Habermas and the Public Sphere

edited by Craig Calhoun

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Preace

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

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¹ The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, by Jürgen Habermas, first published in German in 1962.
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 conference 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. 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**
Further Reflections on the Public Sphere

Jürgen Habermas

Translated by Thomas Burger

Rereading this book after almost thirty years, I was initially tempted to make changes, eliminate passages, and make emendations. Yet I became increasingly impressed with the impracticability of such a course of action: the first modification would have required me to explain why I did not refashion the entire book. This, however, would be asking too much of an author who in the meantime has turned to other matters and has recalled that the original study emerged from the synthesis of contributions based in several disciplines, whose number even at that time almost exceeded what one author could hope to master.

There are two reasons that may justify the decision in favor of an unrevised new printing of the eighteenth edition, which had gone out of print.¹ For one, there is the continuing demand for a publication that in a variety of programs of study has become established as a sort of textbook. For another, there is the contemporary relevance bestowed on the structural change of the public sphere by the long-delayed revolution occurring before our eyes in central and eastern Europe.² The current relevance of this topic—and of its multifaceted treatment—is confirmed by the reception of the book in the United States, where an English translation³ finally appeared last year.⁴

I want to use this occasion for a few comments intended less to downplay the temporal distance created by the span of a generation than to throw it into clear relief. It is trivial to state that research and theoretical problems are different now from
what they were in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when this study originated. Since the Adenauer regime, the contemporary scene has changed, i.e., the extrascientific context that shapes the horizon of experience from which social-scientific research derives its perspective. My own theory, finally, has also changed, albeit less in its fundamentals than in its degree of complexity. On the basis of a first and certainly only superficial acquaintance with current thinking on some relevant topics, I want to remind the reader of those changes, at least by way of illustration and in the hope of stimulating further studies. I shall proceed by following the structure of the book in that I shall first deal with the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere (chapters 1 to 3), then with the structural change of the public sphere with regard to the transformation toward the social welfare state and the change of the structures of communication through the mass media (chapters 5 and 6). After that, I shall discuss the study's theoretical perspective and its normative implications (chapters 4 and 7), where my focus will be on the possible contribution of the study to the newly relevant questions of the theory of democracy. This is the aspect in relation to which the book has received most attention, not so much at the time of its first publication but in connection with the student rebellion and the neoconservative reaction it triggered. In the process it has occasionally been the object of polemical treatment coming equally from the right and from the left.5

1 The Genesis and Concept of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

As was stated in the preface to the first edition, my first aim had been to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere from the historical context of British, French, and German developments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The formation of a concept specific to an epoch requires that a social reality of great complexity be stylized to give prominence to its peculiar characteristics. As is the case with any sociological generalization, selection, statistical relevance, and weighting of historical trends and examples pose a problem involving great risks, especially for someone who, unlike the historian, does not go back to the sources but instead relies on the secondary literature. Historians have rightly complained of empirical shortfalls. Yet I have been put somewhat at ease by Geoff Eley's friendly assessment in his extensive and comprehensively documented contribution to the conference: "On re-reading the book . . . it is striking to see how securely and even imaginatively the argument is historically grounded, given the thinness of the literature available at the time."6

The basic lines of my analysis have been corroborated by H. U. Wehler's summarizing presentation of a wide body of literature. By the end of the eighteenth century there had emerged, in Germany, "a public sphere, although a small one, where critical-rational discussion was carried on."7 With the growth of a general reading public that transcended the republic of scholars and the urban bourgeois and who no longer limited themselves to a careful reading and rereading of a few standard works but oriented their reading habits to an ongoing stream of new publications, there sprang from the midst of the private sphere a relatively dense network of public communication. The growing number of readers, increasing by leaps and bounds, was complemented by a considerable expansion in the production of books, journals, and papers, an increasing number of authors, publishers, and book sellers, the establishment of lending libraries, reading rooms, and especially reading societies as the social nodes of a literary culture revolving around novels. The relevance of the associational life that began to take off late in the German Enlightenment has by now been acknowledged, although its significance for future developments lay more with its organizational forms than with its manifest functions.8 The societies for enlightenment, cultural associations, secret freemasonry lodges, and orders of illuminati were associations constituted by the free, that is, private, decisions of their founding members, based on voluntary membership, and characterized internally by egalitarian practices of sociability, free discussion, decision by majority, etc. While these societies certainly remained an exclusively bour-
geois affair, they did provide the training ground for what were to become a future society's norms of political equality.9

The French Revolution eventually triggered a movement toward the politicization of a public sphere that at first revolved around literature and art criticism. This is true not only of France, but holds for Germany as well.10 A "politicization of associational life," the rise of a partisan press, the fight against censorship and for freedom of opinion characterize the change in function of the expanding network of public communication up to the middle of the nineteenth century.11 The policies of censorship, with which the states of the German Federation fought against the institutionalization of a political public sphere and managed to delay its advent until 1848, only made it more inevitable that literature and criticism would be sucked into the whirlpool of politicizations. Peter U. Hohendahl has used my concept of the public sphere to trace this process in detail, although for him it is the collapse of the revolution of 1848 that marks the turning point for the beginning structural transformation of the early liberal public sphere.12

Eley has directed attention to several recent studies in English social history that fit well into the proposed theoretical framework for the analysis of the public sphere. With reference to the popular liberalism of nineteenth-century Great Britain,13 these studies investigate the processes of class formation, urbanization, cultural mobilization, and the emergence of new structures of communication along the lines of those voluntary associations that became constituted in the eighteenth century.14 Raymond Williams's studies in the sociology of communications are particularly illuminating on the transformation of a public sphere characterized initially by an educated bourgeoisie interested in literature and the critical discussion of cultural issues into a sphere dominated by mass media and mass culture.15

At the same time, Eley repeats and substantiates the objection that my overly stylized depiction of the bourgeois public sphere leads to an unjustified idealization involving more than an overdrawn emphasis on the rational aspects of a public communication whose basis is reading and whose main vehicle is conversation. It is wrong to speak of one single public even if

we assume that a certain homogeneity of the bourgeois public enabled the conflicting parties to consider their class interest, which underneath all differentiation was nevertheless ultimately the same, as the basis for a consensus attainable at least in principle. Apart from introducing a greater internal differentiation of the bourgeois public, which by means of a more detail-oriented focus could also be accommodated within my model, a different picture emerges if from the very beginning one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere.

(2)

We may use "excluded" in Foucault's sense when we are dealing with groups that play a constitutive role in the formation of a particular public sphere. "Exclusion" assumes a different and less radical meaning when the same structures of communication simultaneously give rise to the formation of several arenas where, beside the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, additional subcultural or class-specific public spheres are constituted on the basis of their own and initially not easily reconcilable premises. The first case I did not consider at all the time; the second I mentioned in the preface but left it at that.

