
Habermas and the Public Sphere

edited by Craig Calhoun

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Preface

Efforts to understand the history, foundations, and internal processes of public discourse are gaining importance in several disciplines. They inform democratic theory in political science, the self-reflection of literary and other cultural critics, the modernism/postmodernism debate in philosophy and cultural studies, new approaches in ethics and jurisprudence, and empirical studies in sociology, history, and communications. The debate has been influenced deeply by a variety of Jürgen Habermas's works. Surprisingly absent from the discussion, at least in English, has been one of Habermas's most important and directly relevant early works, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.¹ Though this work has been among Habermas's most influential in German, and though it has been translated into several languages, it has only recently appeared in English, 27 years after publication of the German original.

The translation is propitiously timed. The book is certain to inform scholarship on problems of the relationship of state and civil society, the origins of and prospects for democracy, and the impact of the media. Perhaps even more important, the book's integrated treatment of these and other issues promises to enrich current work by drawing researchers from different disciplines into a common discourse. *Structural Transformation* will also surprise readers of Habermas's later work (including not only his fans but some who deride him as the new Parsons). This is by far the most historically concrete of Habermas's major works, building its theoretical argument

largely out of synthetic empirical discussions of Britain, France, and Germany between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries.

The present volume originated in a September 1989 conference on the occasion of the publication of the English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Coming on the heels of China's prodemocracy movement and in the midst of the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, the conference seemed more than a purely abstract, academic undertaking. In planning the conference, I tried to keep faith with the interdisciplinary nature of Habermas's undertaking. Participants came from backgrounds in history, the social sciences, literature, communications, and philosophy. One of the pleasures of the conference was in seeing how well the discourse sparked by Habermas's book could integrate themes from these various disciplines and from the many interdisciplinary concerns represented by participants: feminism, critical theory, cultural studies, democratic politics. The conference was also marked by a level of engagement and an absence of posturing that convinced many of us there that the public sphere was not altogether lost in the late twentieth century. Of course, this engagement also revealed some of the limits of that public sphere: at dinner one night the rational-critical discourse of twenty-some conferees rose to such a pitch that the proprietor of a local Polish restaurant felt compelled to bang on a glass and assert that the purpose of his establishment was peaceful dining, not loud conversation.

In organizing the conference and preparing this book for publication, I have incurred a number of debts. Tom McCarthy and Moishe Postone not only shaped my own reading of *Structural Transformation* but helped in the planning of the conference and offered useful comments on my introduction. Rekha Mirchandani and Ruth Slavin acted as able, supportive, and knowledgeable assistants throughout the planning and the conference; Ruth Slavin also prepared the index. Kevin Sargent came through with last-minute transportation and logistical assistance. The main financing for the conference came from the Provost's Office of the University of North Carolina as part of its support for the Program in Social Theory and Cross-

Cultural Studies. I am grateful also to my colleagues in that program, who provided an extremely stimulating community within which to prepare for and conduct the conference. The Center for Psychosocial Studies in Chicago contributed financially to the conference but also played an even more central role, since it was my reading of *Structural Transformation* in its seminar on social theory that occasioned the original idea for the conference.

At the conference, commentators played an especially important role, as papers were distributed rather than presented aloud; commentators had to take major responsibility for initiating discussion. Most also took the time to prepare careful, written comments that became the bases of their contributions to this book. Benjamin Lee, who had been an active participant, graciously stepped in to fill the place left when Fredric Jameson was at the last minute unable to complete his commentary. I am also grateful to Thomas Burger, who translated Habermas's essay revisiting the structural transformation of the public sphere for this volume; Leah Florence ably helped edit that translation.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Jürgen Habermas, who took time from a very busy schedule to participate in this conference. I only hope that he found it as valuable as the various participants all found his own contributions. His many comments from the floor and his open and constructive response at the conclusion were immensely clarifying and remarkable for their freedom from vanity and pretense.² Even for those of us who disagreed with him, he remains a model interlocutor of the public sphere.

Notes

1. Only a handful of earlier studies in English saw the significance of this work; the most prominent discussions are in P. Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca, 1982); J. Cohen, "Why More Political Theory," *Telos* 40 (1979): 70-94; and D. Held, *An Introduction to Critical Theory* (London, 1982). *Structural Transformation* gets only very brief discussion in the main English language book on Habermas, T. McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), and is not even mentioned in several others. More recently, *Structural Transformation* has been taken up in important ways in (particularly French) historical studies (see Baker's essay in this volume),

and from there it has spread to other historical discourse. Indeed, in the present book the philosophical writers still seem more inclined to treat Habermas's post-1970 theory of communicative action as his "real" work, with *Structural Transformation* viewed as preliminary, while others are more likely to find attractions in the earlier work and problems in the later (Hohendahl makes a related point in his remarks on Benhabib and McCarthy).

2. An edited selection of these concludes this book.

Habermas and the Public Sphere

Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere

Craig Calhoun

If we attend to the course of conversation in mixed companies consisting not merely of scholars and subtle reasoners but also of business people or women, we notice that besides storytelling and jesting they have another entertainment, namely, arguing.

*Immanuel Kant*¹

Jürgen Habermas's important early book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* asks when and under what conditions the arguments of mixed companies could become authoritative bases for political action. The question, Habermas shows, is a crucial one for democratic theory. What are the social conditions, he asks, for a rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions? This is an inquiry at once into normative ideals and actual history. It focuses upon the bourgeois political life of the seventeenth through mid twentieth centuries, yet it aims to reach beyond the flawed realities of this history to recover something of continuing normative importance. This something is an institutional location for practical reason in public affairs and for the accompanying valid, if often deceptive, claims of formal democracy.

Habermas's social theory is often interpreted as moving over the years from a Hegelian-Marxist orientation to a sort of Kantian orientation. Though not without truth, this view underestimates the unity in his intellectual project. Kant occupies a central place in *Structural Transformation* as the theorist who

offered the fullest articulation of the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere. In this public sphere, practical reason was institutionalized through norms of reasoned discourse in which arguments, not statuses or traditions, were to be decisive. Though Habermas rejects Kantian epistemology and its corollary ahistorical exaltation of philosophy as arbiter and foundation of all science and culture, in his recent work he nonetheless argues that something remains crucial from the Kantian view of modernity. Above all else, this is a notion of "procedural rationality and its ability to give credence to our views in the three areas of objective knowledge, moral-practical insight, and aesthetic judgment."² This procedural rationality is fundamentally a matter of basing judgment on reasons.

Habermas's task in *Structural Transformation* is to develop a critique of this category of bourgeois society showing both (1) its internal tensions and the factors that led to its transformation and partial degeneration and (2) the element of truth and emancipatory potential that it contained despite its ideological misrepresentation and contradictions. The key issues are implicit, if rather lightly expressed, in the quotation above from Kant. In a nutshell, a public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both quality of discourse and quantity of participation. Habermas develops the first requirement in elaborating how the classical bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was constituted around rational critical argument, in which the merits of arguments and not the identities of arguers were crucial. The key point to draw from Kant, then, is the ubiquity of argument; this exercise of reason was the valuable kernel in the flawed ideology of the bourgeois public sphere. Kant betrayed a certain elitism in the way he noted that mere business people and even women might argue, but the emphasis can be put on the positive, since participation in argument is a means of education capable of overcoming the debilities that make some arguers inferior (and thus it is a very different matter from ascribed statuses that permanently exclude some people). On the other hand, reading Kant more negatively, we see that businesspeople and women were not "subtle reasoners," and we come across the dialectic leading to the decline of the public sphere.

The early bourgeois public spheres were composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly educated, propertied men, and they conducted a discourse not only exclusive of others but prejudicial to the interests of those excluded. Yet the transformations of the public sphere that Habermas describes turn largely on its continual expansion to include more and more participants (as well as on the development of large scale social organizations as mediators of individual participation). He suggests that ultimately this inclusivity brought degeneration in the quality of discourse, but he contends that both the requirements of democracy and the nature of contemporary large-scale social organization mean that it is impossible to progress today by going back to an elitist public sphere.

Among the writers represented in this book, as among others responding to *Structural Transformation*, there are those who stress the issue of rational, critical debate and the questions of from whence it came, whether it was ever reality as much as ideal, and why it declined, if indeed it did. There are also those who stress the issue of participation, focusing on the exclusionary character of the early public sphere and the gains won by those who fought to enter it and transform it. Several, including Benhabib, Fraser, Eley, and Ryan, focus on the issue of gender, an exclusion that Habermas noted but one that is only problematically grasped by the Marxism that shaped his own early analysis and that of some of his most prominent early critics.³ The gendered character of the early public sphere is also less clearly linked to the theme of transformation by "massification" than is exclusion on class grounds; inclusion of small numbers of elite, literate women would not have transformed the bourgeois public sphere into a mass. Schudson focuses on the extent of participation as an essential dimension of publicness, a key criterion for evaluating a public sphere. At the same time he raises questions about whether earlier constitutions of the public sphere really produced more rational-critical debate than those of recent years. Indeed, to some contemporary theorists, the very emphasis on rational-critical debate implies an incapacity to deal fairly with "identity politics" and concerns for difference. It is with this in mind that Warner, for example, focuses on publicity in general, rather than on its intersection

with rational-critical debate. Garnham and Warner, somewhat relatedly, focus on Habermas's fairly wholesale incorporation of the Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture, and they raise questions about whether his understanding of modern mass media is adequate. In all these cases, and they are just a small sampling, one of the challenges of reading and responding to *Structural Transformation* is to keep fully in mind Habermas's two-sided constitution of the category of public sphere as simultaneously about the quality or form of rational-critical discourse and the quantity of, or openness to, popular participation. This informs not just his definition but his whole approach, inasmuch as he attempts to recover the enduringly valuable ideal of the bourgeois public sphere from its historically contradictory and partial realization.

In this introductory essay I propose mainly to offer a synopsis of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* for the benefit of readers not familiar with that work. I will briefly situate *Structural Transformation* in the larger trajectory of Habermas's intellectual project and will add a few critical comments and elaborations of my own. Since the papers in this book speak for themselves and are the subject of detailed commentaries printed here, I will introduce them only very briefly.

1

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere was born in controversy and is likely to continue to spark controversy. It originated as Habermas's *Habilitationschrift* (thesis for the post-doctoral qualification required of German professors) and was intended for submission to Max Horkheimer (and Theodor Adorno) at Frankfurt. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, apparently thought it at once insufficiently critical of the illusions and dangerous tendencies of an Enlightenment conception of democratic public life, especially in mass society, and too radical in its politically focused call for an attempt to go beyond liberal constitutional protections in pursuit of truer democracy. Habermas successfully submitted it to Wolfgang Abendroth at Marburg.⁴ Influential in the early years of the student movement, *Structural Transformation* soon drew criticism from that

direction as well when young leftists attacked it for focusing on the bourgeois public sphere to the exclusion of the proletarian one, for an inadequate grasp of everyday life (including mass media) in advanced capitalism, and for exaggerating the emancipatory potential in the idealized bourgeois public sphere.⁵ Habermas himself was apparently unhappy with the work, or at least conscious of the large amount of empirical research done on themes relevant to it during the 1960s, for one of the reasons for the delayed translation was that he had intended for years to rework this text. He never did, but readers may be surprised how many of Habermas's later themes are prefigured (and often given their most sociological formulation and historically specific treatment) in this work. It also enters into an interesting and important dialogue with other key work of the mid twentieth century, notably that of Hannah Arendt.⁶ And the book remains extraordinarily suggestive, still the most significant modern work on its subject.

