

A Critical Study of Communicative Rationality in Habermas's Public Sphere

Aikaterini Strani

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Heriot-Watt University

Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary research examines the public sphere as a communicatively-constructed realm and challenges Habermas's model of public sphere communication based on the "public use of reason"/communicative rationality. It questions the model's counterfactual normativity and its emancipatory potential in revisiting core concepts such as reason, power and consensus, while also considering social complexity, the media and counterpublics. This research is theoretical but informed by the quest for empirical relevance.

Using critical hermeneutic methods, the thesis critically reconstructs Habermas's theories of the public sphere and of communicative rationality, as these were developed and revised throughout his works, in order to lay the foundations for second- and third-order critique. The main critics considered in revisiting Habermas's public sphere model are: Niklas Luhmann (functionalism and social systems), Michel Foucault (historical materialism, theory of power and rejection of universal norms), Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib (critical feminism, identity politics), Thomas McCarthy (critique of rationalism and normativity), James Bohman (social complexity) and Colin Grant (post-systemic communication studies). Drawing on these, the thesis proposes a renewed public sphere model consisting of systems and emergent publics, while rethinking communicative reason and power in conditions of overcomplexity (Bohman). Lastly, it redefines normativity in an empirically plausible light, connected to emergent communication practices.

DEDICATION

To my parents and to Rodney.

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DECLARATION STATEMENT

(Research Thesis Submission Form should be placed here)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Research scope

This interdisciplinary research project examines the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) as a communicatively-constructed realm and adopts a critical approach to Habermas's conceptualisation of communication in the public sphere through the "public use of reason". In particular, it offers a critique of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality combined with that of the "public use of reason", as the fundamental prerequisites and ultimate aims of debate in the public sphere. It questions the model's counterfactual normativity and its emancipatory potential in revisiting core concepts such as reason, power and consensus, while also considering social complexity, the media and counterpublics. This research is theoretical, albeit with potential for further empirical study.

The research belongs to the interdisciplinary field of Communication Studies. Communication in its various forms is central to Habermas's paradigm. In his seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* ([1962], 1992b) he defines the public sphere as "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1992b: 27) for generating public opinion, promoting generalised interests, legitimating and challenging authority. Habermas's public sphere does not constitute a tangible site; instead, it emerges and takes shape through communication, it is sustained through communication and derives its power from communication. It is through communication in the form of the public use of reason that public opinion is created within a public sphere (or public spheres) and communicated to other public spheres and to the state; that state policies are criticised; that authority is contested; and ultimately that views and actors are legitimated. In the words of Hannah Arendt, whose sociopolitical theory influenced the work of Habermas, it is communication that "makes man a political being" (Arendt, 1998: 3). And for Habermas, the public sphere represents the ideal communication community for the aforementioned political functions.

The medium of communication in Habermas's public sphere is "people's public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*)" (Habermas, [1962] 1992b: 27). The precise

form of this use of reason is not adequately explicated in Habermas's early work, however it is analysed in great detail in the framework of *communicative rationality* (Habermas, 1984; 1987; 1990a). Indeed, this thesis considers the "public use of reason" as a manifestation of communicative rationality, which constitutes a complex notion of rationality dependent on communication and based on argumentation, consensus, discourse and intersubjectivity (cf. Chapter 4). At least in Habermas's initial conceptualisation of the public sphere ([1962] 1992b), before any references to communicative rationality, it may be assumed that the "public use of reason" referred largely to rational-critical debate.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (hereinafter *Structural Transformation*), Habermas provides a historical account of the emergence and development of the *bourgeois* public sphere and its structural changes, both internal and external. These involve relations between the public sphere and the state, civil society and the repercussions on public opinion. He concludes with possible contributions to the theory of democracy. Habermas himself sees a democratic state as capable of enabling the exchange of conflicting ideas by means of a constitutionally created dynamic of public communication (Grant, 2000a: 139). The public sphere, based on the bourgeois model, is presented as the realm in which dialogue is the essential (and ideal) form of communication, and reasoned argumentation is the basis for decision-making and conflict resolution. This is the foundation for Habermas's normative model of *discursive democracy* or *deliberative democracy* (cf. Habermas, 1996b; 1998; 2001), according to which free and unconstrained dialogue constitutes the principle of democratic legitimacy and consolidation for all modern societies. Also, the public sphere constitutes the basis for modern democracy, crystallised in the dialogical principle of direct face-to-face communication.

However, the inadequacy of face-to-face models for large-scale communicative practices in conditions of plural *demos* or *poleis* in contemporary societies has led to the search for alternative forms of communication without distorting legitimacy, transparency, accessibility or effectiveness. As societies develop and become more sophisticated, communication is increasingly mediated and mediatised, which in turn increases complexity, uncertainty and risk. Indeed, the public sphere as a forum of communication is constantly expanding and undergoing structural and functional transformations. Against this backdrop, the 'public use of reason' seems more and more

irrelevant with the conflation of public and private and the emergence of new public spheres. In this respect, Habermas's ideal communication community seems utopian and has been criticised as serving no functional purpose (cf. Luhmann, 1990; 2000). Post-bourgeois conceptions of the public sphere have argued for a new taxonomy with the profusion of new publics, the spatial and functional differentiation of public spheres arising from increasing social complexity and the constant redefinition of boundaries between "public" and "private"- if these ever existed. Fraser (1993; 1995), Benhabib (1993), Negt and Kluge (1993) and others have suggested new models of publicness based on plurality of spheres and reasons, or agonistic instead of consensus-oriented practices. In light of these critiques, Habermas acknowledged the effects of social complexity and differentiation in the theory of the public sphere and revisited his model of the public sphere and of communicative reason in his later works. He accepted the existence and importance of multiple publics and multiple public spheres and analysed deliberative democracy based on networks of modern publicness (Habermas, 1996b; 1998).

Yet, the conceptualisation of this new model spurred further critique. While the concept of the public sphere has been revisited and accepted as dynamic, constantly evolving and transforming, nevertheless the "public use of reason" as its medium of communication and part of its normative basis has not been re-examined as extensively by Habermas or by his critics. Furthermore, certain critiques of Habermas focus either on a simplistic model of Habermas's public sphere or solely on Habermas's earlier bourgeois model without taking into account his later revisions. This does not do justice to Habermas's theory and its intended role as a "methodological fiction" (Habermas, 1984; 1987).

This thesis has essentially critical intent in seeking to offer a more complete view of Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a communicative realm. For this reason, it focuses on his model of communicative rationality as the lifeblood of the public sphere and as an ideal communication model. While most scholars tend to analyse Habermas's models of the public sphere and of communicative rationality as distinct paradigms, this thesis combines them into one work. The main aims are: to provide a comprehensive analysis of Habermas's notion of communicative rationality in the public sphere; to rethink the public sphere as an aggregate concept which comprises multiple publics and multiple criteria for (rational) debate; to challenge communicative rationality as a model

of public deliberation; to include a consideration of traditional and new media in public sphere communication; to re-evaluate the normative claims of public sphere theory in light of the above.

“If we conceive of politics today as emanating from social, personal and environmental concerns, consolidated in the circulation of discursive practices rather than in formal organisations, then a common place that formulates and propagates common senses and metaphors that govern our lives might be at the crossroads of a reconceptualisation of collective practices” (Carpignano et al., 1993: 119).

1.1 Thesis outline

The second chapter of this thesis introduces Habermas’s model of the public sphere and attempts to hermeneutically reconstruct his theoretical premises, in order to facilitate critique in subsequent chapters. Reconstructing Habermas’s theoretical premises in a hermeneutic manner is not an easy task, for he has reviewed and enriched his theory since the publication of his first study of the public sphere under the title *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* ([1962] 1992b). For heuristic reasons, therefore, the chapter begins with the reconstruction of his initial model, its scope and method and with the analysis of core concepts such as publicness, publicity (2.1.3) and public opinion (2.4.2). The basic blueprint of this initial model of an essentially bourgeois public sphere is outlined in 2.2 and people’s ‘public use of reason’ is presented as the distinguishing and “unprecedented” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) medium of communication between participants in such a public sphere. The chapter continues with Habermas’s account of the socio-structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere, manifested in the hybridisation of public and private spheres, the disengagement of the social and intimate spheres and the “culture-consuming” as opposed to a “culture-debating” public (op.cit.: 159).

A reconstruction of the political functions of Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere follows in 2.4, with an emphasis on contestation of authority and an extensive analysis of the generation of public opinion as the public sphere’s main political function. The transformation of these functions, as argued by Habermas, is examined next, with a focus on the commercialisation of the press, leading to the deterioration of the principle of publicity in Habermasian terms and to the illusory and fictional character of the

transformed public sphere (2.5.6). The chapter ends with the “blurred blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 175) ensuing from these transformations and points out the differences identified by Habermas between this and the initial model.

The third chapter offers a critique of Habermas’s analysis presented in the previous chapter from the perspective of the topography of the public sphere (3.1) and its normative basis (3.2). The argument against a conceptualisation of the public sphere as a single entity is initially explored, with an extensive analysis of semi- and sub-publics (Habermas, 1992b; 1996b; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Grant, 1997) and (subaltern) counterpublics (Fraser, 1993; Warner, 2002; Carpignano, 1999 and others). Foucault’s concept of *hétérotopies* (Foucault, 1984: 47) is also discussed in 3.1.4 as a spatial alternative to Habermas’s public sphere and the possibility of a despatialised model is explored in 3.1.5.

The core elements of the normative basis of Habermas’s public sphere are critically examined in the second part of the third chapter, where the nexus between topography – that is, the shape, size, and spatial elements of the public sphere – and its normative content are also clarified. This analysis is presented in the form of aporias of the public use of reason; in particular, its public as opposed to its private use, its function as a “medium of political confrontation” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) and as a critical mechanism for the promotion of universal interests in argumentation. The issue of universal access and inclusion with regard to communication in the public sphere is also critically examined; the counterfactuality of Habermas’s normative model is explored in the end. Based on Habermas’s intentions to construct a counterfactual normative model, his revisions and clarifications are encapsulated in 3.3.

The fourth chapter offers a critical examination of Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality in an attempt to explicate the normative and functional dimensions of the ‘public use of reason’. It should be noted that Habermas offers a historical and philosophical analysis of his notion of ‘the public use of reason’ in *Structural Transformation*, but it is his concept of communicative rationality, developed in his later works (1984; 1987; 1990a; 1995 etc.) that includes the answers to the aporias mentioned in chapter 3 and encompasses the core elements of his communication model. In other words, Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality is central to his conceptualisation of the public sphere and clarifies the scope and

functions of the 'public use of reason'. The rationale behind this model is examined firstly in chapter 4, while the basic attributes of communicative rationality (intersubjectivity, understanding, argument, consensus and discourse) are analysed separately. Section 4.2.4 offers some preliminary conclusions and points to the fictive and utopian perspectives of the model.

The second half of Chapter 4 examines the lifeworld and its significance to communicative rationality. A preliminary definition in Habermasian terms is given initially and the phenomenological origins of the concept are then briefly explained. A more detailed analysis follows, which looks at lifeworld taxonomy and focuses on the *everyday lifeworld* originally examined by Schütz and Luckmann (1974). The Habermasian lifeworld is further analysed in terms of its intersubjectivity, (in)transparency and dynamic nature, in the sense that it is constantly undergoing changes and is not static. Its structural components and functions are examined next and its role in communicative rationality is established. The detailed examination of the lifeworld also serves as an introduction to the following chapter, which explores the challenge of Social Systems theory to Habermas's core concepts of communicative rationality and to communication in the public sphere as a whole.

The fifth chapter examines the critique of Habermas's communicative rationality and the public sphere by the, essentially functionalist, Social Systems theory (Parsons, Luhmann). Firstly, Habermas's conception of society as System and Lifeworld is presented (based on Habermas, 1984; 1987), in order to examine communicative rationality in the public sphere against the backdrop of a conflictual coexistence of system and lifeworld. Luhmann's epistemological objections, not only to publicness and communicative rationality in general, but also to intersubjectivity, understanding, consensus, and meaning (*Sinn*) are critically analysed. Luhmann's observation-based model of communication between social systems is also contrasted to Habermas's action-based, human communication model and the chapter ends with a critical re-evaluation of the Habermas/Luhmann debate, focused on the aforementioned core concepts.

The discussion of the challenge of Social Systems theory to Habermas's model is followed by the challenge of Foucault's theory in Chapter 6. In particular, Habermas's reliance on counterfactual norms such as consensus, universal access and universal (or

at least generalised) interests is contrasted with Foucault's theory of power, his notion of discourse as opposed to Habermas's *Diskurs*, his fervent opposition to universal norms (counterfactual or not) and to rationality in particular. This chapter ends with a counterintuitive reconsideration of the Foucault/Habermas debate, exploring arguments on Foucault's "cryptonormativity" (Habermas, 1990b: 276) and the possibility of a misunderstanding between the two theorists (6.3.5 and 6.3.6).

Chapter 7 explores the theoretical and epistemological implications of the critical work presented in previous chapters. In particular, it reflects on the implications of the critical reconstruction of Habermas's original theory and the theory's later developments, mainly in *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b) and brings together the contributions of the critics examined throughout the thesis. Based on these findings, the chapter identifies ways in which public sphere theory can be reworked. It proposes: a) a conception of the public sphere as an aggregate concept comprising 'systems' and 'emergent publics' (Grant, 2012, *forthcoming*) as opposed to Habermas's distinction between formal and informal publics (1996b); b) an essentially agonistic view of public spheres, where power differentials are viewed as constructive in emergent communication, as opposed to Habermas's insistence on setting them aside; c) a reconsideration of communicative rationality as a model of public deliberation in conditions of complexity and multiple ethical and moral codes; d) a redefinition of normativity less tied to idealising presuppositions and counterfactuals, and more informed by actually existing practices. The reflections of the theoretical and epistemological implications of this critical work and the above proposals for reworking public sphere theory establish the contribution of the thesis to public sphere theory.

Chapter 8 offers concluding methodological reflections. It reflects on the methods of critical analysis, as well as the results. It compares the methods used in the thesis with the methods of critique used by Habermas's critics (systemic/functional, critical feminist, historical materialist, critical hermeneutics etc.). It then evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the (essentially) critical hermeneutic method of reconstruction and multi-level critique used in the thesis. The chapter concludes with the implications for communication theory and establishes the innovation of the thesis in making a complex case for a reconceptualisation of normativity based on a "multiparadigmatic" approach (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 6).

CHAPTER 2

Habermas's Model of the Public Sphere: A Hermeneutic Reconstruction of his Theoretical Premises

2.0 Introductory Remarks

Although the concept of the public sphere tends to be associated with the work of Jürgen Habermas, the original German term *Öffentlichkeit* is in actual fact attributed to Immanuel Kant. Kant originally conceived a model of *Öffentlichkeit* as the privileged realm of the public use of reason. It had the status of an exclusive realm, which was reserved for the citizens of the Prussian state at the time. Kant's model envisioned the replacement of the rule of authority with that of reason: *veritas non auctoritas facit legem*¹ (McCarthy, 1978: 381; Habermas, 1992b: 53). Reason was conceptualised as the tool of argument, negotiation and mediation.

Based on the Kantian model, Habermas developed his own theory of *Öffentlichkeit* and defined its premises in his *Habilitationsschrift* which he later published under the title *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1964). It was published in English almost 30 years later under the title *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1992b). In this work, he traces the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in 18th century England, France and Germany among the already existing, albeit slowly transforming, *political public sphere*, *literary public sphere* (or public sphere in the world of letters) and *intimate sphere*, which represented the core of a person's private sphere and was shielded from intrusion (Burger, in Habermas, 1992b: xv-xvi). What was crucial to this emergence and subsequent evolution was the invention, development and expansion of the printed press, which proliferated views, criticisms, information and entertainment, established some form of publicness and became the vehicle for the formation of a nascent form of public opinion. These concepts of publicness and public opinion will be extensively analysed in sections 2.1.3 and 2.4.2 respectively.

Paradoxically, Habermas holds the very media that contributed to the evolution and consolidation of the public sphere and its various forms, that is, the media of mass

¹ Freely: "It is truth, not authority, that makes the Law".

communication, as responsible for its decline and ultimate degeneration. He identifies a concomitant deterioration of the public sphere through the conflation of public and private spheres, the growth of culture industries and the evolution of large private interests. However, he believes in the normative potential of his theoretical perspective and suggests possible contributions of his own theory to the theory of democracy.

This chapter will attempt to reconstruct the factors and principles of the public sphere as it was conceptualised by Habermas not only in *Structural Transformation*, but also in his magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984-1987) and his later works “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere” (1993a), *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), *The Inclusion of the Other* (1998) and “Political Communication in the Media Society” (2006). It begins with the initially conceptualised model of a bourgeois public sphere, developed in *Structural Transformation* and revised in “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere” (Habermas, 1993a). It then follows Habermas’s analysis of the socio-structural transformation of the public sphere with the hybridisation of public and private and the shift from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public (2.3). The political functions of that public sphere and their transformation are discussed in 2.4; this analysis includes the functions of public opinion and civil society and covers Habermas’s examination of these concepts both in his early and later works.

2.1 The Initial Model: A Bourgeois Public Sphere

2.1.1 Initial Scope

In his preface, Habermas clearly delineates the aims and methods of his research into the structural transformation of the public sphere. He presents his aim to be the analysis of “the type ‘bourgeois public sphere’” (Habermas, 1992b: xvii) and he also introduces two caveats: Firstly, that his research focuses on the *liberal* model of the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1992b: xviii). The basic features of a liberal model of public space are examined by Benhabib (1993: 73-98, particularly pp. 81-85 for the liberal model). Benhabib notes that, strictly speaking, the liberal model of public space actually follows the thought and work of Ackerman, and Habermas’s model is instead labelled as “the discursive model” (Benhabib, 1993: 85). Nevertheless, the latter presents strong similarities to the liberal model as conceived by Benhabib. Liberalism in these two models of public space “is a form of political culture in which the question of

legitimacy is paramount [...and] a political culture of “public dialogue” based on certain kinds of “conversational constraints”” (op.cit.: 81).² Along the same lines, Calhoun adds that the liberal model of the public sphere “pursues discursive equality by disqualifying discourse about the differences among actors” (Calhoun, 1997: 83). For the sake of conceptual clarity, at this initial stage the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere will be assumed as a model based on equality and lack of any form of discrimination or bias among the participants.

Secondly, Habermas specifies the type “bourgeois public sphere” in order to distinguish it from the *plebeian* public sphere and also from a less obvious variant, the “plebiscitary-acclamatory form of regimented public sphere characterising dictatorships in highly developed industrial societies” (Habermas, 1992b: xviii). He justifies the deliberate disregard of the plebeian public sphere by describing it as “a variant that was suppressed in the historical process” (ibid.). Also, this form of public sphere was “illiterate” (Habermas, 1992b: xviii), while the second type, that is, the public sphere characterising dictatorships in highly industrial societies, is “post-literary” (ibid.). This refers to a more developed public sphere that has moved away from the world of letters and has acquired political functions, which are discussed in 2.2.5 and 2.4.1. Habermas contends that these types of public sphere had different characteristics and political functions than the bourgeois and therefore should be excluded from his investigation (Habermas, 1992b: xviii-xix).

The full title of Habermas’s thesis is *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. It is already clear from this title that Habermas chose to focus on a specific model of the public sphere, which is the bourgeois model.³ He specifies in the preface that he will only be dealing with the bourgeois model and not with the plebeian public sphere, which he leaves aside as a

² At this stage, this preliminary definition is given only for the sake of clarification. Concepts and issues such as legitimacy, public dialogue or conversational constraints are discussed in following chapters.

³ According to the translator’s note, the original term *bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit* is difficult to translate adequately, since the term *bürgerlich* has the connotations of both “bourgeois” or “citizen” and also means “middle class” in contrast to “noble” or “peasant”. “For better or worse, [*Bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*] is rendered here as “bourgeois public sphere”” (Burger, “Translator’s Note”, in Habermas: 1992b, xv).

“variant that in a sense was suppressed in the historical process” (Habermas, 1992b: xviii).⁴ It is the rise, structural transformation and decay of this bourgeois public sphere that Habermas analyses in *Structural Transformation*. Its characteristics are encapsulated in the succinct statement he makes in the first chapter:

“The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*).” (Habermas, 1992b: 27)

The term “private people” refers to property owners and points to Habermas’s essentially bourgeois model of the embryonic 17th century public sphere. The early institutions of this public sphere, where an unprecedented form of debate took place, were coffee and tea houses in England, salons and cafés in France and *Tischgesellschaften* (dinner meetings) in Germany. Propertied citizens would gather in such sites and engage in critical debate about matters of common interest in order to form an unprompted type of public opinion:

“By the “public sphere” we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1964: 49).

Habermas’s initial demarcation of his investigation, therefore, describes the public sphere as a sphere of propertied citizens who engage in rational debate on matters of common (or rather, bourgeois) interest for the formation of some form of public opinion.

2.1.2 Initial Method

The method that Habermas uses in his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere is based on interdisciplinarity in the form of a combination of a sociological and historiographic

⁴ “The plebeian public sphere is a bourgeois public sphere whose social preconditions have been rendered null”, G. Lottes, *Politische Aufklärung und plebejisches Publikum* (Munich, 1979), p. 110, cited by Habermas, in Calhoun, 1993: 425.

approach. This is crucial, for it points out that Habermas is not offering a purely political analysis of an essentially political category, even though his investigation belongs to “the broad field formerly reflected in the perspective of the traditional science of politics” (Habermas, 1992b: xvii). This interdisciplinary method of “sociological investigation of historical trends” (Habermas, 1992b: xviii) is evident throughout his analysis of the public sphere, sometimes to a point when historiography, analysis and critique are particularly hard to distinguish.⁵ In this respect, what is particularly interesting is that Habermas clarifies from the outset that the bourgeois public sphere is conceptualised as “a category that is typical of an epoch” (Habermas, 1992b: xvii) and as a result “cannot be transferred, idealtypically generalised to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations” (ibid.). It seems that he wishes to make clear that he is looking at a specific historical category of the public sphere and therefore is not interested in presenting a generalised model, and certainly not a normative ideal. Yet it is precisely the idealisation and normative attribution to an allegedly historical category that constitutes the main object of critique of Habermas’s theory of the public sphere. In other words, what he claims not to be his objective is indeed considered by his critics not merely as his main goal, but also as the main weakness of his theory. The next Chapter of this thesis attempts to clarify Habermas’s intentions in order to establish whether his interpreters are justified in inferring his normative claim.

2.1.3 ‘Public’ and ‘publicity’

Before embarking on any reconstruction or critique of Habermas’s preliminary demarcation of a type of bourgeois public sphere, certain clarifications must be made with regard to certain key concepts. The term “public sphere” is the English translation of the original German noun *Öffentlichkeit*, formed from the older adjective *öffentlich* during the 18th century, in analogy to ‘publicité’ and ‘publicity’ (Habermas, 1992b: 2-3). *Öffentlichkeit* is not, however, always coterminous with publicity. As will be discussed in 2.4 and 2.5, *publicity* denotes an originally (Kantian) normative ideal, a principle which has undergone such transformation in the course of increased mediatisation that its meaning and connotation have changed. Even as a Kantian

⁵ The issue of historiography vs. sociology / abstraction is examined in the next Chapter of this thesis (section 3.2, particularly 3.2.7).

principle, however, publicity was not interchangeable with the Habermasian notion of *Öffentlichkeit*. Its literal meaning is “the public”, in analogy to *Publikum*, however again *Öffentlichkeit* and *Publikum*, or *the public*, are not synonymous. Burger, who translated Habermas’s *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* into English, writes in his translator’s note that *Öffentlichkeit* may be rendered variously as “(the) public”, “public sphere”, or “publicity”, however whenever the context made more than one of these terms sensible, “public sphere” was chosen as the preferred version (Burger, 1992b: xv). We therefore see already from the first pages of the book and from our first encounter with *Öffentlichkeit* that the public sphere, the public, publicity or publicness are all crucial to our understanding of Habermas’s conceptualisation of the *Öffentlichkeit* and should therefore be clarified before any analysis of the initial premises of Habermas’s theory.

This is the route that Habermas takes before setting his initial question and begins by looking into the terms “public” and “publicness”. The term “public”, both as an adjective and as a noun, has a series of different meanings. Firstly, it confers openness as opposed to exclusivity or confinement; for instance, a public event is open to all. This openness, however, does not necessarily imply general accessibility (Habermas, 1992b: 2). To illustrate this, Habermas uses the example of public buildings, which in fact are not accessible to all but simply house institutions of the public authority of the state. In this case, public refers to a state-related entity. It may also acquire the exact opposite meaning, however, as “the sector of public opinion that simply happens to be opposed to the authorities” (ibid.) A third meaning is that of representation and recognition, as in the case of a “public [official] reception” (ibid.). This connotation of “powerful display of representation” (ibid.) is extensively analysed by Habermas in his remarks on “representative publicness” (cf. 2.1.5).

In Habermas’s model, the state and the public sphere do not overlap; “public” does not refer to state or government but rather to interests and topic of discussion.

“We speak of the political public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state. Although state authority is so to speak the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it.”(Habermas, 1974: 49)

It is precisely this extragovernmental character of the public sphere that confers an aura of independence, autonomy and legitimacy on the “public opinion” generated in it

(Fraser, 1993: 124) – these concepts are explicated in subsequent sections of this chapter. This “informally mobilised body” of non-governmental discursive opinion may either confront the state as its opponent (Habermas, 1974: 49n.2), or complement the state in its decision-making role, thus influencing power and consolidating popular sovereignty.

“In the proceduralist paradigm, the public sphere is not conceived simply as the back room of the parliamentary complex, but as the impulse-generating periphery that *surrounds* the political centre: in cultivating normative reasons, it affects all parts of the political system without intending to conquer it.” (Habermas, 1996b: 442)

It is evident from Habermas’s subsequent work that this seemingly harmonious coexistence of state and public sphere is only temporary.

A fourth meaning of the term “public” is linked to the concepts of publicity and public opinion, in such way that the public constitutes the “carrier of public opinion” (ibid.). This implies a critical capacity and intent (ibid.) which is the very rationale behind the concept of publicity. The latter, however, constitutes one of those concepts whose meaning and connotation have changed over time. It has come to constitute the negative face of publicness, in a social transformation that destroyed the normativity of publicness and replaced it by staged and manipulative publicity.

“In the realm of the mass media, of course, publicity has changed its meaning. Originally a function of public opinion, it has become an attribute of whatever attracts public opinion: public relations and efforts recently baptised “publicity work” are aimed at producing such publicity” (Habermas, 1992b: 2).

This semantic shift in the concept of publicity is crucial in Habermas’s theory, for it constitutes one of the catalysts in the transformation of the public sphere. The implications of the transformation of publicity for the public sphere and for democracy are discussed in 2.4, on the transformation of the public sphere’s political function. For the purposes of reconstructing Habermas’s early model, publicity is taken to be synonymous to publicness at this stage, and it is indeed used interchangeably by Habermas when he refers to earlier models. Publicness is a variable concept which has acquired different characteristics in different historical periods and, as will be discussed in this chapter.

At this stage, it is clear that a definition of the term “public” is not an easy task and by demonstrating that, Habermas opts for an examination into the concept of “public” as distinguished by “private”. He traces this public/private distinction from Classical Greece through to the High Middle Ages and the era of feudalism in Europe. The reason he gives for focusing on the public/private distinction is that “the public sphere itself appears as a specific domain – the public domain versus the private” (Habermas, 1992b: 2). Therefore, it is through the examination of the binary concept public/private that the clarification on these concepts will emerge.

2.1.4 The Greek Model and the Initial Question

Habermas’s analysis of the Greek model of public life is largely based on the work of Hannah Arendt (1958). He uses the contrast between *polis* and *oikos* (household) as a parallel to the public/private distinction and presents *bios politikos* (public life) in the *agora* as early forms of a public sphere and public life. Although the distinction between public and private, or between *polis* and *oikos* was sharp, nevertheless only private individuals in the form of masters of households were allowed to participate in public life and in the public sphere. The latter was constituted in “discussion (lexis)” and “common action (praxis)” (Habermas, 1992b: 3) and represented “freedom and permanence” (Habermas, 1992b: 4) as opposed to restriction of women and slaves in the household. This public sphere was a site for equality, excellence, and public display of virtue. Based on “horizontal” hierarchy and relationships dependence (Habermas, 1992b: 15), the Greek model functioned as “an ideological template [...] [which] has preserved continuity over the centuries” (Habermas, 1992b: 4). What is more important, though, is that the public sphere in classical Greece was a site of display and visibility. It was where “issues were made topical and took on shape” (ibid.) in front of all the citizens, as opposed to the confinement and obscurity of the household under the master. It could therefore be said that at least in earlier models of public spheres, the public/private distinction was an issue of visibility as opposed to obscurity. So, at least during antiquity, ‘public’ was analogous to ‘visible’.

Habermas encapsulates the initial aim of his investigation into “gaining a historical understanding” (Habermas, 1992b: 4) of the public sphere in all the forms it has assumed during its structural transformation.

“If we are successful in gaining a historical understanding of the structures of this complex that today, confusedly enough, we subsume under the heading public sphere, we can hope to attain thereby not only a sociological clarification of the concept but a systematic comprehension of our own society from the perspective of one of its central categories” (Habermas, 1992b: 4-5)

Again, Habermas presents historical investigation as his method for sociological study. The nature of this nexus between historiography and sociological study in Habermas seems to be that of method and research aim.

2.1.5 Representative publicity

In order to gain this historical understanding and answer the initial question, Habermas continues his investigation of the public/private distinction in the High Middle Ages and the era of feudalism in Europe. He concomitantly traces the (modern) roots of the bourgeois public sphere in what he calls “representative publicness”. The latter is a form of publicity, or publicness (at least at this early stage these terms are used interchangeably), whose carriers were the feudal powers of the time and whereby “an opposition between the public and private spheres [...] did not exist” (Habermas, 1992b: 5). Feudal society and hierarchy were based on land on a “vertical relation of dependence” (Habermas, 1992b: 15), therefore if land is *assumed* to have been the public sphere and the feudal lord is subordinate to and depends on it, then his authority would be considered private *in relation to the land* (Bruner, quoted in Habermas, 1992b: 5). The authority of the feudal lord, however, was not analogous to a private form of authority such as that of the master of a household in Greek and Roman times (*oikodespotes* and *pater familias* respectively). Rather, “public” and “private” were “both [...] emanations from a single unified authority” (op.cit.: 6), at this stage “fused together into an indivisible unity [...] inseparable from land” (ibid.).

The reason, however, that representative publicness was not a public sphere in the modern sense is not merely the lack of its distinct separation from a private realm.