With regard to the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution and the Chartist movement, I spoke of the beginnings of a "plebeian" public sphere, and considering it merely a variant of the bourgeois public sphere that remained suppressed in the historical process, I believed neglecting it to be justifiable. However, in the wake of E. P. Thompson's pathbreaking The Making of the English Working Class there appeared a multitude of investigations concerning the French and English Jacobins, Robert Owen and the activities of the early socialists, the Chartists, and also the left-leaning populism in early-nineteenth-century France.16 These studies have provided a different perspective on the political mobilization of the rural lower classes and the urban workers. Günter Lottes, in direct confrontation with my concept of the public sphere, studied the theory and practice of English radicals in the late eighteenth century, as exempli-
fied by the London Jacobins. He shows how under the influence of radical intellectuals and under the conditions of modern communication, the traditional culture of the common people brought forth a new political culture with organizational forms and practices of its own. "The emergence of the plebeian public sphere thus marks a specific phase in the historical development of the life relations of the petite bourgeoisie and the strata below it. It is, on the one hand, a variant of the bourgeois public sphere, for it takes it as a model. On the other hand it is more than a mere variant, since it develops the bourgeois public sphere's emancipatory potential in a new social context. The plebeian public sphere is, in a manner of speaking, a bourgeois public sphere whose social preconditions have been rendered null."17 The exclusion of the culturally and politically mobilized lower strata entails a pluralization of the public sphere in the very process of its emergence. Next to, and interlocked with, the hegemonic public sphere, a plebeian one assumes shape.

Within the traditional forms of representative publicnecss, the exclusion of the people operated in a different manner. Here the people functioned as the backdrop before which the ruling estates, nobility, church dignitaries, kings, etc. displayed themselves and their status. By its very exclusion from the domination so represented, the people are part of the constitutive conditions of this representative publicnecss.

I continue to believe that this type of publicnecss (only sketchily described in section 2 of Structural Transformation) constitutes the historical background to modern forms of public communication. Had he kept this contrast in mind, Richard Sennett might have been able to avoid orienting his diagnosis of the collapse of the bourgeois public sphere toward a wrong model. For Sennett makes certain features of representative publicnecss an integral part of the classical bourgeois public sphere; he does not grasp the specifically bourgeois dialectic of inwardness and publicnecss that in the eighteenth century, through the ascendancy of the audience-oriented privateness of the bourgeois intimate sphere, begins to capture the literary world as well. Since he does not sufficiently distinguish between the two types of publicnecss, he believes that he can document the cor-

rectness of his diagnosis of the end of "public culture" by reference to the decline in the forms of an impersonal, ceremonialized role-playing esthetic of self-presentation. However, staging the presentation of oneself behind a mask that removes private emotions and everything subjective from sight should properly be considered part of the highly stylized framework of a representative publicnecss whose conventions had already crumbled in the eighteenth century, when bourgeois private people formed themselves into a public and therewith became the carriers of a new type of public sphere.18

I must confess, however, that only after reading Mikhail Bakhtin's great book Rabelais and His World have my eyes become really opened to the inner dynamics of a plebeian culture. This culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines.19 Only a stereoscopic view of this sort reveals how a mechanism of exclusion that locks out and represses at the same time calls forth countereffects that cannot be neutralized. If we apply the same perspective to the bourgeois public sphere, the exclusion of women from this world dominated by men now looks different than it appeared to me at the time.

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No doubt existed about the patriarchal character of the conjugal family that constituted both the core of bourgeois society's private sphere and the source of the novel psychological experiences of a subjectivity concerned with itself. By now, however, the growing feminist literature has sensitized our awareness to the patriarchal character of the public sphere itself, a public sphere that soon transcended the confines of the reading public (of which women were a constituting part) and assumed political functions.20 The question is whether women were excluded from the bourgeois public sphere in the same fashion as workers, peasants, and the "people," i.e., men lacking "independence."
Both women and the other groups were denied equal active participation in the formation of political opinion and will. Under the conditions of a class society, bourgeois democracy thus from its very inception contradicted essential premises of its self-understanding. This dialectic could still be grasped within the categories of the Marxist critique of domination and ideology. Within this perspective I investigated how the relationship between public and private spheres changed in the course of the expansion of the democratic right of participation and the social-welfare state's compensation for class-specific disadvantages. Nevertheless, this structural transformation of the political public sphere proceeded without affecting the patriarchal character of society as a whole. Equality of civil rights, finally attained in the twentieth century, has no doubt created for hitherto underprivileged women the opportunity to improve their social status. Yet women who, through equal political rights, also managed to come to enjoy increased social-welfare benefits did not therewith accomplish the modification of the underprivileged status tied to gender.

The progress toward emancipation, for which feminism has struggled for two centuries, has by now been set into motion on a broad front. Like the social emancipation of wage workers, it is a phenomenon of the universalization of civil rights. However, unlike the institutionalization of class conflict, the transformation of the relationship between the sexes affects not only the economic system but has an impact on the private core area of the conjugal family. This shows that the exclusion of women has been constitutive for the political public sphere not merely in that the latter has been dominated by men as a matter of contingency but also in that its structure and relation to the private sphere has been determined in a gender-specific fashion. Unlike the exclusion of underprivileged men, the exclusion of women had structuring significance.

This is the thesis advocated by Carol Pateman in an influential essay first published in 1983. She deconstructs the contract-theoretical justifications of the democratic constitutional state to demonstrate that rationalist legal criticism of the paternalistic exercise of domination merely functions to modernize patriarchy in the form of a rule of brothers: "Patriarchalism has two dimensions: the paternal (father versus son) and the masculine (husband versus wife). Political theorists can represent the outcome of the theoretical battle as a victory for contract theory because they are silent about the sexual or conjugal aspect of patriarchy, which appears as nonpolitical or natural." Pateman remains skeptical concerning women's integration on equal terms into a political public sphere whose structures continue to be wedded to the patriarchal features of a private sphere removed from the agenda of public discussion: "Now that the feminist struggle has reached the point where women are almost formal civic equals, the opposition is highlighted between equality made after a male image and the real social position of women as women" (p. 122).

Of course, this convincing consideration does not dismiss rights to unrestricted inclusion and equality, which are an integral part of the liberal public sphere's self-interpretation, but rather appeals to them. Foucault considers the formative rules of a hegemonic discourse as mechanisms of exclusion constituting their respective "other." In these cases there is no communication between those within and those without. Those who participate in the discourse do not share a common language with the protesting others. This is how one may conceive of the relationship between the representative publicness of traditional domination and the devalued counterculture of the common people: people were forced to move and express themselves in a universe that was different and other. In this system, therefore, culture and counterculture were so interlinked that one went down with the other. Bourgeois publicness, in contrast, is articulated in discourses that provided areas of common ground not only for the labor movement but also for the excluded other, that is, the feminist movement. Contact with these movements in turn transformed these discourses and the structures of the public sphere itself from within. From the very beginning, the universalistic discourses of the bourgeois public sphere were based on self-referential premises; they did not remain unaffected by a criticism from within because they differ from Foucaultian discourses by virtue of their potential for self-transformation.
elaborated by the young Marx, and had received its specific shape in the German constitutional-law tradition since Lorenz von Stein.