That subject is the historically specific phenomenon of the bourgeois public sphere created out of the relations between capitalism and the state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Habermas sets out to establish what the category of public meant in bourgeois society and how its meaning and material operation were transformed in the centuries after its constitution. The motivation for this lies largely in an attempt to revive the progressive potential in "formal" democracy and law and thus to counterbalance their neglect in the Marxist tradition.⁷ More specifically, it is part of Habermas's lifelong effort to reground the Frankfurt School project of critical theory in order to get out of the pessimistic cul de sac in which Horkheimer and Adorno found themselves in the postwar era. In a nutshell, the attempt to ground a vision of societal transformation and human emancipation on the proletariat has foundered. The experience of fascism and the rise of the cultural industry and "engineered consent" seemed to indicate that there was no historical subject on which critics might pin their hopes for transcending capitalism. Habermas turned away from the search for such a subject and developed an account of intersubjective communicative processes and their emancipatory potential in place of any philosophy (or politics)

of the subject. At the same time Habermas sought to incorporate into his theory a full appreciation of the implications of changes that had occurred in both capitalism and state structures through the period of Western modernity. The rise of the large corporation, the problematization of consumption (as a response to successful increases in productive capacity), the development of the social-welfare state and mass democracy all altered both the conditions that framed the view of classical Marxism and the conditions of bourgeois society itself. In this respect, *Structural Transformation* also parallels much of the older Frankfurt School's analysis of the transition from liberal to "organized" capitalism.

The importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration. Public discourse (and what Habermas later and more generally calls communicative action) is a possible mode of coordination of human life, as are state power and market economies. But money and power are non-discursive modes of coordination, as Habermas's later theory stresses; they offer no intrinsic openings to the identification of reason and will, and they suffer from tendencies toward domination and reification. State and economy are thus both crucial topics for and rivals of the democratic public sphere.

Structural Transformation approaches these concerns first by trying to develop a historically specific understanding of the modern category of publicness. The bourgeois public sphere is "a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, ideal typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations" (p. xvii).⁸ The Enlightenment category thus is different from its classical Greek ancestor, just as it is different from its transformed contemporary descendant. Greek thought made a strong division between public and private affairs. But in the private realm of the *oikos*, the Greek head of a household confronted only necessity. Freedom was to be found in public, though of course the public realm of autonomous citizens rested on the private autonomy of each as master of a household (most of whose members were ex-

cluded from the public). The bourgeois public sphere that Habermas explores shares some features with this picture, but it reverses a key element. It is defined as the public of *private* individuals who join in debate of issues bearing on state authority. Unlike the Greek conception, individuals are here understood to be formed primarily in the private realm, including the family. Moreover, the private realm is understood as one of freedom that has to be defended against the domination of the state.⁹

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notion developed alongside the rise and transformation of the modern state, as well as on the basis of capitalist economic activity. The modern state constituted the public as a specific realm again (as had the Greek polis). In the middle ages, publicness had been more of a "status attribute" (p. 7). It was a characteristic of the ruler, borne even by his person. In a world of kings who could say "L'état, c'est moi," the public of a country did not exist apart from a king and his court. This was the heyday of "representative publicity," and lordship was represented "not for but 'before' the people" (p. 8). Gradually, however, court society developed into the new sort of sociability of eighteenth-century salons. Aristocrats played leading roles in the early bourgeois public sphere. Habermas does not mean to suggest that what made the public sphere bourgeois was simply the class composition of its members.¹⁰ Rather, it was *society* that was bourgeois, and bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere.¹¹ The new sociability, together with the rational-critical discourse that grew in the salons (and coffee houses and other places), depended on the rise of national and territorial power states on the basis of the early capitalist commercial economy. This process led to an idea of society separate from the ruler (or the state) and of a private realm separate from the public.

This notion of civil society is basic to Habermas's account of the public sphere, and his account in turn offers a great deal of richness to current discussions of civil society that come close to equating it with the private market.¹² Civil society, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, developed as "the genuine domain of private autonomy [that] stood opposed to the state" (p. 12). Capitalist market economies formed the basis of

this civil society, but it included a good deal more than that. It included institutions of sociability and discourse only loosely related to the economy. Transformations of the economy nonetheless produced transformations in all of civil society.

In an account that partially prefigures Benedict Anderson's analysis of "print capitalism," Habermas shows the intimate involvement of print media in the early extensions of market economies beyond local arenas.¹³ Long-distance trade, for example, meant a traffic in news almost as immediately as a traffic in commodities. Merchants needed information about prices and demand, but the newsletters that supplied those needs very quickly began to carry other sorts of information as well. The same processes helped to engender both a more widespread literacy and an approach to the printed word as a source of currently significant "public" information. These developments became revolutionary in the era of mercantilism, when town economies were extended into national territories and the modern state grew up to administer these territories. The development of the state bureaucracies as agents of permanent administration, buttressed by standing armies, created a new sphere of public authority. "Now continuous state activity corresponded to the continuity of contact among those trafficking in commodities and news (stock market, press)" (p. 18). Public authority thus was consolidated into a palpable object distinct from the representative publicity of the ruler and the older estates as well as from the common people, who were excluded from it. "'Public' in this narrower sense was synonymous with 'state-related'" (p. 18). But the public sphere was not coterminous with the state apparatus, for it included all those who might join in a discussion of the issues raised by the administration of the state. The participants in this discussion included agents of the state and private citizens.

The public sphere, like civil society in general, could only be conceptualized in this full sense once the state was constituted as an *impersonal* locus of authority. Unlike the ancient notion of the public, therefore, the modern notion depended on the possibility of counterposing state and society. Here Habermas joins with Arendt in stressing how a private sphere of society could take on a public relevance. "Civil society came into ex-

istence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority" (p. 19). It became possible to recognize society in the relationships and organizations created for sustaining life and to bring these into public relevance by bringing them forward as interests for a public discussion and/or the action of the state.¹⁴ In this way a certain educated elite came to think of itself as constituting the public and thereby transformed the abstract notion of the *publicum* as counterpart to public authority into a much more concrete set of practices. The members of this elite public began to see themselves through this category not just as the object of state actions but as the opponent of public authority.

Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became "critical" also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason. (P. 24)

The last phrase of the quote is crucial. The bourgeois public sphere institutionalized, according to Habermas, not just a set of interests and an opposition between state and society but a practice of rational-critical discourse on political matters. Thus, for example, critical reasoning entered the press in the early eighteenth century, supplementing the news with learned articles and quickly creating a new genre of periodical. The very idea of the public was based on the notion of a general interest sufficiently basic that discourse about it need not be distorted by particular interests (at least in principle) and could be a matter of rational approach to an objective order, that is to say, of truth.

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason. (P. 27)

2

With the general category of public sphere established, we can now look at several of Habermas's more specific arguments about its transformations. After its introductory section, *Structural Transformation* is organized as a repeated series of themes: social structure, political functions, and ideology are analyzed first for the constitution of the classical sphere and then for its degenerative transformation.¹⁵ Though the book has perhaps been more often read for its account of the degeneration of the public sphere, the earlier argument about its constitution is both more original and more interesting. Throughout, one sees precursors of themes familiar to readers of Habermas's later work.

Two processes helped to institutionalize the public sphere as it developed out of court society and urban corporations in the early modern era. First, the family was reconstituted as an intimate sphere that grounded both the evaluative affirmation of ordinary life and of economic activity alluded to above and the participation of its patriarchal head in the public sphere. Second, the public sphere was initially constituted in the world of letters, which paved the way for that oriented to politics. The two processes were intertwined. For example, early novels helped to circulate a vision of intimate sentimentality, communicating to the members of the literary public sphere just how they should understand the heart of private life.

The intimate sphere figures importantly in Habermas's account: "The public's understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain. Historically, the latter was the source of privateness in the modern sense of a saturated and free interiority" (p. 28). In the new conjugal family, "private" meant not merely the burden of necessity, as in classical Greece, and not only the property-owning privacy of economic control either. Rather, the family was understood as at least partially differentiated from material reproduction. Just as state and society were split, so economy and family (the intimate sphere) were distinguished within the private realm. The subjectivity the

family nurtured was "audience-oriented" because it was played out in dramas staged for the other members of the family (mirroring the ideal types offered by the sentimental literature of the period).

In this way the reconceived family helped lead to a reconceptualization of humanity itself.¹⁶ It emphasized, first off, the autonomy of its head. This rested on the private ownership of property, but the notion of the intimate family excluded that from its core, thus providing a key element of the false consciousness of the bourgeois. The family was believed to be independent of the market, "whereas in truth it was profoundly caught up in the requirements of the market. The ambivalence of the family as an agent of society yet simultaneously as the anticipated emancipation from society manifested itself in the situation of the family members: on the one hand, they were held together by patriarchal authority; on the other, they were bound to one another by human closeness. As a privatized individual, the bourgeois was two things in one: owner of goods and persons and one human being among others, i.e., *bourgeois* and *homme*" (p. 55). The family was idealized as the purely human realm of "intimate relationships between human beings who, under the aegis of the family, were nothing more than human" (p. 48). At the same time, the intimacy of the family promised a liberation from the constraints of what existed, from necessity, because it was a realm of pure interiority following its own laws and not any external purpose. "In this specific notion of humanity a conception of what existed was promulgated within the bourgeois world which promised redemption from the constraint of what existed without escaping into a transcendental realm. This conception's transcendence of what was immanent was the element of truth that raised bourgeois ideology above ideology itself, most fundamentally in that area where the experience of 'humanity' originated" (p. 48). The family thus provided a crucial basis for the immanent critique of the bourgeois public sphere itself, for it taught that there was something essential to humanness that economic or other status could not take away.¹⁷

Literature of the period, especially sentimental early novels like Richardson's *Pamela*, relied on and reinforced this same

sense of humanness. This was a matter not just of their content but of the author-reader relationship developed by the genre: "The relations between author, work, and public changed. They became intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was 'human,' in self-knowledge, and in empathy" (p. 50). At the same time, the literary public sphere helped to develop the distinctively modern idea of culture as an autonomous realm: "Inasmuch as culture became a commodity and thus finally evolved into 'culture' in the specific sense (as something that pretends to exist merely for its own sake), it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself" (p. 29).