“This *publicness* (or *publicity*) of representation was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather, it was something like a status attribute [...]. In itself the status of manorial lord, on whatever level, was neutral in relation

to the criteria of “public” and “private”; but its incumbent represented it publicly. He displayed himself, presented himself as an embodiment of some sort of “higher” power” (Habermas, 1992b: 7, emphasis in the original).

Representative publicness was therefore not a sphere of political communication per se (Habermas, 1992b: 7), but served as a form of a lord’s representation – his *public* representation “not for but “before” the people” (Habermas, 1992b: 8) since “the prince and the estates of his realm “were” the country [...] not just its representatives” (Habermas, 1992b: 7-8).

Still, we see characteristics of an embryonic form of public sphere emerging from this initial structure of publicness. The rationale behind representation is to make something, or someone, public, that is to bring it, or him, to the forefront. Therefore, even though the feudal powers’ public representation was done “not for but “before” the people”, there was still the element of visibility that was crucial to this form of publicity: “Representation pretended to make something invisible visible through the public presence of the lord” (Habermas, 1992b: 7). Just like the (“normative” – Habermas, 1992b: 4) ancient Greek model of a public sphere, visibility was key to publicness and it is in fact what distinguished it from the private sphere at the time, although private manifestation became public in the plebeian public sphere. Moreover, a separation of the public from the private eventually took shape after courtly life was brought to the centre of representative publicity as a result of the advent of humanism.⁶ Of course, there was still representation of the nobles, however they developed a “framework of sociability” (Habermas, 1992b: 11). A sphere of “good society” emerged as a result of this sociability, a sort of a noblemen’s clique which constituted the final form of representative publicity based on the monarch’s court, in fact as an “enclave within a society opposed to the state” (ibid.). This does not mean that the sphere of the “good society” was opposed to the state ideologically, but rather it was excluded from state authority. In that sense, this sphere was essentially private. Hence the public/private

⁶ Humanism was the early manifestation of bourgeois culture which at the time “became a component of courtly life” (Habermas, 1992b: 9): “Under the influence of the *Cortegiano* the humanistically cultivate courtier replaced the Christian knight. The slightly later notions of the gentleman in Great Britain and of the *honnête homme* in France described similar types. Their serene and eloquent sociability was characteristic of the new “society” centred in the court” (ibid.).

separation is made clear as the distinction between the state (“public”) and what is excluded from it (“private”).

Because of this initial polarisation and eventual split into public and private elements, such as religion as the first sphere of private autonomy⁷, or the emergence of independent, i.e. privatised institutions of public authority (Habermas, 1992b: 11-12), this model of representative publicity eventually disintegrated towards the end of the 18th century. It seems that a clear separation of public and private realms or areas is a fundamental prerequisite for the emergence and functioning of a public sphere. This becomes clearer in chapters 5 and 6 of *Structural Transformation*, where the hybridisation of public and private spheres in modern times contributed to the structural transformation and ultimate “disintegration” (Habermas, 1992b: 175) of the public sphere. What also becomes evident is that the concepts public and private, both as separate concepts and in their binary form of public/private distinction, are not static but dynamic.

Through the initial social structure of two distinct public and private realms, Habermas sees a sphere of civil society emerging as a “corollary of depersonalised state authority” (Habermas, 1992b: 19) and as “the genuine domain of private autonomy” (op.cit.: 12). This sphere did not emerge from the noblemen’s “good society”, as one would expect. Instead, even though it constituted at this early stage a *private sphere of civil society*, its core was not the nobleman, as was in the case of representative publicness, but the newly emerging social class of the bourgeois. Civil society is analysed in 2.4.5.

Habermas illustrates the deterioration of representative publicity and the emergence of the bourgeoisie through Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister*, where the central character, a nobleman, denounces the world of the bourgeois. This illustration is not without importance for Habermas’s historical investigation, for the emergence of the bourgeois as a separate class distinct from the nobility marks the beginning of the process that led to the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere.

⁷ Cf. Habermas’s lecture on religion in the public sphere: Habermas, J. 2006: “2005 lecture: Jurgen Habermas on 'Religion in the Public Sphere'” in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1, 1-25.

“The “lord” was “public” by virtue of representation [...] The nobleman was what he represented; the bourgeois, what he produced [...] The representative bearing that the nouveau riche wanted to assume turned into a comical make-believe. Hence, Goethe advised not to ask him “What art thou?” but only: “What hast thou? What discernment, knowledge, talent, wealth?”” (Habermas, 1992b: 13).

Habermas uses Goethe’s work in order to compare early forms of publicness to a stage, where the representative role of noblemen was becoming obsolete and authority was instead displayed or performed through economic activity and commercial relationships.

The decline of this representative role, as well as the emergence of the private sphere of civil society (Habermas, 1992b: 19) point to a further shift and re-definition of the public/private distinction. While the sphere of economic activity was the private sphere of the conjugal family and the household in earlier times, this “private sphere of society” became “publicly relevant” (Arendt, [1958] 1998: 46). Arendt attributes this shift to “the rise of the social” (op.cit., 38-50). For her, society or “the social” is a hybrid realm, neither strictly public, nor strictly private, where “private interests assume public significance” (op.cit.: 35). It is also “the collective of families organised into the facsimile of one super-human family” (op.cit.: 29).

“Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence [...] assumes public significance, and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public” (Arendt, 1998: 46)

In the second half of the 18th century such activities of “general interest” (Habermas, 1992b, 19) involved the “traffic in commodities and news” (op.cit., 16) which emerged as a result of the advent of capitalism and subsequent mercantilist policies. The traffic in news was done by way of *private* correspondence, in a way that public reporting depended upon “private exchange of news” (op.cit., 21) and was in fact “constituted of residual elements of what was actually available” (ibid.). This news was circulated in printed journals which “pointed to a new form of public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 254, n.35), since it was through these journals that news gained publicity in the sense of visibility. At the time, the state systematically used this public realm of periodically printed journals for its own interests. As a result, the public now assumed the role of “the addressee of the authorities’ announcements” (ibid.) and a channel of communication between the state and the public was therefore established. This marked

the beginning of a newly emerging form of publicness, with this public, essentially bourgeois, as its carrier.

2.1.6 The Bourgeois and the Genesis of the Public Sphere

In the core of this public to which the authorities' promulgations were addressed was "the new stratum of bourgeois people" (Habermas, 1992b: 22) according to Habermas's analysis. As mentioned in the previous section, the bourgeois belonged to a class distinct from noblemen and were differentiated by them primarily not by who they were but by their profession and skill. "Officials of the rulers' administration" (Habermas, 1992b: 23), that is, mostly jurists, were at the centre of this stratum, along with the "capitalists [...] merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs and manufacturers" (ibid.). What is important in the definition and understanding of the newly-emerged stratum of the bourgeois is the fact that it did *not* include the *burghers* in the sense of citizens, or members of a town community (burgh).⁸

"These others, who were not 'citizens' but 'bourgeois', served their masters, their church and their employers or were 'free' as members of the liberal profession [and] they had nothing more in common among themselves than that they belonged to the 'bourgeoisie'- which did not mean a whole lot more than that this label distinguished them from nobility, peasantry, [...] the lower strata of the town [...] and] the people, *le peuple*" (Schramm, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 255, n.54)

The issue of citizenship in relation to the bourgeois identity is a particularly interesting one. The Greek model, described in 2.1.4, was based on citizenship and excluded all non-citizens of a city-state. Representative publicity was not based on citizenship, which represents political status, but instead it was based on social status. The bourgeois model seemed not to be based on any other status than "the bourgeois" which, at least at its nascent stage, was rather diffuse and vague. In fact, the bourgeois, at this stage, could more easily be distinguished by what they were not rather than what they were.

⁸ This should not be confused with the German adjective *bürgerlich* which may actually convey both meanings, i.e. that of the bourgeois and of the middle-class "townsman", *Bürger*. Paradoxically, this distinction is clearer in the English translation.

Be that as it may, the eclipse of representative publicity made “room for another sphere known as “the public sphere in the modern sense of the term”” (Habermas, 1992b: 18). At its core was this newly-emerged stratum of jurists and businessmen, which constituted “the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public” (Habermas, 1992b: 23). Its function, however, was not merely that of an addressee of the state’s announcements. Capitalist mercantilism gradually increased the importance and the standing of the bourgeois, eventually making it “the public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*” (ibid., emphasis in the original). At this initial stage, therefore, the public sphere “was specifically a part of “civil society”, which established itself as “the realm of commodity exchange and social labour governed by its own laws” (Habermas, 1992b: 3).

This sphere of the bourgeois, that is, the learned community, was in contact with the administration through their main channel of communication, the press. It was, however, not part of it:

“The state as an organisation 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 organisationally and institutionally from the society represented by the bourgeoisie” (Böckenförde, cited in Habermas, 1993a: 431).

As a result of this continuous communication with the separate entity that was the state, Habermas argues that the bourgeois reading public “became “critical” (Habermas, 1992b: 24), in the sense that it “provoked the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason” (ibid.). This means that, from a reading public merely constituting the addressee of the authorities’ promulgations, the bourgeois (at least in Habermas’s analysis) evolved into a public who made use of its reason with critical intent on primarily literary matters, their opinions being published in the press. Because of the publicity (in the modern sense of public display) of such opinions based on critical judgment, at this stage at least the use of this public’s reason was “subjected to regulation” (Habermas, 1992b: 25) by the state. In later stages, before the French Revolution, this critical intent of the learned public eventually turned against the authorities themselves. A sphere that was earlier subject to state authority was therefore transformed according to Habermas into a “forum in which the private people come

together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 25). The liberal features of this public sphere on Habermas’s historiography, particularly contestation and legitimation of public authority, are now becoming clearer and will be analysed in 2.4.6.

2.2 The Basic Blueprint

2.2.1 The initial demarcation

In Chapter 2 of *Structural Transformation*, Habermas provides a detailed analysis of the social structures of the nascent bourgeois public sphere as it emerged from the public sphere of civil society (cf. section 2.3). He begins with a “basic blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) of the bourgeois public sphere. As this section serves as an introduction to these concepts and does not analyse them in great depth, only the basic blueprint will be presented here and individual concepts will be discussed in their respective sections.

Habermas’s sketch, as well as his later analysis, is centred on the definition of the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1992b: 27). Habermas continues to examine the distinction between the concepts of “private” and “public”. While in ancient forms of publicness (Classical Greece, Rome) and in earlier modern forms such as representative publicness (examined above) the distinction between public and private realms was more or less clear, the bourgeois *public* sphere as the new form of publicness in the 18th century constituted of *private* people, or rather, *private men*. The private bourgeois man has already been described as owner of commodities and property. Habermas also points out the human and personal dimension of privateness in addition to the economic one. The private man was also the head of his family and a human being per se (Habermas, 1992b: 28-29). This role that the private man assumes as a result of social transformation and constant redefinition of public and private realms is discussed in depth in section 2.3.1.

The reason the bourgeois public sphere was made up by essentially *private* men as opposed to public figures, such as individuals of authority or of a privileged social status is that the very purpose of the bourgeois public sphere was not to constitute or to replace authority, but to control and challenge it through “political confrontation”

(Habermas, 1992b: 27). One of the main shifts in this new form of publicness embodied by the bourgeois public sphere, therefore, was that the bourgeois, as *private* persons, did not “rule” (Habermas, 1992b: 28).

“Their power claims against the public authority [...] undercut the principle on which existing rule was based. The principle of control that the bourgeois public opposed to the latter – namely publicity – was intended to change domination as such” (Habermas, 1992b: 28).

The bourgeois public sphere, therefore, functioned as a “warning system with sensors [...] sensitive throughout society” (Habermas, 1996b: 359), however it had limited capacity of solving problems. This meant that its real power rested in communication through which the public attempted to monitor and to contest authority. This communicative power “cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it” (Habermas, 1993a: 452). Communication, therefore, is not only what constitutes the public sphere, but also what empowers it to challenge public authority. The medium of this communication was “people’s public use of reason” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) – analysed in 2.2.2.

Habermas encapsulates schematically his basic blueprint of the public and private realms in the 18th century in the table below. In this schematic representation, he places the bourgeois public realm between the private realm and the realm of public authority. This denotes the essentially mediating role of even initial forms of public sphere. The private domain in this blueprint comprises civil society and the conjugal family with the intimate sphere as the interior domain of the family (see section 2.2.4).

This diagram does not merely represent the public/private relation but is in fact a “schema of *social* realms” (Habermas, 1992b: 30, my emphasis), or of the social structures of the public sphere. Indeed, Habermas explains in his encyclopedia article on the public sphere that the latter is “first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1974: 49).

Schematic Representation of the Initial Blueprint of the Public Sphere Based on Social Realms (taken from Habermas, 1992b: 30)

Private Realm		Sphere Of Public Authority
Civil Society (realm of commodity exchange and social labour)	Public Sphere in the political realm Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)	State (realm of the “police”)
Conjugal family’s internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)	(market of culture products) “Town”	Court (courtly-noble society)

For reasons of conceptual clarity and in order better to understand this basic blueprint, it is essential to clarify the distinction between the formal notions of *realm* and *sphere*. At this stage and based on Habermas’s schematic representation, this is slightly problematic. *Realm* and *sphere* may appear synonymous, but in fact the former may in certain cases represent a more encompassing entity than the latter. Habermas’s diagram above is in fact a “schema of social *realms*” (Habermas, 1992b: 30, my emphasis). The private *realm* (*Bereich*) included the intimate *sphere* of the conjugal family (*Intimsphäre*), civil society, and the “authentic ‘public *sphere*’” (*authentische Öffentlichkeit*) (ibid., my emphasis). The term *public sphere in the political realm* (*Öffentlichkeit im politischen Bereich*) also illustrates a sphere as a smaller entity and in this case also a component of a realm. In line with this, one could assume that a realm is the broader category of certain types of spheres, or at least an aggregate concept in relation to that of a sphere. In the same diagram, however, Habermas presents the *sphere* of public authority (third column) as one of the three social *realms* schematically represented in order to set out the blueprint for the 18th century bourgeois public sphere. In this case, sphere and realm appear to be interchangeable. At the same time, the *sphere* of public authority, which is a social *realm*, comprises the state, as the *realm* of the police, and the court. Here, the realm is presented as the smaller entity and in this case a component of the encompassing entity of the sphere – which at the same time may equate to a realm itself. The distinction, if any, of these two concepts is certainly not clear, at least at this stage, and their boundaries appear fuzzy. This conceptual clarity is significant because it is central to the analysis and critique of spatiality in the public sphere (which is discussed in 3.1). For the purposes of this theoretical

reconstruction, realm will be taken to signify a more general concept than sphere unless explicitly stated otherwise.

A further important element in Habermas's schema above is that there is a single dividing line between the first and second columns representing the private realm and the public sphere, but a double dividing line between these realms and the sphere of public authority. Habermas explicitly states that "[t]he line between state and society divided the public sphere from the private realm" (Habermas, 1992b: 30), thus implying that the state corresponds to the public sphere and society to the private realm. In the diagram above, the state is shown to belong to the sphere of public authority which is clearly distinct from the public sphere, both in the world of letters and in the political realm. If this line is taken to be the double dividing line between the state and the private and public spheres,⁹ then according to the logic above the private and public spheres belong to the private realm and the sphere of public authority belongs to the public sphere. This is not as paradoxical as it may seem.

Firstly, as Habermas illustrates, the "authentic 'public sphere'" (Habermas, 1992b: 30) was in fact part of the private realm, being constituted by private people.

"Included in the private realm was the authentic "public sphere", for it was a public sphere constituted by private people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres" (Habermas, 1992b: 30).

To a certain extent, therefore, it could be said that the private and a portion of the public spheres belong to the private realm. Secondly, public authority did belong to the public domain in earlier forms of publicness when 'public' corresponded to 'state'. In the 18th century, however, the public/private relation was redefined and the boundaries of these realms, and spheres, were once more shifted. Public authority, represented by the state and the court, was now clearly distinct from publicness in the form of the public sphere.

⁹ Not realms, since public authority could be said to belong to the public realm but not to the public sphere.

2.2.2 People's public use of reason

In Habermas's initial demarcation, the public use of reason is presented as the medium of political debate in the nascent bourgeois public sphere.

“The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*). In our [German] usage, this term (i.e., *Raisonement*) unmistakably preserves the polemical nuances of both sides: simultaneously the invocation of reason and its disdainful disparagement as merely malcontent griping.” (Habermas, 1992b: 27)

The use of the term *Raisonement* instead of *Vernunft*, which is the word most commonly used to render the concept of reason, is of particular interest. Kant used the term *Vernunft* throughout his classical works, but also used the terms *rasonieren*, explained by Habermas as “reasoning”, and *Raisonement*, explained by Habermas as “use of rational argument” (Habermas, 1992b: 27, n. 1). Indeed, the difference between the two terms is that *Vernunft* refers to the cognitive capacity of reason, while the term *Raisonement* is a French borrowing (*raisonnement*) and refers to the *ability* to reason or to the technique and skill of *reasoning* rather than reason itself. This is why in other instances *Raisonement* is referred to (or rather, translated as) “critical discussion” (Habermas, 1992b: 28). It should be made clear, therefore, that the “public use of reason” in Habermasian terms implies the public use of the skill of *reasoning* and argumentation rather than reason in the sense of logic.¹⁰

According to Habermas's analysis, the voice of reason constituted the voice of freedom; if freedom was deprived, rational debate and indeed a public sphere as conceptualised by Habermas were therefore untenable (Habermas, 1992b: 35). As a result, the public use of reason presupposed and derived its power from freedom of speech and expression. Following Habermas's historiography, in the initial stages of the bourgeois public sphere, when these freedoms were not fully granted, the use of reason was practised by “internal” as opposed to “public” groups and was thus revealed in stages (Habermas, 1992b: 35). It becomes evident that, by portraying the public use of reason as *the* medium of communication in the public sphere (Habermas, 1992b: 27), Habermas emphasises the power of reason and its salience in public discourse in a way

¹⁰ This points to the distinction between practical and communicative reason, which is extensively examined in 4.1.1.

that it is endowed with an essentially normative status. It is presented as the cornerstone of the public sphere in a way that only a public sphere founded on the public use of reason can fulfil its purpose of public opinion formation, critical monitoring and contestation of authority. In this way, the public use of reason in the public sphere functions as “a kind of critical yardstick by means of which the shortcomings of existing institutions can be assessed” (Thompson, 1993: 178).

2.2.3 Institutions of the Early Bourgeois Public Sphere

Having discussed the medium of debate in the early bourgeois public sphere, Habermas turns to its institutions. He discusses how the periodical press, and in particular critical journals, and new centres of sociability, such as salons, coffeehouses and table societies, were instrumental in the development of the bourgeois public sphere. As publicness gradually detached itself from the court, it began to develop and take shape as the court’s counterweight in the “town” (Habermas, 1992b: 30). The “town” functioned as an economic centre and the site for civil society as the “realm of commodity exchange and social labour” (ibid.). As seen in Habermas’s blueprint, the “town” comprised the social realms that belonged to the same category as the public spheres in the world of letters and in the political realm. It was a “market for cultural products” (ibid.), the space of most trading and business activities and it also provided the site for the public sphere in the world letters, or the literary public sphere. In this variant of the public sphere, private people gathered as a public (or as publics) to deliberate on art, literature and music (Habermas, 1992b: 31-33, 38-39). Even though the public sphere in the world of letters constituted a precursor to the public sphere in the political realm, these two forms of publicness coexisted in the 18th century. Their relation will be discussed in depth in section 2.2.5.

The institutions of these forms of publicness were salons in France, table societies in Germany and coffeehouses in Britain. In those sites, the “heirs of humanistic-aristocratic society” socialised with “bourgeois intellectuals (through sociable discussions that quickly developed into public criticism)” (Habermas, 1992b: 30). Habermas traces the emergence of these new institutions of the public sphere from the “town” in each of their respective countries. In Great Britain, the town always predominated over the court and acquired more vigour with the emergence of

coffeehouses as embryonic institutions of the public sphere. In these sites, the nobility frequently met with upper bourgeois strata representing “landed and moneyed interests” (Habermas, 1992b: 33) and engaged in critical debate not only on art and literature, as was the case in the literary public sphere, but also on economics and politics.

“For inasmuch as the “town” took over its cultural functions, the public sphere itself was transformed. [...] Thus critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economic and political disputes without any guarantee [...] that such discussions would be inconsequential” (Habermas, 1992b: 31-33)

This expansion of the issues on the debating agenda marked the step from the literary public sphere to the one in the political realm in Habermas’s historiography. As the debating agenda included more topics for discussion, the public sphere also became more inclusive and gradually transformed. Access was easier in this new institution, which “embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers, [...] wealthy [and] poor” (Habermas, 1992b: 33). Coffeehouses were also more active and influential as an institution than salons in France or table societies in Germany.

In France, the salon emerged as a replacement of the prince’s festivities. Similarly to Britain’s coffeehouses, for the first time until then bourgeois intellectuals met with the nobility and critically deliberated on literature and the arts.

“One sees here the first signs of the combination of the economically unproductive and politically functionless urban aristocracy with eminent writers, artists and scientists (who frequently were of bourgeois origin) typical of the salon of the 18th century” (Habermas, 1992b: 31)

What was novel at the time was that these two social strata, the bourgeoisie who had economic wealth and power and the aristocracy who might not have been as wealthy but enjoyed royal privileges and influence, met and debated “on an equal footing” (Habermas, 1992b: 33) in a way that “opinion became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence” (Habermas, 1992b: 33-34). The public use of reason seemed to be not only the medium but also the basis and ultimate judge of the debate.

In Germany, even though there was no “town” to provide grounds for the development of institutions of a public sphere, nevertheless these emerged in the form of table societies (*Tischgesellschaften*). These were fewer and less active than salons and coffeehouses (Habermas, 1992b: 34), however they did constitute sites where private people engaged in productive work gathered to form a public. Again, increasing social inclusiveness according to Habermas meant the “bourgeois met with socially prestigious but politically uninfluential nobles as ‘common human beings’” (Habermas, 1992b: 34-35). Social status was therefore replaced by language, which, as vehicle for the public use of reason, transcended the barriers of social hierarchy (Habermas, 1992b: 34). This transcendental character of language, and of the public use of reason, which is advocated by Habermas, is of crucial importance, since it constitutes one of the qualities that grant the public use of reason its normative status according to Habermas’s model.¹¹

It is therefore evident that, even though these institutions presented certain differences in size and composition of publics, nature of debates and agenda of topics, they had certain key features in common (Habermas, 1992b: 36). Firstly, they all constituted sites and centres of literary and political criticism among private people. Habermas also claims that debate in these sites was not only rational but it was also critical. Secondly, the very idea of a public consisting of private people gradually led to a disregard of economic status and an “equalisation of power” (Habermas, 1992b: 71) among participants, which was not the case in earlier forms of publicity presented by Habermas, such as representative publicness.

“They were centres of criticism – literary at first, then also political – in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain *parity of the educated*” (Habermas, 1992b: 32, my emphasis).

Therefore, this, alleged, “parity of the educated” between the nobility and bourgeois intellectuals extended to the “parity of common humanity” (Habermas, 1992b: 36) and meant that the only authority in these spheres of debate was that of reason and of “the better argument” (ibid.). The overarching authority of the better argument, which was based on reason, thus led to a “bracketing” (Fraser, 1993: 119) of the identities or social

¹¹ The normative character of Habermas’s theory will not be discussed at this stage of reconstruction of his theoretical premises.

status of the participants and placed the emphasis on merits of argument to the detriment of power. These are, of course, bold claims, and they will be discussed further below.

Thirdly, the expansion of the agenda for topics that were put under rational-critical criticism allowed the “problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned” (Habermas, 1992b: 36). Since literature and art were more accessible and available to the general public through the expansion of the market, they were transformed from cultural products with an exclusive and “sacramental” character (op.cit.: 37) to commodities and ultimately to matters of “common concern” (op.cit.: 36) that could be discussed by a wider range of the public. This led to the emergence of the new profession of “art critic” (op.cit.: 41) who was not regarded as an omniscient expert but as “one private person among others [whose] expertise only held good until countermanded” (ibid.). True judgement therefore was supposed to be attained only through discussion and rational-critical debate.

“Truth appeared as a process, a process of enlightenment. Some sectors of the public might be more advanced in this process than others [...] [experts] were permitted and supposed to educate the public, but only inasmuch as they convinced through arguments and could not themselves be corrected by better arguments” (Habermas, 1992b: 259, n.32).

In other words, literary criticism was no longer a privilege of the experts but also a right of the private people at least, and the authority of the better argument, again, seems to supersede privilege and expertise.

Fourthly, Habermas views this putative disregard of social status as resulting in the facilitation of access and hence increasing inclusivity of the public sphere.

“[T]he same process that converted culture into a commodity [...] established the public as in principle inclusive [...] of all private people, persons who [...] could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion” (Habermas, 1992b: 37)

Still, this inclusivity did not imply that the public of these institutions, that is, the public that participated in the bourgeois public sphere, was in fact the general public at its entirety. The bourgeois public sphere still maintained the element of representation; it

claimed to represent the wider public that did not, or could not, gather in these institutions.

“Wherever the public established itself institutionally as a stable group of discussants, it did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name, perhaps even as its educator – the new form of bourgeois representation” (Habermas, 1992b: 37)

This form of representation seems to be inherent in the public sphere, whose function also claimed to be that of the public’s mouthpiece, as Habermas suggests. So far, Habermas has made reference to two forms of public sphere (literary and political) which also points to two kinds of publics – the literary, consisting of readers, audience, and art critics, as these were described above, and the public of the public sphere in the political realm, whose main interests and topics for debate were not art and literature but matters of “common concern” (Habermas, 1992b: 36). Although these publics may have overlapped, they did not actually constitute one single public (see section 2.2.5).

Fifthly, in addition to sites of literary debate and critique, salons, coffeehouses and table societies were also sites of legitimation. 18th century artists presented their ideas and work for discussion in salons before publicising them – “a new work, even a musical one, had to legitimate itself first in this forum” (Habermas, 1992b: 33). As in the salons where “intellectuals” met with the aristocracy, literature had to legitimate itself in coffee houses (*ibid.*). Rational-critical debate, therefore, was central to the emergence and development of the bourgeois public sphere, for it constituted the medium not only of its existence but also its legitimation (see 2.4.6).

Lastly, the most important element of this new form of publicness is its institutionalisation. The fact that private individuals came together *as a public* denotes a certain degree of organisation according to which this public had certain functions to fulfil (legitimation, critique, contestation of authority) and certain rules to follow (authority of the better argument, rational-critical debate).

“Not that this idea of the [equal] public was actually realised in earnest in the coffee houses, the *salons* and societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalised and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realised, it was at least consequential” (Habermas, 1992b: 36).

Indeed, the establishment of rules and aims of an institution does not necessarily imply that these are realised. Up to this point this has not been clear in Habermas's historical account of the evolution of the public sphere. The fact that the "equalisation of power" (Habermas, 1992b: 71) was merely an objective claim and did not reflect the true conditions of debate in coffeehouses, salons and table societies detaches Habermas from his strictly historical account of this institution and reveals the normative dimension of his theory. The above statement is crucial, for it reveals that Habermas does not base his investigation on actual facts, but on institutionalised ideas of that time. In other words, a principle according to which actually existing forms of (embryonic) public spheres functioned – or had to function. The development of a normative theory based on what seem to be counterfactual ideals is analysed in 3.2.7.

The institutionalisation of these sites of the public sphere increased their popularity and their numbers, at least in England initially (Habermas, 1992b: 58-64). Communication between and across these sites was vital for the viability and preservation of their institutionalised character. This was achieved through periodicals and literary journals, and later through the new genre of critical journals, which were unique in that they were detached and independent from conversational circles and also separate from the literary works themselves (op.cit.: 42). The periodical press, therefore, helped to create channels of communication between public spheres and this constituted the first signs of mediation in the public sphere. While communication within a public sphere was mainly direct, in the form of face-to-face dialogue, communication among public spheres was now "transposed into a different medium" (ibid.), that is, the periodical press. In this way and through these media, rational-critical debate became a self-perpetuating process of enlightenment and in certain cases it also acquired a "transtemporal character" (ibid.) because of the continuity of this process of mutual enlightenment and the search for truth (ibid.).

2.2.4 Role of the bourgeois family in the evolution of the bourgeois public sphere

In this section, Habermas focuses on the relation between the patriarchal conjugal family and the bourgeois public sphere and the role of the former in the evolution of the latter. In particular, he argues that the bourgeois public engaged in public debate centred on experiences stemming from "the patriarchal conjugal family" (Habermas, 1992b:

43). Since the bourgeois public sphere was the sphere of private people, and the core of the private realm was the family, as mentioned above, the latter's role was central to bourgeois public life. In other words, the subjectivity in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created "its own public" (Habermas, 1992b: 29), which, as "the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain" (ibid.) had not yet assumed a political character. In this way, privatised individuals entered into society "out of a private life that had assumed institutional form in the enclosed space of the patriarchal conjugal family" (Habermas, 1992b: 46). What Habermas argues, therefore, is a concomitant institutionalisation of the public sphere with the emergence of salons, coffeehouses and table societies and of the private sphere with the patriarchal conjugal family.

Despite this, it is important to emphasise that public and private realms were still quite distinct at this stage of Habermas's analysis and their parallel institutionalisation did not lead to the submersion of one into the other. Arendt illustrates a similar trend in her analysis:

"This enlargement of the private, the enchantment [...] of a whole people, does not make it public, does not constitute a public realm, but, on the contrary, means only that the public realm has almost completely receded, so that greatness has given way to charm everywhere; for while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor [sic] the irrelevant" (Arendt, 1998: 52).

Still, the "privatisation of life" (Habermas, 1992b: 44) became an increasing phenomenon, especially in Great Britain, with the change in architectural styles based on rooms that ensured the individual's privacy with more enclosed and confined spaces. In order to mark this change and to highlight the increased intimacy of the conjugal family, Habermas names it the "intimate sphere" (Habermas, 1992b: 48), as the core of the private sphere, which was "profoundly caught up in the requirements of the market" (Habermas, 1992b: 55).¹²

¹² "The sphere of the market we call "private"; the sphere of the family, as the core of the private sphere, we call the "intimate sphere". The latter was believed to be independent of the former, whereas in truth it was profoundly caught up in the requirements of the market" (Habermas, 1992b: 55).

