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Excavations: The History of a Concept

In this book I hope to make the case for seeing *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* as a work that still resonates with some of the urgent questions facing the 'democratic project' today. In privileging this work and the category 'public sphere', I'm suggesting that if we want to enrich our grasp of the problems facing the democratic imagination, we would do well to read Habermas's later works through the lens of *Structural Transformation* and its key concerns. *Structural Transformation* invites us to reflect closely on the nature of public deliberation and the democratic process at a time when the rhetoric of 'citizenship' has become such common currency – especially, though not exclusively, in Western democracies – against a backdrop of striking developments: increasingly sophisticated political marketing techniques; changes in media culture that implicate the very institutions which aspire to connect citizens with the powerful; an ascendant politics of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism which can sometimes displace and sometimes appropriate the discourse of citizenship; and patterns of political behaviour, such as staggeringly low voting rates, which highlight widespread disaffection with the official institutions of democracy, especially in the younger generations.

A historicist reading of *Structural Transformation* could read off the present and future in terms of an unfolding historical dialectic: either a negative dialectic in which the potential for a truly democratic and rational public sphere has been irreversibly squandered, or a positive dialectic that gestures towards a radical–democratic endgame in which the rationality of the undemocratic bourgeois public sphere and the democracy of the irrational mass society might finally be reconciled. But what I propose instead is to read *Structural Transformation* as the sort of encounter between theory and history that offers a useful counterweight to the drift into abstraction characteristic of more recent critical theory. It is this kind of historically grounded attention to the evolution of discourses, practices and institutions that, I suggest, does more to energise and stimulate our thinking about democracy than either a *philosophically* abstract preoccupation with

the relationship between law, morality and reason, or an *institutionally* abstract preoccupation with constitutional norms and human rights, both of which have been at the centre of the Habermasian project in recent years.

The point of *Structural Transformation* is *not* to provide a history to feed our nostalgic aspirations, and Habermas himself has never idealised the eighteenth-century public sphere to quite the degree that his critics have charged. Instead, it offers us a frame of reference which may help us to reflect on both the points of connection *and* the discontinuities between the past and our current predicament. Though as historiography it may not always pass muster with professional historians, scholars of social and political thought can find more in *Structural Transformation* than in any of Habermas's more recent works to expose the slippages between ambiguous, complex histories and virtuous ideals or grand theoretical systems. We start, then, with a survey of the main themes of *Structural Transformation*.

THE BOURGEOIS PUBLIC SPHERE

Under feudalism, Habermas reports, the 'public realm' existed not as a sphere of interaction and debate but merely of representation: aristocracy and nobility played out the symbolic dramas of majesty and highness before their subjects. To talk of a public realm is even misleading insofar as 'publicness', as a status attribute or performative mode, was more significant than spatial location.[1] The links between this 'representative publicness' and today's mass-mediated spectacles of public life are thin: it was simply staged performance *before* the people, not *on behalf* of a public. In fact, there was no 'public' as such, only public display. A distinct public realm and its corollary, a distinct private sphere, were all but absent. However, emergent forms of trade and finance capitalism – Habermas here focuses on Britain, France and Germany – and the eventual establishment of a 'civil society' underpinned by the ideology of 'private' autonomy, would eventually transform 'publicness' into something very different.

Long before feudalism was in its death throes, the increasing geographical reach and regularity of early capitalist trading set in train an expanding network of communications, primarily trade newsletters.[2] To begin with, the newsletters circulated among closed networks of merchants. This was not yet the rise of a print-based public culture. 'Publicness' was still the preserve of the feudal powers and it remained primarily oral, theatrical and immediate. By the

sixteenth century, however, the European social landscape was changing rapidly and capitalist trade began to assume a foundational rather than adjunct role in economic and political life. Growing interdependence between an increasingly centralised state[3] and the merchant capitalists (the former securing the political and military force to underpin the expansion of foreign and domestic markets, the latter securing revenue for the former) signalled the beginnings of a novel sense of 'publicness'. 'The feudal powers, the Church, the prince, and the nobility, who were the carriers of the representative publicness, disintegrated in a process of polarisation':[4] the Reformation paved the way for the growing privatisation of religion; public authority assumed more bureaucratic dimensions (including a greater separation between parliament and judiciary); and the state budget enjoyed greater independence from the monarch's private holdings. The people were still merely subjects but the term 'public' now came to be associated with matters pertaining to an increasingly depersonalised state authority.[5] The publicness and significance of the noble and aristocratic courtly cultures began to diminish.

A complex relationship between economy and state emerged during the mercantilist phase. On the one hand, struggles over economic production and trade saw an increasingly confident 'private sphere' starting to erode the omnipotence of the state. A nascent bourgeoisie was carving out its independence and building a 'civil society' based on private commerce. But, under mercantilism, of course, economic affairs were a matter of intense public interest. The state authority depended on the fruits of private economic initiative and the fate of the bourgeoisie hung on the state's tax policies, legal statutes and military:

> 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 zone of public interest, that zone of administrative contact became 'critical' … in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason.[6]

This 'critical reasoning' depended on the dissemination of printed information. For Habermas, the political, economic, cultural and technological developments of the press played a fundamental role: the modern conception of an active, reasoning 'public' – as distinct from a collection of 'subjects' – is unimaginable without

them. The press emerged as an outgrowth of the increasing traffic in merchant newsletters. Already, under feudalism, these newsletters had 'unleashed the very elements within which this power structure would one day dissolve'.[7]

Habermas paints the second half of the seventeenth century as a critical period during which something approaching a publicly accessible 'press' emerged, feeding off and filtering the news conveyed in the private correspondences of the merchant capitalists.[8] This marked the emergence of regularised printed communication addressed to unspecified recipients. Of course, the 'audience' was largely confined to bourgeois and intellectual strata. But crucially, the press departed from the principle of immediacy: a piece of news was no longer a private affair, something of interest only to those whom it directly implicated, but was part of a larger communicative environment premised on a putative general interest. This 'general interest' was more than simply a novel ideological construct: it also reflected the very material forces which progressively eroded localised economic self-sufficiency and integrated the bourgeoisie (and, of course, their workers who were *not* generally privy to the new communication flows) into regional and national networks of interconnection and interdependency. They became expanded 'communities of fate', in other words,[9] or, to use Benedict Anderson's well-known formulation, 'imagined communities'.[10] This period saw the emergence of what were called 'political journals' (produced with increasing regularity until, eventually, daily publication became the norm) containing information on taxes, commodity prices, wars, foreign trade and the like.

For Habermas, two supply-side drivers were critically important for the growth of the press. First, news had become a commodity and there were economies of scale to be harnessed by producing news for expanded readerships. Second, state authorities rapidly cottoned on to the power of the printed word. As power migrated from the localism of the estates to a centralising state, print offered an efficient means of communicating decrees, proclamations, royal news and other symbols of authority across the territory.[11] But the effectiveness of this propaganda tool and the extent to which the medium provided a new forum for the old functions of 'representative publicness', ran up against obvious limits. On the demand side, there was a fundamental tension between the self-image of an emergent 'reasoning' public and the principle of rule by decree.[12] In mercantilism the state had set in train a 'peculiar ambivalence of public regulation and private

initiative'.[13] In that liminal zone between the state and what would later emerge as 'civil society', the press did more to kindle than to smother the flames of bourgeois revolt.