The constitutional construction of the relationship between a public authority that guarantees liberties and a socioeconomic realm organized on the basis of private law has two sources: on the one hand, the liberal theory of constitutional rights developed during the period of German history known as Vormärz (pre-March), insisting (with obvious political intention) on a strict separation of public and private law; on the other hand, the consequences of the failure of the "dual German revolution of 1848/9" (Wehler), that is, the development of a state based on the rule of law but without democracy. E. W. Böckenförde highlights this specifically German retardation in the gradual enactment of political equality for all citizens as follows:

Once "state" and "society" have begun to confront each other, the problem of society's share in the state's decision-making power and its exercise arises. . . . The state put individuals and society into a condition of civil liberty, and it maintained them in this condition through the creation and enforcement of the new general legal order. Yet individuals and society did not attain political freedom, that is, no share in the political decision-making power concentrated in the state, and no institutionalized possibility to exert an active influence upon it. The state as an organization of domination rested as it were within itself, that is to say, sociologically speaking, it was supported by the monarchy, the civil service and the army, and partially also by the nobility, and thus was "separated" both organizationally and institutionally from the society represented by the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{22}

This historical background also supplies the context for the specific interest in a public sphere. The latter is capable of assuming a political function only to the extent to which it enables the participants in the economy, via their status as citizens, to mutually accommodate or generalize their interests and to assert them so effectively that state power is transformed into a fluid medium of society's self-organization. This is what the young Marx had in mind when he spoke of the reabsorption of the state into a society that has become political in itself. The idea of such a self-organization, channelled through the public communication of freely associated members of society,

2 The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Three Revisions

The structural transformation of the public sphere is embedded in the transformation of state and economy. At the time, I conceived of the latter within a theoretical framework that had been outlined in Hegel's philosophy of right, had been

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The two shortcomings remonstrated by Eley have implications for an ideal-typical model of the bourgeois public sphere. The modern public sphere comprises several arenas in which, through printed materials dealing with matters of culture, information, and entertainment, a conflict of opinions is fought out more or less discursively. This conflict does not merely involve a competition among various parties of loosely associated private people; from the beginning a dominant bourgeois public collides with a plebeian one. From this it follows, especially if one seriously tries to make room for the feminist dynamic of the excluded other, that the model of the contradictory institutionalization of the public sphere in the bourgeois constitutional state (developed in section 11 of \textit{Structural Transformation}) is conceived too rigidly. The tensions that are to be faced in the liberal public sphere must be depicted more clearly as potentials for a self-transformation. As a result, the contrast between an early political public sphere (lasting up to the middle of the nineteenth century) and the public sphere of the mass-democratic social-welfare states, which has been subverted by power, no longer has the ring of a contrast between an idealistically glorified past and a present distorted by the mirror of cultural criticism. This implicit normative gradient bothered many reviewers. As I shall discuss, it was a consequence not only of the ideology-critical approach as such but also of the blocking out of aspects that I mentioned, to be sure, but whose significance I underestimated. Still, a mistake in the assessment of the significance of certain aspects does not falsify the larger outline of the process of transformation that I presented.
demands (in a first sense) that the “separation” of state and society, as sketched by Böckenförde, be overcome.

Connected with the conception of this separation on the level of constitutional law is another, more general one: the emergence, through differentiation, of an economy controlled through market mechanisms from the premodern orders of political domination. Since the early-modern period, this differentiation had accompanied the gradual ascendancy of the capitalist mode of production and the emergence of modern state bureaucracies. In the retrospective view of liberalism, these developments are interpreted as having their point of convergence in the autonomy of a “bourgeois society” in Hegel's and Marx's sense, that is, in the economic self-regulation of an economic society organized through activities under private law upheld by a constitutional state. This model of a progressive separation of state and society, no longer specially geared toward the specific development in the German states of the nineteenth century but informed more by the prototypical development in Great Britain, supplied the foil for my analysis of the reversal of this trend that began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For this interlinking of state and economy removes the ground from under the model of society assumed by bourgeois private law and the liberal view of the constitution.23 The de facto negation of the tendency toward a separation of state and society I conceptualized, by reference to its juridical reflections, as a neocorporatist “societalization of the state,” on the one hand, and as a “state-ification of society,” on the other, both occurring as a result of the interventionist policies of a now actively interfering state.

All this has by now been investigated with much greater precision. I merely want to bring back to mind the theoretical perspective that emerges when the normative meaning of the self-regulation of a society characterized by a radical democratic elimination of the separation between state and economic sphere is compared with the functional interlinkage of the two systems as it actually became reality. My guiding point of view was that of the potential for societal self-regulation inhering in the political public sphere, and I was interested in the repercussions of those complex developments toward the social-

welfare state and organized capitalism in the Western type societies. In particular, I was concerned with the repercussions on the private sphere and the social bases of private autonomy (subsection 1 below), the structure of the public sphere as well as the composition and behavior of the public (subsection 2), and finally, the legitimation process of mass democracy itself (subsection 3).

With regard to these three aspects, my presentation in chapters 5 to 7 of Structural Transformation exhibits a number of weaknesses.

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In the modern natural-law conceptions, but also in the social theories of the Scottish moral philosophers, civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft) was always contrasted with public authority or government as a sphere that is private in its entirety.24 According to the self-conception of early modern bourgeois society, stratified by occupational groupings, the sphere of commodity exchange and social labor as well as the household and the family relieved from productive functions without distinctions were deemed to belong to the private sphere of “civil society.” Both were structured in a like sense; the position and decision-making latitude of private owners involved in production constituted the basis for a private autonomy whose psychological flip side, so to speak, lay in the conjugal family’s intimate sphere. For the economically dependent classes, a tight structural connection of this sort never existed. But only with the onset of the social emancipation of the lower strata and with the politicization of class conflicts on a massive scale in the nineteenth century did awareness also arise in the life-world of the bourgeois social strata that the two realms, the family’s intimate sphere and the occupational system, were structured at cross-purposes. What a later literature conceptualized as the tendency toward an “organizational society,” as the progressing autonomy of the level of the organization vis-à-vis the network of basic interactions, I described in section 17 as the “polarization of the social sphere and the intimate sphere.”
The realm of private life, defined by family, neighborly contacts, social occasions, and all sorts of informal relations, does not merely become a distinct entity through differentiation; it is simultaneously transformed differently for each social stratum in the course of long-term tendencies such as urbanization, bureaucratization, the concentration of enterprises, and finally the shift to mass consumption accompanied by ever more leisure time. Yet I am interested here not in the empirical aspects (which need to be supplemented) of this structural transformation of the circumstances of life experience but in the theoretical point of view from which I described at the time the changing status of the private sphere.

After the universalization of equal civil rights, the private autonomy of the masses could no longer have its social basis in the control over private property, in contrast to those private people who in the associations of the bourgeois public sphere had come together to form the public of citizens. To be sure, the actualization of the potential for societal self-regulation presumptively contained in an expanding public sphere would have required that the culturally and politically mobilized masses make effective use of their rights to communication and participation. But even under ideally favorable conditions of communication, one could have expected from economically dependent masses a contribution to the spontaneous formation of opinion and will only to the extent to which they had attained the equivalent of the social independence of private property owners. Obviously, the propertless masses could no longer gain control of the social preconditions of their private existence through participation in a system of commodity and capital markets organized under private law. Their private autonomy had to be secured through reliance on the status guarantees of a social-welfare state. This derivative private autonomy, however, could function as an equivalent of the original private autonomy based on control over private property only to the degree to which the citizens, as clients of the social-welfare state, came to enjoy status guarantees that they bestowed on themselves in their capacities as citizens of a democratic state. This in turn appeared to become possible

in proportion to the expansion of democratic control to the economic process in its entirety.