Since the intimate sphere of the conjugal family constituted an institution of the private sphere, it was also connected with other institutions of the private sphere such as the market (Habermas, 1992b: 46). The distinguishing feature of private people was that they were owners of property and therefore participated in the newly emerged market economy. This granted them a certain degree of “private” autonomy (ibid.). Moreover, the intimacy of the family also granted them a different form of private autonomy detached from the realm of economy, which was the autonomy of human beings. Habermas argues that it was this private autonomy which “provided the bourgeois family with its consciousness of itself” (ibid.). Established and maintained voluntarily, it was based on love and cultivation of the individual’s personality “without whose subjective validity society would not have been able to reproduce itself” (Habermas, 1992b: 48) and in this way led to the “emancipation of an inner realm” (op.cit.: 47), which followed its own laws.

Autonomy, however, did not necessarily imply freedom. Firstly, the significant role of the family in the reproduction of capital, since it was linked to the market and “guaranteed a continuity of personnel” (ibid.), brought forward its social role.

“[A]s an agent of society [the conjugal family] served especially the task of that difficult mediation through which, in spite of the illusion of freedom, strict conformity with socially necessary requirements was brought about” (ibid.).

The private realm, therefore, was not entirely independent of or sharply distinct from society. Secondly, even though the private individual on the one hand was independent as a property owner and businessman, on the other hand, as the male head of the family he represented and exercised authority on his wife and children. In this way, private autonomy in the market became authority in the patriarchal conjugal family and therefore “made any pretended freedom of individuals illusory” (ibid.).

Having said that, Habermas later argues that these ideas of freedom, love, and personal cultivation were “also reality” (Habermas, 1992b: 48). Since the market did not mediate relationships within the intimate sphere of the family, the individuals in that sphere had the role of human beings and nothing more (ibid.). Therefore, through love and care the bourgeois family led “not only to bourgeois authority but to a premonition of a better human condition” (Horkheimer, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 261, n.48). This argument

seems to contradict Habermas's previous claim of "illusory" freedom of individuals in the patriarchal conjugal family (Habermas, 1992b: 47). One could therefore be led to the assumption that freedom of the individuals may have been "illusory" for the wife and children, who were not considered private people per se, but it was a reality for the propertied male who was independent economically and exercised authority in the family. Again, when Habermas refers to the reality of the freedom of the individual he seems to refer to the propertied male, that is, the private individual.¹³

Within the institution of the conjugal family, individuals started experimenting with the subjectivity which they discovered in their relations with other family members and which represented the "innermost core of the private" (Habermas, 1992b: 49). The result of this experimentation was the writing of initially intimate letters as the "imprint of the soul" (ibid.) of one family member communicating with another, or in other cases addressed to oneself in the form of a diary. This "dual relation to both one's self and the other" (ibid.) revealed a direct or indirect "audience-oriented subjectivity" (ibid.). The individual's experiments with subjectivity were gradually publicised, taking the form of novels, whose purpose was to place a "final veil over the difference between reality and illusion" (Habermas, 1992b: 50). Habermas's analysis argues that this blurring of reality and illusion through audience-oriented subjectivity gave rise to the genre of fiction.

Precisely because fiction had its roots in subjectivity, which was now made public as "audience-oriented" (Habermas, 1992b: 49), readers could relate to it and compare it to their own subjectivities and experiences. As any other cultural commodity, literature and fiction were subjected to rational public critique in the public sphere in the world of letters.

"[The political public sphere] is carried by a public recruited from the entire citizenry. But in the diverse voices of this public, one hears the echo of private experiences that are caused throughout society (Habermas, 1996b: 365).

¹³ In "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (1993a), Habermas argues that the exclusion of women from the 18th century public sphere had structuring significance since women were not excluded in the same fashion as workers, peasants, and the "people" (i.e. men lacking "independence") (Habermas, 1993a: 427-428). This issue will be discussed in depth in 3.2.5.

In this way, “the subjectivity originating in the interiority of the conjugal family, by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself” (Habermas, 1992b: 51). It becomes evident, therefore, that Habermas largely attributes the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere to the “expansion and at the same time completion of the intimate sphere of the conjugal family” (Habermas, 1992b: 50).

2.2.5 The Public Sphere in the World of Letters in Relation to the Public Sphere in the Political Realm

As seen in the previous section, Habermas notes that as soon as products of culture became commodities available to the general public, they also became thematised, that is, used as a topic of public critical discussion. Although the public sphere in the world of letters at this stage had not yet assumed, or at least it did not claim to assume, the role of political critic, still, it provided a “training ground of critical public reflection” (Habermas, 1992b: 29). Most importantly, it was independent of the court. Representative publicity centred in the court, therefore, gradually evolved into the public sphere in the world of letters (or literary public sphere) before transforming into the fully-fledged public sphere in the political realm. It is important to note that, unlike the public sphere in the political realm, the public sphere in the world of letters was not inherently bourgeois (ibid.).¹⁴ Again, this points to the distinction of the public use of reason as a process that can be learned from the cognitive and inherent capacity of Reason. In this case, the bourgeois learned and developed this skill through their encounters and debated with intellectuals within the public spheres of the time.

As mentioned above, the public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters and “through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society” (Habermas, 1992b: 30-31). Habermas sees this evolution from one form of publicness to the other as having been effectuated by means of appropriation.

¹⁴ “The bourgeois avant-garde of the educated middle class learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with the ‘elegant world’” (Habermas, 1992b: 29).

“The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion” (Habermas, 1992b: 51).

According to the above statement, the key to this appropriation was the shift to a public sphere which, unlike its predecessor which operated in the world of letters, aimed at contesting public authority, this new sphere of monitoring authority functioned in the same fashion and using the same institutions with its predecessor. It constituted, in short, a sort of restructured, updated version of the former. Moreover, Habermas maintains that the public in the political realm considered itself as the “accomplishment of a consciousness functionally adapted to the institutions of the public sphere in the world of letters” (Habermas, 1992b: 55). In other words, the institutions of the literary public sphere that were already in place (salons, coffeehouses etc.) gradually served the public sphere in the political realm. The process, however, was not this simple.

The public sphere took on political importance precisely through assuming a “polemic” (Habermas, 1992b: 52) character as a sphere of contestation of authority. Habermas argues that since its political task from the outset was “the regulation of civil society” (ibid.), its character was “from the beginning both private and polemical at once” (ibid.). This distinguishes the (modern) public sphere of the 18th century from its Classical Greek and Roman models, which constituted agonistic models between citizens and did not aim to dispute the government (ibid. also see Benhabib, 1993).

In order to clarify the polemic nature of the public sphere, Habermas resumes his discussion of the principle of *Öffentlichkeit*. He argues that publicity emerged not merely as a counterweight, but rather as a direct opponent to the secrecy of the state (Habermas, 1992b: 52). Advocates of publicity demanded the subjection of the prince’s decisions to the law for their legitimation, and not decision-making based on the arbitrary and all-mighty authority of the monarch. The significance of law in the form of established, universal and permanent norms is brought to the fore as the means of reversal of the principle of absolute sovereignty into that of “*veritas non auctoritas facit legem* (truth, not authority makes the law)” (Habermas, 1992b: 53, emphasis in the original).

“In the “law” the quintessence of general, abstract and permanent norms inheres a rationality in which what is right converged with what is just; the exercise of power is to be demoted to a mere executor of such norms” (ibid.).

This principle of subjection of domination to the public’s use of reason and to public opinion “as the only legitimate source of [...] law” (Habermas, 1992b: 54) is crucial to Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, for it constitutes one of its fundamental attributes and, as will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, one of the main elements of its normative matrix.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of rational-critical debate and the “authority of the better argument” (Habermas, 1992b: 36), the institutionalisation of the public sphere resulted in the establishment of certain “universal rules” (Habermas, 1992b: 54):

“These rules, because they remained strictly external to the individuals as such, secured space for the development of these individuals’ interiority by literary means [...] 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 [...] in this way they hoped to bring rule into convergence with reason” (Habermas, 1992b: 54-55).

Again, the establishment of such rules denotes the elevation of the public sphere into an institutionalised form of publicness with certain functions and objectives, and does not necessarily mean that these rules were respected, or that authority was indeed legitimated and contested through the public use of reason.

Lastly, Habermas presents the central idea of this section on the relation between the literary and the political public sphere. He argues that while the latter evolved from the former, at the time of coffeehouses and salons they co-existed and “blended with each other in a peculiar fashion” (Habermas, 1992b: 55).

“Problems voiced in the public sphere first become visible when they are mirrored in personal life experiences. To the extent that these experiences find their concise expression in the language of religion, art and literature, the “literary” public sphere in the broader sense [...] is intertwined with the political public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 365).

As mentioned in previous sections, two main publics (at least)¹⁵ were active at the time – the literary and the political, which claimed to be the “mouthpiece” (Habermas, 1992b: 37) of *the* wider public that did not participate in these public spheres. Nevertheless, precisely because of their concomitant evolution and eventual amalgamation, these public spheres were considered to be identical by the educated classes so that “in the self-understanding of public opinion the public sphere appeared as one and indivisible” (Habermas, 1992b: 56). This “fiction of one public” (ibid.; also Grant, 2000b) was accepted and facilitated for the following reasons.

Firstly, it contributed to the emancipation of civil society from mercantilist rule; secondly, it transformed the principle of publicity from a means of representation of authority, to a means of contestation of authority; and thirdly, because with the (fictional) existence of one public, the functions of the two public spheres converged (Habermas, 1992b: 56). Within *the* public sphere that combined the functions of the literary and political public spheres, the bourgeois man had the status and identity of a property owner *and* a human being per se and could therefore discuss a wider choice of topics representing a broader range of interests – at least in theory.

“The fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on the fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatised individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple” (Habermas, 1992b: 56, emphasis in the original).

As discussed in 2.2.4, this process started from the institutionalisation of the private sphere and the development of the intimate sphere, in which the man assumed the dual role of head of the family (authority) and human being (humanity). Since the private sphere also comprised the market, however, this “doubling of the private sphere on the higher plane of the intimate sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 29) identified the dual nature of the private man as a property owner and a human being. Therefore, as soon as private men in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity as property owners on matters of “common concern” (Habermas, 1992b: 36) with the aim to influence or challenge authority, “the

¹⁵ Habermas clarified in his initial chapter that he would purposely exclude the plebeian public sphere from his investigation (see 2.1.1).

humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm” (Habermas, 1992b: 56). The fictionality of the *one* public and its functional role constitute a separate topic of discussion, and they are analysed in section 3.

2.3 Socio-Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

After presenting the initial demarcation of his model of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas critically examines its social-structural transformation of the public sphere from the initial “blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 30) in an attempt to demonstrate the alleged “disintegration” (Habermas, 1992b: 175) of the public sphere in the late 19th and 20th centuries. He attributes this decline to various socio-economic factors which are thoroughly analysed in this section. Again, Habermas adopts an essentially historical approach in order for him to put forward his arguments and trace the gradual “disintegration” (ibid.) of the public sphere.

Firstly, he analyses the “mutual infiltration of public and private spheres” (Habermas, 1992b: 141), that is, the gradual interpenetration of state and society, which were previously distinctly separated. Secondly, he examines the “polarisation of the social sphere and the intimate sphere” (ibid.: 151) in looking at the changing role of the conjugal family and its relation to the sphere of labour. Thirdly, he moves to the analysis of the transformation from a “culture-debating” to a “culture-consuming public” (op.cit.: 159) where he argues for the decline of “rational-critical debate” and its replacement by consumption and other nonverbal or non-discussion based activities that are fostered by the media. Lastly, he encapsulates his above arguments into a section entitled “the blurred blueprint” (op.cit.: 175) and sums up the differences between the earlier model and the modern, transformed model explicated in this section.

2.3.1 The Gradual Merging of Public and Private Spheres

Habermas begins this section of his analysis by pointing out that while the bourgeois public sphere evolved within the “tension-charged field between state and society” (Habermas, 1992b: 141), nevertheless it “remained itself a part of the private realm” (ibid.). This refers to his initial thesis laid out with the presentation of the initial “blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 30) where the “authentic public sphere” (ibid.) was in

fact part of the private realm, for it was formed by *private* people. To a certain extent, therefore, it could be said that a certain interdependence and partial overlap between the public and private spheres existed *by definition* in Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere. In the same context, Habermas explicitly states that “[t]he line between state and society divided the public sphere from the private realm” (ibid.), thus implying that the state corresponds to the public sphere and society to the private realm. State and society were therefore separated in the earlier model and because of their correspondence to the public/private relation according to Habermas, the separation of the state and society ensured that of public and private spheres. Habermas will use this analogy in order to put forward his argument for the gradual disintegration of the public sphere through the increasing overlap and interpenetration between public and private spheres.

Habermas's historical account starts with the great depression of 1873, which is shown to have shifted trade policy from liberalisation of trade back to a new form of protectionism. He explains how “oligopolistic mergers became more pronounced” (Habermas, 1992b: 143) in domestic and capital markets, how competition was restricted in international commodity markets and how “the interplay between expansive and restrictive tendencies” (ibid.) consolidated this background shift to protectionism.¹⁶

As a result, it is argued that in the late 19th century, (civil) society¹⁷ could no longer claim to constitute a sphere free from power because of constant government

¹⁶ Habermas examines the conflict of interests between the “restrictive interest of commercial and finance capital [and the...] expansive interest of manufacturing and industrial capital” (Habermas, 1992b: 58) in Chapter 3 of *Structural Transformation*. He describes the interest of manufacturing and industrial capital as an expansive interest because of the new and wider potential that manufacturing and industrial capital offered in the initial stages of industrialisation. This clash of interests is portrayed as having gradually evolved into a nascent form of party conflict.

¹⁷ In Habermas's initial “blueprint” explicated in 2.2, Habermas describes civil society as belonging to the *private* domain together with the intimate sphere as the interior domain of the family (Habermas, 1992b: 30). Civil society, therefore, as the “sphere of labour and commodity exchange” (ibid.), was initially *sharply* separated from the

intervention. It is described as having acquired an essentially “antagonistic structure” (Habermas, 1992b: 144) as the shift from “horizontal exchange relationships among individual commodity owners” (ibid.) to “vertical relationships between collective units” (ibid.) became more evident.

“The interferences of the state in the private sphere since the end of the last century showed that the masses, now entitled to political participation, succeeded in translating economic antagonisms into political conflicts” (Habermas, 1992b: 146).

In other words, the gradual intermeshing of state and society urged the economically weak into using “political means” (Habermas, 1992b: 145) against their stronger market competitors in order to efface the inequality of opportunities in the economic arena. Because of this “antagonistic structure” (Habermas, 1992b: 144) of civil society, a stronger state became imperative according to Habermas’s argument. However, as he points out, the “barrier” (Habermas, 1992b: 145) between state and civil society did not start to erode until “*new* functions accrued to the state” (ibid., emphasis in the original).

Habermas argues that these new functions of the state were not merely an extension of its older ones but instead comprised “altogether new” (Habermas, 1992b: 146), “formative functions” (Habermas, 1992b: 147). He explains that these constituted in: firstly, protecting the economically weak through an established welfare state; secondly, in alleviating poverty and strengthening the middle classes through supporting and guiding “long-term changes in the social structure” (ibid.); and thirdly, in “influencing private and [...] regulating public investments” (ibid.). Most importantly, however, Habermas points out that the state also provided certain services that until then had been “left to private hands” (ibid.), such as production and distribution. The role of the state, therefore, seems to have expanded to such an extent that it is portrayed as taking over certain functions that previously belonged to the private sphere of civil society.¹⁸

sphere of public authority represented by the state and court (cf. schematic representation of the initial “blueprint” in Habermas, 1992b: 30).

¹⁸ Cf. “The initial blueprint” in Habermas, 1992b: 30. Also, in “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere”, Habermas notes: “Civil society was always contrasted with public authority or government as a sphere that is private *in its entirety*” (Habermas, in Calhoun, 1993: 433).

As the state intervened in the sphere of labour and commodity exchange at the time of the Industrial Revolution, according to Habermas, a “repoliticised social sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 148) was formed, in which state and society were “fused into a single complex that was not entirely public or private” (ibid.).

“The private institutions themselves assumed [...] a *semipublic* character; one may even speak of the quasi-political character of private economic units” (Habermas, 1992b: 148, my emphasis).

This “semipublic” or “quasi-political” (ibid.) status of the private sphere is of particular importance. In this case, it seems to refer to a transitional phase of the private sphere that has acquired public characteristics and functions and, similarly, to a transitional phase of society that has acquired political functions of the state. It could also refer to an end-state according to Habermas’s rationale, and not merely to a transitional phase, since the “mutual infiltration of public and private spheres” (Habermas, 1992b: 141) is presented as irreversible in the context of mass culture and consumerism.¹⁹

In order to demonstrate the impact of the “interdependence of hitherto separate spheres” (Habermas, 1992b: 148), Habermas points out its consequences on the legal level, namely the complete transformation of the status of private law with the restriction of property rights, the “super-ownership on the part of the public” (Wieacker, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 149) and the increase in “contracts between the public authority and private persons” (Habermas, 1992b: 150). At the same time he also portrays the concomitant shift, in Germany at least, of public administration to the private sector, in a way that the “‘publification’ of private law” (Habermas, 1992b: 151) complemented a process of “privatisation of public law” (ibid.).

Overall, Habermas’s central argument in this section is the “reciprocal permeation of the state by society and of society by the state” (Habermas, 1992b: 151) with the rise of neomercantilist forces. Habermas’s main argument here is that the separation of state

¹⁹ As regards the term “semipublic”, Grant mentions semi-public (and sub-public) spheres of “clandestine communication” (Grant, 1997: 94) and gives the example of *Samizdat* publications in the former Soviet Union as a form of such communication (Grant, 2000b: 71). Grant also examines “semi-public spheres” in the specific context of literary communication in the GDR (Grant, 1995). Such forms of publicness are examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

and society, which until the mid-19th century is portrayed as sharp and, more importantly, is described as “the basis of the bourgeois public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 142), was progressively “destroyed” (ibid.). In other words, Habermas attributes the “disintegration of [...] the public sphere in its liberal form” (ibid.) to the gradual bridging of the dichotomy between state and society.

2.3.2 Refeudalisation of society

Habermas does not regard state interventionism as the main cause of the “interlocking of the public sphere with the private realm” (Habermas, 1992b: 141-142) but instead he sees it as a constitutive element of a larger process of “‘refeudalisation’ of society” (Habermas, 1992b: 142).

“[The] competition of organised private interests in the face of the “neomercantilism” of an interventionist administration leads to a “refeudalisation” of society insofar as, with the linking of public and private realm, not only certain functions in the sphere of commerce and social labour are taken over by political authorities but conversely political functions are taken over by societal powers” (Habermas, 1992b: 231).

It becomes clear that Habermas uses the term “refeudalisation” to refer precisely to the process of “stateification of society” (Habermas, 1992b: 142) and “‘societalisation’ of the state” (ibid.). This merging of state and society (and, as explained above, of public and private) is reminiscent of Habermas’s account of the Middle Ages. In Chapter 1 of *Structural Transformation*, Habermas traces the (modern) roots of the bourgeois public sphere in what he called “representative publicness” (Habermas, 1992b: 5). The latter was described as a form of publicness whose carriers were the feudal powers of the time and whereby “an opposition between the public and private spheres [...] did not exist” (ibid.). This model of representative publicity disintegrated towards the end of the 18th century because of the polarisation and eventual split into public and private elements (Habermas, 1992b: 11-12). Habermas’s argument seems to be that a clear separation of public and private realms or areas constituted a fundamental prerequisite for the emergence and functioning of a bourgeois public sphere. Therefore the backward shift towards the merging of private and public realms denotes a return to feudal times – hence the term “refeudalisation”.

Habermas considers this phenomenon as extending to the “public’s rational-critical debate” (Habermas, 1992b: 158).

“The public’s rational-critical debate also became a victim of this “refeudalisation”. Discussion as a form of sociability gave way to the fetishism of community involvement as such” (Habermas, 1992b: 158).

This observation of “fetishism of community involvement” is of particular significance. It means that Habermas sees the mutual overlap of state and society as ultimately replacing public debate in a social context with a sort of obsession with community involvement for the sake of it. This is better understood if we consider the following. “Rational-critical debate” or “public use of reason” constituted according to Habermas *the* method of debate in the bourgeois public sphere. Thompson suggests that the public use of reason in the public sphere functions as “a kind of critical yardstick by means of which the shortcomings of existing institutions can be assessed” (Thompson, 1993: 178). “Private reflection” (Habermas, 1992b: 91) and “private reading” (Habermas, 1992b: 158) constituted the preconditions for this kind of debate.²⁰ The public use of reason, therefore, required some “private” form of preparation which, according to Habermas, gradually diminished in the favour of “the fetishism of community involvement” (*ibid.*) and increasingly public activities. And even though Habermas does not explicitly state that this constituted a negative development, there is a strong subtext which suggests that the loss of the “private” preconditions for the public use of reason in the public sphere resulted in the demotion of the status of the public sphere in general.

A further consequence of this “mutual infiltration of public and private spheres” (Habermas, 1992b: 141) according to Habermas is “a repoliticised social sphere [...] to which the distinction between “public” and “private” could not be usefully applied” (Habermas, 1992b: 142). Habermas describes this as the emergence of “the sphere of the ‘social’” (Habermas, 1992b: 141). Such a sphere seems to have combined state and social interests, roles and laws according to Habermas’s analysis above.

“This sphere could be meaningfully conceived neither as purely private nor as genuinely public, nor could it be unequivocally located in a realm to which

²⁰ “The opinion of the public that put its reason to use [...] did not arise from mere inclination but from private reflection upon public affairs and from their public discussion” (Habermas, 1992b: 91).

either private or public law pertains” (Habermas, 1992b: 151, emphasis in the original).

The concept of ‘the sphere of the social’ was not originally developed by Habermas but by Hannah Arendt. In *The Human Condition* ([1958] 1998), Arendt explains how “the social” (Arendt, 1998: 38) arose through the public/private divide.

“The contradiction between public and private has been a temporary phenomenon which introduced the utter extinction of the very difference between the private and public realms, the submersion of both in the sphere of the social” (Arendt, 1998: 69).

Arendt adds that this “new realm” (Arendt, 1998: 45) was characterised by the “irresistible tendency [...] to devour the older realms of the political and private as well as the [...] sphere of intimacy” (ibid.). The “sphere of the social” is in other words described as an inevitable phenomenon of an increasing population.²¹ Arendt does not regard the emergence of this sphere as a necessarily negative development. On the contrary, she argues:

“We are in a far better position to realise the consequences for human existence when both the public and private spheres of life are gone, the public because it has become a function of the private and the private because it has become the only common concern left” (Arendt, 1998: 69).

For both Habermas and Arendt, therefore, purely private and public spheres have become obsolete due to changes in economy and society. The new sphere of “the social” seems to be neither strictly public nor private according to Arendt and Habermas but instead a combination and even replacement of both. Unlike Arendt, however, Habermas does not argue that the private is the only common concern left. In this sense, he is less defeatist.

2.3.3 The Disengagement of the Social Sphere and the Intimate Sphere

According to Habermas’s “basic blueprint” examined above (Habermas, 1992b: 30), the private realm comprised civil society as “the realm of commodity exchange and social

²¹ “The larger the population in any given body politic, the more likely it will be the social rather than the political that constitutes the public realm” (Arendt, 1998: 43).

labour” (ibid.) and the “conjugal family’s internal space” (ibid.). It functioned as “an agent of society” (Habermas, 1992b: 47) since it was responsible for the reproduction of capital and therefore “guaranteed a continuity of personnel” (ibid.). The intimate sphere was the “interior domain of the family” (Habermas, 1992b: 30), which belonged to the private sphere.

While the public and private spheres were “permeating” (Habermas, 1992b: 151) one another according to Habermas with the “fusion” (ibid.) of state and society, the social sphere is presented in this section as progressively detaching itself from the intimate sphere. The growing chasm between the realms of the family and of labour is seen as having resulted in their ultimate separation. Indeed, the “occupational sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 154) is presented as having “moved to [the] periphery” (Habermas, 1992b: 152) of the private sphere to such an extent that the private sphere, having lost its core, ultimately became “deprivatised” (ibid.). Habermas also argues that the conjugal family with the intimate sphere at its core ceased to be the sphere of “social reproduction” (ibid.) and “became ever more private” (ibid.) while “the world of work and organisation [became] ever more ‘public’” (ibid.).

At this point, Habermas seems to be contradicting himself, by claiming that the private sphere is on the one hand becoming “deprivatised” (Habermas, 1992b: 152) while on the other hand “becoming more private” (ibid.). This seeming contradiction is later clarified, however, with his statement that the “occupational sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 154) was undergoing a process of “deprivatisation [...] only in the historical perspective of the property-owning private person” (ibid.), while it only *appeared* as privatisation to the workers. In other words, Habermas claims that for the private person, the sphere of work acquired a “quasi-public” status, whereas for the (property-less) non-bourgeois the absence of a “patriarchal regiment” (ibid.) and its replacement with “human relations on the job” (ibid.) seemed to create a dubious private character. Habermas calls this the “pseudo-private well-being” (ibid.) within the “occupational sphere” (ibid.).

In addition, Habermas argues that the distinction between working for oneself and working for others was replaced by “the status of “function performance” (Habermas, 1992b: 153) – hence the term “functionaries” (ibid.). This newly-emerged type of

employees had different tasks and roles from those of civil servants and “assumed the characteristics of a depersonalised [sic] work relationship” (ibid.) for they were attached to institutions rather than other individuals, according to Habermas. For him, this “occupational sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 154) in turn became independent “as a quasi-public realm in relation to a private sphere reduced to the family” (ibid.). Again, “quasi-public” refers to a formerly public entity that has acquired private characteristics and functions.

Having examined the social sphere, Habermas moves to its relation with the intimate sphere by looking at the transforming status and role of the conjugal family. He argues that because of its disengagement from the now independent “occupational sphere” detailed above, the family “withdrew back upon itself” (Habermas, 1992b: 154). This is explained firstly from the fact that, according to Habermas, the family no longer constituted a realm of production and therefore lost its function of capital formation. “Family property” (Habermas, 1992b: 155) was therefore replaced by “individual incomes” (ibid.) in such way that the family according to Habermas gradually lost its ability to support itself. In relation to this, Arendt’s arguments become relevant once again. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that property is what gives the status of a private man (Arendt, 1998: 60-61). Habermas also follows this reasoning, as illustrated below:

“The distinguishing feature of private people was that they were owners of property and therefore participated in the newly emerged market economy. This granted them a certain degree of “private” autonomy” (Habermas, 1992b: 46).

Therefore, if family property is replaced by individual incomes (Habermas, 1992b: 155), as Habermas suggests, then the “private” character of the family is shaken. It may still include private individuals but it is not private per se. Hence Habermas’s (weak) argument for its deprivatisation, at least from the “historical perspective of the property-owning private person” (Habermas, 1992b: 154).

Secondly, the loss of functions of “the transmission of elementary tradition and frameworks of orientation” (Habermas, 1992b: 155), that is, social reproduction, is also mentioned. As a result of this, the family is seen as having acquired a secondary role in the welfare of its members. Instead, the welfare state is presented as the entity which

assumed the role of providing various types of assistance in order to compensate for the loss of the family's welfare and social reproduction role.

Thirdly, and more importantly, Habermas points out the crucial shift of the family's role from production to consumption.

“[T]he family now evolved even more into a consumer of income and leisure time, into the recipient of publicly guaranteed compensations and support services” (Habermas, 1992b: 156).

Since it lost its welfare role according to Habermas's reasoning above, the family now relied on the state for welfare provision. It therefore became a consumer rather than a producer of welfare services. The role of the state is shown to be acquiring greater importance with the increase of responsibilities and functions while the family seems to be reduced into mere consumption of the services provided by the state but that once were provided by the family itself. As a result, the family is shown to have “lost power as an agent of personal internalisation” (Habermas, 1992b: 156).

What may be deduced from Habermas's observations is that the role and importance of the family was gradually dwindling because it seems to have lost most of its functions to “extrafamilial authorities” (Habermas, 1992b: 156). As processes of “social reproduction” (Habermas, 1992b: 152) were no longer regarded as the exclusive responsibility of the family according to Habermas, he argues that the new function of consumption gave the family “the illusion of a perfectly private personal sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 159). In reality, Habermas argues that a large portion of this privacy was lost due to the ceasing of the family's economic tasks (Habermas, 1992b: 157) along with welfare and “social reproduction” (Habermas, 1992b: 152) functions.

As a result of the family's reduced role, Habermas concludes that “the intimate sphere dissolved before the gaze of the ‘group’” (Habermas, 1992b: 157) and “social communications [were] difficult to distinguish from social control” (ibid.). This means that because of the deprivatisation of the private sphere explained above, in order “[t]o gain privacy, one has to *do* something” (Whyte, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 158). Likewise, Habermas explains that the “private closeness” (Habermas, 1992b: 158) lost in the private sphere was instead beginning to appear in the public sphere.

A further element that Habermas sees as detrimental to his model of the public sphere is urbanisation. From a spatial perspective, he notes changes in architecture of the houses in expanding cities such as the “disappearance of the *salon*” (Habermas, 1992b: 157) within the house on the one hand and “common courtyards for several houses” (ibid.) on the other. Such changes are seen to have had a major impact on the public/private dichotomy in that they contributed in blurring the spatial boundaries between these two spheres. Neither a “spatially protected private sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 158) nor a “free space for public contacts and communications that could bring private people together to form a public” (ibid.) could be guaranteed against the backdrop of increasing urbanisation. According to Habermas, therefore, the loss of the private sphere and that of access to the public sphere became typical of modern *urban* life.

Drawing on the writings of Bahrtdt, Habermas makes a further point regarding urbanisation. Through Bahrtdt, he highlights the importance of the elimination of distance as a result of urban life in dwellings and reiterates his initial observation that “deprivatisation” of the private sphere went in tandem not only with the latter’s expansion but also with the collapse of the intimate sphere.

“If the element of distance that is constitutive of the public sphere is eliminated, if its members are in too close touch, the public sphere is transformed into a mass [...]. The more the city as a whole is transformed into a barely penetrable jungle, the more [the city dweller] withdraws into his sphere of privacy which in turn is extended ever further;” (Bahrtdt, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 158-159)

The statement that “distance [...] is constitutive of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 159) is not in agreement with Habermas’s model, for the latter has its roots, by definition, in “salon sociability” and, at least initially, in face-to-face types of communication. Instead, distance seems to have been introduced with the advent of the press and was not a constitutive element of the public sphere. Nevertheless, we cannot but agree with Bahrtdt’s point that urbanisation had an unprecedented effect on humans both as individuals with the shrinking of the intimate sphere and as citizens with the gradual dissolution of the public sphere.