Beyond this subjectivity, the greatest contributions of the literary public sphere to the political sphere lay in the development of institutional bases. These ranged from meeting places to journals to webs of social relationships. Thus early British businessmen met in coffee houses to discuss matters of trade, including the "news," which was coming into ever-wider circulation. London had 3,000 coffee houses by the first decade of the eighteenth century, each with a core of regulars. The conversation of these little circles branched out into affairs of state administration and politics. Journals of opinion were created, which linked the thousands of smaller circles in London and throughout the country. These were often based at particular coffee houses and replicated in their contents the style of convivial exchange. In France, salons, public institutions located in private homes, played a crucial role, bridging a literary public sphere dominated by aristocrats with the emergent bourgeois political public sphere.¹⁸ In Germany, table societies drew together especially academics but also other sorts of people. The public outside these institutions was very small.

In all these instances, several features were crucial. The first and perhaps most basic was "a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether" (p. 36). Of course, this was not fully realized, but the idea had an importance of its own.¹⁹ This "mutual willingness to accept the given roles and simultaneously to suspend their reality was based on the justifiable trust that within the

public—presupposing its shared class interest—friend-or-foe relations were in fact impossible" (p. 131). The notion of common interest in truth or right policy thus undergirded the "bracketing" of status differences. This was in turn linked to a second crucial feature, the notion that rational argument was the sole arbiter of any issue.²⁰ However often the norm was breached, the idea that the best rational argument and not the identity of the speaker was supposed to carry the day was institutionalized as an available claim. Third, "discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned" (p. 36). All sorts of topics over which church and state authorities had hitherto exercised a virtual monopoly of interpretation were opened to discussion, inasmuch as the public defined its discourse as focusing on all matters of common concern. Fourth, the emerging public established itself as inclusive in principle. Anyone with access to cultural products—books, plays, journals—had at least a potential claim on the attention of the culture-debating public. "However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion" (p. 37).

This literary public sphere produced the practice of literary criticism (see also Hohendahl 1982). The division between critics and "mere readers" was not initially sharp, for "when reviewers of the caliber of Schiller and Schlegel did not regard themselves as too good for voluminous incidental activity of this sort, the lay judgment of the private people with an interest in literature had been institutionalized" (p. 167). It thus institutionalized a form of rational-critical discourse about objects of common concern that could be carried over directly into political discussion: "The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with

institutions of the public and with forums for discussion" (p. 51). A central topic for the transformational discourse was the question of absolute sovereignty versus the rule of general, abstract, depersonalized laws. The new public sphere of civil society made its initial political mark through commitment to the latter, and assertion of "itself (i.e., public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law" (p. 54).

3

This argument is most famously that between Hobbes and those, such as Locke and Montesquieu, who would limit or qualify absolute sovereignty. Its primary locus was Britain, and indeed, Britain serves Habermas as the model case of the development of the public sphere. It was there, for example, that the elimination of the institution of censorship first marked a new stage in the development of public discourse. The free provision of information was, alongside education, crucial to putting the public in a position to arrive at a considered, rather than merely a common, opinion. It was in Britain too, after the Glorious Revolution, that national-level political opposition shifted away from resort to violence, so that "through the critical debate of the public, it took the form of a permanent controversy between the governing party and the opposition" (p. 64).

In France a public that critically debated political issues arose only near the middle of the eighteenth century. Even then it lacked the capacity to institutionalize its critical impulses until the Revolution. There was nothing like the British Parliament, with its attendant political press, nor was the state amenable to any notion of a "loyal opposition." Only in the years just before the Revolution did the philosophes turn their critical attention from art, literature, and religion to politics. The founding of clubs and journals focused on economic policy toward English inspiration in the 1770s. The physiocrats were central, and they were the first to combine activity in this public discourse and membership in the government—a sign that public opinion was becoming effective. The occasion for this, as for the summoning of the Estates General, was the government's grow-

ing financial crisis. Revolution followed quickly, and from the beginning it was a matter of bourgeois public discourse as much as mob action. The clubs played a central role, and almost overnight an extraordinary range of publications sprang up. The Constitution of 1791 declared that "the free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man" (p. 70).

Germany lagged behind France. There "the public's rational-critical debate of political matters took place predominantly in the private gatherings of the bourgeoisie" (p. 72). The nobility remained completely dependent on the courts and thus failed to develop strong enough lines of communication with bourgeois intellectuals to participate in creating a strong civil society separate from the state. Nonetheless, journals with political content proliferated and were debated in reading societies, even if the political efficacy of this public remained limited.

In all three settings some degree of institutional basis for a public sphere was established. Habermas stresses the economic foundations: "The social precondition for this 'developed' bourgeois public sphere was a market that, tending to be liberalized, made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of civil society" (p. 74). This institutionalization of a new and stronger sense of privacy as free control of productive property was a crucial contribution of capitalism to the public sphere. It was reflected on the Continent in the codification of civil law, where basic private freedoms were guaranteed. At the same time a fundamental parity among persons was established, corresponding to that among owners of commodities in the market and among educated individuals in the public sphere. Though not all people were full legal subjects, all such legal subjects were joined in a more or less undifferentiated category of persons.²¹ The extension of these notions into the doctrines of laissez-faire and even free trade among nations brought the development of "civil society as the private sphere emancipated from public authority" to its fullest extent, though it lasted only for "one blissful moment in the long history of capitalist development" (p. 79).

Conceptually, from the physiocrats through classical economists, it was crucial that the laws of the market were seen as a natural order. Hence, civil society could be understood as neutral regarding power and domination, and its discourse only a matter of discovering the right policies for allowing its full development: "The constitutional state predicated on civil rights pretended, on the basis of an effective public sphere, to be an organization of public power ensuring the latter's subordination to the needs of a private sphere itself taken to be neutralized as regards power and domination. Thus the constitutional norms implied a model of civil society that by no means corresponded to its reality" (p. 84). This contradiction would in time become transformative. In this period of its classical flowering, however, the public still understood itself as using its critical debate not to achieve compromises or to exercise power, but rather to discover laws immanent to its form of society. "The 'domination' of the public, according to its own idea, was an order in which domination itself was dissolved. . . . Public debate was supposed to transform *voluntas* into a *ratio* that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all" (pp. 82–83). Here we see reflected not only economic conditions but also the idea of formless or pure humanity developed out of the bourgeois family's conjugal sphere.

The public sphere in this era remained rooted in the world of letters even as it assumed political functions. It took that older, elite public as constitutive of the whole relevant citizenry. Education and property ownership were its two criteria for admission. Restrictions of the franchise did not have to be viewed as restrictions of the public sphere but could be interpreted rather as "mere legal ratification of a status attained economically in the private sphere" (p. 85). These qualifications defined a "man," that is, the fully capable and autonomous person competent to enter into the rational-critical discourse about the general interest. "For the private person, there was no break between *homme* and *citoyen*, as long as the *homme* was simultaneously an owner of private property who as *citoyen* was to protect the stability of the property order as a private one"

(p. 87). So central was this phenomenon that Habermas (echoing stresses of the young Marx) sees in it the origin of ideology itself, in the strong sense that grounds immanent critique as well as describes false consciousness:

If ideologies are not only manifestations of the socially necessary consciousness in its essential falsity, if there is an aspect to them that can lay a claim to truth inasmuch as it transcends the status quo in utopian fashion, even if only for purposes of justification, then ideology exists at all only from this period on. Its origin would be the identification of "property owner" with "human being as such" in the role accruing to private people as members of the public in the political public sphere of the bourgeois constitutional state. (P. 88)

4

In chapter 4 Habermas turns to ideology, especially in the realm of the most "advanced" ideas and greatest thinkers of the time. Here the movement is essentially from Hobbes through Locke, the physiocrats, and Rousseau to Kant and then on to Hegel, Marx, Mill, and Tocqueville. What is being developed and then critiqued is a conception of public opinion as a reasoned form of access to truth. This replaces the notions of public opinion as the "mere opinion" (or arbitrary views) of isolated individuals taken in the aggregate, the reputation that emerges in the mirror of dispersed opinions, and the opinion of the "common" sort of people. Rather, public opinion comes to refer more positively to the views held by those who join in rational-critical debate on an issue.

Despite his unpublic doctrine of absolute sovereignty, Hobbes did bring new respect to opinion by identifying it with conscience (and consciousness). His very devaluation of religious conviction meant a corresponding upward revaluation of other opinion. But it was Locke who fully freed opinion from the taint of pure prejudice. Reason and criticism constructed an educated opinion that was fundamentally different from the "mere" opinion that had been seen as so vulgar. The physiocrats moved still further along this path of separating critique from opinion, at least for the enlightened public.

Rousseau, of course, was more complicated. "The physiocrats spoke out in favor of an absolutism complemented by a public sphere that was a place of critical activity; Rousseau wanted democracy without public debate" (p. 99). The general will was nonetheless a sort of public opinion, a consensus of hearts rather than arguments. However polarized in substance, both sides followed Guizot's injunction "to seek after truth, and to tell it to power" (quoted on p. 101). Since truth was the object of critical reflection and the general will alike, these could be interpreted as in a sense apolitical. The task was to rationalize politics in the name of morality as well as truth, not simply to engage in it.

In this pursuit, Kant became the paradigmatic voice, following Rousseau on the idea of the will of the whole people but the philosophes and the British Enlightenment thinkers on the centrality of critical reason. His was the most fully developed philosophy of the bourgeois public sphere. By themselves, Kant reasoned in "What Is Enlightenment?" individuals would have a hard time working their way out of tutelage, the inability to make use of understanding without external direction. Enlightenment became more possible in free public discourse. "In regard to enlightenment, therefore, thinking for oneself seemed to coincide with thinking aloud and the use of reason with its public use" (p. 104). Communication and criticism were central.²² Thus even Kantian notions of universality, cosmopolitanism, and science were constituted in the communication of rational beings. When Kant called on Enlightenment thinkers to address the "world," or to be men of the world, the public sphere was essential to its definition; the very unity and dignity of the human species was revealed, in part, by its capacity to join in public discourse: "'World' here pointed to humanity as a species, but in that guise in which its unity presented itself in appearance: the world of a critically debating reading public that at the time was just evolving within the broader bourgeois strata" (p. 106). Engagement in the public sphere was the means by which the conflicting private wills of rational people could be brought into harmony. This could happen because society, particularly the private economy, necessarily gave rise to the conditions for turning politics into

morality. *Bourgeois* could be conflated with *homme* because the private economy was a natural order, so constructed that justice was immanent in free commerce.²³

If Kant offered the fullest philosophy of bourgeois publicness, Hegel offered the first critique, denouncing the public of civil society as ideology. Public opinion had the form of common sense; it was dispersed among people in the form of prejudices, not true knowledge; it took the fortuitous for the permanent. "Hegel took the teeth out of the idea of the public sphere of civil society; for anarchic and antagonistic civil society did not constitute the public sphere, emancipated from domination and insulated from the interference of power, in which autonomous private people related to one another" (p. 122). This did not provide the basis for transforming political authority into rational authority, force or interest into reason. Civil society could not dispense with domination but on the contrary required it because of a tendency toward disintegration.