This consideration had its place in the context of a drawn-out controversy among scholars of constitutional law in the 1950s. Ernst Forsthoft and Wolfgang Abendroth were protagonists in this dispute over an issue of legal systematics, i.e., the compatibility of the social-welfare principle with the handed-down architectonics of the constitutional state.25 The Carl Schmitt school argued that the preservation of the structure of the constitutional state required the unconditional priority of the protection of the classical legal freedoms over the demands of social welfare provisions.26 Abendroth, in contrast, interpreted the social-welfare principle simultaneously as the preeminent hermeneutic governing the interpretation of the constitution and as a policy-shaping maxim for the political legislator. The idea of the social-welfare state was to provide the leverage for a radical democratic reformism that preserved at least the possibility for a transition toward democratic socialism. Abendroth maintained that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany aimed at “extending the idea of a substantively democratic constitutional state (which means especially the principle of equality and its combination with the notion of participation in the idea of self-determination) to the entire economic and social order” (Structural Transformation, pp. 226–227, my emphasis). Within this perspective, of course, the political public sphere is reduced to function as a sort of adjunct for a legislator whose judgment is theoretically and constitutionally predetermined and who knows a priori in what fashion the democratic state has to pursue “the substantive shaping of the social order” that is incumbent on it, namely through “the state’s interference with that ownership . . . that makes possible private control over large means of production and therewith control over economic and social positions of power that cannot be democratically legitimated.”27

As much as the insistence on the dogmas of the liberal constitutional state has failed to do justice to the changed social conditions, one cannot but be struck by the weaknesses of a Hegelian-Marxist style of thought, all wrapped up in notions of totality, as is evidently the case with Abendroth’s fascinating
program. Even though in the meantime I have distanced myself more from such an approach, this circumstance does nothing to diminish my intellectual and personal debt to Wolfgang Abendroth, which I acknowledged in my dedication. I must state my conviction, however, that a functionally differentiated society cannot be adequately grasped by holistic concepts of society. The bankruptcy of state socialism now witnessed has once again confirmed that a modern, market-regulated economic system cannot be switched as one pleases, from a monetary mechanism to one involving administrative power and democratic decision making, without threatening its performance capacity. Additionally, our experiences with a social-welfare state being pushed to its limits have sensitized us to the phenomena of bureaucratization and intrusive legalism (Verrechtlichung). These pathological effects are consequences of the state’s interventions in spheres of activity structured in a manner that renders the legal-administrative mode of regulating them inappropriate.

(2)

The central topic of the second half of the book is the structural transformation, embedded in the integration of state and society, of the public sphere itself. The infrastructure of the public sphere has changed along with the forms of organization, marketing, and consumption of a professionalized book production that operates on a larger scale and is oriented to new strata of readers, and of a newspaper and periodical press whose contents have also not remained the same. It changed with the rise of the electronic mass media, the new relevance of advertising, the increasing fusion of entertainment and information, the greater centralization in all areas, the collapse of the liberal associational life, the collapse of surveyable public spheres on the community level, etc. It seems that these tendencies were assessed correctly, even if in the meantime more detailed investigations have been presented. In conjunction with an ever more commercialized and increasingly dense network of communication, with the growing capital requirements and organizational scale of publishing enterprises, the channels of communication became more regulated, and the opportunities for access to public communication became subjected to ever greater selective pressure. Therewith emerged a new sort of influence, i.e., media power, which, used for purposes of manipulation, once and for all took care of the innocence of the principle of publicity. The public sphere, simultaneously prestructured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behavior while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible.

A realistic description and analysis of the power-infiltrated public sphere certainly prohibits the uncontrolled infusion of valuing points of view. Yet by the same token, it is too high a price to pay if, in exchange for such a prohibition, empirically important differences are paved over. Therefore, I introduced a distinction between, on the one hand, the critical functions of self-regulated, horizontally interlinked, inclusive, and more or less discourse-resembling communicative processes supported by weak institutions and, on the other hand, those functions that aim to influence the decisions of consumers, voters, and clients and are promoted by organizations intervening in a public sphere under the sway of mass media to mobilize purchasing power, loyalty, or conformist behavior. These extractive intrusions into a public sphere no longer perceived as anything else than an environment of one’s own system of reference encounter a public communication whose spontaneous source of regeneration is to be found in the lifeworld. This was the meaning of the thesis that “publicity operating under the conditions of a social-welfare state must conceive of itself as a self-generating process. Gradually it has to establish itself in competition with that other tendency which, within an immensely expanded public sphere, turns the principle of publicity against itself and thereby reduces its critical efficacy” (Structural Transformation, p. 233).

While on the whole I would stick to my descriptions of the changed infrastructure of a public sphere infiltrated by power, its analysis needs to be revised, especially my assessment of the
changes in the public's behavior. In retrospect, I discern a number of reasons for the insufficiency of my interpretation: the sociology of voter behavior was only in its beginnings, in Germany at least. What I came to grips with at the time were my own first-hand experiences with the first election campaigns run along the lines of marketing strategies on the basis of opinion polls. I presume that the population of the German Democratic Republic has been similarly shocked by the campaigns of the West German parties currently invading its territory. Also, at the time television had barely made its start in the Federal Republic. I became acquainted with such sociology only years later in the United States; thus I was not able to check the literature with experiences of my own. Furthermore, the strong influence of Adorno's theory of mass culture is not difficult to discern. Additionally, the depressing results of the just-finished empirical investigation for *Student und Politik* may have contributed to an underestimation of the positive influence of formal schooling, especially of its expanding secondary level, on cultural mobilization and the promotion of critical attitudes. It should be remembered, however, that the process later called the "educational revolution" by Parsons, had not yet started up in the Federal Republic. Finally there is the glaring absence of anything belonging to the dimension that by now has come to attract great attention under the label of "political culture." As late as 1963 Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba had still attempted to capture the "civic culture" by means of a few attitudinal variables. Even the more broadly conceived research on value change, initiated by Ronald Inglehart's *Silent Revolution* (Princeton 1977), did not yet extend to the entire spectrum of political mentalities that are firmly engrained in a culture and in which a mass public's repertory of responses is historically rooted.

In fine, my diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into a bad privacy, from a "culture-debating to a culture-consuming public," is too simplistic. At the time, I was too pessimistic about the resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public whose cultural usages have begun to shake off the constraints of class. In conjunction with the ambivalent relaxation of the distinction between high and low culture, and the no less ambiguous "new intimacy between culture and politics," which is more complex than a mere assimilation of information to entertainment, the standards of evaluation themselves have also changed.