2.3.4 From a Culture-Debating to a Culture Consuming Public

The shift “from a culture-debating to a culture consuming public” (Habermas, 1992b: 160) constitutes one of the central elements of the socio-structural transformation of the

bourgeois public sphere as conceptualised by Habermas. In his analysis, he describes the literary public sphere as having been taken over by a sphere of leisure activity, which he labels “the pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption” (Habermas, 1992b: 160). In order to explain the “pseudo-public” character of this transformed sphere, Habermas compares it with the earlier model of the public sphere in the world of letters. He notes that while the latter constituted a preliminary form of a public sphere in the political realm (cf. 2.2.5), it nevertheless “had the kind of “political” character by virtue of which it was removed from the sphere of social reproduction” (Habermas, 1992b: 160). In other words its “political” attribute according to Habermas did not stem from any specific political functions, but instead from its separation from the non-political “cycle of production and consumption” (ibid.) and also from “being emancipated from the constraints of survival requirements” (ibid.).

In Habermas’s initial model, the bourgeois learned and developed the “art of critical-rational public debate” (Habermas, 1992b: 29) through their encounters and debates with intellectuals in the public sphere of the time. The public sphere in the world of letters provided in this way a “training ground of critical public reflection” (ibid.). The socio-structural transformation of the public sphere meant the better educated no longer debated critically in public or enlightened others to do so.

Indeed, Habermas argues that “a stratum of “intellectuals” split off from the highly educated bourgeois strata” (Habermas, 1992b: 174) while having “fully maintained their [...] leadership role even among the new public of culture consumers” (ibid.). The reason that the term “intellectuals” is used in quotation marks by Habermas is that, as he explains, these educated, high status groups were in fact replaced by “well paid cultural functionaries [...] risen from lumpenproletarian bohemia to the respectability of the managerial and bureaucratic elite” (ibid.). Quoting Hauser, Habermas points out that cultural elites regarded themselves isolated from the bourgeoisie, as the latter “no longer [felt] any need of criticism” (Hauser, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 174) and therefore cultural elites “lost the feeling of having a mission to fulfil in society” (ibid.).

The new, post-Industrial Revolution sphere of *culture* consumption could not constitute a public sphere according to Habermas’s model because “leisure behaviour, once it had become part of the cycle of production and consumption, was already apolitical” (Habermas, 1992b: 160). The reason that Habermas gives for characterising this sphere

as “pseudo-public” instead of non-public is that leisure activities may have been public in the sense that they were “achieved in public fashion, namely, in the company of many others” (Habermas, 1992b: 161), however the key difference from the literary public sphere is the absence of critical debate.

“When the laws of the market [...] pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public, rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unravelled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode” (Habermas, 1992b: 161).

Indeed, Habermas emphasises that “no public was formed around ‘group activities’” (Habermas, 1992b: 163), as these were fundamentally “uncritical” (ibid.). Instead, critical debate according to his investigation was replaced by nominal involvement in local community activities.

More importantly, Habermas saw that increasing commercialisation and consumerism meant that the public gradually lost the task and the responsibility of rational-critical debate. The latter became a task of other institutions such as “private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties, and public administration” (Habermas, 1992b: 176). Habermas notes that the public is involved only “sporadically” (ibid.) in “processes of the exercise and equilibration of power” (Habermas, 1992b: 180) and even in these few cases this is merely in order to “contribute its acclamation” (Habermas, 1992b: 176). Instead, the public’s role shifted as it “assumed advertising functions” (Habermas, 1992b: 175) in a way that it ultimately became “unpolitical as a whole and pseudo-privatised” (ibid.).

The commercialisation of culture, its alleged demotion to a commodity²² and the expansion of the public resulted, as Habermas argues, in a situation of “mass culture” (Habermas, 1992b: 166). This was also affected by the expansion of the market in culture goods. Habermas explains that this type of culture adapted to the needs of a less educated public and was therefore “emptied of elements whose appreciation required a certain amount of training” (ibid.). In this respect, the example of the book market is given in order to illustrate the communication of culture through the filter of the market. “Book clubs” (Habermas, 1992b: 167) are displayed as a type of business that implicitly

²² Habermas’s Marxist view of culture being demoted to a commodity due to increasing commercialization is worth noting.

imposes views and preferences on the public by way of “sales strategies and distribution” (ibid.). Following Habermas’s reasoning, therefore, the commercialisation of cultural products led to easier and increased access to cultural goods, which until then could only be available to and appreciated by the educated (Habermas, 1992b: 166). This expansion of the reading public in order to include more buyers and consumers of cultural products led to a “tendency toward the collapse of a literary public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 167-168). Furthermore, Habermas notes that as the critical press gradually “lost its influence” (Habermas, 1992b: 169), “culture-consuming” (Habermas, 1992b: 159) rather than “culture-debating” (ibid.) activities gained increasing popularity in newly industrialised Europe. He adds that these were “detached from literary vehicles” (Habermas, 1992b: 169) and were not centred on debate and discussion but “nonverbal communications [...] facilitated by optical and acoustic support” (ibid.).

2.3.5 The impact of the mass media

Habermas continues his analysis of the culture-consuming public with the impact of the modern media. He makes a distinction between “delayed reward news” and immediate news” (Habermas, 1992b: 170), examples of the latter being “comics, corruption, accidents” (ibid.). He argues that, as agenda-setters, the media push “delayed reward news” into the background and eventually present less of them and more rarely (ibid.). In this way, he describes the modern mass media as bringing about “a peculiar shifting of reality” (ibid.).

“The integration of the once separate domains of journalism and literature, that is to say, of information and rational-critical argument on the one side and of the *belles lettres* on the other, brings about [...] a conflation of different levels of reality” (Habermas, 1992b: 170).

It is interesting to note that Habermas does not use the term “distortion” in this argument but instead opts for “shifting” or “conflation” of reality. He makes his case for the distortion of reality by the media in his later works and in particular *On Systematically Distorted Communication* (1970). “Shifting” refers to the diversion of attention from triggering criticism towards “stimulating relaxation” (Habermas, 1992b: 170). “Conflation” is used to illustrate the merging of pleasure and convenience (ibid.) for the purpose of offering “a substitute more palatable for consumption” (ibid.).

Another interesting term used by Habermas instead of ‘distortion’ in this particular case is “tutelage” (Habermas, 1992b: 171). This term was explained in chapter 4 of *Structural Transformation* where Habermas reconstructed the Kantian notion of enlightenment, which implied “liberation from self-incurred tutelage [...] namely: to think for oneself” (Habermas, 1992b: 104). In particular, since, as Habermas argues, opinion and critique tend to recede to the background and result in “relaxation” (ibid.) and entertainment, the public is once again described as being placed under “tutelage” (Habermas, 1992b: 171), that is, guidance on what to think. The viewers’ response, if any, is restricted according to this argument and communication is thus one-sided with fixed roles of a sender (media) and a receiver (public) of messages rather than critical exchange of views and/or information. For this reason,

“[t]he world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only. By the same token the integrity of the private sphere which they promise to their consumers is [...] an illusion” (Habermas, 1992b: 171).

With this statement, Habermas once again returns to his initial argument of a “pseudo-public or sham-private” (Habermas, 1992b: 160) character of the transformed public sphere.

Habermas gives a further reason to explain the “illusion [...]of] bourgeois privacy” (Habermas, 1992b: 161), that is, the “patented culture industry” (ibid.) that Habermas sees as having replaced the public sphere in the world of letters.

“[T]he privacy that had its referent in the public as an audience was turned into a travesty. The literary patterns that once had been stamped out of its material circulate today as the explicit production secrets of a patented culture industry whose products [...] bring forth in their consumers’ consciousness the illusion of bourgeois privacy to begin with” (Habermas, 1992b: 161).

This alleged “illusion” and even “travesty”, as it is described, explains the “sham-private” (Habermas, 1992b: 160) character that Habermas sees in this new type of sphere. He concludes by stating that ultimately the root of this crucial shift from debate to consumption is “the structural transformation of the family itself” (ibid). Indeed, it has already been explained in the previous section that the family’s role was significantly reduced to a consumer rather than a producer of services – in particular, welfare and social reproduction.

It is evident that, influenced by critical theory, Habermas sees the media as detrimental to rational-critical public debate, because of shaping “a society of private and fragmented individuals for whom it is difficult to form the public rational-critical opinion which could oppose established power” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 10). Habermas considers the mass media responsible for what he describes as “a pseudo-public sphere of a no longer literary public [...] patched together to create a sort of superfamilial zone of familiarity” (Habermas, 1992b: 162) rather than “genuine public debate” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 10).

“The bourgeois ideal type assumed that out of the audience-oriented subjectivity’s well-founded interior domain a public sphere would evolve in the world of letters. Today, instead of this, the latter has turned into a conduit for social forces channelled into the conjugal family’s inner space by way of a public sphere that the mass media have transmogrified into a sphere of culture consumption” (Habermas, 1992b: 162).

Indeed, Habermas is extremely critical of the late 19th century mass media and portrays them as channelling information to individuals through stimuli coming from a “sphere of culture consumption” (ibid.). This consumer society is seen as having been deliberately created and maintained by the mass media in order to reach “their official goal of raising the level of book sales” (Habermas, 1992b: 163). He extends this criticism to the *modern* mass media by arguing that any attempt of “rational debate of private people” (Habermas, 1992b: 164) is now commercialised and represents a “saleable package ready for the box office” (ibid.). In the same respect, the family watching television is described as “unity without conversation” (Fine, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 281, n.54). In his more recent work, he stands by his criticism of media society by arguing that only if “a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments and if anonymous audiences grant feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society” (Habermas, 2006a: 412) can mediated political communication in the public sphere facilitate deliberative legitimisation processes in complex societies (op.cit.: 411). He therefore insists on introducing multiple caveats for the effectiveness of mediated communication in the public sphere at all levels.

Going back to Habermas's analysis of 19th century media, he sees a deterioration of rational-critical debate and its demotion to "one of the production numbers of the starts in radio and television" (Habermas, 1992b: 164), which deprived public discussion of its spontaneity and informality. In this respect, he also sees debate as being transformed into a formalised process and being shifted from public to personal level.

"Discussion, now a "business", becomes formalised; the presentation of positions and counterpositions is bound to certain prearranged rules of the game; consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by that concerning form. What can be posed as a problem is defined as a question of etiquette; conflicts, once fought out in public polemics, are demoted to the level of personal incompatibilities" (Habermas, 1992b: 164).

A crucial point should be made here. The broadcasting of public debates to a wide audience through the modern mass media inevitably involves certain formal rules and regulations that would not apply to earlier forms of public fora. And this is inevitable not because the impact of the media is damaging, as Habermas seems to suggest, but rather because of the wider audience that observes and/or participates in such debates. Indeed, modern publics are more inclusive than the exclusive bourgeois public described by Habermas. In the latter, women and non-bourgeois, non-propertied citizens did not participate in public debate in coffeehouses and table societies. In contrast, modern publics may also comprise women, poorer or less educated strata, ethnic and social minorities etc. Such diversified publics require the introduction of rules on political correctness, forms of address or appropriate register, which may have not been relevant in the early, homogeneous, bourgeois public sphere.

Habermas sums up the "disintegration" (Habermas, 1992b: 175) of the literary public sphere in the following statement:

"The sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason has been shattered; the public is split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical. Consequently, it completely lacks the form of communication specific to a public" (Habermas, 1992b: 175).

In "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (1993a), however, Habermas embarks on a critique of his account of the degeneration of the public sphere in *Structural Transformation* and acknowledges that his argument from a "culture-debating to a

culture-consuming public” (Habermas, 1992b: 159) is “too simplistic” (Habermas, 1993a: 438) and “too pessimistic” (ibid.). This revision is crucial to our critique. The vehemence with which Habermas attempts to demonstrate the shift to a culture-consuming public in *Structural Transformation*, and then the total rejection of that initial argument three decades later, seem to be shaking the credibility of his initial theory. The reason for this is not that an element of the theory had to be revised, but that the bourgeois public sphere, as presented in Habermas’s initial work, had a normative dimension masked by Habermas’s historiographic methods (see 3.2). Any revision, not to mention rejection, of his initial, allegedly normative theory, therefore, undermines its very normativity.

Indeed, in his 2006 piece, Habermas seeks to address the role of the modern mass media in political deliberation.

“At the periphery of the political system, the public sphere is rooted in networks for world flows of messages [...] published opinions [...] are selected and shaped by mass-media professionals [...] these attitudes are influenced by everyday talk in the informal setting or episodic publics of civil society at least as much as they are by paying attention to print or electronic media” (Habermas, 2006a: 416).

Habermas even goes as far as stating that professionals of the media system, especially journalists, as well as politicians, “are both the coauthors and addressees of public opinions” (Habermas, 2006a: 416). He goes on to examine the “elite” (ibid.) of mediated political communication, which he sees as consisting of lobbyists, advocates, experts, moral entrepreneurs and intellectuals (ibid.).

However, his scepticism remains solid. In examining the results of empirical studies on the “cognitive potential of political deliberation” (Habermas, 2006a: 414), he points out that despite the “impressive increase in the volume of political communication” (ibid.) in contemporary western societies, the political public sphere in those societies is nevertheless “dominated by the kind of mediated communication that lacks the defining features of deliberation” (ibid.), namely face-to-face interaction and the lack of reciprocity between speakers and addressees “in an egalitarian exchange of claims and opinions” (op.cit.: 415). While these may constitute some of the defining features of deliberation sensu Habermas, their plausibility is doubtful. Firstly, unmediated

(political) communication based on face-to-face interaction is certainly not the norm in modern societies, with the rise of new forms of mediated communication (online, satellite, etc.) and new forms of public spheres. Secondly, “egalitarian” exchanges of arguments are problematic by definition, as they involve too many presuppositions. “Egalitarian” presupposes equal access to communication in the public sphere and equal opportunity to express opinions, not only with regard to time, but also social standing. In other words, an “egalitarian” exchange of arguments would presuppose that these arguments would be evaluated on the basis of their justification or of evidence given, rather than on the status or background of the person voicing them (cf. “the force of the better argument” 3.2.3). Such a critique based on arguments overburdened with caveats runs the risk of being one-sided.

Furthermore, Habermas blames the modern mass media, in particular the electronic media, for the increasing apathy, lack of trust, and a general “mood of antipolitics” (Habermas, 2006a: 422) which ultimately leads to alienation from politics. Even though he acknowledges that “the Internet has [...] reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers” (op.cit.: 423, note 3), he nevertheless argues that it can claim “unequivocal democratic merits” (ibid.) only with regard to undermining censorship and general media control. His solution to the perils of modern mediated communication is the “independence of a self-regulated media system” (Habermas, 2006a: 420) and “proper feedback” (op.cit.: 423) between mediated political communication in the public sphere and civil society (op.cit.: 420).

Even though absolute “independence of a self-regulated media system” is unattainable in modern societies, even in the case of public media, nevertheless the media have a significant role to play as a platform for public debate in modern societies. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) are less pessimistic about the potential of the mass media in modern democracies.

“Habermas’s position reflects the ambivalence felt by many towards the mass media – that there is a great power, but can it be harnessed for the public good? We suggest that pessimistic answers tend to underestimate the complex and contradictory or fragmented nature of the contemporary mass media *which opens the way for some escape from institutional control*, while more optimistic positions often set too high ideals for the public sphere” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 10-11, my emphasis).

As mentioned above, Habermas also acknowledges the media's potential of undermining censorship and general media control (Habermas, 2006a: 423, note 3). Admittedly, the media "contains both manipulative and emancipatory elements" (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 22) and to ignore the latter would do injustice to their potential. The increasing complexity of modern societies points to new forms of mediatised public spheres which attempt to simulate conditions of face-to-face communication (virtual fora, interactive television, videoconferencing etc.) and minimize "distortions" (Habermas, 1970) due to mediatisation, such as performative aspects of debate. Of course, the issue of media ownership still stands, even for these new forms of media, and rules of debate in each forum are established by the forum's administrator. Even though in some cases these rules are also subject to debate themselves, usually the administrator's decision is final. For this reason, the role of such media as fully interactive public spheres "may be much more limited than cyber-visionaries proclaim" (Couldry, 1999: 190). Still, the increasing number of platforms for debate – virtual, satellite, etc – provides a larger selection for citizens who wish to participate in public debate. Media contribution in facilitating public communication, especially between diverse or marginalized groups (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 10, 26) is undeniable.

2.4 Political Functions of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Adopting a clearly historicist approach, Habermas follows a line of argumentation with respect to the political functions of the bourgeois public sphere on the basis of socio-economic developments. He focuses on the evolution of free press in these countries, which acquired a central role in the formation and diffusion of public opinion, and on the significance of freedom of speech, which was crystallised in the formation of political parties and the codification of these fundamental rights and freedoms in private law. The political functions of the 19th century public sphere may be encapsulated on the basis of Habermas's lengthy comparative historical analysis between Britain, France and Germany.

2.4.1 Contestation of authority

Firstly, the bourgeois public sphere operates as an extra-parliamentary forum²³ to which the opposition and other parties have access and may resort, not only for critique of the government but also for the communication of their own political views and agendas. Habermas describes such fora as “seedbeds of political unrest” (Habermas, 1992b: 59), as they had the crucial task of evaluating and checking the state authorities (Crown and Parliament).

“Men have assumed to themselves a liberty, not only in coffee-houses, but in other places and meetings, both public and private, to censure and defame the proceedings of the State” (Emden, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 59).

Here, the shift from 16th century representative publicity as an organ of the monarchy to publicness in the form of the 18th century public sphere as a judge and critic of the state comes to the fore. Habermas accounts how printed journals brought in commentaries on and even critiques of the state apparatus and established the press as a “genuinely critical organ of a public engaged in a critical public debate” (Habermas, 1992b: 60). Kings and Ministers were therefore *publicly* criticised and even “accused of political machinations” (Habermas, 1992b: 61). The gradual institutionalisation of the press as a critical organ gave a certain degree (albeit small initially) of transparency as the actions of this state authority became publicly known. The public, still essentially bourgeois as presented by Habermas, followed parliamentary deliberations regardless of whether they had the right to vote or not. For part of the disenfranchised population, in particular part of the bourgeoisie, the public sphere still represented a forum to which they could appeal, engage in critical debate and participate in the monitoring of authority and formation of a public opinion.

2.4.2 Public Opinion: Defining “public” and “opinion”

Secondly, communication in the public sphere in the form of rational-critical debate according to Habermas’s conceptualisation would generate some form of public opinion. Before discussing the way in which public opinion is generated, and the

²³ “The minority that did not get its way in Parliament could always seek refuge in the public sphere and appeal to the judgement of the public” (Habermas, 1992b: 63).

reasons it is presented as one of the political functions of the public sphere, it is crucial to define it in the context of Habermas's theory.

Habermas sees public opinion as having come into view as a problematic entity in the final quarter of the 19th century. Indeed, the diverging theoretical interpretations of the public and of public opinion led Dewey to argue that "in no two ages or places does the same idea of the public exist" (Dewey, cited in Eickelman & Salvatore, 2002: 98). Habermas identifies Tarde as the first to analyse public opinion as "mass opinion" (Tarde, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 240). This form of opinion is explained as a product of communication among *masses* as opposed to a Habermasian public bound by critical-rational debate and procedures. It is noted that Tarde's "masses" are loose and indeterminable structures, not "concerned with political domination" (Habermas, 1992b: 240), contrary to the notion of the public which uses its opinion as a form of "reign"(239) through "communicative power" (Habermas, 1996b: 300). Tarde's theory is contrasted to that of Doob, who sees a more organised form of public opinion referring to "people's attitudes on an issue when they are members of the *same social group*" (Doob, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 241, emphasis in the original). So "public" as the subject of public opinion was initially identified with "mass" and then with "group" according to this investigation.

Habermas criticises these theoretical interpretations for reducing public opinion to group behaviour, which is "neutral to the difference between public and private spheres" (Habermas, 1992b: 242).

"Once public opinion itself is dissolved into a group relationship neutral to the difference between reasonable communication and irrational conformity, the articulation of the relationship between group opinion and public authority is left to be accomplished within the framework of an auxiliary science of public administration" (Habermas, 1992b: 243).²⁴

²⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the public as a mass, a crowd and an audience cf. Warner, 2002: "A public is understood to be different from a crowd, an audience, or any other group that requires co-presence. Publics differ from nations, races, professions, or any other groups that, though not requiring co-presence, saturate identity. Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional,

He argues instead that public opinion is not merely a collection of individual opinions (Habermas, 1992b: 241) but its publicness stems from the consensus that it constitutes “the dominant one” (op.cit.: 242): “A group opinion is considered “public” when subjectively it has come to prevail as the dominant one” (op.cit.: 241-242). This definition connects public opinion with “popular opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 238), that is, the opinion of the majority.

In order to clarify his theoretical premises, Habermas turns to the distinction between “public” and “mass”. He uses the empirical findings of Mills in order to emphasise this distinction and move towards a clearer definition of the concept of public opinion. In a public, Mills argues, “virtually as many people express opinions as they receive them” (Mills, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 249), communications are organised, opinions are easily translated into action and the public is “more or less autonomous” (ibid.) from authoritative institutions. By contrast, in a mass “far fewer people express opinions than receive them” (ibid.) because of higher levels of abstraction and lack of organisation. There is no autonomy from institutions to form opinions “by discussion” (ibid.) or to translate them into action. Habermas uses Mills’ theory to reinforce his case for a public sphere independent of institutions of authority for the generation of public opinion “in the strict sense” (Habermas, 1992b: 248).

As regards the concept of “opinion”, Habermas observes that “opinion” was initially equated specifically with an “expression on a controversial topic” (Albig, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 241) and later defined by Ogle as the “expression of an attitude” (Ogle, op.cit.). These interpretations were criticised by Doob, as Habermas notes, for they imply that public opinion exists whenever people have attitudes” (Doob, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 297, n.18). Habermas is averse to this because his own model involves a public opinion that does not constitute a mere attitude, but the result of a more complex process of critical debate in a public sphere which fulfils the functions analysed in this chapter (cf. 2.4: contestation of authority, legitimation and legitimacy of the public sphere). Based on such criticisms of earlier attempts to define public opinion, Habermas concludes that the only meaningful method of studying the concept of public

rather than a permanent state of being. Therefore neither *crowd* nor *audience* nor *people* nor *group* will capture the same sense” (Warner, 2002: 53, emphasis in the original).

opinion is one that is “grounded only in the structural transformation of the public sphere itself and in the dimension of its development” (Habermas, 1992b: 244).

2.4.3 *Public opinion as “fiction”*

Since in Habermas’s model the generation of public opinion constitutes one of the primary political functions of the public sphere, the two concepts have many similarities. In the same way that the “the public sphere has to be “made” [as] it is not “there” anymore” (Habermas, 1992b: 201), Habermas concludes that public opinion too is not “there” as such (op.cit.: 248). In the case of the public sphere, its early institutions in the form of *Tischengesellschaft* or coffeehouses gradually ceased to exist, which also led to the disappearance of the spontaneity of this institutionalised process. According to Habermas’s analysis, “occasions for identification have to be created” (op.cit.: 201) in a way that every case for debate has to have a community or audience created for it to facilitate the discussion (cf. Altmann’s “communification” argument in Habermas, 1992b: 201). This loss of the informal and spontaneous character of early (or ideal) forms of public sphere is what leads Habermas to conclude that it now has to be *made*. In the same respect, and in the case of public opinion as a central political function of the public sphere, he argues that it can therefore be defined “only comparatively” (Habermas, 1992b: 248).

“[P]ublic opinion is measured by the following standard: the degree to which it emerges from the intraorganisational public sphere constituted by the public of the organisation’s members and how much the intraorganisational public sphere communicates with an external one formed in the publicist interchange, via the mass media, between societal organisations and state institutions” (ibid.).

This comparative definition masks Habermas’s suggested solution of an internal public sphere within organisations and public institutions for communication with the media and other organisations, which would encourage rational-critical debate and bring about public opinion “in the strict sense” (ibid.). It would seem that Habermas embraces a definition of public opinion in strictly institutional terms.

Nevertheless, he explicitly argues that the existence of public opinion cannot in fact be proven and thus he makes a case for public opinion as a “fiction of constitutional law” (Habermas, 1992b: 239): “Even its attribution to certain political institutions (as long as

this attribution abstracts from the level of the public's behaviour altogether) does not remove its fictive character" (ibid.). This does not mean, however, that he rejects the concept altogether. Indeed, he argues that it is precisely the *fiction* of its existence that must be sustained.

“[T]he analysis of constitutional norms in relation to the constitutional reality of large democratic states committed to social rights has to maintain the institutionalised fiction of a public opinion without being able to identify it directly as a real entity in the behaviour of the public of citizens.” (Habermas, 1992b: 237)

Habermas asserts his argument of the fictionality of public opinion (Habermas, 1992b: 244) but insists that it nevertheless must be retained. He goes on to identify three main areas of communication within this putatively normative model. The first area is one of “informal, personal, nonpublic opinions” (Habermas, 1992b: 245), which are “at work in great numbers” (Habermas, 1992b: 244).²⁵ Habermas identifies three levels within this category: the first and lowest level is a “subliterary” (Habermas, 1992b: 246) one of “primordial opinion or prejudice” (Habermas, 1992b: 245) which includes opinions that, as “evanescent [...] fashions” (Habermas, 1992b: 246) are taken for granted.²⁶ The second level includes “subreflective results of socialisation” (ibid.) such as attitudes to war and peace and the third level is “post-literary” (ibid.). Habermas explains that this is directly opposed to a subliterary one which involves opinions that are taken for granted in a culture, because this third level includes opinions that are generated by the culture industry “as self-evident” (ibid.). This level is of particular importance, for it involves opinions not formed through rational-critical reflection or debate but through what is presented in the media (Habermas, 1992b: 246).

²⁵ In Chapter 5 of *Structural Transformation*, Habermas offered a more extensive analysis of the “domination of nonpublic opinion” (178) that emerges from nondeliberative, uncritical activities.

²⁶ Cf. Lippmann (1922), *Public Opinion*, on the significance of culture in the perception of social reality. Lippmann argues that all public opinion is formed on the basis of stereotypes which shape everything we perceive: “We define first and *then* see. We pick out what a culture has already defined for us and tend to perceive it in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann, [1922] 2007:50).

All these forms of informal public opinion “play off against institutionalised, procedurally regulated opinion- and will-formation” (Habermas, 1996b: 327), which constitute the second area of communication identified by Habermas and operates within a group’s communication processes. This area is one of “formal, institutionally authorised opinions” (Habermas, 1992b: 245) which also include “quasi-public opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 246). The latter refers to opinions circulating between the press and the government in a narrow, “privileged” (Habermas, 1992b: 247) sphere. As with the “post-literary” model of informal opinions, quasi-public opinions may be addressed to the wide public but, being privileged, they “do not fulfil the requirements of a public process of rational-critical debate according to the liberal model” (Habermas, 1992b: 247).

“The communicative network of a public made up of rationally debating private citizens has collapsed; the public opinion once emergent from it has partly decomposed into the informal opinions of private citizens without a public and partly become concentrated into formal opinions of publicistically effective institutions” (ibid).

Habermas attributes all forms of social or public decline, including apathy, to the alleged loss of rational-critical debate, which has resulted in a shift from public communication to a “communication of publicly manifested opinions” (Habermas, 1992b: 248).

In this respect, Habermas presents two very distinct and “competing” (Habermas, 1992b: 236) meanings of public opinion, namely public opinion as a “critical authority” (ibid.) and as an “object to be molded” (ibid.) in the service of persons and institutions. According to Habermas, the first meaning of “critical authority” is what public opinion strives to become, while instead it is the second meaning which reflects its actual state. He also refers to these two notions as “critical” and “manipulative publicity” (ibid.) respectively. However, he quickly clarifies that publicity and public opinion “do not stand in relationship of norm and fact” (ibid.). Instead, he argues that these are “of different orders” (Habermas, 1992b: 237) that is, they represent distinct functions of the same model – critical and manipulative publicity (Habermas, 1992b: 236). They also “belong to different social tendencies” (ibid.), which means that, according to Habermas, critical publicity aims at public opinion (Habermas, 1992b: 237) while manipulative publicity aims at “nonpublic opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 237).

Habermas argues that these two areas of informal and formal, or nonpublic and institutionalised opinions may be distinct, but they are nevertheless linked by manipulative publicity which “strives to create a plebiscitary follower-mentality on the part of a mediated public” (Habermas, 1992b: 247) and is “staged for the purpose of manipulation or show” (Habermas, 1992b: 249). Habermas explains that nonpublic opinions, which are not autonomous, are integrated into the existing system through the “publicly manifested opinions” (ibid.) mentioned above, which were not formed through rational-critical debate. Therefore, Habermas argues that public opinion “in the strict sense” (Habermas, 1992b: 248) is only attainable if these two main areas of communication are linked with critical as opposed to manipulative publicity – again, rationality seems to function as a panacea for Habermas. This, however seems exceptionally difficult in the framework of increasing political apathy.

2.4.4 Public opinion as a political function of the public sphere

What is crucial in Habermas’s model of public opinion is that it “reigns but it does not govern” (Habermas, 1992b: 239).²⁷ He argues that public opinion is transformed, via democratic procedures, into “communicative power [which] cannot “rule” but it can only point the use of administrative power in specific directions” (Habermas, 1996b: 300).

“The political public sphere characterises public opinion as something that, friction-like, might offer resistance to governmental and administrative practice and that [...] can be diagnosed and manipulated by appropriate means” (Habermas, 1992b: 243).

Its function according to this view, therefore, is not merely guiding or consultative but rather public opinion “reigns” (Habermas, 1992b: 239) by influencing decision-making at government level. While it has no legal or political authority per se, its “communicative power” (Habermas, 1996b: 300) in Habermas’s model is significant.

²⁷ Similarly: “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.” (Habermas, 1993a: 452)

Public opinion is not merely described as a political function of the public sphere,²⁸ but also presented as *its power*. It constitutes the instrument that performs the check on authority and the “invisible power [that...] lays down laws” (Necker, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 263, n.28). Public opinion initially led to the institutionalisation of the discourse of the opposition. Guided by and evolving alongside free and critical journalism, Habermas describes how public opinion functioned as the voice of public critique and scrutiny of the government in its early stages.

“The innovation brought about by the opposition was the creation of a popular opinion. [...] such a public opinion that, aimed at the same objective and furnished with likeminded impulses of will, could be mobilised for political use. It was not demagoguery and sloganeering, uproars and mob scenes that were novel...also, there were still no regular public meetings...Rather, this public opinion was directed by another factor: by the establishment of an independent journalism that knew how to assert itself against the government and that made critical commentary and public opposition against the government part of the normal state of affairs” (Kluxen, cited Habermas, 1992b: 60).