It was only a short step to Marx's denunciation of public opinion as a mask for bourgeois class interests. "The public sphere with which Marx saw himself confronted contradicted its own principle of universal accessibility—the public could no longer claim to be identical with the nation, civil society with all of society" (p. 124). Similarly, of course, property owners could not be seen as equivalent to human beings in general. Indeed, the very division of state and society entailed an alienating division of the person into public and private. The private realm did not offer true respite from public tensions, for the family and the intimate sphere in general were marked by the necessity of labor, patriarchal property ownership, and domination. In Marx's vision, the state would be absorbed into society, and rational planning would enable the development of "an intimate sphere set free from economic functions" (p. 129). In this vision, interaction would be emancipated from the demands of social labor, and private relationships would be freed from the need for any legal regulations. Behind the Marxist view, however, was still the idea of a natural order—Marx disagreed not with the general idea but only with the

claim that bourgeois civil society constituted the natural order that could give rise to harmonious human relationships.

Liberals like Mill and Tocqueville were willing, Habermas suggests, to take the step of discarding the notion of an underlying natural order adequate to ground a philosophy of history in which politics would become morality. Accepting the disharmony of much of capitalist civil society, the liberalism they developed sought protections and ameliorations, relative not perfect freedom. The political public sphere, in their account, did not rest on any natural basis, though some form of the bourgeois public sphere did need to be defended through common sense, prudence, and realism.²⁴ The key issue that they confronted was how to maintain the virtues of public life while its size increased and its composition changed. This democratization of the public sphere was an inevitable result of the tension between its original class limitations and its principled openness. "Electoral reform was the topic of the nineteenth century: no longer the principle of publicity as such, as had been true in the eighteenth century, but of the enlargement of the public" (p. 133). As the public was enlarged, however, public opinion itself came to seem a threat, particularly when it seemed to involve a compulsion toward conformity more than critical discourse. Thus it was that both Mill and Tocqueville worried, for example, about protecting minorities from persecution by majorities. This was actually a matter, in part, of protecting the possibility of free, critical thought from public opinion itself. Here we clearly see an initial theoretical response to the structural transformation of the public sphere.²⁵

Mill and Tocqueville thus accepted an individualism without a comparable notion of the whole and resigned themselves to a more imperfect world.

This resignation before the inability to resolve rationally the competition of interests in the public sphere was disguised as perspectivist epistemology: because the particular interests were no longer measured against the general, the opinions into which they were ideologically transposed possessed an irreducible kernel of faith. . . . The unity of reason and of public opinion lacked the objective guarantee

of a concordance of interests existing in society, the rational demonstrability of a universal interest as such. (P. 135)

The "principle" of the public sphere, critical public discourse, seemed to lose in strength in proportion as it extended as a sphere, partly because its very foundations in the private realm were undermined.

5

The undermining of the foundations of the public sphere came about, Habermas suggests, through a "refeudalization" of society. "The model of the bourgeois public sphere presupposed strict separation of the public from the private realm in such a way that the public sphere, made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state, was itself considered part of the private realm" (pp. 175–176). Structural transformation came about, however, as private organizations began increasingly to assume public power on the one hand, while the state penetrated the private realm on the other. State and society, once distinct, became interlocked. The public sphere was necessarily transformed as the distinction between public and private realms blurred, the equation between the intimate sphere and private life broke down with a polarization of family and economic society, rational-critical debate gave way to the consumption of culture.

The blurring of relations between private and public involved centrally the loss of the notion that private life (family, economy) created autonomous, relatively equal persons who in public discourse might address the general or public interest. First, the inequalities always present in civil society ceased to be "bracketed" and became instead the basis of discussion and action. This happened both because these inequalities grew greater (as in the case of giant corporations) and because the inclusion of more people in the public sphere made it impossible to escape addressing the class divisions of civil society (because, for example, some of these people were excluded from the franchise or lacked the private ownership of the means of production that were the basis of the putative auton-

omy of *bourgeois* and *homme*). Second and relatedly, the notion of an objective general interest was replaced, even ideally, with one of a fairly negotiated compromise among interests.²⁶ The functioning of the public sphere thus shifted from rational-critical debate to negotiation. "The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties, and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation" (p. 176). This second process marked the beginning of the movement toward the welfare state as interest groups in civil society used the public sphere to demand "social rights"—the services or protection of the state. Attempts were made, in other words, to transfer to a political level those conflicts, e.g., between workers and employers, that were not resolvable in the private sphere alone. "The more society became transparent as a mere nexus of coercive constraints, the more urgent became the need for a strong state" (p. 144). But "the occupation of the political public sphere by the unpropertied masses led to an interlocking of state and society which [contrary to Marx's expectations] removed from the new public sphere its former basis without supplying a new one" (p. 177).

Civil society was changed also by the establishment of a world of work as a sphere of its own right between the public and private realms. Large organizations, both public and private, played the central role in separating work from the purely private sphere of the household or the paternalistically managed workplace. The private sphere in turn was reduced to the family. An "externalization of what is declared to be the inner life" occurred. "To the extent that private people withdrew from their socially controlled roles as property owners into the purely 'personal' ones of their noncommittal use of leisure time, they came directly under the influence of semi-public authorities, without the protection of an institutionally respected domestic domain" (p. 159).²⁷

At the same time, and largely as a consequence of these trends, the public sphere was turned into a sham semblance of its former self. The key tendency was to replace the shared,

critical activity of public discourse by a more passive culture consumption on the one hand and an apolitical sociability on the other.²⁸ Habermas's account here is typical of the critique of mass culture in which members of the Frankfurt School had already played a prominent role. He also borrows descriptions of suburban social life from William H. Whyte's *Organization Man* to illustrate the pursuit of "groupness" as an end in itself. Thus participants in social gatherings lost the sense of the pleasures and virtues of argument that Kant and the members of the eighteenth-century public sphere had made central to public life: "In the course of our century, the bourgeois forms of sociability have found substitutes that have one tendency in common despite their regional and national diversity: abstinence from literary and political debate. On the new model the convivial discussion among individuals gave way to more or less noncommittal group activities" (p. 163). This did not mean that there was not a sharing of culture, only that it was a joint consumption rather than a more active participation in mutual critique (and production). "Individual satisfaction of needs might be achieved in a public fashion, namely, in the company of many others; but a public sphere itself did not emerge from such a situation. . . . Rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode" (p. 161). Where works of literature, for example, had previously been appropriated not just through individual reading but through group discussion and the critical discourse of literary publications, the modern media and the modern style of appropriation "removed the ground for a communication about what has been appropriated" (p. 163).²⁹ Thus, "the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (p. 171).

What happened was that in the expansion of access, the form of participation was fatally altered. Innovations that opened economic access to the public sphere and the realm of "high" culture, e.g., cheaper editions of books (not to mention higher incomes of readers), are worthy of praise. But alongside these there has been a psychological facilitation of access by lowering the threshold capacity required for appreciation or participa-

tion. "Serious involvement with culture produces facility, while the consumption of mass culture leaves no lasting trace; it affords a kind of experience which is not cumulative but regressive" (p. 166). The distinction between "serious involvement" and "consumption of mass culture" is perhaps overdrawn, if familiar; that between economically opening access and psychologically facilitating it is clearer. It is surprising, however, that Habermas does not consider the various ways in which access was opened that do not fall into either category—the extension of public education and mass literacy, for example, or the increase in working-class leisure time.³⁰ In any case, what he is charting is simultaneously the depoliticization of the public sphere and its impoverishment by removal of critical discourse. "In relation to the expansion of the news-reading public, therefore, the press that submitted political issues to critical discussion in the long run lost its influence. Instead, the culture-consuming public whose inheritance derived from the public sphere in the world of letters more than from that in the political realm attained a remarkable dominance" (p. 169).

The eighteenth-century public sphere had been constituted in the discourse of private persons but was based on a distinction between the private activities that formed them for public life and provided its motivations and that public life itself. By contrast, "the sphere generated by the mass media has taken on the traits of a secondary realm of intimacy" (p. 172). We experience radio, film, and television communication with an immediacy far greater than that characteristic of the printed word.³¹ One of the effects of this on public discourse is that "bracketing" personal attributes and concentrating on the rational-critical argument becomes more difficult. This feeds into a more general "sentimentality toward persons and corresponding cynicism toward institutions," which curtails "subjective capacity for rational criticism of public authority, even where it might objectively still be possible" (p. 172). A personalized politics revives representative publicity by making candidates into media stars.³² At the same time the new public-relations industry finds it easy to engineer consent among the consumers of mass culture. Even states must address citizens

as consumers when they, like private corporations or political candidates, seek to cultivate an "uncommitted friendly disposition" (p. 195). This of course involves an element of false consciousness in which the degenerate mass public sphere understands itself on the model of its more effective predecessor: "The awakened readiness of the consumers involves the false consciousness that as critically reflecting private people they contribute responsibly to public opinion" (p. 194). Even legislatures are affected, as they become arenas for staged displays aimed at persuading the masses rather than forums for critical debate among their members. The mass-consumption mentality substitutes a pursuit of acclamation for the development of rational-critical consensus.³³

The weakening of the public is not just a matter of new (lower class) entrants being mere consumers or substandard participants. On the contrary, Habermas asserts (with some empirical evidence), the consumption of mass culture increases with wealth, status, and urbanization. The most that can be said is that the consumption levels are highest for those whose wealth has outstripped their education. And the result is that the public sphere as a whole is transformed, not just diluted around the edges.

This transformation involves a literal disintegration. With the loss of a notion of general interest and the rise of a consumption orientation, the members of the public sphere lose their common ground. The consumption orientation of mass culture produces a proliferation of products designed to please various tastes. Not only are these not subjected, according to Habermas, to much critical discussion; none of them reaches the whole of the public. "Of Richardson's *Pamela* it could be said that it was read by the entire public, that is, by 'everyone' who could read at all" (p. 174). Nothing attains such general currency today.³⁴ This break involves not only segmentation of audiences but transformation of the once intimate relationship between cultural producers and consumers. It is, Habermas argues, precisely with this break that intellectuals begin to form a distinct stratum of those who produce culture and its critical commentaries. Once they are so distinguished, they have to explain to themselves their isolation from the public of the

educated bourgeoisie. The ideology of the free-floating intelligentsia responds to precisely this predicament. At the same time, however, even the elite of producers and critics undergoes a specialization that undercuts its public function. "The sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason has been shattered; the public is split apart into minorities of specialists [e.g., lawyers, academics] who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical" (p. 175).

