo\ euh ils sont- ils se
20. connaissent bien mais ils sont pas toujours d'accord pour autant tout le temps mais c'est
21. pas grave/
22. **DaS** : Ils sont jamais d'accord puisque Earlene [elle est du bord opposé hein/
23. **CM** : [Bon\ on va dire jamais/] Je voulais pas commencer trop dur mais voilà on va dire

24. jamais\ parce que vous êtes plutôt DEMOCRATE et grande pacifiste et puis
25. accessoirement vous êtes une grande militante euh de la cause euh francophone de la
26. préservation de la culture cajun et vous enseignez à l'université de Bâton-Rouge la culture
27. cajun cette culture cajun voilà\

Excerpt 3

(extrait d'interview avec l'ambassadeur de France, ABC, 31/05/03)

- **3a:**

Ambassadeur : quand j'ai vu par exemple à la cafétéria de la Chambre des représentants des panneaux sur lesquels il était écrit « Freedom fries » plutôt que « French fries » ou encore « Freedom toast » au lieu de « French toast » j'ai dit hé: stop/

- **3b:**

Ambassadeur : quand vous insultez les Français simplement parce qu'ils sont Français eh bien c'est une sorte de campagne raciste

- **3c:**

Journaliste : quel est votre sentiment quand vous regardez la télévision et que vous tombez sur Jay Leno ou David Lettermann qui font des blagues sur les Français/

(extrait d'une émission en public de Jay Leno se moquant de la position des autorités françaises à l'ONU en la décrivant comme l'expression d'un soutien apporté à Saddam Hussein)

Ambassadeur : ce n'est pas drôle parce que cela nourrit le ressentiment les gens en France qui voient ça disent qu'ils ne comprennent pas comment une grande démocratie comme l'Amérique peut procéder à des attaques aussi basses et absurdes nous pouvons avoir des points de vue différents sur la guerre et la paix mais de grâce les frites restent des frites

Excerpt 4

28. **DaS** : Alors on vient d'entendre la réaction de l'ambassadeur de France euh: aux- aux
29. blagues ANTI-FRANCAISES de la télévision américaine . les Jay Leno les Lettermann
30. qui c'est vrai ces dernières semaines ne nous ont pas ménagés euh nous nous les Français\
31. est-ce que vous êtes comme l'ambassadeur de France\ est-ce que vous êtes CHOQUÉ/

32. est-ce que vous pensez que c'est- ce sont des blagues qui font du mal à la relation entre les
 33. deux pays/ ou est-ce que vous dites euh- ou d'abord est-ce que ça vous fait rire/ tout
 34. simplement\
 35. **EA** {en sous-titre, son nom suivi de la mention : militant républicain} : Eh bien euh je
 36. suis- je suis pas choqué\ Je sais que c'est- c'est les Américains qui fait leurs choses euh
 37. qui font leurs choses\ euh ça a commencé ça euh avec un nommé euh . O'Reilly/
 38. **DaS** : Bill O'Reilly un présentateur de Fox News oui
 39. **EA** : [de Fox News:] . I: s'est fâché contre Chirac . je crois avec bonnes raisons\
 (rires)
 40. **CM** :[hum hum]
 (rires)
 41. **DaS** : Selon vous /
 (rires)
 42. **EA** : Et puis et puis c'est lui qu'a commencé l'affaire de BOYCOTT tous les produits
 43. français\ Et: il a- il est- il est sur- à la télévision partout aux Etats-Unis/ Et puis ce qui est
 44. arrivé/ c'est qu'y a beaucoup de des personnes qui ont sui- son- euh ce qu'il voulait faire/
 45. et puis aujourd'hui y a beaucoup des personnes qui . ils sont- ils boycottent les les produits
 46. français\

Excerpt 5

47. **DaS** : Mais il y a vraiment un gros boycott ou ou ou est-ce que c'est pas les médias qui
 48. exagèrent/ puisque David Abiker euh nous racontait mais moi j'peux le confirmer/ on va
 49. dans n'importe quel restaurant et on demande des « French fries »/ parce que les frites en
 50. Amérique on- ça s'appelle comme ça\ des « frites françaises »\j'veux dire tou- tou- on a
 51. toujours eu des des frites/ Personne ne nous [a jamais]\
 52. **EA** : [Mais]
 53. **DaS** : &dit : « Oh la la/ on sert plus de frites françaises\ »
 54. **EA** : Mais ici c'est c'est c'est un pays FRANCOPHONE/ Lafayette\
 55. **DaS** : Oui

Excerpt 6

- * 57. **EA** : euh moi j'ai des amis en France\
 Beaucoup\ Et puis euh . euh . PLUS OU MOINS on
 58. on aime les Français/ on n'aime pas le gouvernement français en c't instant présent\
 mais
 59. on aime les FRANÇAIS/ et: je crois que c'est ça\
 60. **DaS** : D'accord\ et en tous cas Leno et Lettermann ils vous font rire quand ils se moquent
 61. de la France\
 62. **EA** : Mais oui oui
 63. **DaS** : &des Français qui perdent tout le temps les guerres/ des Français qui sont
 64. froussards: ils vous font rire/
 65. **EA** : Mais oui/
 66. **DaS** : Et vous aussi Earlene/
 67. **EB** : Mais: c'est: oui/ Le le but c'est de faire rire\ C'est ça\ C'est plutôt euh des
 68. comédiens/ en sorte\ euh mais: c'est à dire que je suis pas tout à fait d'accord que les
 69. Louisianais les franco-louisianais DETESTENT le gouvernement français\ La plupart des
 70. franco-louisianais ici connaissent MEME PAS euh ce que c'est le gouvernement de
 71. France . Mais EN EFFET moi j'suis une personne qui était tout à fait contente que la
 72. France\ et M. Chirac aient décidé de parler contre la guerre/ Parce que\ moi/ je suis contre
 73. la guerre\ et je trouvais qu'il y avait aucun autre- y avait pas beaucoup de de de chefs
 74. d'État qui se qui s'avançaient à exprimer p.e. les idées que moi/ je- j'avais . Alors/
 75. **DaS** : Voilà\ vous vous êtes une chiraquienne de Lafayette
 (rires)
 76. **EB** : Voilà/ (rires)