The crucial element of public opinion, during early forms of public spheres, was that it was formed on the basis of public debate and not on the basis of opinions instilled by the monarch, the authorities or manipulated media (Habermas, 1992b: 66-67). Lastly, the communication of public opinion through the press constituted a further political function of the public sphere. Once public opinion is formed, it is publicised and broadcast in order to fulfil its own tasks of influencing, criticising, monitoring and also to form the object of critique itself in order to generate a new public opinion in a self-perpetuating manner.

The relationship between public sphere and public opinion therefore seems uncomplicated – the public sphere generates public opinion through rational critical debate among its participants. However, if we move beyond a historically-based analysis and consider the multiplicity of public spheres (argued in 3.1), then this seemingly simple pattern becomes complex. Public opinions (in the plural) become

²⁸ As Habermas formulated in “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article”: “By ‘the public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas 1974: 49).

segmented and thematised. Opinions of dominant publics may confront those of counter or semi-publics and informal public opinions may “play off against institutionalised, procedurally regulated opinion- and will-formation” (Habermas, 1996b: 327). In this respect, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) make a crucial point; the Habermasian public sphere is made up of private citizens without any official public standing or title, in other words who are “not publicly accountable” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 33). This is important because it means that discussions in such a public sphere made up of private citizens are not aimed at making decisions, but merely at monitoring authority through rational-critical debate. If communication in the public sphere resulted in decisions, “the critical potential would be lost - the public would become the state” (ibid.).

In attempting to deduce a generalised account of the public sphere’s political functions, Habermas initially reiterates and extends his arguments about the social and economic preconditions for the existence and functioning of the public sphere, namely a free market. He seems to establish a link between liberalisation of trade, or freedom of the market, and political freedom. He explicitly states that the political functions of the public sphere could only be seen under conditions of commodity exchange and social labour that are free from government influence and intervention (Habermas, 1992b: 74). In other words, market liberalisation is the social precondition for the bourgeois public sphere, since, as seen in chapter 2 of *Structural Transformation* (Habermas, 1992b: 46-48) the freedom and status of the private individual is linked to property, which is free from state intervention.

2.4.5 Civil society as the sphere of private autonomy

Habermas placed the early bourgeois public sphere *within* civil society and described the nascent bourgeois public as “the public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*” (Habermas, 1992b: 23, emphasis in the original). Indeed, at that initial stage the public sphere “was specifically a part of “civil society”, which at the same time established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labour governed by its own Laws” (ibid.). In Habermas’s analysis of the political functions of the bourgeois public sphere, he presents the latter as dependent on civil society, in a way that the public sphere *communicates* the interests of civil society.

“[T]he sphere of a public that eventually also engaged in a critical debate of political issues now definitively became the sphere in which civil society reflected on and expounded its interests” (Habermas, 1992b: 68-69).

The bourgeois public sphere, therefore, as a functional political element, acquires a “normative status of an organ for the self-articulation of civil society with a state authority corresponding to its needs” (Habermas, 1992b: 74). This “normative status” of the public sphere and its functions is briefly analysed in this section but will be more thoroughly examined in the next Chapter.

It is important to reiterate that Habermas considers civil society as belonging to the *private* realm, as illustrated in his ‘basic blueprint’ (Habermas, 1992b: 30). He describes it as emancipated from state authority and dependent only on mercantilist forces in the framework of 19th century capitalism: “Civil society was always contrasted with public authority or government as a sphere that is private *in its entirety*” (Habermas, 1993a: 433). Once again, this brings into question the public/private distinction and its constant redefinition in the light of socio-economic and political developments. Public and private no longer stood in opposition to each other with the former having a more positive and the latter a more negative connotation. With the privatisation of civil society, namely its total emancipation from government authority, intervention and influence and its dependence on the (private domain of) market, a positive meaning of the term “private” emerged (Habermas, 1992b: 75).

Furthermore, civil society was not merely considered an essentially privatised sphere but rather *the* sphere of private autonomy (op.cit.: 73). Detachment from the state meant that civil society had “free power of control over property that functioned in capitalist fashion” (op.cit.: 75) and was “subordinate to the market’s non-violent decisions” (op.cit.: 79).

“[T]he capitalist [was] perfectly free to employ his wealth in any enterprise he chose, and to regard the profit which he secured as the best proof that his enterprise was beneficial to the State” (Cunningham, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 265, n.49).

This is an essentially Marxist view of civil society, that is, civil society as the essentially autonomous realm of private property and market relations.²⁹

This sphere of private autonomy needed to have its own system of norms and liberties governed by *private law*. A guarantee of the legal status of persons was established as *status naturalis* (Habermas, 1992b: 75), that is, no longer based on and defined by estate and birth. This led to the codification of civil law and the establishment of equal status between the educated individuals in the public sphere and the commodity owners in the market. Besides, the educated public sphere participants were mostly bourgeois property owners. Civil society was codified, therefore, as the “sphere in which private people pursued their affairs with one another free from impositions by estate and state, at least in tendency” (ibid.). Public opinion also had a role in the codification of private law even in Napoleonic France, among attempts to rigorously suppress it. The public critically assessed the proposed legal codes and basic ideas were evaluated through debate.

The law of the emancipated, autonomous, private sphere of civil society, however, represented the norm, which did not necessarily correspond to the legally relevant reality. Civil society is portrayed and codified as the sphere of private autonomy, however Habermas points out that this is a normative claim and not a factual truth.

“Constitutional norms implied a model of civil society that by no means corresponded to its reality. The categories drawn from the historical process of capitalism, including its liberal phase, were themselves historical in character.

They denoted social tendencies, but tendencies only” (Habermas, 1992b: 84).

This clarification that the model of civil society as the sphere of citizens’ private autonomy constituted merely social tendencies is crucial, as it brings out the putative nature of the dual persona of the bourgeois as *citoyen* and *homme*, or property owner and human being in the eyes of the Law. Even though this dual persona served the “positive function of emancipating civil society from mercantilist rule and absolutist regimentation” (Habermas, 1992b: 56) according to Habermas, it did not correspond to the actual conditions at the time.

²⁹ “The anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy” (Marx and Engels, 1962: 362).

It would be a significant omission not to mention Hegel's critique of public opinion and civil society when examining the political functions of Habermas's public sphere. Habermas discusses Hegel's theory as a "dialectically projected countermodel" (op.cit.: 130) of his own model. In *Philosophy of Right* ([1820] 1991), Hegel presented the three main categories of family, civil society and the state and used the German term 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' to denote civil society as 'bourgeois society' as well as to distinguish it from 'political society', that is, the state (Hegel [1820], 1991: 220). For Hegel, the state represents the highest form of ethical life and objective freedom (op.cit.: 275-280), while civil society is beset with conflict and inequalities. Hegel's critique of civil society, according to Habermas's reading, stems from a "profound split" (Habermas, 1992b: 118) which, as Hegel notes in his *Philosophy of Right*, is the cause of discontinuity, confusion and "an inequality of skill and resources and even to one of moral and intellectual attainment" (Hegel, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 118). Habermas notes that this complex and problematic context would risk resulting in the impoverishment of the public and its demotion to a "penurious rabble" (Hegel, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 119). This leads him to the argument that the bourgeois constitutional state, as it comprised a public sphere of a "confused" (ibid.) public, was also gradually becoming "confused" and disorganised alongside civil society and this disorganisation ultimately penetrated the state (ibid.).³⁰ Hegel is not portrayed as a fatalist, however, for he suggests, according to Habermas's interpretation, "precautionary measures" against "clashing interests" (Habermas, 1992b: 120) and against the disintegration of civil society in the form of state intervention or by corporative reintegration (ibid.) of civil society itself. This points to an important difference between the theories of Hegel and Habermas in that, as Habermas observes, Hegel "definitely left liberalism behind" (ibid.) with his views on state interventionism in the economic sphere³¹ while Habermas's model of the public sphere is essentially liberal (cf. *Structural Transformation*, Chapter 1 on the Preliminary Demarcation of a Type of Bourgeois Public Sphere).

³⁰ Consider: "[I]n Hegel's concept of opinion the idea of the public of civil society was already denounced as ideology [...] [this] demotion of public opinion was a necessary consequence of Hegel's concept of civil society" (Habermas, 1992b: 117-118).

³¹ In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b: 342), Habermas once again reconstructs Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and explains how corporations mediate between the state and civil society.

With regard to critical rationality in civil society or the public sphere, Habermas observes that Hegel “rejected the problem of the congruence of politics and morality as a false question” (Habermas, 1992b: 122) and argued against “the idea of making domination rational via the public sphere” (ibid.).

“The public sphere thus demoted to a “means of education” counted no longer as a principle of enlightenment and as a sphere in which reason realized [sic] itself. [...] Thus it did not provide the basis on which a public of private people could translate political into rational authority” (Habermas, 1992b: 120-122).

It could be said therefore that rationality is not characteristic of public opinion in Hegel’s civil society, and that Hegel’s views are antithetical to Habermas’s model of public opinion and of the bourgeois public sphere. Indeed, the former seems to be more interested in a “world historical existentialism of national minds” (op.cit.: 122) according to Habermas’s reconstruction, than in critical publicity as a monitoring or regulating force in the framework of a (bourgeois) public sphere.

Habermas presents Hegel’s civil society as also suffering from an “antagonistic” (op.cit.: 119) environment due to the lack of truly universal interests, which ultimately had an impact on public opinion as a product of civil society. Therefore, a further antithesis between Habermas’s and Hegel’s models is that public opinion, according to the former’s reading of the latter, “had the form of common sense” (op.cit: 120) instead of constituting the result of a process of rational-critical debate in the framework of a Habermasian public sphere.

“Public opinion therefore deserves to be as much respected as despised [...] Thus to be independent of public opinion is the first formal condition of achieving anything great or rational whether in life or in science” (Hegel, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 121).

Habermas demonstrated with the reconstruction of Hegel’s critique the significant shift in Hegel’s concept of public opinion from a “collectively manifested [...] formal subjective freedom of individuals” (Habermas, 1992b: 117) to a “degenerated to the level of a subjective opinion of the many” (op.cit.: 119) as a result of the increasing disorganisation of civil society. In spite of the seeming antitheses between Hegel’s and Habermas’s models, at least at this stage of development of Habermas’s model, Hegel’s

critique forms the basis of Habermas's own account and critique of the public sphere's socio-structural transformation.

2.4.6 Legitimation and legitimacy

Having presented civil society as the sphere of private autonomy, Habermas introduces the "bourgeois constitutional state" (Habermas, 1992b: 79) as the response of the state to the rapid institutionalisation of the public sphere and the shaping of its political functions. He argues that the state responded to these developments by actually institutionalising the public sphere *within* the state apparatus thus establishing and codifying a bourgeois constitutional state. The latter linked the public sphere, and public opinion, to the idea of Law in such way that, in a law-based state functioned a "system of norms legitimated by public opinion" (Habermas, 1992b: 82). Moreover, legal codes originated in the medium of civil society that was the "critical public scrutiny of private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1992b: 76).

Habermas stresses that public opinion legitimated authority "by reference to reason, against the opposition's claim to the contrary" (Habermas, 1992b: 63). It seems that reason, at least in the Habermasian sense, constituted the bone of contention for any authority in order to legitimate itself. And conversely, the claim to reason by the bourgeois constitutional state was the use of public opinion generated from the bourgeois public sphere. In short, Habermas states that public opinion functions as the legitimating force of the bourgeois constitutional state's power and dominations. It neither makes laws nor has any legislative authority, but rather has a legitimising function.

In addition to the function of legitimation, Habermas also sees the public sphere operating as a forum where the legitimacy of values and norms is tested and generated. Discursively generated ("through discourse and counter-discourse", Habermas, 1992b: 125, 219) public opinion is therefore what bestows upon the public sphere its power and function to check, monitor and criticise authority.

"In accord with its own intention, public opinion wanted to be neither a check on power, nor power itself, nor even the source of all powers. Within its medium,

rather, the character of executive power, domination [...] itself, was supposed to change” (Habermas, 1992b: 82).

Indeed, Habermas states that discursively generated public opinion cannot “rule”³² but it can only use its communicative power to “point the use of administrative power in specific directions” (Habermas, 1996b: 300). This alludes to the principle of responsiveness and the system of checks and balances in modern democracies, where the state “is to be checked, supervised and responsive to and controlled, not only through the rule of Law, but the public sphere itself” (Cohen, 1997: online).

Finally, Habermas enlists those functions of the public sphere that are codified in law. Firstly, as regards “a sphere of the public engaged in rational-critical debate” (Habermas, 1992b: 83), these functions comprise freedom of opinion, speech, press, assembly etc., right of petition, equality of vote and others. Secondly, personal freedom and the inviolability of the home comprise the functions concerning the “individual’s status as a free human being, grounded in the intimate sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family” (ibid.). The third set of functions concern transactions of property owners in the sphere of civil society. Furthermore, this legislation established basic rights, such as institutions and organs (press, political parties), private autonomy in the form of family and property, private people as *hommes, citoyens* and commodity owners. These rights protected different aspects of the public sphere and its functions.

2.5 Functional Transformation of the (Bourgeois) Public Sphere

2.5.1 The Commercialisation of the Press and the Manufacturing of News

In presenting the transformation of the public sphere’s political functions, Habermas begins with the press, whose transformation denoted “a shift in function of the public sphere as a special realm” (Habermas, 1992b: 181). Habermas sees the changes in the nature and function of the press as reflecting changes in the public sphere per se. In particular, he points out that, as economic and political functions of the press evolved in parallel, publishers gradually transformed “merchant[s] of news to [...] dealer[s] in public opinion” (Bücher, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 182). This would, ultimately (and

³² Habermas explicitly states: “Public opinion reigns but it does not govern” (Habermas, 1992b: 239).

ideally), make newspapers the “carriers and leaders of public opinion” (ibid.) and in turn it would assert the press’s critical function (Habermas, 1992b: 184) by establishing it as a key political institution of the public sphere.

However, Habermas points out that the gradual abolition of censorship and other types of restrictions to a free press, as well as the introduction of new technologies in the press business resulted in a transition to a press that became “primarily a business [...] on the level of the big business of advanced capitalism” (Habermas, 1992b: 184-185). Crucial to this transition was the advent of advertising in the press and later media of mass communication. He describes advertising as a way of “sell[ing] politics in an unpolitical way” (Habermas, 1992b: 216) and as the main reason of the press becoming “manipulable to the extent that it became commercialised” (Habermas, 1992b: 185).

The political aspects of advertising, which on the outset seemed a purely economic business, were manifest according to Habermas in the “*practice of public relations*” (Habermas, 1992b: 193, emphasis on the original), which is presented as having dominated the public sphere during the 1950s. Habermas argues that the “addressee” of public relations is “‘public opinion’ or the private citizens as the public and not directly as consumers” (ibid.). In other words, public relations according to this view aims at indirectly manipulating public opinion by concealing “business intentions in the role of someone interested in the public welfare” (ibid.).³³ In this way, people may believe that they are forming an opinion critically, however Habermas argues that this opinion is in reality heavily influenced by public relations tactics of “engineering of consent” (Bernays, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 194) and “opinion management [which] systematically creat[es] news events or exploit[s] events that attract attention” (Habermas, 1992b: 193). The generation of public opinion by the public sphere, therefore, becomes according to Habermas an “illusion” (Habermas, 1992b: 194) for the

³³ “Public relations fuses both [news reports and advertising]: advertisement must absolutely not be recognizable as the self-representation of a private interest. It bestows on its object the authority of an object of public interest about which – this is the illusion to be created – the public of critically reflecting private people freely forms its opinion. [...] The awakened readiness of the consumers involves the false consciousness that as critically reflecting private people they contribute responsibly to public opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 194).

public, for this type of public opinion is “staged” (ibid.) by media tactics and public relations strategies. In this way, the press starts “making or creating news” (Steinberg, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 194) instead of merely communicating them to the public. The ultimate aim of all the above, as Habermas argues, is the promotion of private as opposed to common interests.

The “competition of organised private interests” (Habermas, 1992b: 193) in the transformed public sphere as opposed to the promotion of the “common interest” (Habermas, 1992b: 87) is a recurring theme in *Structural Transformation*. Habermas seems to regard it as the key development that triggered the transformation of the public sphere’s political functions, as private interests are regarded as having corrupted the original model. The modern situation in the transformed public sphere, as Habermas sees it, is encapsulated in the following statement:

“The public sphere, simultaneously pre-structured and dominated by the mass-media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contribution, a battle is fought over influence and control of communication flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible” (Habermas, 1993a: 437).

The transformed image becomes clearer if compared with Habermas’s original model. In the latter, the public sphere was a realm of private people which aimed at promoting public, universal interests – “at least in tendency” (Habermas, 1992b: 75). The institutions of Habermas’s original model of the public sphere (salons, coffeehouses, societies etc.) were public as opposed to state-owned or state-controlled. Power or status differentials were neutralised in such institutions through the “authority of the better argument” (Habermas, 1992b: 36).³⁴ In Habermas’s transformed model, public (or universal) interests seem to have been replaced by “private interest[s] of a profit-oriented enterprise” (Habermas, 1992b: 186) and the public sphere became “power-penetrated [...] under the influence of forces developed in society” (Habermas, 1992b: 187). As a result, Habermas notes that the press and other media as the modern institutions of the public sphere became “public corporations” (Habermas, 1992b: 187), directly depended on the state, which granted them “semiofficial status” (ibid.). The

³⁴ Cf. Chapter 2 of *Structural Transformation* on the Social Structures of the Public Sphere, where Habermas explains that only “the authority of the better argument” superseded privilege and expertise in the 18th century bourgeois public sphere.

original and the transformed model analysed by Habermas seem to be in direct opposition to one another.

Habermas adds that this transformation also resulted in a further redefinition of the already blurred boundaries³⁵ between public and private spheres. In particular, he notes that “the sphere of the public was altered by the influx of private interests that received privileged exposure in it” (Habermas, 1992b: 188-189). These private economic interests are seen as having shaken the public dimension of the public sphere and moved it closer to the “private sphere of labour and commodity exchange” (Habermas, 1992b: 30). Habermas concludes that, interestingly, “private people as owners of private property had a direct effect on private people as the public” (Habermas, 1992b: 189). This communication of private people *to* private people through a hybridised medium that seems to have more private than public characteristics according to Habermas denotes not merely a transformation, but instead a deterioration of the public nature of Habermas’s public sphere.

In addition, Habermas explains that the intermeshing of the economic and the political in this transformed public sphere result in a situation where companies instill the idea to consumers that “they act in their capacity as citizens” (Habermas, 1992b: 195) when consuming. Therefore, the state has no choice but to “address” (ibid.) the public not only as citizens but also as consumers. In this way, Habermas concludes that, similarly to businesses, “public authority too competes for publicity” (ibid.).

Habermas points out that the parties involved in this transformed public sphere were not individual citizens but collective entities in the form of interest groups with specific aims and immense power; therefore their aim was not to defend public interests. Instead, their primary goal is presented to be the “credible representation and demonstration of the particular association’s special interest as the general interest”

³⁵ Habermas reiterates: “To the extent that state and society penetrated each other, the public sphere (and along with it the parliament, i.e. the public sphere established as an organ of the state) lost a number of its bridging functions” (Habermas, 1992b: 197). Also see *Structural Transformation*, Chapter 5 on the “mutual infiltration” (Habermas, 1992b: 141) of the public and private spheres and the rise of the “sphere of the social” (ibid.).

(Habermas, 1992b: 200) and therefore their power constituted in the manipulation of public opinion while these groups themselves remained outside the influence of control by public opinion. Habermas notes that this resulted in an “unstable equilibrium [...] between state apparatus and interest groups” (Habermas, 1992b: 198) since, the public sphere may have expanded with the introduction of such groups, however “the haggling out of compromises moved to extraparliamentary sites” (ibid.).

According to Habermas’s rationale, therefore, while the public sphere was intended to constitute a site for the resolution of conflicts “more or less discursively” (Habermas, 1993a: 430) nevertheless “these compromises [...] remain altogether outside the realm of jurisdiction of the state’s institutionalised public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 199). In “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere” (1993a), Habermas adds that previously “genuine processes of public communication” (op.cit.: 430) have been “subverted by power” (ibid.). As a result, semi-public, non-public organisations and interest groups seem to be taking over certain key political functions of the public sphere according to Habermas. What is more important, however, is that Habermas portrays such organisations as largely unaccountable, since the public seems to have lost the power to contest the authority of such establishments.

2.5.2 Refeudalisation of the public sphere

Habermas considers the infiltration of organisations and interest groups into the public sphere as contributing to its ‘refeudalisation’ (Habermas, 1992b: 200). Unlike the refeudalisation of society (cf. 2.3.2), which denotes the intermeshing of the functions of state and society, the refeudalisation of the public sphere implies a return to feudal elements of representation: “the aura of personally represented authority returns as an aspect of publicity; to this extent modern publicity indeed has affinity with feudal publicity” (Habermas, 1992b: 200). Habermas illustrates this point by quoting Altmann and arguing that organisations and interest groups which penetrate the public sphere “*are interested* not so much in their formal representation toward the outside [...] but above all *in the representative showing of their members in the public sphere*” (Altmann, quoted in Habermas, 1992b: 200, emphases in the original). In addition to feudal elements, this emphasis on representation also signifies a return to certain elements of the *polis* in Classical Greece: “The public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed – rather than *in* which public critical debate is

carried on” (Habermas, 1992b: 201, emphasis in the original). While this was not *exactly* the case in Pericles’s Athens, the *polis* did act as a forum for the public display of virtue, as Habermas points out in *Structural Transformation* (Habermas, 1992b: 8). The transformed model described above by Habermas implies the use of the public sphere as a stage rather than a forum of rational-critical debate, which is what his initial model intended.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994) argue that the public sphere’s potential to foster rational debate prevents the process of refeudalization in the public sphere. According to this argument, the refeudalization of the public sphere “is as yet incomplete” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 21) thanks to participation of citizens as an “active audience” (ibid.) instead of passive or apathetic consumers. In other words, the infiltration of organisations and interest groups in the public sphere would only be detrimental in the case of a non-responsive, non-critical public. The process can be reversed in the case of “active audiences” (ibid.), that is, a critically participating public in a way that it would “remain possible that public interests can be served by mass communication” (ibid.).

2.5.3 The transformation of ‘publicity’ (*Öffentlichkeit*)

Habermas extends his arguments on the allegedly nefarious impact of public relations and the promotion of private interests in the public sphere to the deterioration of publicity as a principle. His argument on the normative concept of publicity is encapsulated in the following statement:

“As long as publicity existed as a sphere and functioned as a principle, what the public itself believed to be and to be doing was ideology and simultaneously more than mere ideology. [...] Publicity was, according to its very idea, a principle of democracy not just because anyone could in principle announce, with equal opportunity, his personal inclinations, wishes and convictions – opinions; it could only be realised in the measure that these personal opinions could evolve through the rational-critical debate of a public into public opinion – *opinion publique*” (Habermas, 1992b: 88, 219, emphasis on the original).

Habermas introduces the concepts of “critical” and “manipulative publicity” (Habermas, 1992b: 236) to refer to the original and transformed model respectively. Largely

influenced by Hegel³⁶, he argues that critical publicity “‘exists’ [...] with an addressee that fulfils the behavioural expectations set by it” (Habermas, 1992b: 237). According to this statement, critical publicity ‘exists’ (ibid.) not as representative of the public as a whole, but as a “workable substitute” (ibid.). This argument is rather vague and conveniently loose, which makes it problematic. Habermas does not specify to which section of the public critical publicity applies, but instead he (vaguely) states that it is not representative of the public as a whole. This echoes his previous argument of the public sphere as the mouthpiece of the public, but not comprising the public as a whole (Habermas, 1992b: 37). Although Habermas does not explicitly state it in this case, based on his argumentation throughout *Structural Transformation*, we may presume that he implies that critical publicity, which requires rational-critical reflection and argumentation, is a capacity and a privilege of the few (cf. Chapter 4 of *Structural Transformation*).

“[T]he success of public communication is not intrinsically measured by the requirement of inclusion either but by the formal criteria governing how a qualified public opinion comes about” (Habermas, 1996b: 362).

The transformation from “critical” to “manipulative” publicity is the most crucial one according to Habermas. He attributes it to the impact of the media which “took care of the innocence of the principle of publicity once and for all” (Habermas, 1993a: 437). In particular, it could be said that in his earlier model publicity was produced “from below”, that is, from the private people themselves (cf. Chapter 1 of *Structural Transformation*). In the transformed, post-industrial public sphere, Habermas sees publicity as “generated from above [...] in order to give an aura of good will for certain positions” (Habermas, 1992b: 177). As a result of this, Habermas argues that “critical publicity is supplanted by manipulative publicity” (Habermas, 1992b: 178) and hides the “domination of nonpublic opinion” (ibid.) that emerges from nondeliberative, uncritical activities described above. This “nonpublic opinion” of specific interest groups is seen as occupying the public sphere to the detriment of rational-critical debate in a vicious circle of consumerism (and loss of rational critical discussions). This results in “nonpublic opinion” purposely created to manipulate and lead once again to uncritical and essentially consumption-based activities. Any remaining discussion or

³⁶ Cf. 2.4.5 of this thesis, and also “[I]n Hegel’s concept of opinion, the idea of the public of civil society was already denounced as ideology” (Habermas, 1992b: 117).

debate is regarded by Habermas as merely “the display of competing interests” (Habermas, 1992b: 179) which allegedly “invaded the public sphere” (ibid.).

Habermas turns to the transformed role of the parliament and argues that parliamentary deliberation is no longer “part and centre of the public as a whole” (Habermas, 1992b: 206) because of the transformation of “the structure of the public sphere itself” (ibid.). He attributes this transformation to the “distorting” (ibid.) role of the media, which “represent a disruption of parliamentary work” (ibid.) in a way that “deliberation in parliament has become completely secondary to documentation” (ibid.). In short, Habermas argues that “unhampered communication” (Habermas, 1992b: 209) is no longer the case in parliament as the official site of the public sphere, and that this results in a situation where it no longer matters what is being discussed in parliament but instead how this is *documented* and transmitted by the media. In this way, he concludes that the function of the parliament and of publicity in general is reduced to “a staged display” (Habermas, 1992b: 206) and that its fundamental “critical function” (ibid.) is consequently lost.

Habermas’s image of “staged” or “manufactured” (Habermas, 1992b: 211, 232) publicity and the treatment of the public as spectators is completed by his account of the industry of political marketing. He argues that the promotion of political parties’ image becomes more important than party lines or ideologies. He sees a situation where party meetings are reduced to “advertising events” (Habermas, 1992b: 217) and the party leader and team are “packaged and displayed in a way that makes them marketable” (Habermas, 1992b: 218): “Popularity is not as such identical with publicity, but it cannot be maintained in the long run without it” (ibid.). The use of such marketing tools results in “manufactured publicity” (ibid.) according to Habermas and the consensus generated through such practices is based on offers made to the consuming public “for the purposes of advertising psychology” (Habermas, 1992b: 219). Habermas is highly critical of this and argues that such a type of consensus is better suited to “an authoritarian welfare regime than to a democratic constitutional state committed to social rights” (ibid.). In other words, political marketing tools according to Habermas foster a public ready for “acclamation” (ibid.) of anything advertised by politicians, which leaves no room for (rational in Habermasian terms) criticism.

2.5.4 *Voting apathy and nonpublic opinion*

In examining the transformation of the principle of publicity, Habermas also analyses its impact on voting behaviour and on public opinion. Focusing on the German population, he notes a large incoherence and imbalances in voting publics. In particular, he finds that those belonging to “higher status groups [such as] businessmen belonging to the commercial middle classes” (Habermas, 1992b: 212-213) are more frequent voters than other groups. More importantly, he notes that “members of private associations make use of their right to vote to a greater extent than the nonorganised citizens” (Habermas, 1992b: 213). While it seems that these higher status groups are more politically active, however, Habermas points out that they are “the least inclined to seriously submit their views to discussion” (ibid.) which illustrates “how little they contribute to a process of *public opinion*” (ibid., emphasis on the original). He explains this superficial political participation by once again lamenting the loss of the critically debating public – “without the communication flow of a rationally debating public [...] an opinion once assumed often becomes fixed as a rigid habit” (ibid.). As a result, Habermas concludes that debates in the modern transformed public sphere consist mainly in confirming previously “fixed” views. He reinforces this argument by referring to the “unpolitical consumer attitude” (Habermas, 1992b: 215) of certain enfranchised voters and finally to the “collapse of political ideology” (ibid.) within the framework of an increasing consumer culture “whose receptiveness is public but uncritical” (Habermas, 1992b: 175).

Continuing his account of the decline of political participation and interest, Habermas uses Riesman’s term “new indifferents” (Riesman, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 216) to refer to the increasingly apathetic public of the transformed public sphere. Quoting Riesman, Habermas points out that the key characteristic of this public is that they “view politics [...] as if they were spectators” (op.cit.: 217). This also points to the subtle return of feudal elements described above. Again, Habermas presents the public of his original model as having been reduced to a mere audience without any critical role or even desire for participation.

Based on the above, Habermas argues that this opinion did not qualify for public opinion for it did not fulfil two basic criteria – rational formation and public discussion: “[I]nformal opinions were not formed rationally [...] nor were they formed in

discussion, in the pro and con of a public conversation” (Habermas, 1992b: 221). For this reason, he argues in favour of the deterioration of public opinion into merely “an opinion climate” (Habermas, 1992b: 217). He describes this type of opinion which lacks “the attribute of rationality as such” (Habermas, 1992b: 219) as “nonpublic opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 211). He uses this term to refer to outcome of opinion manipulation through the aforementioned strategies of opinion management, political marketing and advertising etc.: “[Publicity] earns public prestige for a person or issue and thereby renders it ready for acclamatory assent in a climate of nonpublic opinion” (Habermas, 1992b: 201). This “nonpublic opinion” of specific interest groups are seen as occupying the public sphere to the detriment of rational-critical debate in a vicious circle of consumerism (and loss of rational critical discussions) which results in “nonpublic opinion” purposely created to manipulate and lead once again to uncritical and essentially consumption-based activities. Any remaining discussion or debate is regarded by Habermas as merely “the display of competing interests” (Habermas, 1992b: 179), which allegedly “invaded the public sphere” (ibid.). All this results in “a public sphere temporarily manufactured for show or manipulation” (Habermas, 1992b: 222).