By the early eighteenth century it had become commonplace for the pages of journals and periodicals to be taken up not simply with economic information and state propaganda, but with critical, openly opinionated articles: 'In the guise of so-called learned articles, critical reasoning made its way into the daily press.'[14] The press was implicitly critical because its operations challenged the interpretative duopoly of church and state. In the early phases such articles were less likely to attack the activities of state head-on than to plough an impressively independent line on literary, philosophical or pedagogic matters. (The early *Spectator*, for example, focused on the discussion of literature, morality and etiquette.) For this reason, Habermas identifies a bourgeois public sphere in the 'world of letters' as the precursor to a more directly political public sphere.

The precursory role that Habermas assigns to the literary public sphere suffers a certain ambiguity. After all, the literary public sphere Habermas portrays is, ostensibly, an eighteenth-century phenomenon, whilst the previous century is characterised by the emergence of a press more concerned with 'news' and information. In fact, *Structural Transformation* appears to assign the literary public sphere a precursory role on three levels. First, the seventeenth-century press did not, by and large, reflect the 'critical reasoning' Habermas reads into the eighteenth-century public sphere. Pages taken up with commodity prices, taxes, state announcements and so forth did not, of themselves, construct a 'reasoning public' critically reflecting upon matters of state. Second, to the extent that a *political* public sphere is linked to active struggles over the levers of state power, the eighteenth-century literary public sphere prefigures its political counterpart, at least insofar as the formal enfranchisement of the bourgeoisie serves as a yardstick. Finally, there is a synchronic consideration: in the idealistic self-image of the bourgeois public sphere, the literary public sphere is constituted as a 'pre-political' realm of self-clarification, a zone of freedom in which a putative 'humanity' or 'authentic' subjectivity could flourish, whose protection must become the *raison d'être* of a 'just' polity.

The literary public sphere spread beyond the pages of the printed press and beyond the restricted strata of the pedagogues and *philosophes*. 'Critical reasoning' occupied the proliferating coffee houses (especially in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century

England), the salons (especially in pre-revolutionary France) and the literary societies.[15] Of course, illiteracy and poverty excluded much of the rural and the property-less urban populations, and the literature that was energising the bourgeoisie specifically *addressed* the bourgeoisie in both form and content.[16] The literary public sphere, though less exclusionary than its political counterpart, was also gendered: whilst women played an active role in the salons that were attached to private households, their participation in circles convened in the coffee houses and other public spaces was heavily restricted.[17]

Emerging through the literature was a novel, individualised sense of selfhood. Richardson's *Pamela*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Goethe's *Werthers Leiden* exemplified a literary culture increasingly concerned with self-disclosure. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, 'there was no longer any holding back … [T]he rest of the century revelled and felt at ease in a terrain of subjectivity barely known at its beginning.'[18] The literary public sphere located this subjectivity in the private realms of intimacy. The bifurcation of the public and private has a historical precedent in ancient Greece. Here, however, the locus of humanity was the public *agora* itself, through the pursuit of timeless virtues through sport and oratory, whilst the household-slave economy confined the here-and-now of material necessity to the privacy of the *oikos*.[19]

The bourgeois public sphere imagined itself to comprise private people coming together as a public.[20] Power and domination were anathema to a sacrosanct selfhood: the public sphere wanted to wrest culture and its interpretation from authority structures corrupted by public power. This project idealististically evoked an erasure of status: as art and literature were commodified, they would assume intrinsic worth and cease to function as strategic tools of the old powers; and they would become, in principle, accessible to all.[21]

> The bourgeois public's critical public debate took place in principle without regard to all preexisting social and political rank and in accord with universal rules. These rules, because they remained strictly external to the individuals as such, secured space for the development of these individuals' interiority by literary means. These rules, because universally valid, secured a space for the individuated person; because they were objective, they secured a space for what was most subjective; because they were abstract, for what was most concrete.[22]

For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere was, in principle, shaped by the values of egalitarian dialogue. Even on the printed page, key periodicals resorted to dialogical editorial formats in which letters to the editor were accorded special status.[23] Whilst 'truth' was there to be uncovered, the values of critical dialogue were meant to erode dogmatism: discourse should remain open to the equally valid claims of new participants and arguments; each site of discourse should see itself as part of a wider discursive environment.[24] Literary criticism adopted a new 'conversational' role as it sought to feed off and back into the discussions taking place in the coffee houses and literary societies.

The self-professed function of the *political* public sphere would be to secure the protection and integrity of the private sphere.[25] The bourgeoisie were adopting the mantle of the 'universal class' by asserting the meritocratic ideals of the free market. The process of conflating political (that is, bourgeois) and human (that is, universal) emancipation, which would become the target of Marx's critical energies, was underway. In the self-understanding of the bourgeois radicals, the political aspirations of their class were to be conceived in thoroughly negative terms: they did not seek a new division of power so much as a *neutralisation of power* to allow for the flowering of civil society.[26] The ideals of the political public sphere which granted participation rights *regardless* of status and privilege, could, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, only be realised through cleansing privilege, constraint and public interference from the sphere of civil society, and through the development of a constitutional framework based on freedom of contract and laissez-faire trade policies.[27]

The bourgeoisie, claiming to stand as the locus of reason and justice, took on the task of challenging state secrecy.

> Historically, the polemical claim of this kind of rationality was developed, in conjunction with the critical public debate among private people, against the reliance of princely authority on secrets of state. Just as secrecy was supposed to serve the maintenance of sovereignty based on *voluntas*, so publicity was supposed to serve the promotion of legislation based on *ratio*.[28]

The press, of course, were to be the prime carriers of the new 'critical reasoning' in the political public sphere. Not surprisingly, Habermas devotes much attention to developments in Britain where, bitter conflicts over censorship notwithstanding,[29] the histories of press freedom and parliamentary reform have both earlier origins and

a somewhat less volatile trajectory than in France or Germany. As Habermas points out, it is an irony of British history that we associate the rise of 'political journalism', a tradition dedicated to publicising and critiquing state activity, with the Tories during their protracted period of opposition and virtual exclusion from public office in the first half of the eighteenth century. If the Whigs brought the expansive economic interests of the bourgeoisie into Parliament, the Tories were pivotal in elevating the status of *public opinion*. They worked to establish the press as a 'fourth estate of the realm' willing to confront state authorities.[30] The traditional stand-offs between King and Parliament were being displaced by those between 'parties' of power and opposition. Henceforth, opposition parties, of whichever colour, would claim a moral high ground 'uncorrupted' by power. Increasingly, they could also appeal to 'public opinion' as a yardstick of legitimacy in political debate. 'Such occurrences', Habermas reminds us, 'must not be construed prematurely as a sign of a kind of rule of public opinion.'[31] But they signalled a moral and rhetorical evolution in the history of public opinion which would later be reflected structurally in the democratic reforms of the nineteenth century.