6

By means of these transformations, the public sphere has become more an arena for advertising than a setting for rational-critical debate. Legislators stage displays for constituents. Special-interest organizations use publicity work to increase the prestige of their own positions, without making the topics to which those positions refer subjects of genuine public debate. The media are used to create occasions for consumers to identify with the public positions or personas of others. All this amounts to the return of a version of representative publicity, to which the public responds by acclamation, or the withholding of acclamation, rather than critical discourse. In this respect, the latter sections of *Structural Transformation* directly foreshadow Habermas's arguments in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975). The public sphere becomes a setting for states and corporate actors to develop legitimacy not by responding appropriately to an independent and critical public but by seeking to instill in social actors motivations that conform to the needs of the overall system dominated by those states and corporate actors. The only difference is that in the earlier book Habermas implies that organized capitalism has a more successful legitimization regime.

Even political parties reflect the transformation of the public sphere. From the nineteenth century these ceased to be groups of voters so much as bureaucratic organizations aimed at motivating voters and attracting their psychological identification and acclamation by voting. Modern parties "in the proper sense" are thus "organized supralocally and with a bureaucratic

apparatus and aimed at the ideological integration and the political mobilization of the broad voting masses." Their attention is focused on attracting the votes of those not yet committed (and in some cases motivating those whose opinions, but not actual participation, they can count on). Such parties attempt to move people to offer their acclamation without providing political education or remedies for the "political immaturity" of voters (p. 203).³⁵ Plebiscites replace public discourse. When parties were constituted as groups of voters, they were simultaneously groups of participants in the rational-critical public sphere. Legislators were given free mandates, the argument went, because they, *like their constituents*, were autonomous parties to the public sphere with parity of standing in its rational-critical debate; they could not be bound to a position in advance of the discourse. But with the consumption orientation of mass culture and the interpenetration of state and society through organized interest groups and corporations, legislators become agents (or principals) of parties. Instead of joining with their constituents in rational-critical debate, they attempt to garner the support not just of independent constituents (as anachronistic liberal theory has it) but also of special-interest groups. They do this not through rational-critical debate but through offering to represent those interests in bargaining. "Direct mutual contact between the members of the public was lost in the degree that the parties, having become integral parts of a system of special-interest associations under public law, had to transmit and represent at any given time the interests of several such organizations that grew out of the private sphere into the public sphere" (p. 204).

As parties dominate politics and as state and society are generally intertwined, the material conditions for the old sort of public sphere disappear. The new version of representative publicity responds to a "democratic" broadening of the constituency of the public, but at the cost of its internally democratic functioning. No attempt to go back to the old bourgeois public sphere can be progressive, for social change has made its contradictory foundations manifest. "Any attempt at restoring the liberal public sphere through the reduction of its plebiscitarily expanded form will only serve to weaken even more the resid-

ual functions genuinely remaining within it" (p. 208). The struggle instead must be to find a form of democratic public discourse that can salvage critical reason in an age of large-scale institutions and fuzzy boundaries between state and society. The answer, Habermas suggests, lies in what in the 1960s came sometimes to be called "the long march through the institutions." That is, parties, parastatal agencies, and bureaucracies of all sorts must themselves be internally democratized and subjected to critical publicity. In the case of the media, for example, some mechanism for insuring more democratic access and selection is needed as a response to the concentration of ownership and increasing scale of media organizations. There may be no alternative to a politics based on negotiation of interests among organized groups.³⁶ But the trend for these organizations to become less open to rational-critical discourse can be reversed. "To be able to satisfy these functions in the sense of democratic opinion and consensus formation their inner structure must first be organized in accord with the principle of publicity and must institutionally permit an intra-party or intra-association democracy—to allow for unhampered communication and public rational-critical debate" (p. 209).

The struggle to transform institutions and reclaim the public sphere, to make good on the kernel of truth in the ideology of the bourgeois public sphere, is a struggle to make publicity a source of reasoned, progressive consensus formation rather than an occasion for the manipulation of popular opinion. Only thereby can the public realm become an authority for politics rather than merely its playing field: "Public opinion" takes on a different meaning depending on whether it is brought into play as a critical authority in connection with the normative mandate that the exercise of political and social power be subject to publicity or as the object to be molded in connection with a staged display of, and manipulative propagation of, publicity in the service of persons and institutions, consumer goods, and programs" (p. 236). The often touted democratic potential of plebiscites and public-opinion research is minimal, because neither in itself offers an occasion for discursive will formation.³⁷ "Publicity was, according to its very

idea, a principle of democracy not because anyone could in principle announce, with equal opportunity, his personal inclinations, wishes, and convictions—opinions; it could only be realized in the measure that these personal opinions could evolve through the rational-critical debate of a public into public opinion" (p. 219). Public-opinion research is more akin to the simultaneously developed field of group psychology than to democratic practice; it is an auxiliary science to public administration rather than a basis or substitute for true public discourse.

The ideal of the public sphere calls for social integration to be based on rational-critical discourse. Integration, in other words, is to be based on communication rather than domination. "Communication" in this context means not merely sharing what people already think or know but also a process of potential transformation in which reason is advanced by debate itself. This goal cannot be realized by a denial of the implications of large-scale social organization, by imagining a public sphere occupied only by autonomous private individuals, with no large organizations and with no cleavages of interest inhibiting the identification of the general good, as liberal theory suggests. "Institutionalized in the mass democracy of the social-welfare state, . . . the idea of publicity . . . is today realizable only as a rationalization . . . of the exercise of societal and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations themselves committed to publicity as regards both their internal structure and their interaction with one another and with the state" (p. 210). The rationalization is limited, just as it was in the bourgeois public sphere of critical debate among private people, but it is rationalization nonetheless.

7

The second half of *Structural Transformation* is less satisfying than the first. If the early chapters succeed in recovering a valuable critical ideal from the classical bourgeois public sphere, Habermas ultimately cannot find a way to ground his hopes for its realization very effectively in his account of the social institutions of advanced or organized capitalism. While

his idea of intraorganizational publicity and democracy is important, in the absence of a unifying general interest, it can only improve representation in compromise, not achieve the identification of the political with the moral through the agency of rational-critical debate. At the center of this impasse is Habermas's inability to find in advanced capitalist societies an institutional basis for an effective political public sphere corresponding in character and function to that of early capitalism and state formation but corresponding in scale and participation to the realities of later capitalism and states.

Habermas responds to this problem in three ways.³⁸ First, especially in *Legitimation Crisis*, he addresses the consequences of extensive state intervention into the economy. This, as I noted above, is shown in *Structural Transformation* to undermine the bases in civil society for the development of a public sphere as a part of the private realm. Habermas's next move is to argue that this state intervention effectively prevents a focus on the contradictions of capital as such and thus orients political action away from the bases of potential fundamental transformation and toward the state itself. Welfare state democracy demands that states legitimate themselves by demonstrating that their policies serve the overall interests of their constituents. This is a result not only of state intervention as such (which is functionally required to maintain stable socioeconomic function) but also of the transformation of the public sphere into an arena in which a wide range of social interests vie for state action. Because those interests conflict, states are left to face a crisis in which they are unable simultaneously to produce adequate motivation for work and loyalty to the existing regime.³⁹

Second, Habermas takes up the division between system and lifeworld. He argues that advanced capitalist society cannot be conceptualized as a social totality, because it is split into separate realms integrated on different bases. The lifeworld is the realm of personal relationships and (at its best) communicative action. But to it is counterposed a system ordered on the basis of nonlinguistic steering media (money and power), integrating society impersonally through functional or cybernetic feed-

back. This split cannot be overcome, Habermas argues, because there is no immanent logic of capitalism to produce its dialectical transcendence and because large-scale modern society would be impossible without such systemic integration (and dreams of doing away with such large-scale societal integration are not only romantic but dangerous because reduction in scale can come about only in catastrophic ways).⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the lifeworld is the locus for basic human values and is undergoing rationalization processes of its own; it needs to be defended against the continual encroachment of systemic media.

Third, Habermas shifted his attention from the institutional construction of a public sphere as the basis for democratic will formation to the validity claims universally implicit in all speech.⁴¹ In the latter he finds the basis for a progressive rationalization of communication and the capacity for noninstrumental organization of interpersonal relationships. Habermas thus turns away from historically specific grounding for democracy (though the public sphere remains the institutional locus for democratic political practice) toward reliance on a transhistorical capacity of human communication.⁴² Communicative action thus provides an alternative to money and power as a basis for societal integration. On the one hand, Habermas idealizes the directly interpersonal relations of the lifeworld as counterpoint to systemic integration with its dehumanization and reification. On the other hand, especially in more recent work, he explores the capacity of specific institutionalized discourses like law to develop communicative action as a means of societal rationalization and integration.⁴³ More generally, "a radical-democratic change in the process of legitimation aims at a new balance between the forces of societal integration so that the social-integrative power of solidarity—the 'communicative force of production'—can prevail over the powers of the other two control resources, i.e., money and administrative power, and therewith successfully assert the practically oriented demands of the lifeworld."⁴⁴

Habermas thus continues to seek a way to recover the normative ideal of formal democracy from early bourgeois political theory and practice and to develop a basis for discerning the

social directions by which it might progress.⁴⁵ More specifically, he continues to see the development of welfare state capitalism as producing impasses (rather than crises born of a dialectic, which will resolve them) but destroying earlier bases for addressing them through utopian collective action.⁴⁶ However, where *Structural Transformation* located the basis for the application of practical reason to politics in the historically specific social institutions of the public sphere, the theory of communicative action locates them in transhistorical, evolving communicative capacities or capacities of reason conceived intersubjectively as in its essence a matter of communication. The public sphere remains an ideal, but it becomes a contingent product of the evolution of communicative action, rather than its basis.

What happened in *Structural Transformation* to make these moves seem necessary? More precisely, did Habermas have to abandon the more historically specific and social-institutional strategy of *Structural Transformation* to locate bases for the simultaneous rationalization and democratization of politics? I think the answer lies in the last chapters of the book. In a sense, Habermas himself seems to have been persuaded more by his account of the degeneration of the public sphere than by his suggestions of its revitalization through intraorganizational reforms and the application of norms of publicity to interorganizational relations. He seems to have seen no bases for progress in social institutions as such, either those of capitalism and civil society or those of the state, and so turned elsewhere to look for them. The crucial question was what might underpin the development and recognition of a truly general interest.⁴⁷ No longer believing in the capacity of either the public sphere as such or of socialist transformation of civil society to meet this need, Habermas sought a less historical, more transcendental basis for democracy. This is what he found in an evolutionary account of human communicative capacity that stressed the potentials implicit in all speech. This gave him the basis for revitalizing Kantian ideals, and more generally democratic ideals, in a world still torn asunder and subjected to domination by capitalism and bureaucratic power.