I cannot even begin to comment on the diversified literature in the sociology of political behavior, since I have paid only sporadic attention to it. Just as relevant to the topic of the structural transformation of the public sphere is the research on the media, especially the investigations in the sociology of communication concerned with the social effects of television. At the time, I had to rely on the results of the research tradition established by Lazarsfeld, which in the 1970s was heavily criticized for its individualist-behaviorist approach constrained by the limitations of small-group psychology. At the opposite pole, the ideology-critical approach has been continued in a more empirical vein. It has directed the attention of communication researchers to the institutional context of the media, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the cultural context of their reception. Stuart Hall's distinction between three different interpretive strategies on the part of spectators (who either submit to the structure of what is being offered, take an oppositional stance, or synthesize it with their own interpretations) illustrates well how the perspective has changed from the older explanatory models still assuming linear causal processes.

(3)

In the last chapter of the book I had attempted to bring the two strands together: the empirical diagnosis of the breakdown of the liberal public sphere and the normative aspect of a radical democratic vision that takes into account and turns to its own purpose the functional intertwining of state and society that objectively goes on above the heads, as it were, of the participants. These two aspects are reflected in two diverging conceptualizations of "public opinion." As a fictitious construct of constitutional law, public opinion continues, in the normative theory of democracy, to be endowed with the unitariness
of a counterfactual entity. In the empirical investigations of media research and the sociology of communication this entity has long since been disassembled. However, both aspects must be kept in mind if one wants to grasp the mode in which the creation of legitimacy has actually come to operate in mass democracies constituted as social-welfare states, yet does not want to gloss over the distinction between genuine processes of public communication and those that have been subverted by power.

This intention provides the rationale for the provisional model, sketched at the end of the book, of a mass-media-dominated arena in which opposing tendencies clash. The degree of its infusion with power was supposed to be measured by the extent to which the informal, nonpublic opinions (i.e., those attitudes and assessments that are taken for granted within a culture and that make up the lifeworld constituting the context and ground of public communication) are not fed into the circuits of formal, quasi public opinion making by the mass media (which state and economy, considering them system environments, try to influence) or by the degree to which both realms are brought into conflict by means of a critical publicity. At the time, I could not imagine any other vehicle of critical publicity than internally democratized interest associations and parties. Intraparty and intra-associational public spheres appeared to me as the potential centers of a public communication still capable of being regenerated. This conclusion was derived from the trend toward an organization society in which it is no longer associated individuals but rather members of organized collectivities who, in a polycentric public sphere, compete for the assent of passive masses in order to achieve a balance of power and interests against each other and especially against the massive complex of state bureaucracies. As recently as the 1980s, Norberto Bobbio, for example, has proposed a theory of democracy based on the same premises.41

However, this model again ran up against that pluralism of irreconcilable interests that already moved the liberal theoreticians to object to the “tyranny of the majority.” Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill were perhaps not so mistaken in their belief that the early liberal notion of a discursively accomplished formation of opinion and will was nothing but a veiled version of majority power. From the point of view of normative considerations, they were at most prepared to admit public opinion as a constraint on power, but in no way as a medium for the potential rationalization of power altogether. If “a structurally ineradicable antagonism of interests would set narrow boundaries for a public sphere reorganized . . . to fulfill its critical function” (Structural Transformation, p. 234), it would certainly be sufficient simply to charge liberal theory with an ambivalent conception of the public sphere, as I did in section 15 of Structural Transformation.

3 A Modified Theoretical Framework

In spite of the objections raised, I continue to stay with the intention that guided the study as a whole. The mass democracies constituted as social-welfare states, as far as their normative self-interpretation is concerned, can claim to continue the principles of the liberal constitutional state only as long as they seriously try to live up to the mandate of a public sphere that fulfills political functions. Accordingly, it is necessary to demonstrate how it may be possible, in our type of society, for “the public . . . to set in motion a critical process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it” (Structural Transformation, p. 232). This question drew me back, at the close of the book, to the problem on which I had touched but failed to address properly. The contribution of Structural Transformation to a contemporary theory of democracy had come under a cloud if “the unresolved plurality of competing interests . . . makes it doubtful whether there can ever emerge a general interest of the kind to which a public opinion could refer as a criterion” (Structural Transformation, p. 234). On the basis of the theoretical means available to me at the time, I could not resolve this problem. Further advances were necessary to produce a theoretical framework within which I can now reformulate the questions and provide at least the outline of an answer. I want to recall, by way of a few brief remarks, the major way stations of this development.
Only to a superficial glance would it have appeared possible to write *Structural Transformation* along the lines of a developmental history of society in the style of Marx and Max Weber. The dialectic of the bourgeois public sphere, which determines the book's structure, wears the ideology-critical approach on its sleeve. The ideals of bourgeois humanism that have left their characteristic mark on the self-interpretation of the intimate sphere and the public and that are articulated in the key concepts of subjectivity and self-actualization, rational formation of opinion and will, and personal and political self-determination have infused the institutions of the constitutional state to such an extent that, functioning as a utopian potential, they point beyond a constitutional reality that negates them. The dynamic of historical development too was to be fueled by this tension between idea and reality.

Unfortunately, this thought makes it tempting to idealize the bourgeois public sphere in a manner going way beyond any methodologically legitimate idealization of the sort involved in ideal-typical conceptualization. But it is also propped up, at least implicitly, by background assumptions belonging to a philosophy of history that have been refuted by the civilized barbarisms of the twentieth century. When these bourgeois ideals are cashed in, when the consciousness turns cynical, the commitment to those norms and value orientations that the critique of ideology must presuppose for its appeal to find a hearing becomes defunct.\(^42\) I suggested, therefore, that the normative foundations of the critical theory of society be laid at a deeper level.\(^43\) The theory of communicative action intends to bring into the open the rational potential intrinsic in everyday communicative practices. Therewith it also prepares the way for a social science that proceeds reconstructively, identifies the entire spectrum of cultural and societal rationalization processes, and also traces them back beyond the threshold of modern societies. Such a tack no longer restricts the search for normative potentials to a formation of the public sphere that was specific to a single epoch.\(^44\) It removes the necessity for stylizing particular prototypical manifestations of an institutionally embodied communicative rationality in favor of an empirical approach in which the tension of the abstract opposition between norm and reality is dissolved. Furthermore, unlike the classical assumptions of historical materialism, it brings to the fore the relative structural autonomy and internal history of cultural systems of interpretation.\(^45\)

The perspective from which I inquired into the structural transformation of the public sphere was linked to a theory of democracy indebted to Arendt’s concept of a socialist democracy evolving out of the democratic, constitutional welfare state. In general, it remained captive of a notion that became questionable in the meantime, i.e., that society and its self-organization are to be considered a totality. The society that administers itself, that by means of a legal enactment of plans writes the program controlling all spheres of its life, including its economic reproduction, was to be integrated through the political will of the sovereign people. But the presumption that society as a whole can be conceived as an association writ large, directing itself via the media of law and political power, has become entirely implausible in view of the high level of complexity of functionally differentiated societies. The holistic notion of a societal totality in which the associated individuals participate like the members of an encompassing organization is particularly ill suited to provide access to the realities of an economic system regulated through markets and of an administrative system regulated through power. While in *Technik und Wissenschaft als “Ideologie”* (1968) I had still tried to differentiate between the action systems of state and economy on the level of a theory of action, proposing the predominance of purposive and rational (or success-oriented) action versus that of communicative action as a distinguishing criterion, this all-too-handly parallelization of action systems and action types produced some nonsensical results.\(^46\) This caused me, in *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), to link the concept of lifeworld, introduced in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967), to that of the boundary maintaining system. From this emerged, in *The Theory of
**Communicative Action** (1981), the two-tiered concept of society as lifeworld and as system. The implications for my concept of democracy were considerable.