Habermas's attention to the British case is telling: that, in contrast to France, the early appeal to a newly elevated 'public opinion' came through conservative, aristocratically connected strata, resonates with the *formalistic* conception of democracy he has pursued throughout his career. At one level, Habermas cedes to the self-image of the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere the claim that bourgeois publicity does more than simply reflect a narrow, historically contingent class interest. However (and this is a paradox he does not address adequately), Habermas shows how the specific class interests (their opposition to economic liberalisation) of the British Tories made them only half-hearted champions of public opinion. The public, in their view (prefiguring twentieth-century models of democratic elitism), were not suitably equipped to deliberate on substantive matters of state but were, at least, well-placed to judge those in power on their integrity.

Habermas sketches some of the contrasts between developments in the political public spheres of Britain and the Continent. Limited space demands the briefest of summaries here. In Britain, a 150-year struggle, beginning with the Glorious Revolution, sees the press given new de facto and, eventually, constitutionally secured powers to make public the proceedings of Parliament. At the same time, various

attempts are made to control and censor, including stamp taxes, which remain in place until the mid-nineteenth century. But they enjoy only mixed success.[32] '[B]esides the new, large daily newspapers like *The Times* (1785), other institutions of the public reflecting critically on political issues arose in these years … [P]ublic meetings increased in size and frequency. Political associations too were formed in great numbers.'[33] By the end of the eighteenth century, 'loosely knit clubs' and unstable alliances had transformed themselves into parties with clear lines of demarcation and, for the first time, extra-parliamentary structures. 'Public opinion' was increasingly invoked by opposition and ministers alike. Finally, the extension of the franchise to the middle classes in 1832, and the publication of the first issue-based election manifesto, signalled the transformation of Parliament, 'for a long time the target of critical comment by public opinion, into the very organ of this public opinion'.[34]

By contrast, the French story is more staccato. Constitutional props, lacking in Britain, underpinned the proliferation of daily press and parliamentary factions after the Revolution. Yet they were also symptomatic of the precarious nature of the revolutionary public sphere.[35] Before the Revolution, strict censorship had made for a clandestine press, and subsequent constitutional settlements were punctuated by periods of terror. There was a lack, in all but name, of an assembly of estates suitable for reformation into a modern parliament, and a more deeply entrenched gulf between the bourgeoisie and nobility. In Germany, the growth of politically oriented reading societies and critical journals still met with 'the brutal reaction of the princes' at the end of the eighteenth century.[36] Such reaction, of course, attested to the growing critical strength of a 'bourgeois publicity' transforming the political landscape.

But Habermas does not simply document the rise of public opinion. He is also concerned with shifts in, and struggles over, the very meaning of 'public opinion'. In the prehistory of the phrase, 'opinion' harboured negative connotations. Deriving from the Latin *opinio* and associated with the Greek *doxa*, 'opinion' suggested judgment based on presumption rather than reason. A further usage linked the word to reputation or esteem. It lacked the fundamental features of critical reflection, validity or publicness which only came to the fore during the eighteenth century.[37] In the mid-seventeenth century, Hobbes serves as an unwitting signpost towards this later development. For Hobbes, living in the shadow of the Civil War, it was necessary to purge religious conviction from the purview of state authority.

Stripped of Hobbesian misanthropy, opinion might then rise above religious prejudice.[38] Later, Locke would explicitly elevate 'opinion' above prejudice but he did not claim for it a *public* or legislative role.[39] His view, radical at the time, was that opinion could form the basis for 'censure' against the weaknesses and misdemeanours of public authority.

Habermas contends that the conjoining of 'public' and 'opinion' is at least partly an innovation of the British Tories (and oppositional Whigs) who crafted the modern art of opposition in their appeals to a 'sense of the people' or a 'public spirit'.[40] Yet 'opinion' still evoked immediacy and it befell the political class (who were not yet, strictly speaking, 'representatives') to transform it into reason and judgment. Later that century, Burke's theory of 'virtual representation' articulated a shift from 'public spirit' to 'public opinion'. 'The opinion of the public that put its reason to use was no longer just opinion; it did not arise from mere inclination but from private reflection upon public affairs and from their public discussion.'[41] Opinion was losing its association with immediacy in favour of 'critical reflection'.

In revolutionary France, by contrast, Rousseau's 'public opinion' evoked the instinctual *bon sens* of 'the people' against the physiocrats who saw critical reflection as the foundation stone of loyalty. The physiocratic view of the 'enlightened monarch' entailed public debate without democracy. By contrast,

> Rousseau wanted democracy without public debate … However, the Revolution itself combined the two sundered functions of public opinion, the critical and the legislative. The Constitution of 1791 joined the principle of popular sovereignty with that of the parliamentary constitutional state, which provided a constitutional guarantee for a public sphere as an element in the political realm. The French concept of public opinion was radicalised compared to the British notion.[42]

In Germany, the precise term 'public opinion' (*Öffentliche Meinung*) entered common parlance somewhat later. But Kant's 'principle of publicity' is critical for Habermas. Kant articulated the self-image of a critical public sphere in terms of subordinating politics to morality. Morality, immanent in the laws of a self-regulating civil society, could not (contra Hobbes) be 'demoted to the status of politically inconsequential ethical preference'.[43] The public sphere, to that extent, was to function as a bridge between the civil and political realms. The principle of publicity underpinning the public sphere

appealed to a public use of reason, free of manipulation and coercion: a key virtue was thinking for one's self publicly, that is, as a member of humanity and not as a private individual.[44] The public should take their lead from the philosophers engaged in 'pure' reasoning, and '[e]ach person was called to be a "publicist", a scholar "whose writings speak to his public, the world"'.[45] 'Autonomy' is a prerequisite for participation in the Kantian republic: 'Only property-owning private people were admitted to a public engaged in critical political debate, for their autonomy was rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange and hence was joined to the interest in its preservation as a private sphere.'[46] Harmonious social relations would be possible because a free civil society would bring about a cosmopolitan consciousness and the contradiction between 'private vices' and 'public virtues' would be resolved. For everyone who had achieved the requisite autonomy, private aspirations (the maintenance of a 'free civil society') coincided with the aspirations of all who joined him in the public sphere of deliberation. A person who is 'his own master' serves only himself and, by extension, 'the commonwealth' of all persons, including those who are not yet capable of full citizenship but who implicitly share an interest in the renewal of a civil society which grants them equal chances of membership, regardless of status: 'the property-less were not citizens at all, but persons who with talent, industry, and luck some day might be able to attain that status'.[47] For Kant, the role of public deliberation is not to generate consensus or compromise, for 'pure reasoning' rather than dialogue would *reveal* the truth of things; instead, public deliberation, under the guidance of the scholars, provided something of a training in the art of 'thinking for oneself' and a continual reminder to think one's thoughts in the context of the universal 'public'. This early encounter with Kant is significant, for Habermas's entire oeuvre bears the imprint of Kantian thinking: he follows Kant in developing a universalist framework, though he substitutes the monologic conceit of 'pure reasoning' for the rule of dialogue and open-ended argumentation; and he favours Kant's model of a 'reasoning' public over Rousseau's 'common sense', though he is only interested in a republicanism that can accommodate liberalism's concern for the rights of the individual.[48]

But Habermas also lives in the shadows of Hegel and Marx who both abhorred such abstract reasoning. The Kantian system contained a debilitating impasse: a perfectly 'free' civil society (the 'juridical condition'), the necessary foundation of the 'condition of autonomy', had never existed in reality. Act two of the narrative sees Habermas

focus on those dynamics which, rather than bringing history into line with the Kantian ideal, served only to transform both the institutional contours and self-image of the political public sphere.