Habermas's work has changed more in strategy than in overall goal. The reasons for this may not be simply "theoretical progress," however, but some more specific internal weaknesses of *Structural Transformation*. In the remainder of this introduction I can only suggest a few of these (while drawing on and introducing the chapters that follow); I cannot remedy any. Most tend to be problems of underdevelopment or omission of significant issues. Mentioning them thus points directly to possibilities for extending and improving on the analysis in *Structural Transformation*. This is important, for though it is far less theoretically developed, the historical specificity and grasp of concrete social-institutional foundations give *Structural Transformation* some advantages over Habermas's later theory.⁴⁸

A central weakness is that *Structural Transformation* does not treat the "classical" bourgeois public sphere and the posttransformation public sphere of "organized" or "late" capitalism symmetrically. Habermas tends to judge the eighteenth century by Locke and Kant, the nineteenth century by Marx and Mill, and the twentieth century by the typical suburban television viewer. Thus Habermas's account of the twentieth century does not include the sort of intellectual history, the attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writings, that is characteristic of his approach to seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Conversely, his treatment of the earlier period doesn't look at "penny dreadfuls," lurid crime and scandal sheets, and other less than altogether rational-critical branches of the press or at the demagoguery of traveling orators, and glances only in passing at the relationship of crowds to political discourse.⁴⁹ The result is perhaps an overestimation of the degeneration of the public sphere. The revitalization of a critical political public during the 1960s (and its refusal to quite go away since then) lends further credence to this view. Moreover, the public consequences of mass media are not necessarily as uniformly negative as *Structural Transformation* suggests, and there may be more room than Habermas realized for alternative democratic media strategies.⁵⁰

Another important issue is Habermas's treatment of culture and identity. Eley (chapter 12), for example, points to the remarkable absence of nationalism from Habermas's discussion of the public sphere (though the history of nationalism does not necessarily challenge the account Habermas offers). This may be due partly to the general lack of attention to the nineteenth-century public sphere, which Eley sets out specifically to remedy. It seems, however, also to be part of a thinness of attention to matters of culture and the construction of identity.⁵¹ Indeed, this is reflected methodologically, as it were, in Habermas's inattention to cultural variation in his empirical accounts; as Baker notes (chapter 8), he tends to typify epochs with little regard to national or other cultural specificity.⁵²

This bears also on the question of "degeneration" of the public sphere. Even if we grant that the problem-solving functions of the public sphere are being performed less well than in the past, this does not mean that public discourse has ceased to be at least as vibrant a source of understanding, including self-understanding. In the terms Habermas has adopted, we might say that the public sphere plays a crucial "world-disclosing" role alongside of, or possibly independently of, its problem-solving one. And this world-disclosing role is not limited to nonpolitical culture. Phenomena like nationalism, feminism, and gay, ethnic, or youth consciousness often involve crucial redefinitions of the issues and identities involved in political struggles. As Warner suggests (chapter 15), one of the key changes in the public sphere since its "classical" heyday has been an increasing prominence of what may be called identity politics (though it should not be thought that this theme was ever absent). Warner's and Eley's chapters point especially to this theme, but it is also implicit in the whole rethinking of the boundary between public and private broached by feminist discourse and in this volume especially by Fraser and Ryan (chapters 5 and 11). Indeed, feminist thought has probably done more than any other intellectual discourse to point up the difficulties inherent in assuming the public/private dichotomy to exist as neatly as Habermas assumes. The difficulties also go deeper, because Habermas sees maintaining the division as an important task. This is not just a description of bourgeois

thought, for it reemerges in a new form in his discussion of the defense of lifeworld boundaries against systemic intrusion.

When Habermas treats identities and interests as settled within the private world and then brought fully formed into the public sphere, he impoverishes his own theory. In the first place, his own discussion of the literary public sphere showed in a preliminary way how fiction serves to facilitate a discussion about selfhood and subjectivity and to reinforce a vesting of primary identity in a newly constructed intimate sphere. The central theme of the ideological conflation of *bourgeois* and *homme* is a construction of identity on which the bourgeois public sphere may depend but that also takes place in public discourse. As Nancy Fraser suggests, public deliberation need not be understood as simply *about* an already established common good; it may be even more basically an occasion for the clarification (and I would add, constitution) of interests. The very dichotomous understandings of public/private and system/lifeworld are thus among the reasons why Habermas reaches an impasse in his search of a general interest; his theoretical scheme requires him to look for that interest in advance of public life, and his assumptions lead him to locate it along with "true humanity" in the lifeworld or private realm. The feminist critique thus shows not just that Habermas failed to pay enough attention to the gendered nature of the public sphere, nor even that he sees the solution to this problem only in gender neutrality rather than in thematizing the issue of gender. It also points up that the public/private dichotomy itself imposes a neutralizing logic on differential identity by establishing qualification for publicness as a matter of abstraction from private identity (see chapter 15 and less directly chapter 3). Difference may be "bracketed" or tolerated; it is hard on Habermas's account to see the need for it to be positively thematized.

Habermas's neglect of religion, noted by Zaret (chapter 9), is closely related. Habermas implicitly follows the philosophes in imagining that religion and science must stand in a sort of hydraulic relationship to one another. For all their criticism of the Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer (at least until his old age) also shared this view that religion must decline as enlightenment progresses. That secularization is part and par-

cel of modernity and, closely linked to the rise of rational-critical discourse, goes unquestioned. This view contributes to Habermas's blind spot on the role of religion both as a central thematic topic in the early public sphere and as one of its enduring institutional bases.⁵³ This is true not only of England, where religious debate was perhaps as important as literary discourse in paving the way for the political public sphere. It was also true in France, where the anticlerical obsessions of many leading Enlightenment thinkers were ancestors of the very antireligious assumptions Habermas inherits.

Science may also have played an important role, as Zaret suggests, particularly by providing a model of "disinterested" discourse, or rather, discourse shaped by a general interest in knowledge that at least in ideology held the particular interests of participants in check and rendered their private identities irrelevant. This was like a highly restricted version of the literary public sphere, but as Habermas's own later work suggests, the extension of the idea of science to social science was a key moment in the creation of the liberal public sphere.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the ideology of science was one source of views that saw rightness in public policy as distinctly ascertainable from public discourse and potentially superordinate over it. In the name of science one thus could (and can) still treat public opinion as mere opinion. Thus, as Baker notes, the physiocrats and Condorcet in particular saw public discourse as vital, but not primary. For them, unlike many republicans, it was but one of the means that might serve the end of rational social progress. It is not only in the late twentieth-century era of organized capitalism that a specialized nonpublic science has been deployed in the service of administrative rationality and in competition with the public sphere.

Related to these issues of culture and identity is Habermas's neglect of social movements (discussed also in chapters 7 and 12). Habermas's account of the public sphere perhaps conforms too closely to the liberal bourgeois ideal in imagining it simply as a realm into which individuals bring their ideas and critiques. Both public discourse and democratic politics, however, seem crucially influenced by social movements. Such movements may be conceptualized as subsidiary publics, as Eley

(chapter 12) does, or more stress may be placed on their attempts to use force to gain instrumental ends. In either case, movements are crucial to reorienting the agenda of public discourse, bringing new issues to the fore. The routine rational-critical discourse of the public sphere cannot be about everything all at once. Some structuring of attention, imposed by dominant ideology, hegemonic powers, or social movements, must always exist. The last possibility is thus crucial to democracy. Moreover, social movements are occasions for the restructuring not just of issues but of identities. Throughout the modern era, social movements have been in part occasions for the legitimation of new voices (by which I mean not just the inclusion of persons previously excluded but also changes in the identities from which included persons speak).⁵⁵ The absence of social movements from Habermas's account thus also reflects an inattention to agency, to the struggles by which the both public sphere and its participants are actively made and remade. Habermas approaches the public sphere and its transformations more as reflections of underlying developments in civil society and state.

Social movements are among the several possible sorts of subsidiary public spheres we might conceptualize if we break with the idea that there must be one public sphere for each state. Several writers in this book argue for a notion of multiple, sometimes overlapping or contending, public spheres (especially Eley, Baker, Garnham, and Fraser). Part of the background to this lies once again in Habermas's tendency to dichotomize public and private. This is too easily matched up with the similar dichotomy between state and civil society, which engenders the assumption that for any state there must be *one* public. It seems to me a loss simply to say that there are many public spheres, however, for that will leave us groping for a new term to describe the communicative relationships among them. It might be productive rather to think of the public sphere as involving a field of discursive connections. Within this network there might be a more or less even flow of communication. In nearly any imaginable case there will be clusters of relatively greater density of communication within the looser overall field. These clusters may be only more or

less biased microcosms of the whole, as cities have their own public discourse within countries, and as neighborhoods within cities. But these clusters may also be organized around issues, categories, persons, or basic dynamics of the larger society. There is thus a sort of feminist public sphere, or counterpublic, and also a subsidiary public among lawyers. These are obviously different. For any such cluster we must ask not just on what thematic content it focuses but also how it is internally organized, how it maintains its boundaries and relatively greater internal cohesion in relation to the larger public, and whether its separate existence reflects merely sectional interests, some functional division of labor, or a felt need for bulwarks against the hegemony of a dominant ideology. This whole issue points not only to the importance of a more pluralistic, open approach to conceptualizing the public sphere but also to a need for analysis of its internal organization, something almost completely neglected in *Structural Transformation*. In the first half of the book, Habermas simply doesn't address the power relations, the networks of communication, the topography of issues, and the structure of influence of the public sphere except in very general terms of the existence of factions and parties.⁵⁶ In the second half of the book, these figure mainly in the account of degeneration. Yet whatever its qualities, any public sphere is necessarily a socially organized field, with characteristic lines of division, relationships of force, and other constitutive features.⁵⁷

The most glaring and often cited instance of this issue is Habermas's decision that he could put the plebeian public sphere to one side as a derivative discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In one sense, Habermas here posited the existence of multiple public spheres, but this is somewhat deceptive, as he suggested that the plebeian public sphere was not only derivative but also "a variant . . . suppressed in the historical process" (p. xviii). Though it continued a submerged existence (kept alive by various social movements), it not only failed to attain dominance but oriented itself to the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere. Enough has been said about the unfairness of this characterization of the discourse of artisans, workers, and others. The point here is to

note that this is more than just a simple omission. The lack of attention to the plebeian public sphere is also part of a failure to describe adequately the full field of force impinging on the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas is well aware, of course, though it is not a heavily developed theme, that the bourgeois public sphere was oriented not just toward defense of civil society against the state but also toward the maintenance of a system of domination within civil society. It is also the case, however, that throughout its existence the bourgeois public sphere was permeated by demands from below. These took the form not only of calls for broader inclusivity but also more basic challenges and the pushing of new issues forward on the agenda. Moreover, important parts of the struggle to establish some of the features Habermas describes as integral to bourgeois publicity, like freedom of the press, in fact were carried out largely by activists in the so-called plebeian public sphere. The hegemony of bourgeois publicity was always incomplete and exercised within a field constituted partly by its relation to other insurgent discourses.