Furthermore, Habermas adds that because of the increasing power of new “societal forces” (op.cit.: 226) in the guise of privately-owned organisations and parties mentioned above, “the public is no longer one composed of persons formally and materially on equal footing” (op.cit.: 227). For this reason, he states that “the formation of public opinion [...] is not effectively secured” (ibid.) in the modern state. As argued previously, the question of universal accessibility is crucial to Habermas’s model of the public sphere for it “was understood [...] as the precondition that guaranteed the truth of a discourse and counter-discourse bound to the laws of logic” (Habermas, 1992b: 219). He argues, however, that “a mere guarantee that the state will refrain from intrusion is no longer sufficient for this purpose” (op.cit.: 227-228) but rather what the state needs to do is actively intervene in order to ensure participation. Even though state initiatives and involvement may help in facilitating public participation on a presumably equal footing, nevertheless this cannot be easily ensured. Apart from establishing the fundamental democratic rights such as freedom of expression, expression etc., the state may also facilitate accessibility, public engagement, the creation of public spheres and the generation of public opinion by establishing focus groups and discussion forums, as well as raising awareness on matters of public concern. Voting apathy and lack of

interest in participating in public spheres and in politics in general is a deep-rooted phenomenon, however, and while state involvement may help, establishing trust between citizens and the state, and between the state and politicians, would be a more decisive step towards active involvement, participation and the generation of public opinion, as opposed to non-public opinion in Habermasian terms.

2.5.5 Habermas's proposed solutions to the functional transformation of the public sphere

As a solution to the “transmuted functions” (Habermas, 1992b: 196) of publicity, Habermas proposes “unhampered communication” (Habermas, 1992b: 209) in the form of “public rational-critical debate” (ibid.) for such aforementioned organisations, political parties and media. Habermas’s suggested solution is the “subjection of domination to reason” (Habermas, 1992b: 54). In addition, he reiterates that phenomena of “*staged and manipulative* publicity displayed by organisations over the heads of a mediatised public” (Habermas, 1992b: 232, emphasis on the original) and of “*critical* [...] public communication” (ibid.) are competing in the context of the modern social-welfare state. He makes certain suggestions for tackling this. Firstly, he rejects the option of reducing the expanded public sphere by decreasing the number of the enfranchised population. Instead, he makes a case for “a public of organised private people” (Habermas, 1992b: 232) as a way of reinstating the conditions for generating a public sphere in accordance with his normative model.³⁷

“Only such a public could, under today’s conditions, participate effectively in a process of public communication via the channels of the public spheres internal to parties and special-interest associations and on the basis of an affirmation of publicity as regards the negotiations of organisations with the state and with one another” (Habermas, 1992b: 232, emphasis on the original).

³⁷ This thesis will argue that the normative character of his model of the public sphere partly derives from historiography, that is, Habermas describes a 17th-18th century public sphere that never actually existed and uses it as the ideal model and a point of reference for critique of actually existing public spheres today. This view will be examined in 3.2.

Secondly, he argues in favour of the “rationalisation of the exercise of social and political authority” (ibid.) as a way to contest authority and prevent domination.

Furthermore, Habermas believes that “a public sphere effective in the political realm can be realised” (Habermas, 1992b: 233) as long as two important issues are resolved. Firstly, he argues that publicity should be reinstated within “large organisations, both in state and society” (Habermas, 1992b: 234) and points out that its disappearance stems from the “unresolved plurality of competing interests” (ibid.). Secondly, he considers the possibility that economic growth and the “expansion of social wealth” (ibid.) may result in “mutual satisfaction” (ibid.) and therefore the coexistence of multiple interests that are *not* competing. He quickly rejects this possibility, however, by arguing that “means of destruction” (Habermas, 1992b: 234-235) increase in proportion to means of satisfaction of needs.

Overall, Habermas’s suggested solution, which he explicitly states that he does not find utopian, is “relativizing structural conflicts of interest according to the standard of a universal interest everyone can acknowledge” (Habermas, 1992b: 235). He concludes that the struggle between critical and manipulative publicity is still ongoing and its outcome “remains open” (ibid.). However, he points out once more that the principle of publicity “cannot be denounced as ideology” (ibid.), which illustrates his recurrent argument, central to *Structural Transformation*, of the emancipatory potential of the public sphere despite its transformation and alleged disintegration analysed in the final chapters of this book. This normative potential is analysed with critical intent in 3.2.

2.5.6 The public sphere as “illusion” and “fiction”

Habermas notes that, while in earlier times publicity “had to be gained in opposition to the secret politics of the monarchs” (Habermas, 1992b: 201), in modern times it is achieved instead “with the help of the secret politics of interest groups” (ibid.). His criticism of the rise and influence of such semi-public organisations on the public sphere’s political functions is so harsh that he concludes “the public sphere has to be “made”, it is not “there” anymore” (ibid.). The question is, whether indeed it was ever “there”, or, whether the ‘feudalist tendencies’ he described above always existed and never actually disappeared.

This fundamental question on “where” the public sphere is has been examined by many scholars and the answer tends to be that the public sphere does not “exist” as such, but rather it emerges through communication (this is analysed in detail in 3.1.5). Habermas himself stated in his Encyclopaedia Article on the public sphere (1974) that, “a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private citizens assemble to form a public body” (Habermas, 1974: 49). Benhabib also notes on Habermas’s model of the public sphere:

“The public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse to evaluate their validity” (Benhabib, 1993: 87).

It follows from Habermas’s statement, and Benhabib’s reconstruction of his argument, that the public sphere never actually “existed” and had to be “made” (Habermas, 1992b: 201) from the beginning. Nevertheless, he extends the above argument by stating that, since the public sphere “has to be “made”” (ibid.), therefore “it has become a genuine publicist task for parties to generate periodically something like a public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 211). The transformation here constitutes in Habermas’s claim that the public sphere is no longer formed by “private people come together as a public” (op.cit.: 27) but from privately owned organisations representing specific interests – but claiming to represent the common interest. Still, Habermas insists that even if “generating” (op.cit.: 211) a public sphere seems an impossible task, still “the democratic arrangement of parliamentary elections continues to count on the *liberal fictions* of a public sphere” (ibid., my emphasis). According to this rationale, therefore, the public sphere on the one hand “is not “there” anymore” (Habermas, 1992b: 201) and has to be produced by political parties, but on the other hand the “fiction” (op.cit.: 211) or “illusion” (op.cit.: 194) of a “public of critically reflecting private people [that] freely forms its opinion” (ibid.) must be maintained.

2.5.7 The “Blurred Blueprint”

As a result of socio-structural and political transformations of the public sphere examined above, Habermas presents a “blurred blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 175) of the public sphere, compared to his initial sketch (Habermas, 1992b: 30). In summing up the “developmental pathways in the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere”

(Habermas, 1992b: 175), he argues that because of the conflation of public and private realms, the model of the bourgeois public sphere as one “of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) “became unapplicable” (Habermas, 1992b: 176). He reiterates his arguments that the literary public sphere “lost its specific character” (ibid.) and that consumption trends have replaced critical discussion. He argues that apart from the literary and the bourgeois public spheres, even “the parliamentary public sphere – the place in which “truth” would have to present its credentials – has collapsed” (Habermas, 1992b: 179-180).

His main argument is that the bourgeois public sphere as he initially conceptualised it was based on certain social and economic conditions and fulfilled certain social, economic and political functions. As these conditions and functions changed with industrialisation, modernisation and general social transformations, the inner dynamics as well as the external functions of the public sphere also shifted or in other cases were entirely lost according to Habermas. The emergence of cultural consumption and leisure contributed to the rise of a new form of publicity in the context of “the rise of the social” (Arendt, Habermas), mass culture and consumerism. He concludes with the assertion that domination, conflict and consensus are all volatile concepts that are largely influenced by socio-historical developments. Against this backdrop, he presents the structural transformation of the public sphere as a useful tool for determining whether “the exercise of domination and power persists as a negative constant [...] or [...] it is open to substantive change” (Habermas, 1992b: 250). This constitutes a reassertion of his theory’s normative promise that the best way to regulate authority and domination is by institutionalizing his model of the public sphere.

CHAPTER 3

Critique and Habermas's Revised Model of the Public Sphere

3.0 Introductory Remarks

This chapter will critically consider Habermas's paradigm of the public sphere as examined in the previous chapter. Through critique, an attempt will be made to revisit certain challenging issues and concepts within Habermas's model. Habermas has been criticised by media theorists, feminists, social and political scientists for various contentious points in his theory. Pertinent to this research are the ambiguities and contradictions in issues of topography and reason, which, as will be demonstrated, are closely interrelated.

3.1 Topography of the public sphere

The concept of topography refers to a certain relational arrangement of elements in such a way that they become "places" through their "reciprocal relational determinations" (Marchart, 1998: online). It denotes both an internal structure and a classification as a "place" (*topos*) in relation to others. Grant emphasises the hypostatisation of topography in the Habermasian concept of public sphere by advocating that "without Habermas's epistemology, public sphere, publicness, public opinion can be conceptualised in terms of [...] abstraction and mediatisation without topographical equivalence" (Grant, 2000b: 73). In order to avoid such a level of abstraction and critically examine Habermas's model, therefore, the topography of the latter must be analysed. This section begins with a clarification of the concept of "the public" in order to determine its place in the topography of the public sphere – if topography is in fact relevant at all. Secondly, the multiplicity of public spheres is established as opposed to Habermas's initial conceptualization of a single bourgeois public sphere. An examination of the category of counterpublics is attempted next, followed by a contrastive analysis of the public sphere as a *topos* as opposed to Foucault's concept of heterotopias. Lastly, a case is made in favour of a "despatialised" (Thompson, 1993) model of public sphere before examining its normative dimension.

3.1.1 “The public”

The concept of “the public” is often used as a synonym for the public sphere; these concepts, however, are not coterminous. Although they are largely interrelated, “the public” (or a public) is in fact a more generalised and inclusive term than “public sphere”. Habermas’s analysis of the term “public”, analysed in the previous Chapter, followed his historical account of the transformation of the public sphere – from something belonging to the sphere of the state to something emerging from the communication of private citizens, to a transformed entity guided and manipulated by the media. In his examination of the evolution of the concept, Michael Warner (2002) cites Du Bos (1917) and gives a definition of the public as those persons who have acquired enlightenment either through reading or through life in society (*le commerce du monde*); “they are the only ones who can determine the value of poems or paintings” (Du Bos, cited in Warner, 2002: 67). This definition appears to correspond almost fully with the enlightened bourgeois public in Habermas’s model. In *The public and its problems* (1927), John Dewey had defined “the public” as an institution with recognised common goals and at least an informal leadership (Dewey, cited in Eickelman and Salvatore, 2002: 97). His notion also corresponds, at least in part, with Habermas’s public, which consisted of bourgeois citizens communicating on common goals and interests (in its normative model). Any objections to it would constitute in referring to the public not as an institution but as something more spontaneous and diffuse.

However, Dewey rightly argued that in no two ages or places does the same idea of the public exist (op.cit.: 98). In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas notes that the *publicum* developed in the 18th century into the “public” (Habermas, 1992b: 26). “Public” as the subject of public opinion was equated with “mass” and then with “group”, as the social – psychological substratum of a process of communication and interaction among two or more individuals (Habermas, 1992b: 241). The public cannot be a “mass” (or a crowd), however, for this term refers to a more abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media, unable to answer back immediately or with any effect, penetrated by authorised institutions who reduce their autonomy in the formation of opinion by discussion (Mills, 1956: 304). The public, by contrast, is a realm where:

“(1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them, (2) public communications are so organised that there is a chance immediately and

effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against – if necessary – the prevailing system of authority. And (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is thus more or less autonomous in its operation” (op.cit.: 303-304).

The public cannot be a “group” either, for this term is too abstract and denotes an informal and loose organisational structure and an uncertain functional use and purpose.

“The public is organised and made effective by means of representatives who as guardians of custom, as legislators, as executives, judges, etc. care for its especial interests by methods intended to regulate the conjoint actions of individuals and groups. Then and in so far, association adds to itself political organisation” (Dewey, 1927: 35).

Lastly, the public is not an audience. Warner makes the distinction between *the* public and *a* public and argues that the latter refers to a concrete audience, e.g. the public of a theatrical play (Warner, 2002: 50). While this may be one of the meanings of the public (or a public), this aspect of the public is of no concern to our examination of the public sphere. The audience is solicited and provoked, and invited to develop a disposition for interactivity. Activation is not necessarily participation though, at least not in the way we think of participation in the public sphere (Carpignano, 1999: 186). Warner himself clarifies his position by stating:

“a public is understood to be different from a crowd, an audience, or any other group that requires co-presence. Publics differ from nations, races, professions, or any other groups that, though not requiring co-presence, saturate identity. Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional, rather than a permanent state of being. Therefore neither *crowd* nor *audience* nor *people* nor *group* will capture the same sense.” (Warner, 2002: 53)

Like the public sphere, “public” is thought to be a concept, a discursive category rather than a physical topography. According to Warner, the public exists by virtue of being addressed in a “chicken-and-egg circularity” (op.cit.: 50) and it is a virtual entity, whose reality lies in the reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in

order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence (op.cit.: 50-61). It is a space of discourse organised by nothing other than discourse itself; it is autotelic and exists only as the end for which books are published and shows are broadcast (op.cit.: 50). And the way *the* public functions in the public sphere – as *the people* – is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organised, and herein lies its true power. The public's nature as a discursive or communicative space does not imply that publics are mere talking shops without any agency. As they are not decision-making bodies, however, it is communicative action, as opposed to any other kind of action, in the form of public opinion that constitutes the instrument of their agency and makes them influential and central to pluralism and democracy. Communicative action is analysed extensively in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

3.1.2 The public sphere or a public sphere? Semi- and sub- publics

Any attempt to determine the topography of Habermas's public sphere raises the issue of whether the public sphere should be examined as autonomous, well defined, bordered, and most importantly, as a *single* entity. In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas mentions the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere, the plebeian public sphere and the close connection between the political public sphere and the literary public sphere during the 18th and 19th centuries. In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b) he mentions, among others, the “general public sphere” “institutionalised public spheres of parliamentary bodies”, “procedurally regulated public spheres” and the “informal public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 307-308). The topography or indeed any taxonomy of the concept is therefore problematic from the outset. Determining the boundaries and shape of the Habermasian public sphere is therefore a difficult task in light of such conceptual fuzziness.

What becomes obvious is that there does not exist, indeed there has never existed, one public who participated in the one, unique public sphere but many publics and indeed many public spheres – at least in tendency. As discussed in the first chapter, Habermas's initial placement of the public sphere was made with the simple contrast between a *bourgeois* public domain, a private domain (which includes the intimate sphere and what Habermas calls the public sphere of critically reasoned citizens) and the closed domain of the state. Even though he does accept and mention the existence of the plebeian public sphere and other models of public spheres, the very concept of *the*

one single bourgeois public sphere as the sole generator of public opinion and critic of state authority is problematic. Indeed, the purposeful neglect of the plebeian public sphere and the absence of any other *equal* social class counterparts – in fact, the absence of any equal counterparts – to his public sphere have been largely criticised as disregarding social differentiation.

Negt and Kluge made a crucial contribution in this critique with their influential work on the origins, emergence and role of the *proletarian* public sphere as the direct adversary of the bourgeois variant (Negt and Kluge, 1993):

“The proletarian public sphere negates the bourgeois one because it dissolves, partially destroys, and partially assimilates the latter’s elements. In serving its opposing interests, the bourgeois public sphere does the same to every form of the proletarian, which is not supported by the powers opposing it and this cannot protect itself from attack. A coexistence is impossible [...] [T]he proletarian public sphere is none other than the form in which the interests of the working class develop themselves.” (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 35, 92)

In “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere” (1993a), Habermas acknowledges that the plebeian public sphere constitutes “more than a mere variant, since it develops the bourgeois public sphere’s emancipatory potential in a new social context” (Habermas, 1993a: 426). He admits having purposely neglected the emergence and activities of the plebeian public sphere and its role in shaping democracy and society, and instead having conceptualised a bourgeois, non-inclusionary public sphere as the main non-state actor in politics. He therefore looks briefly into the “inner dynamics of a plebeian culture” (op.cit.: 427) emerging along with the bourgeoisie.

“This culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop [...] 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” (ibid.).

Against the same backdrop, and in response to his critics, Habermas also argues for the multiplicity of publics and their competing interests (op.cit.: 424-425).³⁸ In addition, he

³⁸ “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,

offers a clearer demarcation of the topography of public spheres and advocates the coexistence of *competing* public spheres, in the form of subcultural or class-specific public spheres “based on their own and initially not easily reconcilable premises” (op.cit.: 425) and often “having to confront with a hegemonic bourgeois public sphere” (ibid.).

Habermas had alluded to the creation of additional publics within the bourgeois public sphere in his study of its structural transformation (1992). He noted that the sharp separation between state and society, or between state and the private domain gradually gave way to a “multiplicity of intermediate, semi-private and semi-public organisations and class-specific public spheres” (Outhwaite, 2000: 25; also cf. Grant, 1995). This spurred the profusion of new publics of a different nature and function:

“State and society penetrate each other and bring forth a middle sphere of *semi-public, semi-private* relationships ordered by social legislation still emerging, the constitutional tenets of a private sphere that precedes the state and of a public sphere that connects society with the state and this has a function in the political realm are changed in their significance (as regards their sociological import and actual constitutional function) by virtue of a concurrent set of constitutional norms. For what can no longer be vouchsafed indirectly by means of exemption is now in need of being positively granted: a share in social benefits and participation in the institutions of the political realm’s public sphere” (Habermas, 1992b: 231).

In addition to the category of semi-publics, *sub-publics* also started to emerge as a result of the expansion of the public sphere. This new taxonomy of multiple differentiated (sub-) publics constituted a form of inclusion with the establishment of secondary public spheres. For this reason, Grant notes that rather than a place for inclusion, the public sphere may also be seen as a *selection medium* (Grant, 1997). Grant explains that displacing instead of excluding certain publics from the public sphere resulted in new, smaller spheres, created for those displaced from mainstream communication, that is, actors of “clandestine communication” (Grant, 1997: 94).³⁹ This led to the emergence of

as the basis for a consensus attainable at least in principle” (Habermas, 1993a: 424-425).

³⁹ Grant also gives the example of *Samizdat* publications in the former Soviet Union as a form of clandestine communication (Grant, 2000b: 71).

sub-cultural or class specific public spheres, in a way that the public sphere was transformed into a realm of conflicting and competing social interests. Fraser goes as far as arguing that the public sphere was always constituted by conflict and that the bourgeois public was never *the* public (Fraser, 1993: 116).

However, even though the history of the public sphere abounds with evidence of such struggle for domination, we should not underestimate Habermas's bourgeois public sphere or any dominant public at any given time. The conflictual nature of the public sphere may have had its roots in the plurality of competing publics, however it must be noted that it was bourgeois revolution that contributed to the consolidation of capitalist democracy in the Western world. In these cases the bourgeois public was indeed the public. It was the bourgeoisie which was educated and politically motivated and mobilised, formed social movements, and pressure groups to stimulate democratic procedures under an embryonic form of civil society. This is substantiated by Moore's influential work *The Social origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1996), where he traces the social origins of parliamentary democracy largely in a vigorous and independent class of bourgeois town dwellers and establishes the axiom 'no bourgeois - no democracy'.

By contrast, Calhoun makes the case against *multiple* public spheres and instead advocates *one* public sphere involving a field of discursive connections (clusters), e.g. feminist public sphere, subsidiary public of lawyers, etc. In this way a "more or less even flow of communication rather than among multiple public spheres" is achieved (Calhoun, 1993: 37). Through a similar perspective, Garnham contends:

"The problem is to construct systems of democratic accountability integrated with media systems of matching scale that *occupy the same social space* as that over which economic or political decisions will impact. If the impact is universal, then both the political and media systems must be universal. In this sense, a series of autonomous public spheres is not sufficient [...] There must be a single public sphere, even if we might want to conceive of this single public sphere as made up of a series of subsidiary public spheres, each organized around its own political structure, media system, and a set of norms and interests." (Garnham, 1993: 371, my emphasis)

A single public sphere, however, is both unattainable and ineffective, if we consider constant inclusion and exclusion procedures (Grant, 1997) as part of the structural transformation of the public sphere. It is such inclusion and exclusion procedures that lead to the emergence of new, sub- and semi- public spheres.

Moreover, there is strong evidence, both theoretical and empirical, against the singularity of the public sphere. Most scholars agree that although reference is made to *the* public, there are in fact multiple publics, or there could even be an infinite number of publics within the social totality. Benhabib affirms that democratisation in contemporary societies can be viewed as “the increase and growth of autonomous public spheres among participants” (Benhabib, 1993: 87) and Squires urges us to move away from the ideal of a single public sphere in order to allow recognition of the public struggles and political innovations of marginalized groups outside traditional or state-sanctioned public spaces and mainstream discourses dominated by white bourgeois males (Squires, 2002: 446). The constant creation of publics and public spheres point to a self-reinforcing concept of the public sphere in which “each public relates to another which is watching it and publics display their identity by ostensibly differentiating themselves from other publics” (Dayan, 2001: 744). This differentiation of publics has been endorsed by globalisation trends, the information revolution and modes of media consumption, which spurred a diffusion and fragmentation of the public sphere. As a result, one can belong to many different publics simultaneously in cross-public discourses, however this is not always encouraged. The difficulty of maintaining many separate places or distinct social spheres tends to “involve everyone in everyone else’s business” (Meyrowitz, 1985: 315).

On a different level, the conceptualisation of the public sphere as a single, privileged space would lead to its classification as a “meta-space” (Marchart, 1998: online), that is, a space to embrace, encompass and transcend all other similar spaces. Habermas has been criticised for having attempted to introduce such a meta-concept of the public sphere out of one single particular public space (cf. Grant, 2000b). According to this view, Habermas does not describe the public sphere as a domain or as a communicative space, but rather he identifies the concept of the bourgeois *public space* into the holistic concept of *public sphere*. In other words, public spaces are multiple, whereas the Habermasian public space “if it exists, is one public space among many, a space that is not in any way ontologically privileged over the others” (Marchart, 1998: online). The

Habermasian conceptualisation of the public sphere as a normative super-space or a meta-space, that is, a *single* space beyond any other, swallows its plurality and does not leave room for other models.

Based on the above, *the* public could be seen as an aggregate concept which – rightly or wrongly – represents an overarching entity of publics, a patchwork of many smaller publics emerging frequently and constantly, rather than a single entity. Any categorisation or taxonomy of the public sphere would inevitably exclude certain “partial” public spheres, therefore any reference to *the* public sphere will allude to the totality of existent public spheres.

Fraser makes the case for “strong” and “weak” publics within the public sphere: strong publics, whose discourse⁴⁰ encompasses both opinion formation and decision-making (e.g. sovereign parliaments), and weak publics, whose deliberative practice consists in opinion formation and does not encompass decision-making (Fraser, 1993: 134). As the term “strong” and “weak” publics suggest, the force of public opinion is strengthened when a body representing it is empowered to translate such “opinion” into authoritative decisions (op.cit., 134-135). However, is it accurate to describe a public *body* or a public *institution* as an example of *a* public? A public, (or a public sphere, is not meant by definition to belong to the sphere of the state. Instead of Fraser’s dual model, therefore, it is better to opt for the one suggested by Squires, who makes the distinction between *weaker* and *stronger* publics. Squires explains that stronger publics are those with ready access to organised forms of association and publicity such as independent media production, political action committees, professional organisations etc. (Squires, 2002: 457). Therefore, the public constitutes “a *multicontextual* space of circulation, organised not by a place or an institution but by the circulation of discourse” (Warner, 2002: 85, my emphasis).

3.1.3 Counterpublics

Based on the discussion above, a model of multiple publics and multiple public spheres seems to be preferable to one of a single public. Multiple publics, however, do not

⁴⁰ Habermas uses a concept of discourse (*Diskurs*) that is particular to his theory and is based on his model of communicative rationality. The latter, together with *Diskurs*, are analysed in 4.2.

necessarily enjoy an equal footing in the overarching realm of the public sphere or in society. Fraser's distinction between strong and weak publics and Squires's distinction between stronger and weaker publics are made *within* the so-called "dominant" publics which represent a corresponding "dominant" public sphere. However, there have been conceptualised public spheres and therefore also publics outside this "mainstream" schema of "stronger" or "dominant" publics. These are largely referred to as "counterpublics" and their internal taxonomy as well as their classification in relation to dominant publics can be complex.

Warner describes "dominant publics" as those that can take their discourse for granted, "misrecognising the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy" and counterpublics as "spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poiesis of scene-making will be transformative, not replicative merely" (Warner, 2002: 88). According to this view, dominant publics consider their agenda of common interests as either the only, universal agenda, or as the 'normal', mainstream agenda. All other publics and their interests are considered less important or less relevant. Would this mean, however, that the modus operandi of counterpublics and indeed what makes them counter to the dominant, mainstream publics is the promotion of an agenda aimed at reform and transformation against the putative 'universality' or 'normalcy' of dominant publics? Accepting this hypothesis would seriously undermine the role of dominant publics and ultimately reduce them to meaningless talking shops. On one hand, the purpose of a counterpublic does lie in its specific agenda aiming to satisfy a common unifying interest.

"Counterpublics are "counter" to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity. As publics, they remain oriented to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and its affects. A lesbian and gay public has been reshaped so as to ignore or refuse the counterpublic character that has marked its history" (Warner, 2002: 77-78).

On the other hand, this does not mean that a counterpublic does not or cannot deliberate on matters of the "wider" common interest, observe other publics or participate in other discourses. The term "counterpublic" does not undermine the quality of a public – counterpublics are publics too. In most cases, however, when members of a specific counterpublic observe or participate in other public spheres, they do so with a certain

presupposition of their own views and with a certain bias of their own interests, given that they would seek to acquire the status of a public – or a dominant public. An example of a counterpublic would be the feminist or the gay public during the 1960s. Warner notes in his above statement that such publics have been “reshaped so as to ignore or refuse the counterpublic character that has marked [their] history” (Warner, 2002: 78). The nature and purpose of this reshaping is analysed below.

Asen (2000) suggests that we should locate the “counter” in counterpublic in the examination of how publics articulate unjust exclusions from wider publics (Asen, 2000: 439). His argument states that we must view counterpublics as collectives that emerge to articulate such exclusions and “imagine themselves explicitly as alternative collectives” (op.cit., 440). These “emergent collectives” are not necessarily composed of persons excluded from wider public spheres, which may lead to heterogeneous coalitions and the recognition of the simultaneous affinities individuals have with multiple social groups (op.cit., 439). In her study of the feminist public, Felski uses the term counterpublic when referring to “coalitions of overlapping subcommunities, which share common interest in combating gender oppression but which are differentiated not only by class and race positions but often by institutional locations” (Felski, 1989: 171). It is important to reiterate, however, that counterpublics are by no means “weak” or “weaker” publics and the difference with publics lies more in their discourse (Warner) and their agenda consisting of a single common interest.

Being characterised by a specific agenda (the feminist counterpublic is *expected* to give a feminist point of view in discussion and to promote feminist values, even if this may not always be the case), there is constant struggle for a place in the public realm next to other publics. For this reason, Fraser refers to such counterpublics as *subaltern counterpublics*, populated by historically oppressed groups that have been excluded from the dominant public sphere by legal or extralegal means:

“Members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics*, in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpenetrations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1993: 123).

Fraser, therefore, sees a dual function in subaltern counterpublics: they function as spaces of “withdrawal and re-groupment” (op.cit.: 124) and as bases and training grounds for “agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (ibid.). It seems that recognition by dominant publics is vital to subaltern counterpublics, since the latter’s members consider dominant public spheres as arenas for the formation of social identities. Fraser’s main argument is that the multiplicity of publics is better for participatory parity than a single public and that multiple but unequal publics must participate.

The attribute “subaltern” seems rather derogatory for a counterpublic, in that it demotes its scope to a category which is lower and narrower than that of a counterpublic. It could be argued that simply labeling it a “counterpublic” and thus differentiating it from dominant publics would suffice for the sake of an accurate taxonomy. However, what is crucial in Fraser’s study is that she seems to focus on historically oppressed counterpublics which are now considered of equal status to publics, namely feminist, working-class and other publics. In other words, her study does not include examples of contemporary subaltern counterpublics. Indeed, despite her characterisation of counterpublics as “subaltern”, she considers them to have been more “public” than dominant publics. In her critique of *Structural Transformation*, she affirms that the bourgeois public was never *the* public, but the public consisted rather of “multiple competing counterpublics such as nationalist, popular, peasant, elite women, working-class counterpublics” (Fraser, 1993: 116). This contributes to the criticism of Habermas’s model, as he formulated it in *Structural Transformation*, which focused on and conceptualised a model of the public sphere based on a single, privileged, male, bourgeois public.

Warner emphasises the competing nature of subaltern counterpublics against dominant ones:

“Subaltern counterpublics are structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. Friction against the dominant public forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness” (Warner, 2002: 86).

Unlike Fraser, Warner does not focus on a critique of Habermas’s model and does not only examine counterpublics that competed against the bourgeois public sphere.

Instead, he offers a more generalised approach and points out the “agonistic” (Arendt’s term: 1998) nature of counterpublics and their friction with dominant ones. He notes that they make “different assumptions” about the subtexts of communication and about what can be said (Warner, 2002: 86) and that they are characterised by a “poetic-expressive” discourse. An example of such subaltern counterpublics which antagonise dominant ones could be neo-nazi movements in contemporary western world.

Subaltern counterpublics may also emerge in a process of carnivalisation sensu Bakhtin (1984a; 1984b). Bakhtin’s theory of the carnival and of the carnivalisation of politics describes precisely the subversion of hegemonic discourse and practices through mockery using hyperbolic and vulgar humour, which leads to the gradual establishment of a “counterhierarchy” (Morris, 1995: 10). The Carnival, according to Bakhtin, is a *chronotope* (place and time, cf. Bakhtin, 1984b: 123) of increased collectivity and sense of belonging in an equal setting. Individual differences are hidden behind masks or disguises and new, alter- personas are projected. Bakhtin makes clear that during carnival everyone who was “usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age” (Bakhtin, 1984a: 10) was considered equal. Furthermore:

“Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (Bakhtin, 1984b:123).

This sense of collectivity, of “free and familiar contact between people” (Bakhtin, 1984a: 10) is crucial for Bakhtin’s notion of carnival. Moreover, carnival, according to Bakhtin, is not merely a “pageant” (Bakhtin, 1984b:122) with masks, performers and spectators, but also a site of active participation (ibid.). Carnival participants “live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a *carnivalistic life*” (ibid., emphasis on the original). This sort of life entails a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (Bakhtin, 1984a: 10) in such way that it represents “the reverse side of the world”, or “life turned inside out” (Bakhtin, 1984b: 122).

Bakhtin developed the metaphor of the carnival to demonstrate a radical display of ‘otherness’ with its emphasis on a “*new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life” (Bakhtin, 1984b: 123, emphasis on the original). In this way, subaltern *carnivalesque*

social forces emerge, which enter hegemonic discourse while enjoying impunity.