THE FALL OF THE BOURGEOIS PUBLIC SPHERE

For Hegel, the intractable problems of privilege and conflict in civil society destroyed the universalism and permanence to which 'public opinion' could lay claim in the Kantian system. With Hegel, public opinion 'no longer retained a basis of unity and truth; it degenerated to the level of a subjective opining of the many'.[49] Politics could not be subsumed by an abstract 'universal morality'. The state is compelled to intervene in an unruly civil society. Yet, in standing above public opinion, the state could in principle unify civil society: it could become an embodiment of the Zeitgeist in which a populace craving spirit, rather than abstract morality, would find meaning. In the Hegelian system, then, public opinion is paradoxically respected *and* despised as it both reflects and threatens to dissolve a national ethos.[50] For Habermas, Hegel demotes the public sphere to a 'means of education', motivation and assembly for an otherwise entropic public opinion.[51]

Marx, like Hegel, saw civil society characterised by intractable contradictions rather than a latent harmony of interests but, as is well known, this ultimately led him down a very different path. Whilst the universal ideals of the bourgeois revolutions served to conceal their partial realisation, Hegel's glorification of the Prussian estates-based constitution looked to Marx like a futile attempt to rewind the emancipatory energies unleashed by the revolutions.[52] For Hegel, the bourgeois public sphere had, in assuming legislative functions, become *too* public. For Marx, by contrast, it was *not public enough*. Marx's statement on the German bourgeoisie in 1844 neatly encapsulates this perspective:

> It is not radical revolution or universal human emancipation which is a utopian dream for Germany; it is the partial, merely political revolution, the revolution which leaves the pillars of the building standing. What is the basis of a partial and merely political revolution? Its basis is the fact that one part of civil society emancipates itself and attains universal domination, that one particular class undertakes from its particular situation the universal emancipation of society. This class liberates the whole of society, but only

> on the condition that the whole of society finds itself in the same situation as this class, e.g. possesses or can easily acquire money and education.[53]

Workers, eventually seeing through the fog of the 'free market' their real conditions of alienation and exploitation, would at last carry forward the programme of a truly universal emancipation. Habermas summarises the socialistic model of the public spheres as follows:

> From the dialectic immanent in the bourgeois public sphere Marx derived the socialist consequences of a counter-model in which the classical relationship between the public sphere and the private was peculiarly reversed. In this counter-model, criticism and control by the public were extended to that portion of the private sphere of civil society which had been granted to private persons by virtue of their power of control over the means of production … According to this new model … [p]rivate persons came to be the private persons of a public rather than a public of private persons … [T]he public sphere no longer linked a society of property-owning private persons with the state. Rather, the autonomous public … secured for itself … a sphere of personal freedom, leisure, and freedom of movement. In this sphere, the informal and personal interactions of human beings with one another would have been emancipated for the first time from the constraints of social labor … and become really 'private'.[54]

But Marx, like Hegel, laboured under a misguided historicism. Neither foresaw the changes which both the public sphere itself and, indeed, the critical discourses of 'public opinion' would undergo. As the nineteenth century progressed, the political public sphere became an arena whose consensually oriented self-image began to give way to one concerned with conflict management and the *division* rather than dissolution of power: compromise between interest groups and factions became the guiding principle.[55] The writings of J.S. Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville reflected this transformation: 'With liberalism … the bourgeois self-interpretation of the public sphere abandoned the form of a philosophy of history in favor of a common sense meliorism – it became "realistic".'[56]

Nineteenth-century liberals observed a public sphere expanding through the growth of press outlets and the spread of literacy and through the rise of working class, women's suffrage and, beyond Europe, anti-slavery movements. They also witnessed more and more conflict within the capitalist class itself. Marx notwithstanding, 'Electoral reform was the topic of the nineteenth century: no longer

the principle of publicity as such … but of the enlargement of the public … The self-thematisation of public opinion subsided.'[57] It also became important for nineteenth-century liberalism to emphasise the dangers of public opinion and the importance of defending individual liberties from the tyranny of the majority.[58] The concerns of Mill and de Tocqueville were, Habermas points out, double-sided. Whilst lamenting a 'tyrannical' aspect to public opinion, they also criticised the excessive bureaucratisation and centralisation of state power, which developed rapidly during the transition towards a more intensively organised (interventionist) phase of capitalism. Whilst chiding them for their 'reactionary politics',[59] Habermas praises their sense of the changing relationship between the state and the political public sphere, one far more prescient than either the bourgeois or Marxian models:

> Two tendencies dialectically related to each other indicated a breakdown of the public sphere. While it penetrated more spheres of society, it simultaneously lost its political function, namely: that of subjecting the affairs that it had made public to the control of a critical public.[60]

We might, then, surmise that, if nineteenth-century society saw democracy spread more widely, then it also saw it spread more thinly. But that glosses over some complexities. The fate of the political public sphere under organised capitalism is characterised by Habermas as a process of 'refeudalisation', where 'the distinction "public" and "private" could [no longer] be usefully applied'.[61]

The transition towards organised capitalism involved the interlocking of state and society. 'Society' strengthens its grip on state power. But instead of a convergence of interests between civil society and the state, the coherence of civil society itself is progressively eroded as market 'imperfections' become endemic crises. 'Processes of concentration and crisis pulled the veil of an exchange of equivalents off the antagonistic structure of society.'[62] With organised private interest groups clamouring for the levers of state power, some demanding protectionism and others liberalisation, the politicisation of civil society intensifies.[63] Working-class agitation also intensifies this politicisation and ultimately results not, as Marx anticipated, in the dissolution of capitalism, but in expanded suffrage, Keynsian redistributive measures, the 'publification' of contractual law and collective wage-bargaining processes, and welfarism. Zones of activity emerged that were, strictly speaking, neither private nor public:

the 'public sector' related in a privatised manner towards 'clients' (individuals and corporations) and employees whilst operating under the banner of a 'public interest'.[64]

Against the bourgeois ideal, the very term 'public interest' was now assumed to reflect compromise and negotiation between antagonistic private interests. However, the point is not simply that the public sphere would no longer preoccupy itself primarily with uncovering a 'natural' coincidence between private and universal interests (and the ways in which this avenue was kept open, such as in discourses of nationalism, are lamentably absent from the purview of *Structural Transformation*). The continuity of the term 'private interest' between the bourgeois and post-bourgeois public spheres actually obscures a critical discontinuity central to Habermas's thesis, namely in the constitution of 'privacy' itself. What is at stake is the way in which private interests, as units of public opinion, were thought to be formed.