From that time on I have considered state apparatus and economy to be systemically integrated action fields that can no longer be transformed democratically from within, that is, be switched over to a political mode of integration, without damage to their proper systemic logic and therewith their ability to function. The abysmal collapse of state socialism has only confirmed this. Instead, radical democratization now aims for a shifting of forces within a “separation of powers” that itself is to be maintained in principle. The new equilibrium to be attained is not one between state powers but between different resources for societal integration. The goal is no longer to supersede an economic system having a capitalist life of its own and a system of domination having a bureaucratic life of its own but to erect a democratic dam against the colonializing encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld. Therewith we have bid a farewell to the notion of alienation and appropriation of objectified essentialist powers, whose place is in a philosophy of praxis. 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.

(3)

The social integrative power of communicative action is first of all located in those particularized forms of life and lifeworlds that are intertwined with concrete traditions and interest constellations in the “ethical” sphere (“Sittlichkeit”), to use Hegel’s terms. But the solidarity-generating energies of these fabrics of life do not directly carry over into democratic procedures for the settling of competing interests and power claims on the political level. This is especially so in posttraditional societies in which a homogeneity of background convictions cannot be assumed and in which a presumptively shared class interest has given way to a confused pluralism of competing and equally legitimate forms of life. To be sure, the intersubjectivist formulation of a concept of solidarity that links the establishment of understandings (Verständigung) to validity claims that can be criticized, and therewith to the ability on the part of individuated subjects fully in a position to make up their own minds (zurechnungsfähig) to announce their disagreement (Neinsagenkönnen), already does away with the usual connotations of unity and wholeness. However, even in this abstract formulation the word “solidarity” must not suggest the false model of a formation of will à la Rousseau that was intended to establish the conditions under which the empirical wills of separate bourgeois could be transformed, *without any intermediary*, into the wills, open to reason and oriented toward the common good, of moral citizens of a state.

Rousseau based this expectation of virtuousness (illusory from the beginning) on a separation of the roles of “bourgeois” and “citoyen,” which made economic independence and equality of opportunity a precondition of the status of autonomous citizen. The social-welfare state negates this role separation: “In the modern Western democracies this relationship has been severed. The democratic formation of the will has become instrumental to the promotion of social equality in the sense of maximizing the even distribution of the national product among the individuals.”49 Pruss justifiably underscores that nowadays the public role of the citizen and the private role of the client of the social-welfare state’s bureaucracies are interlinked in the political process. “The mass democracy established as a social-welfare state [has] produced the paradoxical category of the ‘societalized private person,’ whom we commonly call ‘client’ and who becomes one with the role of citizen to the extent to which he becomes societally universal” (ibid., p. 48). Democratic universalism flips over into “generalized particularism.”

In section 12 of *Structural Transformation* I criticized Rousseau’s “democracy of nonpublic opinion” because he conceives of the general will as a “consensus of hearts rather than of
arguments.” The morality with which Rousseau demands the citizens to be imbued and that he places in the individuals’ motives and virtues must instead be anchored in the process of public communication itself. The essential aspect here is pinpointed by B. Manin:

It is necessary to alter radically the perspective common to both liberal theories and democratic thought: the source of legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals, but rather the process of its formation, that is, deliberation itself. . . . A legitimate decision does not represent the will of all, but is one that results from the deliberation of all. It is the process by which everyone’s will is formed that confers its legitimacy on the outcome, rather than the sum of already formed wills. The deliberative principle is both individualist and democratic. . . . We must affirm, at the risk of contradicting a long tradition, that legitimate law is the result of general deliberation, and not the expression of general will.$^{50}$

Therewith the burden of proof shifts from the morality of citizens to the conduciveness of specific processes of the democratic formation of opinion and will, presumed to have the potential for generating rational outcomes, of actually leading to such results.

(4)

This is why “political public sphere” is appropriate as the quintessential concept denoting all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion and will on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state. This is why it is suitable as the fundamental concept of a theory of democracy whose intent is normative. In this sense Jean Cohen defines the concept of deliberative democracy as follows: “The notion of a deliberative democracy is rooted in the intuitive ideal of a democratic association in which the justification of the terms and conditions of association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens. Citizens in such an order share a commitment to the resolution of problems of collective choice through public reasoning, and regard their basic institutions as legitimate insofar as they establish a framework for free public deliberation.”$^{51}$ This discourse-centered concept of democracy places its faith in the political mobilization and utilization of the communicative force of production. Yet, consequently, it has to be shown that social issues liable to generate conflicts are open to rational regulation, that is, regulation in the common interest of all parties involved. Additionally, it must be explained why engaging in public arguments and negotiations is the appropriate medium for this rational formation of will. Otherwise, the premise of the liberal model would be justified, that the only way in which irreconcilable conflicting interests can be “brought to terms” is through a strategically conducted struggle.

In the last two decades John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Bruce Ackermann, Paul Lorenzen, and K.-O. Apel have contributed arguments intended to clarify how practical-political questions, insofar as they are of a moral nature, can be decided rationally. These authors have made explicit the “moral point of view” that permits an impartial assessment of what, in a particular case, is in the general interest. Regardless of how they have formulated and justified their universalizing principles and moral axioms, this much seems to have become clear in this wide-ranging discussion: there are solid reasons available that can provide a foundation for a universalization of interests and for an appropriate application of norms embodying such general interests.$^{52}$ Beyond that, with K.-O. Apel,$^{53}$ I developed a discourse-centered approach to ethics that views the exchange of arguments and counter-arguments as the most suitable procedure for resolving moral-practical questions.$^{54}$ Therewith the second of the two above-mentioned questions receives an answer. The discourse-centered approach to ethics does not limit itself to the claim that it can derive a general principle of morality from the normative content of the indispensable pragmatic preconditions of all rational debate. Rather, this principle itself refers to the discursive redemption of normative validity claims, for it anchors the validity of norms in the possibility of a rationally founded agreement on the part of all those who might be affected, insofar as they take on the role of participants in a rational debate. In this view, then, the settling of political
questions, as far as their moral core is concerned, depends on the institutionalization of practices of rational public debate. Of course, although issues of political principle almost always also have a moral dimension, by no means all questions institutionally defined as part of the bailiwick of political decision makers are of a moral nature. Political controversies frequently concern empirical questions, the interpretation of states of affairs, explanations, prognoses, etc. Also, certain problems of great significance, so-called existential issues, often concern not questions of justice but, as questions concerning the good life, have to do with ethical-political self-image, be it of a whole society, be it of some subcultures. After all, the majority of conflicts have their sources in the collision of group interests and concern distributive problems that can be resolved only by means of compromises. Yet this differentiation within the field of issues that require political decisions negates neither the prime importance of moral considerations nor the practicability of rational debate as the very form of political communication. Empirical and evaluative questions are frequently inseparable and evidently cannot be dealt with without reliance on arguments. The ethical-political process of coming to an understanding about how, as members of a particular collectivity, we want to live must at least not be at odds with moral norms. Negotiations must rely on the exchange of arguments, and whether they lead to compromises that are fair depends essentially on procedural conditions subject to moral judgment.