“Carnival broke with the tyranny of single-voices official speech: it represented the world from the other’s alleged viewpoint, instead of representing the other as opposite to the self. [...] Carnival would show the consequences of carrying the official priorities to excess, rendering their solemnity comic, and by implicitly pleading for a return to moderation, flexibility and tolerance. [...] [P]olitics can be carnivalised: its values inverted, its forms mocked, its content taken out of context to appear comic” (Morris, 1995: 10-11).

The carnivalisation of politics described above constitutes one of the increasingly popular attempts of contesting authority. Carnavalesque political satire used by counterpublics, for instance, can constitute a form of radical oppositional politics, legitimised or not, with the intention of challenging the status quo. In his discussion of the Notting Hill Carnival as a form of political resistance to oppression, Jackson (1988) paraphrases Clausewitz in stating: “Carnival is, like rioting and war, the continuation of politics by other means” (Jackson, 1988: 226). Its subversive power lies in its playful and exaggerated character; carnivalesque responses to hegemony and authority employ laughter, excess and absurdity rather than rational argumentation. In this way, "extrapolitical" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 6) carnivalesque counterpublics openly challenge authority and dominant public spheres while themselves remaining unchallenged.

Squires (2002) does not fully agree with the simplistic distinction between publics and counterpublics. She proposes instead three types of responses that a marginalized public sphere might produce given existing political economic, social and cultural conditions: enclave publics, counterpublics and satellite publics (Squires, 2002: 448). According to this distinction, an enclave public is a (non-dominant) public which enclaves itself, hiding counter-hegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive or avoid sanctions, while internally producing lively debate and planning in safe places. Counterpublics are those who can engage in debate with wider publics to test ideas and perhaps utilize traditional social movement tactics (boycotts, civil disobedience). Finally, satellite publics are publics seeking separation from other publics for reasons other than oppressive relations, but they are involved in wider public discourses from time to time. Warner agrees that some publics are more likely than others to stand in for *the* public, to frame their address as the universal discussion of the people, while other publics mark themselves off unmistakably from any general or dominant public (Warner, 2002: 84).

Squires points out that different sites within a public sphere may foster any of these responses at a given time (Squires, 2002: 465).

While Squires's topography of counterpublics is novel and well established both conceptually and empirically, she seems to regard the public sphere as an end-state to the long and suffered struggle of marginalised publics for recognition and equality. She suggests that a marginalised public will move from the satellite to the enclave and ultimately to the counterpublic sphere, which is "the optimal choice for the public sphere" (op.cit., 460). This entails a certain mystification and idealisation of the public sphere as the ultimate goal of all marginalised and oppressed publics. It highlights its importance but views it agonistically in Arendtian terms (cf. Arendt, 1998; Benhabib, 1993), and not essentially communicatively.

Finally, publics (and counterpublics) are not necessarily homogeneous in membership or participation. Squires reinforces that view by suggesting the possibility for heterogeneous black publics to emerge for those who do not identify as black but are concerned with similar issues to be involved in a coalition with black people (Squires, 2002: 454). These heterogeneous coalitions, to follow Squires's 'ladder' of publicness, may in the end transform themselves into organised social movements instead of public spheres. Losing their public sphere identity and 'status', though, means that they lose part of their inclusiveness, spontaneity and freedom of deliberation and enter the temporality of politics, having to adapt themselves to the performatives of rational-critical discourse (ibid.). For many counterpublics, to do so would be to "cede the original hope of transforming, not just policy, but the space of public life itself" (Warner, 2002: 89).

Lastly, the definition of a counterpublic depends on the demarcation of the dominant, the hegemonic, the prevailing public or publics. If we accept the multiplicity of publics and of public spheres (these terms are not interchangeable), then we will also have to accept that these multiple public spheres are not all equal. Some are more dominant than others (or, to use Fraser's terms, "stronger" than others) and they may be counter to each other, thus functioning as counterpublics in relation to other publics. Two public spheres may be considered dominant (in situations of bipolarity for instance) but at the same time be counterpublic spheres to each other, or to other spheres. At the same time, one public sphere may include both publics and counterpublics, e.g. the black public

sphere includes a portion of the feminist or gay public spheres (or counterpublics), the public spheres of the disabled which include the public spheres of the deaf, the blind, the mute etc. and a portion of the “dominant” male public sphere. This overlap between publics and counterpublics hinders a clear conceptualisation of these terms and points to the fuzziness of the boundaries (Grant, 2000b: 84; Grant, 2004: 226) and shape of the public sphere.

3.1.4 Public spheres vs. Heterotopias

The debate between Habermas and Michel Foucault is analysed extensively in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Foucault’s concept of “hétérotopies” (Foucault, 1984: 47) is discussed here as a spatial alternative to Habermas’s public sphere. Foucault uses the concept of “hétérotopies” to refer to spaces which do not conform to the model of homogeneous and ‘normal’ everyday spaces. In his analysis, he initially contrasts them with utopias (*utopies*), which “have no real locality” (Foucault, 1994: xviii). Utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces (Foucault, 1984: 47) which is why they “permit fables” (Foucault, 1994: xviii). Foucault’s notion of *heterotopias* (from the Greek *hetero*=other + *topos*=place) refers to actually existing physical spaces which “dissolve our myths” (Foucault, 1994: xviii) of (chimerical) homogeneous communication spaces. These ‘other’ spaces act as counter-sites (“contre-emplacements” in 1984: 47) or mirrors to other actually existing spaces in society, reflecting common experiences of everyday social spaces. They have different forms and fulfil specific functions. Examples of heterotopias include schools, care-homes, prisons, theatres, even cemeteries. The school, for example, may be regarded as a reflection of society or of political structures; a monastery may be regarded as the sacred space which reflects the same structures but is based on different norms and fulfils different functions; a theatre as the space reflecting life, emotions and events.

It is important to note that the functions of heterotopias are not constant through time but volatile (Foucault’s vehement opposition to universal or transcendental concepts is analysed in Chapter 6). Not any actually existing space can be regarded as heterotopia, however there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to construct heterotopias (Foucault, 1984: 47-8).

Heterotopias are not necessarily spaces of exclusion, even though prisons, psychiatric hospitals or retirement homes constitute examples of “*hétérotopies de déviation*” (op.cit.: 48). Foucault also mentions the category of “*hétérotopies de compensation*” (op.cit.: 49) referring to the ‘other’ spaces of brothels or even colonies. The role of such spaces is to create an actually existing space of illusion (ibid.) that is modelled on another actually existing imperfect space. In other words, it is an example of a heterotopia simulating utopia. Regardless of their nature and function, heterotopic sites are different to public spaces in that they are not freely accessible. Entry to such spaces is either compulsory (e.g. prison, psychiatric hospital) or through permission or membership (e.g. cinema, school, monastery etc.).

Heterotopias are not homogeneous. They presuppose a plurality of discourses and constitute spaces in which “radically different social spaces can come into connection with one another” (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: xii). In this way, they introduce alterity into uniformity, ‘otherness’ into ‘normality’. All the other real sites than can be found within heterotopic sites are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted (Foucault, 1984: 47). In this way, heterotopic spaces are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible (op.cit.: 48).⁴¹ One typical example is the space of gentlemen’s clubs established by British colonists in India, which were radically different from Indian life and everyday social spaces (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: xii). This introduction of ‘otherness’ is crucial to Foucault’s conceptualisation of a heterotopia.

In this respect, existing contemporary public spheres are similar to heterotopic sites. They too presuppose a plurality of discourses, following specific norms in order to fulfil specific functions. They may be considered as a simulation of utopian models of the public sphere so they could also be regarded as ‘*hétérotopies de compensation*’. Virtual or remote public spheres in particular, which are constituted via the media of the Internet, satellite or other technologies, display heterotopic characteristics. They bring together social spaces which are radically different to the rest and may some times be incompatible. Lastly, even though they operate on the principle of free and universal access, in actual fact this is limited by presuppositions to rational debate. Those wishing to participate may not fulfil the caveats of generalisation of common interests or

⁴¹ “L’hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles”.

bracketing of power differentials for instance (examined in 3.2.5 and 3.2.6 below). As regards Internet public spheres, membership may be limited by additional issues such as lack of availability of hardware or software, network administrators etc. For this reason, it could be suggested that certain actually existing public spheres resemble Foucauldian heterotopic sites, while the public sphere in its normative Habermasian version is more like a “homotopos” (Marchart, 1998: online). The concept of homotopos refers to a space of sameness rather than a space of otherness and alterity, a sort of “anti-heterotopia” (ibid.) which eschews the privileged, limited or exclusionary nature of heterotopias. Therefore, amongst the multiplicity of heterotopias as ‘des espaces autres’, public spheres could be conceptualised as *homotopoi*, spaces of sameness as regards norms, goals and functions and with wider accessibility.

3.1.5 Where is the public sphere? Towards a “despatialised” model

Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a specific domain – the public domain versus the private (Habermas, 1992b: 2). Depending on the circumstances, either the organs of the state or the media, like the press, which provide communication among members of the public, may be counted as “public organs” (ibid.). This “floating” nature of the public sphere, wavering between the public and the state, between public and private realms, acting as a medium and sometimes becoming fully absorbed by the medium leaves us no room than to describe its nature and position as essentially fluid. Squires advocates this fluidity by noting that allowing for the response types of enclave publics, counterpublics and satellite publics to exist simultaneously not only across publics but also within dominant public spheres, we can retain the flexibility necessary to describe the fluid nature of public spheres (Squires, 2002: 465).

In attempting to determine the shape and boundaries of the public sphere, Habermas describes how a “spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into a public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 361). Still, it is not clear whether the public sphere is itself a space.

“Every encounter in which actors do not just observe each other but take a second person attitude, reciprocally attributing communicative freedom to each other, unfolds in a *linguistically constituted public space*, founded in communicative action. [This] spatial structure of simple episodic encounters can

be expanded, rendered more permanent in an abstract form for a larger public of present persons” (Habermas, 1996b: 361, my emphasis).

The public sphere could therefore be considered as an “enlargement” or an abstraction of “linguistically constituted public spaces”. Squires adopts a similar approach⁴² and Benhabib (1993) also talks about “models of public space” in her comparative study of Arendt’s ‘agonistic model’, Ackerman’s ‘liberal model’ and Habermas’s ‘discursive model’. Marchart also advocates the spatiality of the public sphere and argues that it derives from the spatial operations of discourse (Marchart, 1998: online). In other words, he argues that it is discourse that creates the space that is the public sphere.

Still, identifying the public sphere with a physical space may be plausible but it must take account of the contingencies of communication media. Face-to-face models of communication in a fixed spatial-temporal context are today inadequate to reflect the increasingly mediated communication that produce and sustain contemporary public spheres, such as the Internet or interactive television. Such public spheres constitute rather spatial simulations or “spatial metaphors” (Grant, 2000b: 68; Carpignano, 1999: 184). They give the individuals who participate in them a sense of belonging to an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) of people who are “widely dispersed in space (and perhaps also in time)” (Thompson, 1993: 183). This floating character of the contemporary public sphere points to a non-spatial model.

Let us examine the view that the public sphere is not a space, but instead a ‘fiction’, a metaphor without any spatial relevance.⁴³ The terms “communicative”, “discursive”, or “social” space may denote abstract entities, and space does not necessarily mean forum, coffee-house, salon, or someone’s house (although it could). Furthermore, Benhabib points out that the public sphere emerges wherever debate occurs (Benhabib, 1993: 87),

⁴² “[A] *set of physical or mediated spaces* where people can gather and share information, debate opinions, and tease out their political interests and social needs with other participants. The spaces of a public sphere can be formal or informal. Conversations may occur spontaneously or be planned (e.g. neighbourhood meeting)” (Squires, 2002: 448, my emphasis).

⁴³ cf. Grant’s argument that without Habermas’s epistemology, the public sphere can be conceptualised in terms of “abstraction [...] without topographical equivalence” (Grant, 2000b: 73).

and thus that it cannot be restricted to certain places such as a parliament for instance. According to this rationale, the public space itself is not a physical space at all (nor a space among spaces), but rather a *principle*. For Negt and Kluge, it is “not so much a site, as a process” (Hansen, “Foreword”, in Negt and Kluge, 1993: xl). Others see it as an omnipresent potential waiting to be used:

“The public sphere cannot simply be a street or a square, someplace where I go to become an object or instead heroically to reassert my subjectivity, some other place out into which I go to “intervene” or “act”. If it is anywhere, the public is “in” me, but it is all that is not me in me, not reducible to or containable within “me”, all that tears me from myself, opens me to the ways I differ from myself and exposes me to that alterity in others” (Keenan, 1993: 132-133).

Keenan’s statement encapsulates a seemingly constructivist view that the public sphere is what we make of it. If the public sphere is not a space but it is “in” us, as Keenan suggests, then it constitutes a potential which is realised whenever we decide to use it. Space, in this view, is a temporary and fleeting construction (Grant, Baecker).

Certainly, by defining the public sphere from an essentially spatial perspective we become submerged in its spatiality and neglect its fundamentally communicative nature. It comes into being with discourse which is primarily a communicative concept, contrary to Marchart’s vehement support for its spatiality. In this respect, Watson argues that for Habermas the public sphere is not a space (social or physical), but rather it is dialogue, even though the public sphere can involve space as dialogue occurs in a shared space (Watson, 1997: online). By defining the public sphere as dialogue, however, we are again entering the vicious circle of indicating the spatial dimension of dialogue and thus defining the public sphere as a space instead of communication. This vicious circle can be easily avoided by defining the public sphere as a “communicative space” in order to denote both its spatiality and its communicative nature.

It is evident that both of the diametrically opposing views of the public sphere as a spatial entity and as a non-spatial present certain weaknesses. This leads to the option of a “de-spatialised” model (Thompson, 1993: 187). Such a model would be abstract, shapeless, more informal and spontaneous than Habermas’s model. Its shapeless form

would resemble that of a “rhizome” without a beginning, an end or a centre (ibid).⁴⁴ “De-spatialised” does not mean “non-spatial”, but rather denotes a shift from the notion of space as one of the defining characteristics of the public sphere to that of communication. Indeed, by defining the public sphere from an essentially spatial perspective we become submerged in its spatiality and neglect its fundamentally communicative nature. If we deprive the public sphere of a physical space or a “shared locale” (Thompson, 1993: 183), it may still “operate” and retain its functions through virtual or other forms of non-physical, mediated spaces. If we deprive the public sphere of communication in any form, it collapses.

Critiques of the spatial dimension of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere led him to reconsider his initial model of *Öffentlichkeit* as a “sphere of private people come together as a public” – Habermas, 1992b: 27), and reconceptualise it as a “network”:

“The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communications are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions” (Habermas, 1996b: 360).

The difference between the earlier and the reconceptualised model is that a network implies a higher degree of organisation and interconnectedness, and also, more importantly, it moves away from strictly spatial references. This is also illustrated by the stipulation that communications in the public sphere network are filtered and organised into topically specified public opinions (ibid.), while the earlier model focuses on the public use of reason as method and aim (Grant, 2000b: 68) without specifying how it is used or achieved.

Yet, if we consider the argument that the public sphere is not a spatial entity, then it would be classified as “non-space” or “non-place”. It would belong to the realm of the philosophical, the normative, the ideal, the utopian; it would become “an abstraction” (Grant, 2000b: 73). This would not do justice to earlier and contemporary attempts at public debate in the form of embryonic, successful or not, public spheres. A “de-

⁴⁴ Thompson borrows the term “rhizome” from Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, who first used it in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism ad Schizophrenia* (1988) in order to describe all kinds of non-hierarchical networks.

spatialised” conceptualisation (Thompson, 1993: 187), on the other hand, suggests the existence of public spheres albeit in a non-tangible form. Networks described by Habermas (1996b: 360) established for communicating information and opinions, filtering and synthesising “streams of communication” (ibid.) for the generation of public opinions represent contemporary forms of “de-spatialised” public spheres. The Internet (e.g. wikipolitics), interactive television, televoting and other forms of virtual participation in political debate constitute attempts at generating public opinions and contesting authority through public critical debate. Of course, there are crucial issues of participation, accessibility and legitimacy in such cases, nevertheless such fora do exist, they are not abstractions, and they represent contemporary attempts at (re-)creating virtual public spheres.

3.2 Aporias of the normative claim of the ‘public sphere’

This section discusses Habermas’s project of establishing a normative model of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). By critically examining its historical emergence, consolidation and disintegration, Habermas attempts to demonstrate that, although the public sphere is structurally transformed with the penetration of state powers and the nefarious impact of the media, its emancipatory potential remains as a result of strong normative foundations.

These normative foundations comprise several interrelated conceptual categories: the *rationality of the subject* upon which communication in the public sphere is based for the formation of *public opinion* and for its *legitimation*, the notion that the public sphere is a privileged domain in which power can be *contested*, and the *inclusionary* nature of the public sphere. In examining these, this section will critically consider the normative power invested by Habermas in the rational capacity of the public in *his* account of a putatively inclusionary public sphere.

3.2.1 The Public Use of Reason

Structural Transformation introduces strong normative claims and attempts to identify the still-valuable normative ideals of modernity, which involve a rationalisation of society and of democratic will formation (Calhoun, 1993: 40). This is illustrated by the very definition of the public sphere given by Habermas:

“The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public [...] The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*)” (Habermas, 1992b: 27)

This public use of reason was initially practiced in the salons and coffeehouses of 18th century Europe between members of an educated reading public, which began to debate critically rather than merely discuss matters of the common good. Rational-critical debate is presented as the lifeblood of the public sphere and it is precisely the decline from a “reasoning” to a “consuming” public that marks its structural transformation and ultimate degeneration. This conception, which alludes to Kantian and Hegelian ideals of the public use of reason,⁴⁵ emphasises the power of the individual’s reason and its salience in public discourse. Only a public sphere founded on the public use of reason can lead to “rational” democratic will and public opinion formation.

There is no explicit definition of the concept of *reason* used by Habermas in his analysis of the public sphere, even though it is presented in *Structural Transformation* as the norm for all debate in the public sphere. In his magnum opus *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984-1987), Habermas attempts a more thorough examination of the rational basis of communication and neglects “putatively non-rational forms of communication such as irony, jokes, fictions and other ‘distortions’” (Grant, 2000b: 31). If this attempt implies the exclusion of these elements from rational-critical debate, then it would dangerously limit the boundaries of reason in organised argumentation. These forms of “non-rational” communication certainly have a place in critical debate, for they often mask “rational” argumentation by way of allegories, metaphors, ironies etc.

3.2.2 Private vs. public use of reason

Before examining the normative attribution to reason, it is essential to clarify its *public* use as opposed to private. Kant originally recognised the emancipatory potential of the public use of reason and distinguished it from its private use in arguing that the latter

⁴⁵ According to Kantian philosophy, Enlightenment depended on the deployment of reason in the public sphere (Grant, 2000b: 75). Hegel regarded the subjection of domination to reason as the public sphere’s main function (Habermas, 1992b: 117).

may be confined and deprived of critical argument in the case of positions of duty.⁴⁶ Habermas's "public use of reason" is not public in a sense that it is addressed to an audience, but rather its publicity derives primarily from the very (physical) spaces where it is practised. In other words, given that the institutions of the nascent public sphere were salons and coffeehouses, the use of reason in these "unofficial" sites as opposed to a parliament for example, is essentially public.

"Even outside of the political domain, arguments call for a public use of reason (in a sense). Rational discourses merely make a topic of what functions in everyday life as a resource for the binding force of speech acts, namely validity aims that demand intersubjective recognition and offer the prospect of public justification when they are questioned" (Habermas, 1998: 86).

This should not lead to the assumption that argumentative debate in the conjugal family can also be classified as a "public use" of reason. At this early stage of the public sphere's emergence, the spheres of public and private are well distinct according to Habermas, and the conjugal family belongs not to the public but to the *intimate sphere* (Habermas, 1992b: 48). The use of reason in these spheres is not considered by Habermas as public.

It is important to emphasise that Habermas appears to be interested neither in forms of *private* use of reason nor in *individual* reason as a capacity, but rather to its *collective* form, use and manifestation. This points to a further distinction beyond the public-private dichotomy, which is that of an *aggregate* as opposed to individual notion of rationality. Only when private people come together as a "public",⁴⁷ their use of reason

⁴⁶ "The public use of a man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one's reason I mean that use which anyone can make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public. What I term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular civil post or office with which he is entrusted" (Kant: [1784]).

⁴⁷ This also alludes to the emergence of the public sphere from the private realm.

is public, it embodies the true power of the public sphere and ultimately forms the basis for popular sovereignty.⁴⁸

In this respect, Rawls (1997) also makes a sharp distinction between public and “nonpublic” reasons and detaches himself from the simple dichotomy between public and private reason. Instead, he proposes a category of “nonpublic” reasons that are neither public nor private.

“Public reason is characteristic of a democratic people: it is the reason of its citizens, of those sharing the status of equal citizenship [...] there are many non-public reasons and but one public reason. Among the nonpublic reasons are those of associations of all kinds: churches and universities, scientific societies and professional groups. [...] This way of reasoning is public with respect to their members, but nonpublic with respect to political society and to citizens generally. [...] These reasons are social, and certainly not private” (Rawls, 1997: 93-99).

It is evident that Rawls’s “nonpublic reasons” are used within different associations of civil society and therefore seem more institutionalised and thematised than Habermas’s public use of reason. In this case, the attributes “public”, “nonpublic”, “social”⁴⁹ and “private” refer to the status of the participants as a group, that is, if they gather as a group of citizens, of students, of scientists, of members of a particular faith etc. These “nonpublic reasons” are used in unofficial or semi-official gatherings of such groups but this does not mean that they should be excluded from the public sphere as “non-public” and therefore not qualifying for a place in public debate. Furthermore, Rawls’s “nonpublic reasons” comprise examples of *loci* that would partly match Habermas’s model of public sphere: unofficial gatherings of private people who come together to engage in reasoned debate for the formation of “topically specified” (Habermas, 1996b: 360) opinions. The difference is that such opinions would not be characterised as public

⁴⁸ “Certainly one may say, ‘Freedom to speak or write can be taken from us by a superior power, but never the freedom to think!’ But how much, and how correctly, would we think if we did not think as it were in common with others, with whom we mutually communicate!” (Kant, cited in Habermas, 1992b: 104).

⁴⁹ The emergence and rise of the social sphere from within the public and private sphere and the ultimate submersion of the latter in the social sphere was extensively (and initially) considered by Hannah Arendt – cf. *The Human Condition*, [1958] 1998: 38-49.

with regard to their scope, which would not include “political society and [...] citizens generally” (Rawls, 1997: 99). Habermas’s *public* use of reason implies critical argumentation of a wider range of issues.

3.2.3 The force of the better argument

As explained in Chapter 2, according to Habermas’s earlier model, the public use of reason enabled the equalisation of power among participants in the public sphere (Habermas, 1992b: 71) through the *force of the better argument*:

““Publicity” is the common perspective from which the citizens *mutually* convince one another of what is just and unjust by the force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1998: 64).

Habermas argues that the “force of the better argument” bracketed status differences (Calhoun, 1993: 13) and elevated the public sphere to an ideal realm where “the conflicting private will of rational people could be brought into harmony” (ibid., 21). It moved participants towards greater understanding and ultimate consensus, which is, according to the model in question, the purpose of debate for the formation of public opinion. Reason manifested through the force of the better argument, however, involves a set of fundamental presuppositions.

Firstly, the public use of reason presupposes and derives its power from freedom of speech and expression. In the embryonic stages of the public sphere, when these freedoms were not fully granted, the use of reason was practiced by “internal” as opposed to “public” groups and was thus revealed gradually. In particular, Habermas argues that before the transition from representative publicness to the embryonic bourgeois public sphere, reason was still considered a privilege of the nobility (Habermas, 1992b: 31) “because it was a threat to any and all relations of domination” (Habermas, 1992b: 35).

“Reason, which through public use of the rational faculty was to be realised in the rational communication of a public consisting of cultivated human beings, itself needed to be protected from becoming public because it was a threat to any and all relations of domination.” (Habermas, 1992b: 35)

This points to the significance that Habermas places on reason in a democratic society. The initial reluctance of its public use aimed at depriving the public of the freedom of contestation of authority and this constituted a form of domination and oppression.

Secondly, Habermas's theory stipulates that power differentials and interests must be bracketed in public rational argumentation. The force of the better argument thus presupposes a disregard of the identities or social status of the debaters and places the emphasis on merits of argument to the detriment of power.⁵⁰

Rational debate also presupposes that participants set aside their individual interests and communicate on the basis of reason alone in order to reach consensus, for the promotion of universal interests.

“Neutralisation of social power and rationalisation of political domination in the medium of public discussion indeed presuppose now as they did in the past a possible consensus, that is, the possibility of an objective agreement among competing interests in accord with universal and binding criteria. Otherwise the power relation between pressure and counterpressure, however publicly exercised, creates at best an unstable equilibrium of interests supported by temporary power constellations that in principle is devoid of rationality according to the standard of a universal interest.” (Habermas, 1992b: 234)

The primacy of “universal” over individual or subjective interests as a proviso for the use of reason is further analysed in 3.2.6. In short, rational-critical debate in Habermas's public sphere presupposes that individuals set aside their individual interests in favour of ‘common’, or ‘universal’ interests. Only in this way will participants be able to debate rationally, to use their reason alone, irrespective of interests, and fulfil their duties as citizens of generating public opinion and critique authority.

⁵⁰ Cf. “While the bourgeoisie, for all practical purposes excluded from leadership in state and Church, in time completely took over all the key positions in the economy, and while the aristocracy compensated for its material inferiority with royal privileges and an even more rigorous stress upon hierarchy in social intercourse, in the *salons* the nobility and the *grande bourgeoisie* of finance and administration assimilating itself to that nobility met with the “intellectuals” on an equal footing” (Habermas, 1992b: 33).

3.2.4 Reason as a medium

In addition to the above presuppositions of the public use of reason, what is crucial is its conceptualisation by Habermas as a “medium of political confrontation” (Habermas, 1992b: 27). Carpignano (1999) makes an interesting contribution on this issue. He raises the question of how reason can become a *medium* of confrontation (Carpignano, 1999: 180) according to the Habermasian conceptualisation. Reason is certainly crucial to debate and contestation, however Habermas’s model idealises reason as “*the medium*” for rational critical conversation (Habermas, 1992b: 27), failing to examine the role of the media of mass communication in rational argumentation in the public sphere.

“In spite of the preeminence Habermas assigns to print in his narrative of the bourgeois public sphere, the medium remains secondary and inconsequential in the normative definition of publicity” (Carpignano, 1999: 182).

Carpignano’s observation succinctly points out that, although Habermas attributes the expansion and evolution of the public sphere to the media (the printed press of the 17th and 18th century) and blames them for its decline and ultimate degeneration, nevertheless the media seem to be absent from the processes of rational critical discourse and have a residual function in Habermas’s model of democratic will formation. As Livingstone and Lunt (1994) rightly argue, the media are certainly not marginal to the political process, and “in general are part of discursive democracy rather than a sphere of social activity separated from the political” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 30). Consequently, Habermas’s normative account of the public sphere based on rational contestation suffers from failing to account for mediatisation, which is a crucial factor in communication in the public sphere. An adequate reconceptualisation of the normative content of the public sphere’s theoretical basis should therefore consider the role and function of the media not only as a means of communication per se but also as filters of opinion and will formation.

According to Habermas, the early press constituted an “instrument through which political decisions could be thought before the new forum of the public” (Habermas, 1992b: 58). The characterisation of the press as an *instrument* of the public sphere is of particular interest. At the time, of course, critical press was still evolving but nevertheless its role was not to function merely as an amplifier of decisions and

comments made by the authorities and the public respectively, but rather as a forum for debate and a filter of opinion and will formation through public scrutiny. The function of the press at the time was both that of communicating and of forming public opinion, that is, the press acted both as a transmitter, or a medium, and as a forum or a 'site' where public opinion was formed.

By presenting it as an instrument of a physically and conceptually distinct public sphere that emerged in coffeehouses (and other forms of "early institutions"), however, Habermas seems to relegate the press into a residual function. There is extensive literature that examines the media of mass communication in general as a public sphere and not merely as a tool of a public sphere (cf. Garnham, 1993; Watson, 1997; Kellner, 1990 among others). To neglect their assumption of the role of a public sphere is a considerable omission and renders any critique of the relation between media and the public sphere incomplete. As Carpignano argues above, Habermas fails to mention this potential at this stage of the development of the press (Carpignano, 1999: 182). Indeed, on the one hand Habermas emphasises the importance of printed journals and their increasing popularity in the 18th century in assuming the role of discussion fora, in disseminating information, views and critiques and thus helping to foster a bourgeois public sphere and an embryonic form of public opinion. On the other hand, the mere function of the medium is presented to be that of "an *instrument*, a technical means at the disposal of a preconstituted, rational, discursive subject which, if used properly, ensures the outcome of the linguistic engagement" (Carpignano, 1999: 182, my emphasis).

In the later works *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) and *The Inclusion of the Other* (1998), Habermas sets a further precondition for the public use of reason. He explicitly states that the rationality of debate in the public sphere is assured by "a vibrant political culture favourable to open participation" (Habermas, 1998: xx), which is also "accommodating" and "accustomed to political freedom" (Habermas, 1996b: 486; 488; 490):

"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 socialisation, of the political culture of a populace accustomed to freedom" (Habermas, 1993a: 453)

While this cannot be contested, it should be borne in mind that political culture is not a static but essentially dynamic concept which encapsulates the behavioural and attitudinal pattern of citizens and leaders that affects a political system. There is a strong argument that a democratic political culture is not something inherent but constitutes a learning process. The same could be argued for the public use of reason.

3.2.5 *Inclusion / Universal access*

A further element of the normative matrix of Habermas's *Öffentlichkeit* is its alleged inclusionary nature in the sense of universal access. Unrestricted access to the public use of reason would ensure the formation of a more diversified, representative and legitimate public opinion. In order for this to be achieved, "everyone had to be able to participate" (Habermas, 1992b: 37) in debate. However, despite this apparent advocacy of free participation in deliberation which implies inclusion, Habermas's bourgeois public sphere was subject to a series of exclusion procedures, such as gender, social status, or education, that undermine this normative claim.

The "private" people that came together as a public and formed the public sphere (Habermas, 1992b: 27) were the propertied male bourgeois. They constituted a small minority in any given state while the majority constituted the rural population described as the "common people" (Habermas, 1992b: 84). And yet the bourgeois constitutional state counted on the autonomy of the small minority of private people and the new constitutions, whether written or unwritten, referred to and protected the rights of "citizens" or "human beings" with "publicity" as their organisational principle (*ibid.*). Still, the public sphere was theoretically, or rather normatively, considered as a realm accessible to everyone.