In the bourgeois model, the 'private' realm consisted in the intimate, familial sphere and the economic realm of the capitalist market place. The two components, one the precondition of the other, were both based on the ideals of autonomy and subjective freedom. In the self-image of an expanding, post-bourgeois public sphere, the economic realm and the domestic sphere became unhinged from one another. For the large majority of those who now qualified as citizens, the economic realm consisted not in capitalistic enterprise and the free deployment of private property, but in an objectified 'world of work'.[65] Complex new class configurations emerged with the rise of managerialism, dispersed shareholdings, and heavily unionised occupational sectors, eclipsing the binary opposition between property owner and wage labourer. Whilst the economy became more intensively politicised, the realm of 'private' freedoms began to close in on its contemporary associations with family life, intimacy and leisure.

Under liberal capitalism, bourgeois family life was supposedly set free from the realm of material production. But that autonomy was critically dependent on the economic success of the head of household.[66] Under organised capitalism, though, family life took on a different relationship to the economic realm. The family began to give way to the individual as the basic economic unit. The risks associated with the economic realm become more individualised and simultaneously softened in the context of welfarism. The welfare state did not, of course, simply bypass the family unit. To the present day,

in fact, policies relating to welfare payments, tax, state education and the like, tend to invoke the nuclear family as the social norm. But welfarism also hailed the *individual* to an unprecedented degree: 'Against the so-called basic needs, which the bourgeois family once had to bear as a private risk, the individual family member today is publicly protected.'[67] A *culture* of welfarism, underscored by both state and non-state institutions, reached into domains of social reproduction that were once the preserve of the family: social services, relationship counselling, therapeutic services and proliferating channels of guidance on child rearing, diet, lifestyle and the like.

But the implications for changing public–private relations are complex. The domestic sphere became a 'hollowed out' realm of privacy[68] making way for an increasingly inward-looking privacy focused on leisure, consumption and lifestyle (a syndrome Habermas would later refer to as 'privatism').[69] Habermas, in this early work, calls these newfound private freedoms 'illusory'.[70] The divorce between public and private life was in fact one-sided and what developed was the 'the direct onslaught of extrafamilial authorities upon the individual'.[71] In a powerful turn of phrase, Habermas speaks of a 'floodlit privacy'.[72] Risking metaphorical excess, we might say that what Habermas laments is a society lacking the mirrors required either to shine the lights back on those institutions or to reflect adequately upon itself. In the bourgeois model, the political public sphere aspired to the former and the literary public sphere the latter and both were of a piece. But the reception of cultural products had now degenerated into a mere aspect of the 'noncommital use of leisure time'.[73] A culture *debating* public had, according to Habermas, been displaced by a culture *consuming* public.

A public sphere evolving 'from the very heart of the private sphere itself' no longer existed even as an aspiration:

> Bourgeois culture was not mere ideology. The rational–critical debate of private people in the salons, clubs, and reading societies was not directly subject to the cycle of production and consumption, that is, to the dictates of life's necessities. Even in its merely literary form … it possessed instead a 'political' character in the Greek sense of being emancipated from the constraints of survival requirements. It was for these reasons alone the idea that later degenerated into mere ideology (namely: humanity) could develop at all. The identification of the property owner with the natural person, with the human being as such, presupposed a separation inside the private realm between, on the one hand, affairs that private people pursued individually

each in the interests of the reproduction of his own life and, on the other hand, the sort of action that united people into a public.[74]

This passage is helpful in clarifying Habermas's arguments. The ideological nature of eighteenth-century bourgeois universalism is indisputable. Yet the bourgeois public sphere could be more than *mere* ideology precisely *because* of the structural dominance of the bourgeoisie: to use the Aristotelian distinction, once favoured by Marx, the bourgeois public sphere could imagine itself to exist in the 'realm of freedom', rather than the 'realm of necessity'. The same could not be said for a majority of citizens in the post-bourgeois public sphere. Habermas, echoing the views of his Frankfurt School predecessors, treats the domain of 'leisure' less as a realm of freedom than as a recuperative and compensatory necessity shaped by the onerous demands of the world of work; for the most part leisure, in Adorno's phrase,[75] is a 'mere appendage of work', an extension of worker dependency. Whilst the 'leisure' enjoyed by the bourgeoisie stood at least at arm's length from questions of survival, leisure in the post-bourgeois world lacked the capacity 'to constitute a world emancipated from the immediate constraints of survival needs'.[76] The foundations of an autonomous realm of reflection and debate were lacking. Urban and suburban lifestyles were eroding the integrity of both privacy and publicity, and the solitary act of reading and the sociability of public debate, once symbiotic, were imploding into the television-dominated living room.[77] The frenetic pace of modern life didn't lend itself to critical reasoning. Neither, moreover, did the evolving mass media and cultural industries, for whom Habermas reserves much of his contempt.

Habermas's impassioned critique of the twentieth-century mass media and cultural industries is provocative and a little less than coherent. The reader is left to untangle the twin threads of sweeping polemic and more nuanced critique which enjoy an uneasy coexistence. I shall attempt, very briefly, to do a little unpicking here. Twentieth-century mass culture is drawn, for Habermas, towards a lowest common denominator. As the public sphere expands, the complexity of cultural products is lowered to make them more readily saleable: individuals do not have to raise their own levels of understanding and reflection to meet the requirements of the cultural supply.[78] Intellectuals, critics and the avant-garde become alienated and aloof from this homogenising mass.[79] This depiction, Habermas assures us, does not amount to elitism: what he laments

is not the expansion of the 'public' per se but the way in which the untrammelled commercialism of mass culture congeals into tried and tested formulae. It favours the palatable immediacy of human-interest stories over complex processes, whilst fostering a facile intimacy. The complex characters and narratives of modern literature give way to advice columns, emotions laid bare, 'real life' stories, with 'real people' – celebrities and 'ordinary' folk – we can swiftly identify with: quite possibly Habermas would see the recent glut of cheap, high-rating 'reality TV' programmes as the apex of this culture of immediacy. Mass culture deprives audiences of the space to carry out psychological work for themselves: it takes on all their emotional needs and problems directly for them. The intimacy is 'illusory', though, precisely because this personal immediacy is handed down in depersonalised form – the psychological guidance is administered, en masse, in formulaic fashion: Habermas would likely see the bespoke 'interactivities' of today's digital mediascape as the latest achievement of this 'administered individualisation' (see Chapter 4).

To put it in McLuhanite terms (though Marshall McLuhan was much more approving), there is an implosion of the public and the private. Private life is publicised and public life is simultaneously privatised as public figures (stars, politicians and the like) are fed to us as predigested chunks of biography and psychological profile.[80] Debate and discussion of cultural goods, though increasingly 'unnecessary', hasn't been altogether killed off. But, like the cultural goods themselves, debate has become administered, carried out within the confines of professional media spaces, to a set of predefined rules and generic conventions: it serves as a 'tranquilising substitute for action'.[81]

Whilst the *commodification* of cultural supply is what troubles Habermas most in *Structural Transformation*, there is undoubtedly a thinly veiled but less than reasoned technophobia at play. Habermas's print-centric bias comes to the fore when he charges the new broadcast media with discouraging distanced reflection or extended discussion.[82] The relentless and frenetic churnings of radio and television are the main culprits.[83] Habermas has since conceded that his analysis was one-sided and that empirical research on media reception since he wrote *Structural Transformation* has increasingly problematised the assumptions of audience passivity;[84] on the other hand, however, recent remarks[85] suggest that Habermas has neither renounced nor properly qualified his logocentric antipathy towards the audio-visual media. The problem is *not* that Habermas

dislikes mediated communication per se. As we have seen, he fears the *immediacy* of electronic media and favours the distance and space afforded by print culture as a complement to speech-based argumentation. But what he fails to emphasise adequately is just how precarious these distinctions are: the spoken word itself is always already mediated through embodiment; and the printed word does not *necessarily* afford more space and distance than electronic media – compare the scatter-gun temporality of the daily press with the reflective longitude afforded a television documentary researched and produced over months or years. The distinctions break down rapidly on examination and we shall have cause to revisit these problems later in the book.