9

Habermas's writing implies that the point of *Structural Transformation* is to show the degeneration of the public sphere and to argue that progress must lie in a democratic accommodation to the conditions of mass society rather than in their overthrow or a return to any golden age. Many readers have been most influenced by the book's critique of the twentieth-century mass public. But it seems to me that the most important part of the book is in fact the first half, in which Habermas constitutes the historical category of the public sphere and attempts to draw from it a normative ideal. For many commentators, this raises a basic question of how to identify the extent to which Habermas discusses theoretical ideals versus practical actualities of the bourgeois public sphere. This is clearly important as a matter of historical description. Theoretically, however, the precise balance between the two seems less significant. It is crucial that Habermas address both, for this not only enables his recovery of the ideal from flawed material practice, it en-

ables the identification of the social foundations on which the ideal can be partially realized (and whose change must mean the structural transformation of the public sphere).

When he wrote *Structural Transformation*, Habermas still hoped that showing how a determinate set of sociohistorical conditions gave rise to ideals that they could not fulfill would provide motivation for the progressive transformation of those conditions. He has now rejected the tradition of ideology critique out of which his approach to historical reconstruction came. He sees it as undesirably linked to totalizing Marxist understandings of the relationship between base and superstructure, to a Hegelian dialectic of idea and reality, and to a notion of society that fails to grasp the substantial autonomy of systems of money and power. Nonetheless, Habermas has not surrendered the idea of immanent critique.⁵⁸ Rather, he has removed the immanence from specific historical conditions to universal characteristics of human communication. This allows him to ground his normative argument, to keep it from arbitrariness, but it removes it from any clear purchase on historical progress. That is, communicative ethics does a much better job of setting out a normative ideal than of indicating what is likely to make it persuasive to people at any particular point in time and how to make judgments about better or worse communication in circumstances far from the ideal. There remain, in other words, advantages to the historical specificity of *Structural Transformation* even if one does not keep to a strong Hegelian-Marxist faith.

Despite, or perhaps in a way because of, his moves away from critique of history and ideology, Habermas remains centrally engaged in the project of identifying the still-valuable normative ideals of modernity. Where he earlier took on a critique of the ideological contradictions of modernity, he now defends its unfinished project. That project involves a rationalization of society and of democratic will formation not far from that embodied in the notion of the political public sphere. The rehabilitation of formal democracy that thirty years ago was a crucial complement to Marxism now appears just as important in the struggle against the "new conservatives."⁵⁹ These people present themselves often as postmodernists and

sometimes misleadingly as radicals or progressives. Though there are genuine insights in this tradition, at their postmodernists reveal a cynicism and a relativism that together permit the normalization of evil; more generally, they obscure the criteria of progress along with the rigidities of utopianism.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere has a great deal to offer in this struggle. Its historical specificity, for example, should make it appealing where the neo-Kantian universalism of the theory of communicative action concerns. Though they are not always developed, *Structural Transformation* also offers much clearer openings to a political and social theory sensitive to issues of difference and identity. This is not to say that it solves the difficulties inherent in dealing with difference seriously while trying to avoid relativism and nihilism generally. But on this as on other issues, it offers a framework that should prove helpful to those who would develop and use it in many different ways.

The most important destiny of Habermas's first book may prove to be this: not to stand as an authoritative statement but to be an immensely fruitful generator of new research, argument, and theory. It is curious that it should do so in the English-speaking world nearly thirty years after its publication; ironically the newly translated book seems enormously timely. Perhaps this is not only because of its theme but also because of the way in which it weaves economic, social-organizational, communicational, social-psychological, and cultural dimensions of its problem together in a historically specific analysis. This multidimensional, interdisciplinary account is central to enabling Habermas to offer the richest, best developed conceptualualization available of the social nature and foundations of public life. As scholars set out to make sense of the great wealth of empirical research on the various specific topics related to this theme, this book will form an indispensable point of theoretical departure. It should also continue to enrich the tradition of empirical work. We should be grateful that it has finally appeared in English.

It would perhaps be the nicest irony if this new reception of *Structural Transformation* should prove Habermas wrong in revealing that cynicism and exhaustion of utopian energy

not reached the point of rendering critique of ideology powerless. Certainly the book's resonance with so many discourses suggests that the recovery and extension of a strong normative idea of publicness is very much on the current agenda. No book is likely to help more than *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Notes

1. *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York, 1956), 250–251, quoted in Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 106.
2. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990; orig. 1983, 1988), p. 4; see also "Law and Morality," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City and Cambridge, 1988), 217–299.
3. For example, O. Negt and A. Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience* (Minneapolis, forthcoming in translation; orig. 1973).
4. In chapter 17 Habermas notes his continuing appreciation for Abendroth but indicates that he now rejects most of Abendroth's Hegelian-Marxist optimism about total social transformation.
5. Negt and Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience*; Negt, "Mass Media: Tools of Domination or Instruments of Liberation? Aspects of the Frankfurt School's Communications Analysis," *New German Critique* 14 (1978): 61–80; see the more general discussion in Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca, 1982). See also note 5 to chapter 17.
6. See especially H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958); see also chapter 3.
7. See J. Cohen, "Why More Political Theory," *Telos* 40 (1979): 70–94, esp. pp. 74 ff.
8. References to *Structural Transformation* will be given simply by page numbers in the text.
9. Habermas's account of the modern public sphere is thus fundamentally at odds with the classical republican tradition (idealized by Arendt) not only in the instance of ancient Greece but also in that of the Renaissance (see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton, 1975).
10. Compare Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), which refutes that more simplistic notion but does not take on Habermas's deeper conceptualization. Habermas, like Wuthnow, sees members of the state bureaucracies as the core of the "bourgeois" strata that occupied the central position in the new public sphere (pp. 22–23). "*Bürgerliche*," it is also worth reminding ourselves, carries a less exclusively economic connotation than "bourgeois," reflects the transformation out of feudalism, and more clearly signifies urbanness.

11. This is why the plebeian public sphere was, in Habermas's view, derivative of the bourgeois, though I think that this is historically ambiguous; chapters 12 and 17 both discuss this further.
12. For a comment, from another angle, on the narrowing implicit in many invocations of civil society, see C. Taylor, "Modes of Civil Society," *Public Culture* 3, no. 1 (1990) pp. 95–118.
13. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1982). Zaret (chapter 9) wants to go much further in making printing technology an independent causal factor in the analysis. This leads Kramer (chapter 10) to say that he favors a sort of technological determinism.
14. Charles Taylor (*The Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989) has recently stressed the key role played in the making of the modern self by the "affirmation of ordinary life," which he traces especially to the era of the Protestant Reformation. This is a linked development inasmuch as it involves the same raising of the demands of ordinary existence—family, work, economy—to a level of primary value.
15. Chapter 7, "On the Concept of Public Opinion," is actually a very weak counterpart to chapter 4, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere: Idea and Ideology." It fits the scheme I suggested insofar as the "auxiliary science" of public-opinion research is a key ideological and intellectual reflection of what has become of the public sphere. It is, however, a much shallower treatment of twentieth century ideology of public life than its precursor is of seventeenth and eighteenth century ideology and political philosophy. Both before and after World War II there was a fairly large outpouring of literature on democracy and public life, some of which Habermas cites but the whole of which he never seriously addresses. He offers no consideration, for example, of John Dewey (e.g., *The Public and Its Problems*, New York, 1972) nor of early twentieth century American reformers or preachers of the social gospel.
16. It is remarkable that Habermas's account of how the family helped to give rise to a notion of "pure" and undifferentiated humanity does not betray any sense of the role of religion in helping to produce this result. Yet the tradition of interiority was pioneered by Augustine, and during the Protestant Reformation it was given decisive new form as something shared equivalently among all people.
17. In this connection, we can see in Habermas's discussion of the intimate sphere a prefiguration of his use of the lifeworld as a standpoint for critique of the "colonization" of systemic relations. Nancy Fraser has argued that this is a suspect standpoint for emancipatory critique because it involves an idealization, or an acceptance of the self-idealization, of the patriarchal family ("What's Critical about Critical Theory: The Case of Gender," in *Unruly Practices*, Minneapolis, 1990). Somewhat surprisingly, Habermas seems more attentive to this issue in *Structural Transformations* than in his later theory of communicative action (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, 1979; *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, 1984 and 1988). Even in the earlier work, however, he approaches gender only in terms of equality (e.g., p. 56), not in terms of any more positive valuing of difference. See chapter 7 for a consideration of the seeming duality between a hierarchical recognition of difference and its suppression in the name of equality. See also chapter 18.
18. Salons were also distinctive in including, even being organized by, women. But this perhaps reflected their transitional nature, for the emerging bourgeois public sphere was firmly the province of patriarchal males (as were both coffee houses and table societies).

19. One of the criticisms of *Structural Transformation*, made as early as Negt and Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience*, is that Habermas does not distinguish clearly enough between the ideal and the actuality of the bourgeois public sphere. See chapter 18.

20. "Intrinsic to the idea of a public opinion born of the power of the better argument was the claim to that morally pretentious rationality that strove to discover what was at once just and right" (p. 54).

21. This general legal capacity was linked to a progressive transformation in the idea of person. The simple qualification of property holder, for example, replaced various specific statuses based on family, urban freedoms, or feudal relations. Even that was but a way station, however, as the person was increasingly redefined as a natural category rather than a constructed category (see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*). It is no accident that the sort of economic reasoning that takes individual persons as uncritically given, and thus in no need of special theoretical construction, arose in the same period.

22. Here again, we see the later, even more neo-Kantian Habermas prefigured in *Structural Transformation*. He quotes Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: "The touchstone whereby we decide whether our holding a thing to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore external, namely the possibility of communicating it and of finding it to be valid for all human reason" (p. 108).

23. Habermas (p. 115) finds two versions of Kant's political philosophy: in one the cosmopolitan order would emerge from natural necessity alone; in the other it had to be pushed along by moral politics as well.

24. Later liberals, especially the more economic, have tended to succumb to equating capitalism with a natural basis for society, complete with a range of apparently objective, but in fact socially constructed, constraints.

25. In a sense, within the scheme of the book, described above, the discussion of Mill and Tocqueville would almost seem to belong in the last chapter (though that would disrupt the chronological flow of the book). Habermas seems to suggest that they present the basic theory of the posttransformation public sphere, much as Locke, the physiocrats, and Kant did for the classical bourgeois public sphere. Accordingly, it remains only to add the chapter on public-opinion research.

26. Habermas uses an excursus on law and legal norms to illustrate the loss of capacity to identify the general interest by loss of the formal universality that guaranteed "truth" (which now sounds antique as an attribute of laws): this truth "was only guaranteed as long as a public sphere, elevated in the parliament to an organ of the state, made it possible to discover, through public discussion, what was practically necessary in the general interest" (p. 178). As this idea of an objective, formally validated foundation was lost, the law not only suffered a potential loss of legitimacy but was changed internally. The distinction between general law and specific regulatory measure became blurred.

27. This resembles part of what Habermas would later call the "colonization of the lifeworld" (*The Theory of Communicative Action*, esp. vol. 2).