Excerpt 7

77. **DaS** : LA chiraquienne de Lafayette ou euh: peut-être deux/ avec vous\ Barry Ancelet\
 78. **BA** {sous son nom on peut lire : directeur du département des langues Université de
 79. Lafayette} : Moi j'voudrais euh le euh . dire deux ou trois choses\ . Une chose est que
 80. David lettermann et Jay Leno sont des farceurs

Excerpt 8

357. **DaS** : il y a UN habitant de Scot qui veut déjumeler et ça fait un sujet à la télévision
 358. locale Et y a cinq cents: manifestants à la Nouvelle Orléans et ça fait pas de sujet . Alors
 359. c'est de la censure/
 360. **EA** : mais j'doute je doute qu'il y avait 500\
 Ce qu'il faut comprendre que les personnes
 361. qui sont . de l'opinion de madame euh et et aussi monsieur . mais madame est d'mes
 => 362. bons amis euh dans les Etats-Unis je dirais qu'il y a peut-être . dans les 300 millions de
 => 363. personnes aux Etats-Unis y a peut-être euh trois quatre millions qui sont de leur de leur-
 => 364. d'accord avec eux
 365. **DaS** : ben oui mais c'est beaucoup/ trois quatre millions
 366. **EB** : [Mais non:]
 367. **EA** : [Pas dans un pays] de 300 millions\
 c'est pas/
 368. **DaS** : oui mais un habitant de Scot [qui veut déjumeler]
 => 369. **BA** : [Moi j'accepte pas] son compte
 370. **EB** : Moi j'accepte pas son compte non plus
 371. **BA** : J'accepte pas le compte\
 372. **EB** : (rires)
 373. **DaS** : oui
 => 374. **BA** : non ça c'est ça c'est un compte de Fox News
 (rires)
 375. **EB** : Voilà/ . Et moi j'me MEFIE
 376. **DaS** : C'est normal/ il regarde Fox News\
 377. **EB** : [et j'me méfie/]
 378. **BA** : si on pose [si on posait] la question plus généralement j'crois qu'il y aurait plus de
 => 379. personnes que ça/. mais moi je veux savoir aussi\
 quand/ est-ce que le discours qui .
 => 380. examine qui qui questionne est devenu NECESSAIREMENT anti-patriotique/ . moi j'ai
 => 381. le droit de m'exprimer de me demander pourquoi mon président fait telle ou telle chose&
 382. **EB** : exactement/
 => 383. **BA** : &pourquoi le congrès fait telle et telle chose . notre pays est BASE là-d'ssus
 384. **EA** : [C'est ce que Bill O'Reilly fait] . oui
 385. **BA** : [d'après les principes des Conservateurs d'ailleurs]

Excerpt 9

=> 320. **EB** : oui mais il y avait beaucoup d'autres Américains ici aux Etats-Unis qui voulaient
 => 321. pas la guerre non plus\ {geste de dénégation appuyé de la part d'Elmo} et tous ces gens là
 322. même les gens qui ont fait de la manifestation on les a pas- ils ont eu pas beaucoup de-
 323. ils ont pas eu beaucoup de secondes de minutes à la à la télévision
 => 324. **BA** : tu peux faire ça mais y en a un ici {il se montre du doigt} y en a un autre là
 325. {il montre Earlene du doigt}
 326. **EA** : j'connais ça
 => 327. **EB** : et il y a eu une manifestation pour la paix à la Nouvelle Orléans/ y a pas y a pas eu
 => 328. de de média qui a OSE envoyer ça ici à Lafayette/ J'veux dire . c'est [c'est à dire]

Excerpt 10

418. **DaS** : vous n'aviez pas l'impression même AU PLUS FORT de la guerre vous n'aviez
 419. pas eu l'impression de voir UN PEU [la même information partout/]
 420. **BA** : [Y avait une hésitation] Moi j'ai constaté une hésitation de de de contredire ou de
 421. de de mépriser l'action du gouvernement surtout quand la guerre a commencé parce que
 422. comme Earlene avait dit on voulait pas on voulait pas mettre on voulait pas critiquer la
 423. guerre tandis que les soldats venaient de commencer à se battre\
 Ça c'est ça c'est deux
 => 424. choses différentes mais à c't heure que on voit que ça commence à à à prendre des
 => 425. conclusions et des résolutions on commence à se demander OÙ SONT les armes où sont
 => 426. euh . on commence à poser des questions
 427. **EB** : la preuve/
 428. **DaS** : oui alors mais comme le disait Philippe tout à l'heure on se le demande mais on se
 429. le demande moins fort que on ne parle de Rudolph hein euh la GRANDE affaire c'est
 430. l'arrestation du coupable des attentats d'Atlanta . ça vous [paraît normal]/ en un mot
 431. parce que la pluie arrive
 432. **EB** : [oui c'est ça]

=> 433. **BA** : oui mais oui mais quand l'affaire
de Watergate a éclaté c'était pas sur la première
=> 434. page