There is a more compelling line of argument in *Structural Transformation*. Innovations in media technology (telegraphy, wireless broadcasting, print processes and so forth) had important economic consequences. They demanded high infrastructural outlay, which favoured larger and larger markets and a low 'elasticity of supply' – the introduction of television, for example, was (until recently) only economically viable on a truly mass scale.[86] But rather than developing this, Habermas focuses on the more general question of commodification, and his arguments demand some unravelling.

Habermas's narrative of the commodification of culture only partly echoes that of the Frankfurt School. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer (and more like Walter Benjamin), he paints the early phase of commodification during the eighteenth century as a progressive, democratising force. At what point, then, does commodification become the villain of the piece? The answer, Habermas suggests, lies in 'rigorously distinguishing' between different functions of commodification. In the bourgeois model, commodification impacted only on distribution: it helped to uncouple culture from status by making it available to anyone who could afford it. It did not, however, drive the content.[87] The same cannot be said of the twentieth century:

> To the degree that culture became a commodity not only in form but also in content, it was emptied of elements whose appreciation required a certain amount of training – whereby the 'accomplished' appropriation once again heightened the appreciative ability itself. It was not merely standardisation as such that established an inverse relationship between the commercialisation of cultural goods and their complexity, but that special preparation of products that made them consumption-ready, which is to say, guaranteed

> an enjoyment without being tied to stringent presuppositions. Of course, such enjoyment is also entirely inconsequential … [M]ass culture leaves no lasting trace; it affords a kind of experience which is not cumulative but regressive.[88]

But, at the very least, Habermas would have to relativise this tale of two commodifications in order to make it convincing. Even when maximum profit was not the *raison d'être* of the cultural industries – Habermas points out, for example, that for eighteenth-century literary journals a degree of loss-making was the norm[89] – it is hard to accept that content somehow remained utterly untainted by the logic of the market or that cultural producers could ever proceed merrily without any regard for commercial success. Habermas cites the mass production of what we now call 'paperback classics': this, he suggests, is the contemporary exception that proves the rule because market logic broadens distribution and access without damaging the integrity of the cultural product.[90] But this is a flawed argument: the mass appeal of particular 'classics' is what makes large, cheap print runs of some (and not other) titles economically viable. The mischievous response would be to ask Habermas to wander down the bookshop aisles containing all the abridged and audio editions of the 'classics' and invite him to comment on the integrity of the content. But the real point is that commodification has manifold and potentially ambivalent consequences for the cultural public sphere. It can improve access when economies of scale and competition lower costs, but it can also lead to the cultural industries policing supply, keeping costs high and excluding the less well-off; it can undermine elitism by rendering content responsive to the tastes and experiences of 'ordinary' folk, but it can also work to silence marginal and innovative forms whose market appeal is anything less than calculable (the recent popularisation of opera embodies these ambivalent tendencies). It's simply untenable and unhelpful to claim that the Penguin edition of Jane Austen and the Mills and Boon book signify two distinct modes of commodification: analysis of the contemporary cultural public sphere must instead be attuned to the consistently ambivalent potentials of commodification, even where we suspect the darker consequences to be in ascendancy.

With this in mind, we can now return to the basic kernel of Habermas's thesis: namely, that the mutually reinforcing tendencies of a citizenry bereft of space and time, and a cultural 'market place' which reduces the citizen to a ratings, box-office or circulation

statistic, have all but dissolved the image of a critical public sphere; a sense of culture as 'political' by virtue of being an end-in-itself for producer and recipient alike has faded; so too have the symbiotic relations between the public and the private, and between the cultural and political public spheres. For Habermas, it is not the fact that state and society have become interlocked per se that erodes the principle of critical publicity. What matters is that this process erodes the old institutional bases of critical publicity without supplying new ones.[91] On the one hand, institutions of society (private interest groups, political parties and the like) become *part of* the state power structure. On the other hand, the state (and the culture of welfarism more generally) has reached into once private spheres of society with ambivalent consequences.

In classical liberalism, the parliamentary legislature, representing public opinion, mediates between competing private interests and executive authority. But the expansion of state activity exceeds the capacities of parliamentary process. Parliament becomes a cumbersome bottleneck in need of containment. It increasingly resembles a rubber-stamping committee: '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.'[92] That's not to say that Parliament was entirely stripped of *symbolic* significance, especially as organised capitalism initiated such a visible expansion of state activity. (Since the 1980s, however, 'disorganised capitalism' has ushered in a much less visible expansion of state activity, obfuscated by a neo-liberal mythology of 'rolling back the state'.) But parties of government and opposition have generally been complicit in what Claus Offe has called the 'separation of form and content' in parliamentary democracies.[93] Parliamentary 'debate' became increasingly subjected to techniques of stage management. Internal party debate was similarly disciplined as increasingly defensive 'catch-all' parties scrapped over the votes of unaffiliated and apolitical citizens.[94]

During the twentieth century, then, Habermas sees a tragic trade-off unfolding. The expansion of democracy has come at the cost of its continual degradation. Where the bourgeois model conceived the act of voting merely as a necessary conclusion – a 'guillotine' – imposed on drawn-out processes of deliberation, today's 'plebiscitary' democracy is content to accept voting and democratic participation as synonymous (which is why low electoral turnouts are treated as the most scandalous indicators of the state of democracy). The number

of plebiscites (including opinion polls and media vox pops as well as formal ballots) and the number of people at liberty to participate in them has been dramatically expanded. Moreover, today's plebiscitary culture does routinely acknowledge the problem of the ill-informed citizen, even if opinion polls and focus groups are indifferent to it. It's widely agreed that citizens should be aware of the propositions and beliefs underpinning each option on the ballot paper before they exercise their choice. But the governing logic here is not that of the public sphere: today's ethic of good citizenship does not demand that our opinions are 'tested out' in the argumentative crossfire of the coffee house or, for that matter, the Internet discussion group. Rather, the governing logic is that of the market: the analogy is the educated consumer who, before plucking goods from the supermarket shelf, carefully considers the range of choices on offer and the cases that competing corporations make for their products. 'Citizens relate to the state not primarily through political participation but by adopting a general attitude of demand.'[95]

If a lack of widespread participation in political debate renders the political public sphere more intensively mediated in one sense (politics is something you read *about*, *see* on the television and make yes/no responses *to*, not something you *do*), then it is rendered more *immediate* in another sense: the political public sphere is taken up almost entirely with the relationship between lay individuals and professional politicians vying to win their acclaim. Peer-to-peer public debate becomes an increasingly marginal practice.[96] Habermas does not claim that there is no longer any horizontal political debate to speak of, but that such debate is rarely *public*: 'the political discussions are for the most part confined to in-groups, to family, friends, and neighbors who generate a rather homogeneous climate of opinion anyway'.[97]

For Habermas, the 'public sphere' has become merely the aggregate of individualised preferences, an administrative variable brought into the circuit of power only when its presence is functionally required: 'Today occasions for identification have to be created – the public sphere has to be "made", it is not "there" anymore.'[98] In this context, Habermas talks of a shift away from the 'critical publicity' that underpinned the bourgeois model, towards that of 'manipulative publicity'. Where *public* deliberation provides a bulwark against prejudice, reactionism and parochial perspective, opinion in late capitalism has been reduced to a 'mood-dependent

inclination'[99] more amenable to the symbolic push and pull of the publicity industries.