The discourse-centered theoretical approach has the advantage of being able to specify the preconditions for communication that have to be fulfilled in the various forms of rational debate and in negotiations if the results of such discourses are to be presumed to be rational. Therewith this approach opens up the possibility of linking normative considerations to empirical sociological ones.

(5)

Since the discourse-centered concept of democracy first of all has to be clarified and made plausible within the framework of a normative theory, the question remains of how, under the conditions of mass democracies constituted as social-welfare states, a discursive formation of opinion and will can be institutionalized in such a fashion that it becomes possible to bridge the gap between enlightened self-interest and orientation to the common good, between the roles of client and citizen. Indeed, an element intrinsic to the preconditions of communication of all practices of rational debate is the presumption of impartiality and the expectation that the participants question and transcend whatever their initial preferences may have been. Meeting these two preconditions must even become a matter of routine. Modern natural law’s way of coming to terms with this problem was the introduction of legitimate legal coercion. And the subsequent problem entailed by this solution, how the political power required for the coercive imposition of law could itself be morally controlled, was met by Kant’s idea of a state subject to the rule of law. Within a discourse-centered theoretical approach, this idea is carried further to give rise to the notions that additionally the law is applied to itself: it must also guarantee the discursive mode by means of which generation and application of legislative programs are to proceed within the parameters of rational debate. This implies the institutionalization of legal procedures that guarantee an approximate fulfillment of the demanding preconditions of communication required for fair negotiations and free debates. These idealizing preconditions demand the complete inclusion of all parties that might be affected, their equality, free and easy interaction, no restrictions of topics and topical contributions, the possibility of revising the outcomes, etc. In this context the legal procedures serve to uphold within an empirically existing community of communication the spatial, temporal, and substantive constraints on choices that are operative within a presumed ideal one.

For instance, the rule to abide by majority decisions can be interpreted as an arrangement squaring a formation of opinion that seeks truth and is as discursive as circumstances permit with the temporal constraints to which the formation of will is subject. Within a discourse-centered theoretical approach, decision by majority must remain internally related to a practice of rational debate, which entails further institutional arrange-
ments (such as the requirement to state one's reasons, rules allotting the burden of proof, repeated readings of legislative proposals, etc.). A majority decision must be arrived at in such a fashion, and only in such a fashion, that its content can be claimed to be the rationally motivated but fallible result of a discussion concerning the judicious resolution of a problem, a discussion that has come temporarily to a close because coming to a decision could no longer be postponed. Other institutions too may be interpreted from this same perspective of a legal institutionalization of the general conditions of communication for a discursive formation of will, as, for example, the regulations concerning the composition and mode of operation of parliamentary bodies, the responsibilities and immunities of elected representatives, the political pluralism of a multiparty system, the necessity for broad-based parties to package their programs so that they appeal to various interest constellations, etc.

The deciphering of the normative meaning of existing institutions within a discourse-centered theoretical approach additionally supplies a perspective on the introduction and testing of novel institutional arrangements that might counteract the trend toward the transmutation of citizens into clients. These must reinforce the gradation between the two roles by interrupting the short circuit that abandons the field to the play of immediate personal preferences and the generalized particularism of interests organized in special-interest associations. The novel idea of connecting the vote to a “multiple preference ordering” is a case in point. Such suggestions must be based on an analysis of the inhibiting factors at work in the existing arrangements that condition citizens to an unpolitical follower mentality and prevent them from reflecting and being concerned with anything but their own short-term personal interests. In other words, the unlocking of the democratic meaning of the constitutional state’s institutions within a discourse-centered theoretical approach must be supplemented with the critical investigation of the mechanisms that in democracies constituted as social-welfare states function to alienate citizens from the political process.
communication that regulate the flow of the formation of political opinion and will so as to endow their fallible results with the presumption of practical rationality.\textsuperscript{50} This sovereignty turned into a flow of communication comes to the fore in the power of public discourses that uncover topics of relevance to all of society, interpret values, contribute to the resolution of problems, generate good reasons, and debunk bad ones. Of course, these opinions must be given shape in the form of decisions by democratically constituted decision-making bodies. The responsibility for practically consequential decisions must be based in an institution. Discourses do not govern. They generate a communicative power that cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it. This influence is limited to the procurement and withdrawal of legitimation. Communicative power cannot supply a substitute for the systematic inner logic of public bureaucracies. Rather, it achieves an impact on this logic "in a siegelike manner." If the sovereignty of the people is in this fashion dissolved into procedures and attempts, the symbolic place of power—a vacuum since 1789, that is, since the revolutionary abolishment of paternistic forms of domination—also remains empty and is not filled with new identity-conveying symbolizations, like people or nations, as Rödel, following Claude Lefort, would have it.\textsuperscript{60}

4 Civil Society or Political Public Sphere

Having thus changed my premises and upgraded their precision, I can finally return to the task of describing a political public sphere characterized by at least two crosscutting processes: the communicative generation of legitimate power on the one hand and the manipulative deployment of media power to procure mass loyalty, consumer demand, and "compliance" with systemic imperatives on the other. The question that had been left pending concerning the basis and sources of an informal formation of opinion in autonomous public spheres now can no longer be answered with reference to the status guarantees of the social-welfare state and with the holistic demand for the political self-organization of society. Rather, this is the place where the circle closes between the structural transformation of the public sphere and those long-term trends that the theory of communicative action conceives as a rationalization of the lifeworld. 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.

The central question in Structural Transformation is nowadays discussed under the rubric of the "rediscovery of civil society." The global reference to a "supportive" spirit of differentially organized lifeworlds and their potential for critical reflection is not sufficient. It must be made more concrete, and not only with regard to patterns of socialization and to cultural traditions. A liberal political culture rooted in motives and value orientations certainly provides a favorable soil for spontaneous public communications. But the forms of interchange and organization, the institutionalizations of support of a political public sphere unsubverted by power, are even more important. Here is the point of departure for Claus Offe's most recent analyses. Offe uses the concept of "relations of association," intending "to confront the global categories of lifeworld and form of life that are to provide the discourse ethic with an anchor in the social realm, with rather more sociological categories."\textsuperscript{61} The vague concept "relations of association" is not by accident reminiscent of the "associational life" that at one time constituted the social stratum of the bourgeois public sphere. It also recalls the now current meaning of the term "civil society," which no longer includes a sphere of an economy regulated via labor, capital, and commodity markets and thus differs from the modern translation, common since Hegel and Marx, of "societas civilis" as "bourgeois society" ("bürgerliche Gesellschaft"). Unfortunately, a search for clear definitions in the relevant publications is in vain. However, this much is apparent: the institutional core of "civil society" is constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy and ranging (to give some examples in no particular order) from churches, cultural associations, and academics to independent media, sport and leisure clubs, debating societies, groups of concerned citizens, and grass-roots petitioning drives.
all the way to occupational associations, political parties, labor unions, and "alternative institutions."