28. Rather surprisingly, perhaps, in a residual and narrow Marxism, Habermas treats leisure behavior as inherently apolitical because it is not tied to survival needs (p. 160).

29. Habermas rather confusingly talks about this being a result of "the private form of appropriation" (p. 163), when, of course, this is hardly unique to the new situation but in fact, on his own account, was essential to reading. A few pages later (p. 170)

Habermas praises the private appropriation of the printed word for encouraging a distance from objects of appropriation that encourages critical thinking. I think the real point is that he does not see the new sort of private appropriation characteristic, for example, of television as coupled with a more rational-critical public exchange. Whether this is so, and if so, whether it has to do with media as such, can of course be debated. Habermas reflects here the orthodoxy of the critique of "mass culture"; this has been challenged, for example, by the so-called "new reception theory" and empirical studies purporting to show that people are much less passive recipients of mass-media messages than the mass culture critics had thought. See, e.g., S. Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Center: Some Problematics and Problems," in Hall et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London, 1980); R. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse* (Chapel Hill, 1986); J. Fiske, *Television Culture* (London, 1987); D. Kellner, *Television* (Boulder, 1990). Habermas acknowledges this issue in both his contributions to this book.

30. Habermas notes in chapter 17 that he underestimated the positive influence of expansion of formal schooling.

31. Here Habermas is on somewhat stronger ground with recent media scholars; see, e.g., J. Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (New York, 1985).

32. See chapter 15 for an interesting perspective on this, stressing the importance of embodiment and abstraction from bodies—a theme that Habermas deals with minimally and weakly (though he acknowledges its significance in chapter 18).

33. See, however, chapter 15, where the implications of a consumer consciousness are given a broader reading.

34. It might be more accurate to say that no text attains such currency. Certainly news reports of certain public dramas, space shuttle explosions or hostage crises, for example, do attain thoroughly general currency and are, for a time, avidly discussed. Of course, these are not texts and generally do not involve communication or collective self-reflection of the same sort; I do not think any films or other sorts of communications manage to achieve a reception by the whole public rather than one or more of its subsections. This is one of the touchstones of contemporary criticism of public discourse, especially on the right, e.g., A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, 1987) and E. D. Hirsch, *What Every American Needs to Know* (New York, 1987), but also on the left, e.g., R. Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York, 1988).

35. This is a special concern of Harry Boyte's; see chapter 13 and sources cited therein.

36. Here Habermas anticipates his later discussion (following Parsons and Luhmann) of the systemic integration necessary to modern large-scale societies but based on the nonlinguistic steering media of money and power and thereby always opposed to and distanced from the lifeworld (*The Theory of Communicative Action*, esp. vol. 2). As Habermas discusses in chapter 17, however, he later concluded that system and lifeworld must be seen not as aspects of a social totality but as separate parts of a two-tiered concept of society. He thus sees the conceptualization of *Structural Transformation* as flawed because it suggests a potential for internal democratization of the state apparatus and economy. He now sees these as "systematically integrated action fields" that cannot be transformed democratically from within. Instead of seeking transformation of the systems of administrative power and money, we should seek to prevent or limit their encroachment on the lifeworld by better boundary maintenance.

37. See the discussion in C. Calhoun, "Populist Politics, Communications Media, and Large Scale Societal Integration," *Sociological Theory* (1988): 219–241.

38. In what follows, I trace only a single thread in Habermas's social and political theory; I do not attempt to describe the whole of his voluminous work, which includes major writings on the philosophy of the social sciences, intellectual history, contemporary politics, and specific philosophical issues. In particular, I do not explore his attempt, especially during the remainder of the 1960s, to rethink the relationships between science and social life, theory and practice, though it clearly is closely related to the work discussed here, particularly in its development of a notion of rationalization. See *Theory and Practice* (London, 1974; orig. 1963–1971), *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988; orig. 1967), *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston, 1971; orig. 1968); and *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (Boston, 1970; orig. 1968–1969).

39. *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. T. McCarthy (London, 1976). The discussion in D. Held, "Critical Theory and Political Transformation," *Media, Culture, and Society* 4 (1982): 153–160, is helpful and unusual in relating this to *Structural Transformation*.

40. This argument is central to *The Theory of Communicative Action*, which remains Habermas's fullest theoretical statement. It was developed earlier, however, especially in a pair of critical engagements with the work of other leading German scholars. Engaging Niklas Luhmann, Habermas sought to maintain a place for critical theory and normative engagement within functionalist sociology, and he rejected Luhmann's "methodological antihumanism." He thus accepted the bulk of Parsons and Luhmann's account of social systems but denied that an account of such systems was a full account of society, since it omitted the lifeworld. See J. Habermas and N. Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (Frankfurt, 1971) and also the discussion and critique in T. McCarthy, "Complexity and Democracy, or the Seductions of Systems Theory," *New German Critique* 35 (1985): 27–53. Habermas has recently discussed Luhmann's appropriation of the philosophy of the subject in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, 368–385. Engaging Hans-Georg Gadamer, Habermas drew on hermeneutics to challenge the simplistic positivism of typical social science and was pushed toward the phenomenological notion of the lifeworld (for his more developed concept of which he draws on Schutz; see *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 119–152). Habermas contended, however, that hermeneutics (and phenomenology and what in English are called "interpretive sociologies") cannot offer an adequate account of the systemic dimensions of society and remain trapped within a context- and tradition-dependent point of view that is unable to ground the progressive and defensible development of norms and knowledge (see *The Logic of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, orig. 1967, and also K.-O. Apel et al., *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Frankfurt, 1971). Habermas initially relied on "ideology critique" to argue that subjective understanding is subject to systematic distortions. Abandoning the notion of ideology critique in his later work (see his discussion in chapter 17), Habermas nonetheless refused to accept the epistemological claims of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (New York, 1975; orig. 1960) on the grounds that they are necessarily relativistic (Habermas, Review of *Truth and Method*, in F. R. Dallmayr and T. A. McCarthy, eds., *Understanding Social Inquiry*, South Bend, Ind., 1977). Habermas remained committed to the ideal of cumulative, perfectible, and especially universally valid knowledge and regarded sociology as a means for emancipation from tradition. Gadamer replied that no thinker can escape embeddedness in a tradition ("On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Berkeley, 1976, orig. 1967). The exchange thus anticipated Habermas's continuing confrontations with so-called postmodernist thought.

41. Habermas's use of speech-act theory to develop his category of communicative action appear especially in volume 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

42. In a sense, his scheme remains Hegelian, positing an abstract communicative potentiality in all speech that is both challenged by instrumental use of language and (eventually) dialectically redeemable in a more fully developed form of social integration. Thus work like Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment was attractive to Habermas as a seeming empirical verification that there was some such process of cumulative gain in moral capacity at both the individual biographical level and the collective historical level. See Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society, Moral Consciousness, and Communicative Action* and "Justice and Solidarity: On the Discussion Concerning 'Stage 6,'" *Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989–1990): 32–51. To the extent that Habermas no longer accepts and relies upon Kohlberg's theory (which has been subjected to widespread criticism), his own theory loses not only an empirical example but also an account of the development of the human individual that can locate the exercise of practical reasoning in a moral person.

43. See "Law and Morality." Habermas also remains committed to the close relationship between politics and morality and to the Kantian notion of the capacity of practical reason to bring these together. See *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

44. Chapter 17, sec. 3.

45. I do not mean that these are the only normative ideals addressed in Habermas's theory, only that they are central.

46. "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies," in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 48–70.

47. In addition to the summary remarks above, see chapter 2 on the centrality in Habermas's theory of the attempt to discern a general interest.

48. Jean Cohen has similarly suggested that "both Habermas' early and late work, each in its own way, but neither on its own, are indispensable" for the task of grasping the gains and losses of modernity and the possibilities for emancipation and democracy. See "Why More Political Theory," p. 94.

49. See chapter 6.

50. See chapters 14 and 15; Nicholas Garnham, "The Media and the Public Sphere," in P. Golding, G. Burdock and P. Schlesinger, eds., *Communicating Politics: Mass Communications and the Political Process* (New York, 1986), 37–54; M. Warner, *The Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), and my "Populist Politics." As Ben Lee suggests, chapter 16, Habermas may also have inadequately grasped the distinctiveness of print media, understanding them implicitly as an extension of speech (contra Derrida). In any case, the question of what difference media make to communication in the later Habermasian theory remains open. The theory is clearly based on face-to-face communication, and its tenets may not be directly extendible to electronically mediated communication.

51. Habermas's discussion of literature as a basis for discourse about bourgeois subjectivity is an important exception to this, though it too is a relatively undifferentiated account.

52. It should be said that Habermas is far more attentive to cultural specificity in *Structural Transformation* than in any of his other major work. Chapter 17 gives an instance where Habermas might revise his work in the direction of greater attention

to cultural variation. With the transformations of Eastern and Central European postcommunist societies in mind, he comments, "A public sphere that functions politically requires more than the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state; it also needs the supportive spirit of cultural traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture, of a populace accustomed to freedom" (sec. 4).

53. The role played by the Catholic Church in Poland's recent democratization has brought this to widespread attention. But churches (and other religious institutions) have played crucial roles in other movements and public spheres, e.g., in sustaining the discourse about and struggle for civil rights in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s, in the early twentieth-century preaching of the social gospel, in the British and American antislavery movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and so forth. Thus Baker may be right that Zaret violates the strictures of historical specificity (and perhaps theoretical precision) in suggesting that Habermas should have treated early seventeenth-century religion and science as instances of the public sphere. But Zaret is no doubt right that these were significant precursors to and influences on the bourgeois public sphere. At least as important, religion remained an enduring constituent concern and institutional basis of the public sphere in many settings throughout the modern period. And religious claims were and are often made as part of a rational-critical public discourse, not simply to the religious conscience.

54. Rather surprisingly, Habermas does not consider the various provincial discourses on economic matters—e.g., in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Manchester in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—as progenitors or subsidiaries of the public sphere. His account is focused exclusively on capital cities (as Ryan notes in chapter 11 in emphasizing the local state). He also perhaps overstates the prominence of a strictly literary public sphere in grounding the eventual political one.

55. This is a familiar theme of so-called new-social-movements theory. That theory suggests, however, that this is a recent change. It rather seems to me to have been a central part of the social movements throughout the modern era—of the early labor movement and the Second Great Awakening as much as of recent ecological or gay-rights activism.

56. Somewhat relatedly, having established that the ideology of the public sphere minimizes the importance of status distinctions, Habermas shows little interest in such factors as the occupational or regional identities of participants. He vaguely notes but does not consider, for example, the disproportionate involvement of members of the state bureaucracy itself in the early public sphere (on which see Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

57. Pierre Bourdieu's approach to the analysis of such fields is perhaps the best developed but by no means the only one. See, e.g., *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, 1988) and P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, 1991).

58. S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York, 1986) offers a clear discussion of this point.

59. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987); *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).