> In the end an opinion no longer even needs to be capable of verbalisation; it embraces not only any habit that finds expression in some kind of notion – the kind of opinion shaped by religion, custom, mores and simple 'prejudice' against which public opinion was called in as a critical standard in the eighteenth century – but simply all modes of behaviour.[100]

What drives much of Habermas's writing after *Structural Transformation* is precisely the goal of showing how this trade-off between democratic expansion and degradation might be conceived as something other than fateful tragedy.

CRITICAL PUBLICITY AND LATE CAPITALISM

The first tentative steps towards this 'reconstructive turn' are, however, taken in the closing pages of *Structural Transformation*. Though Habermas has no desire to see the promises of the bourgeois model redeemed in full – such hopes would be both unrealistic and dangerous – he does ponder on the possibilities for a renaissance of critical publicity within late capitalist democracies.

In the first instance, if the bourgeois model of critical publicity is to prove relevant to late capitalism then the state must be accorded a different role from that of the liberal phase. The altered scope of state activity demands an increase in critical publicity and scrutiny. To narrowly conceive of parliament as *the* public sphere writ large, corralling public opinion into a singular arena, would be to support an atrophied model of democracy. The changed scope of state activity is not to be lamented, but does demand new thinking on the ways in which it can be exposed to critical publicity.[101]

Apart from the dangers of narrowing the methods and scope of deliberation, to privilege Parliament is to reinforce a monocentric model of power which is unrealistic and regressive. Critical publicity, according to Habermas, must also be extended to those agencies (special-interest groups, corporations, professional associations, parties and so forth) which interact with the state:

> Not only organs of state but all institutions that are publicistically influential in the political public sphere have been bound to publicity because the process in which societal power is transformed into political power is as

much in need of criticism and control as the legitimate exercise of political domination over society.[102]

Moreover, it would be dangerous to overlook those agencies which, whilst not accruing any direct political power, nevertheless influence the political process. Whatever 'public interest' credentials accrue, for example, to a media institution or campaign group, such organisations cannot legitimately stand aloof from the obligations of critical publicity. In other words, institutions that claim to be institutions *of* the public sphere must, themselves, be opened up to the critical scrutiny of a wider public sphere: Habermas, then, advocates a *reflexive publicity*. As long as public spheres operate above the heads of consumers and not in interaction with a critically debating public, they remain sorely lacking *as* public spheres. Politically relevant institutions

> must institutionally permit an intraparty or intra-association democracy – to allow for unhampered communication and public rational–critical debate. In addition, by making the internal affairs of the parties and special-interest associations public, the linkage between such an intraorganisational public sphere and the public sphere of the entire public has to be assured. Finally, the activities of the organisations themselves – their pressure on the state apparatus and their use of power against one another, as well as the manifold relations of dependency and of economic intertwining – need a far-reaching publicity. This would include, for instance, requiring that the organisations provide the public with information concerning the source and deployment of their financial means.[103]

Habermas's fragmentary remarks betray a rather pained ambivalence rather than a nostalgic attitude towards the bourgeois model and its idealised separation of the public and the private. On the one hand, if public authority can be understood realistically only as the outcome of conflicting 'private' interests (in which the so-called 'public sector' is also implicated), so the reverse is true: the 'private sphere' of civil society does, and indeed must, bear the imprint of public intervention. The bourgeois model cannot live up to its own ideals of universality and equality of participation by reference to merely de jure, that is, negative guarantees:

> [T]he formation of a public opinion in the strict sense is not effectively secured by the mere fact that anyone can freely utter his opinion and put

out a newspaper. The public is no longer composed of persons formally and materially on equal footing.[104]

Certainly Habermas declines to analyse extant and potential policy measures to address these inequalities. (Such indeterminacy is a source of frustration to many readers and commentators but also helps to keep *Structural Transformation* relevant and thought-provoking some decades later.) But the baseline argument remains that questions of democracy cannot be sheared off from questions of social inequality. (I explore this issue further in Chapter 2.) On the other hand, Habermas does not want to see the distinction between the public and the private extinguished altogether. He continues to value the idea of a space of reflection and clarification which feeds off and into *but is not governed by* the public sphere. But this discourse of private autonomy – what it means and whose interests it serves – is a vexed one: 'privacy' can shield manipulative power relations within the domestic sphere, for example, just as it can empower individuals to pursue their own life projects without public interference. Habermas's notion of privacy remains unsatisfactorily vague and I try to tease this issue out more satisfactorily in the following chapter.

Structural Transformation scarcely affords more clarity when it comes to the institutional dimensions of a reconstructed public sphere. For here Habermas is concerned less with imagining new political institutions as such as he is with the conscious and progressive application of the principle of critical publicity to existing institutions: parties, unions, extra-parliamentary decision-making spheres, media, special interest groups and so forth. The downside to this is an implicit conservatism: the focus is more on reforming and renewing extant institutions than it is on imagining new ones. I shall argue in later chapters that this conservatism rears its head even more strongly in Habermas's recent work on constitutionalism. But, by and large, Habermas has always been less concerned with the question of how radically we should rethink the *institutions* of democracy and the public sphere than with developing frameworks which can help us to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of particular institutions. This formalistic orientation was already showing through even in *Structural Transformation*, his most concrete, historical investigation, in which he sketches some basic democratic values that prefigure his more recent ideas around 'discourse ethics'.

Public spheres must be judged according to their inclusivity: critical attention must focus on the ways in which particular groups

or individuals are marginalised. It is, of course, in keeping with the norms and expectations of a democratic society that associations and organisations exist which comprise people of similar interests, opinions and backgrounds. But membership of and participation in such groups should not be conditional on ascriptive markers of status, such as wealth or ethnicity. Even then, it's only when their internal procedures are available for scrutiny by a broadly conceived, pluralistic public domain that they make a positive contribution to a reconstructed public sphere:

> The public sphere commandeered by societal organisations and that under the pressure of collective private interests has been drawn into the purview of power can perform functions of political critique and control, beyond mere participation in political compromises, only to the extent that it is itself radically subjected to the requirements of publicity, that is to say, that it again becomes a public sphere in the strict sense.[105]

And critical publicity implies the development of procedural norms governing internal and external relations, which give due weight to the principle of *open* dialogue in which nothing and no one is off limits. Such straightforward idealism will always exist in tension with both pragmatic considerations (how to get things done in the time available) and ethical considerations (the classic dilemma of balancing openness with the demands of mutual respect and care for the other incumbent on an egalitarian discourse ethic). That Habermas does little to refine his model or clarify these dilemmas in *Structural Transformation* itself is beyond dispute: they are precisely the kinds of dilemma that will recur throughout our encounter with Habermas in this book.