John Keane attributes to these associations the following task or function: "to maintain and to redefine the boundaries between civil society and state through two interdependent and simultaneous processes: the expansion of social equality and liberty, and the restructuring and democratization of the state." In other words, he refers to opinion-forming associations. Unlike the political parties, which to a large extent have become fused with the state, they are not part of the administrative system but manage to have a political impact via the public media because they either participate directly in public communications or, as in the case of projects advocating alternatives to conventional wisdom, because the programmatic character of their activities sets examples through which they implicitly contribute to public discussion.

Similarly, Offe endows the relations of associations with the function of establishing contexts conducive to a political communication that, through sufficiently convincing arguments, readies citizens to engage in "responsible behavior": "To behave responsibly means for the actor to adopt toward his own actions, in the *futurum exactum*, the evaluative perspectives of the expert, the generalized other, and his own self all at once, thus subjecting the criteria governing the behavior to functional, social, and temporal validation."

The concept of civil society owes its rise in favor to the criticism leveled, especially by dissidents from state-socialist societies, against the totalitarian annihilation of the political public sphere. Here Hannah Arendt's concept of totalitarianism, with its focus on communication, plays an important role. It provides the foil that makes it understandable why the opinion-shaping associations, around which autonomous public spheres can be built up, occupy such a prominent place in the civil society. It is precisely this communicative praxis on the part of citizens that, in totalitarian regimes, is subjected to the control of the secret police. The revolutionary changes in eastern and central Europe have confirmed these analyses. Not coincidentally, they were triggered by reform policies initiated under the banner of *glasnost*. As if a large-scale experiment in

social science had been set up, the apparatus of domination was overthrown by the increasing pressure of peacefully proceeding citizen movements; the German Democratic Republic is the primary case in point. In a first step, out of these citizen movements grew the infrastructure of a new order, whose outline had already become visible in the ruins of state socialism. The pacemakers of this revolution were voluntary associations in the churches, the human rights groups, the oppositional circles pursuing ecological and feminist goals, against whose latent influence the totalitarian public sphere could from the beginning be stabilized only through reliance on force.

The situation is different in Western-type societies. Here voluntary associations are established within the institutional framework of the democratic constitutional state. And here a different question arises, one that cannot be answered without considerable empirical research. This is the question of whether, and to what extent, a public sphere dominated by mass media provides a realistic chance for the members of civil society, in their competition with the political and economic invaders' media power, to bring about changes in the spectrum of values, topics, and reasons channeled by external influences, to open it up in an innovative way, and to screen it critically. It seems to me that the concept of a public sphere operative in the political realm, as I developed it in *Structural Transformation*, still provides the appropriate analytical perspective for the treatment of this problem. This is why Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, in their attempt to make the concept of civil society fruitful for an up-to-date theory of democracy, adopt the architecture of "system and lifeworld" as it was proposed in *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

I conclude with the reference to an inventive study dealing with the impact of electronic media on the restructuring of basic interactions. Its title, *No Sense of Place*, stands for the claim of the dissolution of those structures within which individuals living in society have hitherto perceived their social positions and have placed themselves. Now even those social boundaries that defined the lifeworld's coordinates of space and historical time have begun to move:
Many of the features of our "information age" make us resemble the most primitive of social and political forms: the hunting and gathering society. As nomadic peoples, hunters and gatherers have no loyal relationship to territory. They, too, have little "sense of place"; specific activities are not totally fixed to specific physical settings. The lack of boundaries both in hunting and gathering and in electronic societies leads to many striking parallels. Of all known societal types before our own, hunting and gathering societies have tended to be the most egalitarian in terms of the roles of males and females, children and adults, and leaders and followers. The difficulty of maintaining many separate places or distinct social spheres tends to involve everyone in everyone else's business.\(^6\)

An unforeseen confirmation of this somewhat overblown thesis is again provided by the revolutionary events of 1989. The transformation occurring in the German Democratic Republic, in Czechoslovakia, and in Romania formed a chain of events properly considered not merely as a historical process that happened to be shown on television but one whose very mode of occurrence was televisual. The mass media's worldwide diffusion had not only a decisive infectious effect. In contrast to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the physical presence of the masses demonstrating in the squares and streets was able to generate revolutionary power only to the degree to which television made its presence ubiquitous.

With regard to the normal conditions of Western societies, Joshua Meyrowitz's thesis that the mass media induced the dismantling of socially defined boundaries is too linear. There are obvious objections. The dedifferentiation and destructuring affecting our lifeworld as a result of the electronically produced omnipresence of events and of the synchronization of heterochronologies certainly have a considerable impact on social self-perception. This removal of barriers, however, goes hand in hand with a multiplication of roles becoming specified in the process, with a pluralization of forms of life, and with an individualization of life plans. Deracination is accompanied by the construction of personal communal allegiances and roots, the leveling of differences by impotence in the face of an impenetrable systemic complexity. These are complementary and interlocking developments. Thus the mass media have contradictory effects in other dimensions as well. There is con-

siderable evidence attesting to the ambivalent nature of the democratic potential of a public sphere whose infrastructure is marked by the growing selective constraints imposed by electronic mass communication.

Thus if today I made another attempt to analyze the structural transformation of the public sphere, I am not sure what its outcome would be for a theory of democracy—maybe one that could give cause for a less pessimistic assessment and for an outlook going beyond the formulation of merely defiant postulates.

Notes

1. The question of a new printing has arisen for rather extrinsic reasons. The sale of the Luchterhand-Verlag, to which I am much obliged for the promotion of my early books, necessitated a change of publishers. At the same time, this edition by the Reclam-Verlag in Leipzig represents the first publication of any of my books in the German Democratic Republic.


4. This provided the occasion for a conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in September 1989. In addition to sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers, there were participants from the disciplines of history, literature, communication, and anthropology. I found the meeting extraordinarily instructive, and I am grateful to the participants for suggestions.


Further Reflections on the Public Sphere

33. See, however, R. N. Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart (Berkeley, 1985).
34. See, for example, S. H. Barnes, Max Kaase, eds., Political Action: Mass Participation in Western Democracies (Beverly Hills, 1979).
35. See the anniversary issue "Ferment in the Field," Journal of Communication 33 (1983). For this reference my thanks go to Rolf Megersohn, who herself has been active for decades in the fields of the sociology of mass media and of mass culture.
43. S. Benhabib, Critique, Norm, and Utopia (New York, 1987).
Further Reflections on the Public Sphere


64. See the contributions by J. Rupnik, M. Vajda, and Z. A. Pelczynski in Keane, ed., Civil Society and the State (1988), part 3.