Notes

1 EXCAVATIONS: THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT

1. J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1989 [1962]), p. 7.
2. Ibid., pp. 15–17.
3. Although Habermas writes as a social theorist rather than historian, the 'grand narrative' of political centralisation is in fact treated with more precision and with more acknowledgement of uneven developments than I can do justice to here.
4. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 11.
5. Ibid., p. 18.
6. Ibid., p. 24.
7. Ibid., p. 15. Given the explosive consequences Habermas attributes to the advent of mass printing, it is curious that communications media have remained so glaringly under-theorised in his work overall. I address this blind spot in Chapter 4.
8. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 16–20.
9. Ibid., p. 24.
10. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
11. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 21.
12. Habermas does not discuss the thesis, often dismissed as 'technological determinism', that there was actually something inherent in the nature of this new medium that contributed to the demise of representative publicness. See M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 1994 [1964]).
13. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 24.
14. Ibid., p. 25.
15. Ibid., p. 34.
16. Ibid., pp. 37–8.
17. Ibid., p. 33.
18. Ibid., pp. 49–50.
19. Ibid., pp. 3, 52.
20. Ibid., p. 27.
21. Ibid., pp. 32, 39–41.
22. Ibid., p. 54.
23. Ibid., p. 42.
24. Ibid., p. 37.
25. Ibid., pp. 52–5.
26. Ibid., p. 28.
27. Ibid., pp. 73–9.
28. Ibid., p. 53.

29. In Britain, 'Licensing Acts' during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries heavily restricted the development of publishing enterprises and served as a means of censorship; a system of stamp taxes imposed upon the press during the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century simultaneously restricted legitimate circulation and encouraged an oppositional underground press; libel and sedition laws further inflamed controversies over press freedom.
30. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 60–1.
31. Ibid., p. 64.
32. Ibid., pp. 58–9.
33. Ibid., p. 65.
34. Ibid., pp. 66–7.
35. Ibid., pp. 67–71.
36. Ibid., p. 73.
37. Ibid., p. 89.
38. Ibid., pp. 90–1.
39. Ibid., pp. 91–2.
40. Ibid., pp. 93–4.
41. Ibid., p. 94.
42. Ibid., p. 99.
43. Ibid., p. 103.
44. Ibid., pp. 104–6.
45. Ibid., p. 106.
46. Ibid., pp. 109–10.
47. Ibid., p. 111.
48. See J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, trans. C. Cronin and P. de Greiff (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).
49. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 119.
50. Ibid., p. 121.
51. Ibid., pp. 117–22.
52. Ibid., pp. 122–3.
53. K. Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction' [1843–4] in *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 253–4.
54. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 128–9.
55. Ibid., pp. 131–2.
56. Ibid., p. 131.
57. Ibid., p. 133.
58. Ibid., pp. 133–3.
59. Ibid., p. 136.
60. Ibid., p. 140.
61. Ibid., p. 142.
62. Ibid., p. 144.
63. Ibid., p. 146.
64. Ibid., p. 151.
65. Ibid., p. 152.
66. Ibid., pp. 154–5.
67. Ibid., p. 155.
68. Ibid., p. 157.

69. J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann 1976).
70. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 156.
71. Ibid., p. 157.
72. Ibid., p. 159.
73. Ibid., p. 159.
74. Ibid., p. 160.
75. T.W. Adorno, 'Free time', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991).
76. In view of the common criticism that Habermas overplays the ideologically integrative effects of the culture industry, it is worth noting the attention he devotes to these material questions. His citation of H.P. Bahrdt reinforces this: 'The reciprocity of the public and private spheres is disturbed … not … because the city dweller is mass man per se and hence no longer has any sensibility for the cultivation of the private sphere; but because he no longer succeeds in getting an overview of the ever more complicated life of the city as a whole in such fashion that it is really public for him. The more the city as a whole is transformed into a barely penetrable jungle, the more he withdraws into his sphere of privacy which in turn is extended ever further.' *Structural Transformation*, p. 159.
77. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 157–9.
78. Ibid., p. 166.
79. Ibid., p. 175.
80. Ibid., p. 171.
81. Ibid., p. 164.
82. Ibid., pp. 163, 170–1.
83. 'In comparison with printed communications the programmes sent by the new media curtail the reactions of their recipients in a peculiar way. They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under "tutelage", which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree.' Ibid., p. 171.
84. J. Habermas, 'Further reflections on the public sphere', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 439.
85. For example, in a recent discussion of Kant he makes the following remark: 'He [Kant] could not forsee the structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere into a semantically degenerated public sphere dominated by the electronic mass media and pervaded by images and virtual realities. He could scarcely imagine that this milieu of 'conversational' enlightenment could be adapted both to nonverbal indoctrination and to deception *by means of* language.' Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other*, p. 176.
86. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 189. Today the situation is more complex. Advances in digital technology have made smaller-scale and niche broadcasting ('narrowcasting') more viable. But the implications for diversity are not all positive as demographics and communities of low priority to advertsisers tend to get marginalised. Moreover, even today, television remains a 'mass medium' in many respects. In my

current home country, Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, a small, widely dispersed population means that even mainstream broadcasting is a less than lucrative business.
87. Ibid., pp. 165–6.
88. Ibid., p. 166.
89. Ibid., p. 182.
90. Ibid., pp. 166–7.
91. Ibid., p. 177.
92. Ibid., p. 176. Tripartite corporatism ('beer and sandwiches at 10 Downing Street' was the quaint British metonym) bringing unions, corporations and government into negotiation has, of course, been replaced by the domineering presence of the professional lobbyists, and the shadowy networks of corporate hospitality in most Western democracies.
93. C. Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson, 1984).
94. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 203–5.
95. Ibid., p. 211.
96. Ibid., p. 202.
97. Ibid., p. 213
98. Ibid., p. 201.
99. Ibid., p. 237.
100. Ibid., p. 241.
101. Ibid., pp. 226–7.
102. Ibid., p. 210.
103. Ibid., p. 209.
104. Ibid., p. 227.
105. Ibid., p. 208.

2   DISCURSIVE TESTING: THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND ITS CRITICS

1. J. Habermas, 'Further reflections on the public sphere', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 438.
2. C. Calhoun, 'Introduction', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 33.
3. G. Eley, 'Nations, publics and political cultures: placing Habermas in the nineteenth century', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 307.
4. K. Baker, 'Defining the public sphere in eighteenth century France: variations on a theme by Habermas', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 191–2.
5. As Eley puts it: 'It's open to question how far these [alternative public spheres] were simply derivative of the liberal model … and how far they possessed their own dynamics of emergence and peculiar forms of internal life.' Eley, 'Nations, publics and political cultures', p. 304.
6. By which I mean that their principles, objectives and *modus operandi* did not, according to revisionist historiography, diverge so greatly from those of the bourgeois public sphere that their exclusion from the