"The public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all [...] in its deliberations, [the public] anticipated in principle that all human beings belonged to it" (Habermas, 1992b: 85).

Firstly, it seems from the above extract that the terms *public sphere of civil society* and *public sphere* both refer to the same entity, that is, *the* public sphere. Furthermore, Habermas has expanded on the assumption that civil society belongs to the private

realm and moreover that it constitutes, at least normatively, the sphere of private autonomy. As he clarified in his “basic blueprint” (Habermas, 1992b: 30), however, the term *public sphere of civil society* refers to the embryonic public sphere of the late 17th century which “was specifically a part of “civil society”, [...] at the same time established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labour governed by its own laws” (Habermas, 1992b: 23). It follows from this, therefore, that *since the beginning* of its development, the public sphere functioned as a forum accessible to all – at least normatively.

Secondly, Habermas’s public sphere is bourgeois, confined to a specific stratum of a country’s citizens, such as the propertied, educated elites (Habermas, 1992b: 85), then access is not in fact universal but restricted. Indeed, the “criteria for admission” (ibid.) to the bourgeois reading public of the 18th century was property ownership and education, which was at the time dependent on social status and therefore also determined by the right to own property. The claim to universal accessibility is therefore inherently contradictory. Habermas attempts to justify it through expanding the scope of the concept of “citizens”.

“The public sphere was safeguarded whenever the economic and social conditions gave everyone an equal chance to meet the criteria for admission [...] If everyone, as it might appear, had the chance to become a “citizen” then only citizens should be allowed into the political public sphere, without this restriction amounting to an abandonment of the principle of publicity” (Habermas, 1992b: 86-87).

The problem with this rationale is the presupposition that the economic and social conditions would give everyone an equal opportunity of meeting the criteria for citizenship. If economic and sociological conditions in the sphere of civil society were such that everyone had an equal chance of becoming a property owner and therefore participate in the public sphere, then universal access in the public sphere would be ensured. Such conditions were free competition guaranteed with antitrust laws, the widely and evenly distributed ownership of means of production by petty commodity producers, and “complete mobility of producers, products and capital [so that] supply and demand would always be in equilibrium” (Habermas, 1992b: 86). By delineating the limits of restrictions to accessibility, Habermas finds a very convenient, although

not necessarily persuasive, way of bridging the gap between the theory of universal and the practice of restricted, conditional access to the public sphere.

Furthermore, such a claim to universal access to the public sphere leads to the assumption that the public opinion generated from such an all-inclusive public sphere represents the general, common interest of everyone. In fact, Habermas states that the basis of public opinion in the bourgeois public sphere was “class interest” (Habermas, 1992b: 87), which is not surprising considering that actually only the propertied, educated bourgeois males were allowed to participate in the public sphere. Still, Habermas points out that during that time the interests of the property-owning class were commonly identifiable with general interests, since only property owners had private interests that “automatically converged into the common interest in the preservation of a civil society as a private sphere” (ibid.). Based on such interests, this opinion was public and because it emerged from rational-critical debate, it had a claim on rationality. All these contradictions within the bourgeois constitutional state along with the transforming social, theoretical and economic pre-conditions of equal access to the allegedly inclusionary public sphere foretell its structural transformation and ultimate demise.

Thirdly, according to Habermas’s formulation, the public use of reason constituted the medium of “political confrontation” (Habermas, 1992b: 27) of the bourgeois public sphere exclusively, that is, the sphere of property-owning, educated citizens (Habermas, 1992b: 55-56). This already excluded women, the poor and uneducated members of society and non-nationals.

“However exclusive this public might be in any given instance, it could never close off itself entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who-insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion” (Habermas, 1992b: 37).

This leads to the assumption that the public use of reason constitutes a right and even a capacity of the learned and wealthier members of society.⁵¹ As a consequence, the

⁵¹ Again, this points to the Kantian concept of *Öffentlichkeit* which, although based on the public use of reason, it constituted in actual fact a privileged realm.

public sphere is elevated to a status of a privileged realm that claims the exclusivity of reason and thus ostracises the poor and uneducated. Although it is true that the propertied and educated had easier and better access to information and knowledge to engage in a debate on issues of the common good, nevertheless the outright exclusion of the poorer and less educated from the public sphere as a realm of essentially rational-critical debate would undermine its normative basis. The ‘force of the better argument’ would give way to the force of the higher education or privilege, resulting in a form of “democratic elitism” (Habermas, 1993a: 451).⁵²

Still, the ‘force of the better argument’ alone would not necessarily correspond to a model of communication in an open and inclusive public sphere. By bracketing “power” and “interest” (Calhoun, 1993: 22, 35) from the public sphere for the prevalence of reason, Habermas “provides a moral justification for a conception of the public that is fundamentally exclusionary” (Aronowitz, 1993: 91). It seems that Habermas focuses his discussion of the quality of political participation on the level of rationality and sophistication of political discourse as opposed to the quantity of participants. Besides, as mentioned earlier, the public sphere “did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name” (Habermas, 1992b: 37). In fact, instead of a sphere representing “universal interests”, it represented and advocated the interests of a particular privileged class, in the sense of having the privilege of reason, not necessarily money or social status. Ultimately, the identification of the *bourgeois* public sphere of propertied, educated citizens capable of the public use of reason, with the *normative* public sphere (Grant, 2000; Marchart, 1998) would undermine the validity of the concept’s normative basis.

For these reasons, Fraser proposes a *post-bourgeois* conception of the public sphere, “allowing us to envisage a greater role for certain public spheres than mere autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision-making” (Fraser, 1993: 136). Such a post-bourgeois model of the public sphere would be one of social equality and promotion of multiple publics and counterpublics, as opposed to Habermas’s bourgeois

⁵² Here Habermas refers to “the privileged assertion of local and group-specific special interests” (Habermas 1993a: 451), which result in a paradoxical “generalized particularism” (ibid.), that is, interests of privileged elites masked as general interests of the public.

conception of the public sphere, which “supposes that social equality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them” (Fraser, 1993: 121). Fraser proposes instead “unbracketing” inequalities and explicitly thematising them, therefore spurring the profusion of new publics and eschewing the hypostatisation of the bourgeois public sphere as a meta-space. Opting for a post-bourgeois model, as she suggests, would salvage part of the normative basis of the concept. It would allow for both strong and weak publics, including various hybrid forms, and it should help theorise the relations between them. In his critique of Habermas’s early model, Calhoun (1993) agrees with Fraser’s later one and argues that, in the public sphere, “difference can also be positively thematised” (Calhoun, 1993: 35) rather than excluded or even “bracketed or tolerated” (ibid.). Such post-bourgeois, more inclusive models of the public sphere have led Habermas to add clarifications to his own model.

In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), Habermas appears to be more accommodating of diversity in his model of the public sphere. He argues for a more generalised form of publicness as “a social phenomenon just as elementary as actions, actors, associations or collectives (Habermas, 1996b: 360). He also identifies “transnational public spheres” (op.cit.: 177) as prospective communication sites for the purpose of debate on global issues. This embracing of diversity, which was absent in Habermas’s earlier model (cf. Calhoun’s critique, 1993: 23) constitutes a first step towards a more inclusive model of the public sphere and of public reason as its medium of communication.

Habermas also clarifies the aporia of lack of universality in his public sphere of rational-critical debate in *Between Facts and Norms*, where he makes a clear distinction between communicative and practical reason. This distinction, together with the concept of communicative rationality, will be examined in the next chapter. For the sake of clarity of this argument, it is important to mention that communicative reason is not an inherent capacity of all human beings so that its absence would denote irrationality.

“Rather, what makes communicative reason possible is the linguistic medium through which interactions are woven together and forms of life are structured. [...] Communicative rationality is expressed in a decentred complex of pervasive, transcendently enabling structural conditions but it is not a subjective capacity that would tell actors what they *ought* to do” (Habermas, 1996b: 3-4).

Practical reason, on the other hand, has a heuristic status and, according to Rawls, “the concept of a person itself already presupposes the concept of practical reason” (Rawls, cited in Habermas, 1998: 64). It could be said, therefore, that Habermas’s normative thesis alludes to the communicative rationality of the individual as a qualification acquired in the process of debate and not to the practical reason that is presupposed in discourse.

3.2.6 *Universal interests*

It becomes clear that the primacy of “universal” over individual or subjective interests constitutes a challenging precondition for the use of reason. Firstly, as Habermas explicitly states, the notion of universal interests per se is problematic:

“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” (Habermas, 1992b: 234).

Secondly, as already mentioned above, by disregarding “power” and “interest” in public debate for the prevalence of reason, Habermas “provides a moral justification for a conception of the public that is fundamentally exclusionary” (Aronowitz, 1993: 91). Indeed, as discussed above, Habermas focuses his discussion of the quality of political participation on the level of rationality and sophistication of political discourse as opposed to the quantity or variety of participants. Moreover, he states that the public sphere “did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name” (Habermas, 1992b: 37). *In theory*, of course, “everyone had to be able to participate” (ibid.) and in fact Habermas points out that the public that was formed outside the early institutions of the public sphere (coffeehouses etc.) was very small (ibid.). Still, it is clear from the above that instead of a sphere representing “universal interests”, Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere represented and advocated the interests of a particular privileged class.

In this respect, it is important to note that universal interests can only be predetermined through compromise and are more often than not reduced to mere abstraction. Peace or democracy, for example, are often regarded as universal interests but their claim to universality is unfounded because their connotation is not necessarily positive for every nation or individual. It is doubtful if public debate can ever be based purely on reason or fuelled exclusively by universal interests as norms of rationality. Impartiality for the

sake of reason seems utopian against the backdrop of vested interests that are inherent in argumentation and debate. Consensus is far from the ultimate aim to be reached by argumentation – rather, it is persuasion and influence that is normally sought when engaging in a critical debate. Certainly, this does not imply that actually existing debates are necessarily irrational, but merely that reason is not in actual fact the only motivation or tool used by participants.

3.2.7 *Counterfactuality*

On the outset, Habermas seems to shake the normative foundations of his concept of the public sphere by overburdening the public use of reason with so many presuppositions, namely the equalisation of participants through the force of the better argument, restrictions to an otherwise putatively universal access to debate, and the universalisation (or at least generalisation) of interests. He presents a stringent and binding form of rationality which may be regarded as detrimental to public debate. Such a rigid concept of reason could paradoxically function as a barrier to free expression and thought and ultimately as an exclusion mechanism in the public sphere, even though the “general public sphere” is described by Habermas as “a medium of unrestricted communication” (Habermas, 1996b: 308).

Moreover, while norms “inform decisions as to what one ought to do” and “impose equal and exceptionless obligation on their addressees” (Habermas, 1998: 55), the normativity of the public sphere should not be understood merely as a roadmap to democracy. It is not clear whether Habermas aimed at presenting an *instructive* model of the public sphere that should be adopted by contemporary societies in order for democracy to be consolidated. He does not envisage a reconstruction of the 18th century public sphere in this sense. It seems rather that he was looking to develop a normative concept of the public sphere which can be used as a model for critique of actually existing democracy.

Indeed, all the aforementioned ideals of reason, consensus and universal interests point to *counterfactual* norms. These involve propositions that state what would have happened had something not been the case and are thus characterised by their lack of correspondence to anything *factual* that would act as their basis. In this respect, Grant

criticises the Habermasian model of rational communication as a counterfactual ideal for the reason that, among others, it contrasts with factual communication (Grant, 2000b: 31) and “runs the risk of becoming detached from real communication practices” (op.cit.: 59). This critique of the counterfactuality of Habermas’s norms does not necessarily imply, however, that they should be utterly disqualified. In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), Habermas explains that counterfactuality may serve as the critical basis of a learning process.

“A set of unavoidable idealisations forms the counterfactual basis of an actual practice of reaching understanding, a practice that can critically turn against its own results and thus *transcend* itself. Thus the tension between idea and reality breaks into the very facticity of linguistically structured forms of life. Everyday communicative practice overtaxes itself with its idealising presuppositions, but only in the light of this innerwordly transcendence can learning processes take place at all.” (Habermas, 1996b: 4-5)

By purposely constructing a counterfactual norm, therefore, Habermas forms a basis for critique of actually existing conditions of democratic practice. In addition, he disqualifies the view that counterfactuals are detached from factual practices altogether. Instead, he argues, “these counterfactual presuppositions are rooted in the facticity of everyday practices” (Habermas, 2005: 17-18), in such a way that “even the counterfactual assumptions of communicatively acting subjects can expect to meet with support from the side of social reality” (Habermas, 1995: 165). In order for communication “to prevail, interlocutors cannot but undertake such idealisations” (Habermas, 2005: 18) as a sort of communication standards.

Moreover, for Habermas, the world that we presuppose, not as a sum of facts but rather of objects, is different to the “reality that consists of facts, that is everything that can be represented in true statements” (op.cit.: 91).

“But this doesn’t mean that [...] the unlimited communication community [...] is thereby transformed into an idea that constitutes reality. The conceptual schema of world constitution is inapplicable here. [...] [W]e must make these presuppositions of argumentation *as a matter of fact*, despite the fact that they have an ideal content to which we can only approximate in reality” (Habermas, 1995: 164).

While this may be true, however, the tensions in his model between counterfactual norms and the facticity upon which they are rooted run the risk of bestowing upon it a utopian character. Contrary to Habermas's intentions, the presuppositions of an ideal rational capacity of participants in a debate where the sole aim is consensus for public opinion formation undermine the validity of the normative foundations of Habermas's theory and bring its counterfactuality to the fore. By founding not only the quality of participation in the public sphere but also all forms of communication within it solely on the use of reason, Habermas detaches his theory from reality (or rather, facticity) and exposes its counterfactuality. Reason is certainly crucial to debate and contestation, however Habermas's model idealises reason as *the* medium for rational critical debate, as seen above.

In general, Habermas seems to be idealising the bourgeois public sphere through emphasising the deterioration and alleged perils of modern publicness. His account of the socio-structural transformation of the public sphere constitutes in fact a comparison between "the bourgeois *ideal type*" of public sphere (Habermas, 1992b: 162, my emphasis) and the *real* (at least in Habermas's historical account) public sphere of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Such a comparison is evidently biased and serves little purpose. Moreover, it conflates elements of the "the bourgeois ideal type" (ibid.) and the actual form of publicness which existed at the time in a way that it becomes difficult to distinguish the ideal type from the actual type which is allegedly described in Habermas's historical investigation. This raises doubt on whether the normative content of Habermas's theory of the public sphere indeed exists or it is based purely on examination of historical facts and therefore is of no normative value.

3.3 Preliminary conclusions

Based on the above critiques, Habermas attempted a revision of the model he presented in *Structural Transformation*, adding further clarifications to it. Firstly, in "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (1993a), he recognised certain weaknesses of his initial model as regards the structure of the public sphere and the composition of the public (Habermas, 1993a: 433). The issue of multiple public spheres as opposed to a single (bourgeois), which has already been discussed in 3.1 above, has led Habermas to examine structural changes with the rise of electronic mass media, "collapse" of

associational and community life etc. (ibid.). He also acknowledged different types of contemporary “intra-party and intra-associational public spheres” (op.cit.: 440) as “potential centres of public communication still capable of being regenerated” (ibid.). In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b: 360) he re-defined the public sphere as a network and not merely as a site (Habermas, 1992b: 27), taking into account such transformations in an increasingly complex society. He talks of “channels of communication” (Habermas, 1993a: 436; Habermas, 1996b: 275, 314) in the public sphere as opposed to communication in general, thus implying a higher level of regulation and differentiation in contemporary societies.

Secondly, following critiques on his disregard of the role of the media in the public sphere, and the media as a public sphere, he identifies a public sphere “simultaneously pre-structured and dominated by the mass media [...] which took care of the innocence of the principle of publicity once and for all” (Habermas, 1993a: 437). Drawing on such (largely pessimistic) observations on the role of the media in the public sphere, he urges further research on the media and the social effects of television in particular (ibid.). He also urges for a revision of the analysis of “a public sphere infiltrated by power” (ibid.); ‘power’ in this case, again, refers to domination by the mass media.

As already mentioned in 2.3.4 of this thesis, Habermas also rejects his analysis of the transformation “from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public” (Habermas, 1992b: 160), as “too simplistic (and too pessimistic)” (Habermas, 1993a: 438). He recognises a new level of connection between culture and politics and admits that evaluation standards with regard to culture have changed (ibid.). Still, he does not disqualify the “trend toward the transmutation of citizens into clients” (op.cit. 450) and vaguely suggests “*novel* institutional arrangements” (ibid., emphasis in the original) to offset it.

Overall, Habermas states in “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere” (1993a) that the purpose of his “investigation” on the structural transformation of the public sphere is purely theoretical and that he is not interested in its empirical aspects (Habermas, 1993a: 434). This points to his attempt to introduce a counterfactual norm rather than idealising a particular historical form of the nascent bourgeois public sphere, as some of his critics argue. Counterfactuality is further advocated by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b) where he characterises his model a “methodological fiction”

(Habermas 1996b: 323; 326). In his 2006 paper, he discusses the impact of normative theory on empirical research by studying new forms of deliberation in an increasingly mediatised society, and the formation of “considered public opinions” (Habermas, 2006a: 415) as the result of such forms of deliberation in modern public spheres. His argument is (still) based on a cynical view of the mass media as a distorting factor of political communication and, as is the case in his previous works (cf. 1970, 1976), the mass media is used as a scapegoat for all society’s evils. In the end, Habermas’s argument for the applicability of his communication model of deliberative politics (2006) is not convincing. The next chapter will explore this as a “methodological fiction” (Habermas 1996b: 323; 326) and offer an analysis of Communicative Rationality as a model for the ‘public use of reason’.

CHAPTER 4

Communicative Rationality: A Preliminary Critique

4.0 Introductory remarks

This chapter examines the concept of communicative rationality for a better understanding of the “public use of reason”. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (hereafter *Theory of Communicative Action*), Habermas argues that “every sociology that claims to be a theory of society encounters the problem of employing a concept of rationality, which always has a normative content” (Habermas, 1984: xlii). In a world in which the concept of rationality is severely challenged, however, Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality remains central to his theory of the public sphere. Still, as will be argued here, it faces the same “problem” of “always having a normative content” (ibid.).

As seen in previous chapters, Habermas’s notion of rationality may have distinct forms and functions. On the one hand, reason is presented as *the* medium of debate in the public sphere, hence a presupposition, or indeed a prerequisite for its effectiveness.⁵³ On the other hand, reason is also a potential in communication: “The Theory of Communicative Action intends to bring into the open the rational potential intrinsic in everyday communicative practices” (Habermas, 1984: 442). The centrality of the concept of reason is evident in Habermas’s paradigm of the public sphere, as it appears to constitute both the means to an end and an end in itself, thus incorporating features of both instrumental and practical models of reason in an essentially communicative (discursive) model. The rationale behind this model is examined firstly in the chapter and the basic attributes of communicative rationality (intersubjectivity, understanding, argument, consensus and *Diskurs*) are analysed separately. The second half of the chapter examines the lifeworld and its significance to communicative rationality and to Habermas’s model of society, which is analysed in Chapter 5.

⁵³ Consider: “Within a discourse-centred theoretical approach, decision by majority must remain internally related to a practice of rational debate” (Habermas, 1993a: 449).

4.1 The Rationale Behind Communicative Rationality

4.1.1 Practical vs. Communicative Reason

In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas traces the philosophical origins of the public use of reason in the Enlightenment and describes the Kantian approach to the concept of reason, based on the “subjective maxim [...]: to think for oneself” (Habermas, 1992b: 104). In his own analysis and critique of reason, however (primarily in *Theory of Communicative Action*), he makes a clear distinction between the Kantian concept of practical reason, Weber’s instrumental, purposive or goal-oriented rationality, and his own theory of communicative rationality. According to this analysis, practical reason (*praktische Vernunft*) is regarded as inherent in human beings, as the term *Vernunft* implies: “[T]he concept of a person itself already presupposes the concept of practical reason” (Rawls, cited in Habermas, 1998: 64). Weber, on the other hand, is sceptical about the “charisma of reason” (Habermas, 2001: 140) and instead sees rational action as essentially purposive or goal-oriented, involving the “choice of means” for attaining an end (*ibid.*).

Unlike practical reason, Habermas’s communicative reason is not considered as an inherent capacity of all human beings in a way that its absence would denote irrationality.

“Rather, what makes communicative reason possible is the linguistic medium through which interactions are woven together and forms of life are structured. [...] Communicative rationality is expressed in a decentered [sic] complex of pervasive, transcendently enabling structural conditions but it is not a subjective capacity that would tell actors what they *ought* to do” (Habermas, 1996b: 3-4).

Communicative reason is encapsulated as the “intersubjective relation that speaking and acting subjects take up when they come to an understanding [*Verständigung*] with one another about something” (Habermas, 1984: 392). It is, therefore, a process rather than a capacity, in which argument is central. It emerges and manifests itself through different forms of communication, discourse and social interaction. And it is this fundamentally “social” form of rationality that would enable the creation and development of the public sphere.

4.1.2 Basic characteristics of Habermas's notion of rationality

In *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas observes that the rationality of individuals is manifested in the resistance to illusions and deceptions about themselves.

“Anyone who systematically deceives himself about himself behaves irrationally. But one who is capable of letting himself be enlightened about his irrationality [...] possesses the power to behave reflectively in relation to his subjectivity” (Habermas, 1984: 21).

Such self-awareness about the “irrationality” of one’s actions, however, does not necessarily guarantee rational behaviour. A rational person may choose not to behave rationally (that is, “reflectively in relation to his subjectivity” according to the above statement), either in order to achieve a certain goal, or if he or she does not wish to face the consequences of rational behaviour.⁵⁴ This points to the goal-oriented, instrumental version of rationality which is examined below.

In addition to awareness of the rational basis of one’s actions, Habermas also states that reflection is also important in rationality.

“A person is rational who interprets the nature of his desires and feelings in the light of culturally established standards of value, but especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted” (Habermas, 1984: 20).⁵⁵

According to the above statement, reflective attitude towards one’s self-awareness should be based on normative value judgements, whose framework is culturally

⁵⁴ The rationality of persons does not guarantee the rationality of their actions. Aristotle’s concept of *akrasia*, which is Ancient Greek for “weakness of the will”, describes precisely the tendency of rational people to resort to irrational or impetuous actions when passions and desires become the motivational force of action. According to Aristotle, an *akratic* person knowingly resorts to bad deeds because of his passion (“ο ακρατής ειδώς ότι φαύλα πράττει δια πάθος”, Ηθικά Νικομάχεια, [Ethica Nicomachea]: 1145b, 12-13).

⁵⁵ Habermas calls this “Therapeutic Critique” (inspired by Freud) and defines it as “the form of argumentation that serves to clarify systematic self-deception” (Habermas, 1984: 21).

established. The normative element is crucial in this case, as “culturally established standards of value” seem to function as a critical yardstick against which the rationality of actions should be judged. Arendt, whose theory of publicness also influenced Habermas’s theory, also argues for a reflective attitude towards one’s actions as an essential trait of a rational public man. Arendt believes that “not logos but *nous* [...] the capacity of contemplation, whose chief characteristic is that its content cannot be rendered in speech” (Arendt, 1998: 27) is crucial to rationality. It is this concept of *nous* that is more relevant to the critical facet of Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality (and for its manifestation as “rational-critical debate” in the public sphere). However, there is an element of contingency in adopting a reflective attitude towards one’s self-awareness and actions; reflective judgements are not always reliable. This stems from the fact that they “rely on an ongoing pragmatic feedback [...] and are subject to ongoing re-evaluation” (Szczelkun, 2002: online). Culturally established standards mentioned in the above statement may have a normative function, however the element of interpretation of one’s actions, desires or feelings according to those standards renders them fallible.

It is important to note that, even though self-awareness and reflective judgement are presented as preconditions for potential rational behaviour, or more specifically, for rational-critical debate, Habermas does not mention principles of logic in his preliminary analysis of rationality in *Theory of Communicative Action*. Logic and other normative theories purporting to reasoning, which are placed under the category of “impersonal rationality” by Evans and Over (1996: 7), do not seem to be of interest to Habermas. Instead, he advocates a “cognitivist version of rationality” (Habermas, 1984: 10), which comprises cognitive-instrumental and communicative reason. Although these appear to be conflicting models, it will be shown that Habermas actually includes elements of both in his own model of communicative rationality.

4.1.3 Habermas’s Critique of Instrumental Rationality

In reconstructing Habermas, McCarthy argues that “reason can be defended only by way of a critique of reason” (McCarthy, in Habermas, 1984: viii). Such a self-referential critique (Ingram, 1987: 81) would not suggest non-rational models as an alternative but instead it would propose a rational model of a different type. In this respect, Habermas introduces and develops a concept of communicative rationality that is *sceptical* and

resistant to “cognitive-instrumental abridgments of reason” (Habermas, 1984: xlii). In other words, he engages in a critique of cognitive-instrumental reason and presents communicative rationality as an opposing *normative* model, which nevertheless includes elements of instrumental reason, as will be shown.

Habermas describes cognitive-instrumental rationality as a teleological form of rationality which is measured by the success of goal-directed interventions (Habermas, 1984:14). Actors employing this type of rationality treat each other strategically (ibid.: 134) and achieve self-maintenance through “informed disposition over, and intelligent adaptation to, conditions of a contingent environment” (ibid.: 10). Instrumental reason frees the individual from the “limitations imposed on [their] self-assertion” (ibid.: 15), since the individual is acting in a goal-oriented manner. In his critique of instrumental reason (ibid.: 366-402; Habermas, 2001: 100-160), Habermas points out that it is centred on the knowing subject.

“Instrumental reason is “subjective” in the sense that it expresses the relations between subject and object from the vantage point of the knowing and acting subject and not from that of the perceived and manipulated object” (Habermas, 1984: 389).

With the knowing subject as its centre, instrumental reason ignores influences of communicative interaction and in this way it limits individuals to their “merely subjective views” (ibid.: 11) and hinders further reflective judgement.

This subjectivity, which is key to instrumental rationality, has its roots in certain traditions of the philosophy of the Enlightenment according to Habermas’s analysis. He traces the explanation of reason “through the concept of the self-referentiality of a knowing subject” (Habermas, 2001: 134) in the philosophy of Descartes, whose maxim ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ epitomizes the subjectivity of the knowing and thinking individual/subject. In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant also presents the “noumenal self”⁵⁶ as rational and reflective. Subjectivity in this sense represented “freedom through reflection” (Habermas, 1990b: 303) and was “celebrated” (Habermas, 2001: 141) by philosophers of the Enlightenment. In his critique, however, Habermas argues that “by putting reflection and instrumental rationality in the place of reason, the Enlightenment

⁵⁶ The term “noumenal” refers broadly to the opposite of “phenomenal”, i.e. something as it is, not as it is perceived by humans.

pursued an idolatry of reason” (ibid.): “Subjective rationality [...] has ultimately usurped the place of reason, so that reason itself vanishes without a trace into instrumental reason” (ibid.). This statement represents the core of his above argument of an “idolatry of reason”. Habermas clearly opposes subjectivist accounts of reason and argues that instrumental rationality represents “only a one-sided view of reason” (op.cit.: 141). In this respect, instrumental rationality can never reach the status of “emancipated reason” (Duvenage, 2003: 38).

Furthermore, Habermas takes instrumental reason to a collective level and criticizes the “instrumental politics of great powers” (op.cit.: 136) which aim at satisfying their own subjective interests and establish “alienating institutions” (ibid.). Goal-oriented, instrumental reason in this case led to policies based on the end justifying the means. He concludes that in such cases the principle of subjectivity leads to “a principle of repression which steps forth as the violence of reason itself” (op.cit.: 133). Based on this, Habermas argues for a shift from the subjectivity of instrumental reason to the *intersubjectivity* of communicative reason, analysed in 4.2.1.

4.2 Communicative Rationality

Habermas provides a number of definitions of communicative rationality; the following is exemplary:

“There is a peculiar rationality, inherent not in language as such but in the communicative use of linguistic expressions, that can be reduced neither to the epistemic rationality of knowledge [...] nor to the purposive-rationality of action [...]. This *communicative rationality* is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to one and the same objective world” (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 315, emphasis in the original).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In the same respect, as the expression of communicative rationality, communicative action is defined as the “interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action

Therefore, by definition, communicative rationality is a process rather than a capacity, based on mutual understanding between interlocutors. It emerges and manifests itself through interactive or pragmatic communication and more specifically, through debate and argumentation, claim and counterclaim.

“Whenever speaking and acting subjects want to arrive purely by way of argument at a decision concerning contested validity-claims of norms or statements, they cannot avoid having recourse, intuitively, to foundations that can be explained with the help of the concept of communicative rationality” (Habermas, in Thomson and Held, 1982: 226-227).

It is precisely this processual model of rationality, embodied in argumentative practices, concerning contested validity claims, that is crucial for Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, since the latter emerges and sustains itself through rational-critical debate. The validity claims mentioned above are, according to Habermas, propositional truth, normative rightness and subjective truthfulness (Habermas, 1984: 75; Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 317), and communicative rationality points to “different forms of discursively redeeming [these] validity claims” (Habermas, 1984: 75). Habermas’s concept of discourse (*Diskurs*) is clarified in 4.2.3.

Finally, unlike teleological forms of rationality, the aim of communicative rationality is reaching understanding, which requires interlocutors to overcome their subjective views.

“This concept of *communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and [...] assure themselves of both the unity of the

in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus [...] language is given a prominent place in this model” (Habermas, 1984: 86).

objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld” (Habermas, 1984: 10, emphasis in the original).⁵⁸

Understanding reached through processes of communicative reason, therefore, would be a prerequisite for the generation of consensus according to Habermas. Based on the above, we can break down communicative rationality into five key characteristics, which will facilitate the analysis of the concept; these are intersubjectivity, understanding, argument, consensus and discourse (*Diskurs*).

4.2.1 Intersubjectivity and Understanding

In opting for a conception of rationality that is not exclusively based on cognition and subjectivity but instead on communicative processes of mutual understanding, Habermas does not consider human beings as isolated subjects, for they are socialised and gain knowledge through communication. For this reason, he initiates a paradigm shift from strategic/instrumental to communicative rationality. The former presupposes “one objective world identical for all observers” (Habermas, 1984: 50), which ignores communicative influence on individual perceptions of the world. Habermas’s model suggests “an intersubjectively shared social world” (*ibid.*) where “communicative actors [...] relate simultaneously to something in the one objective world, something in their common social world, and something in each own’s subjective world” (Habermas, 1990b: 392).

This distinction between three separate worlds is of paramount importance.⁵⁹ It does not limit analysis to a dualistic conception of an objective versus many subjective worlds but it also introduces the distinct common social world shared by communicative actors. The difference between the subjective worlds of participants/interlocutors and their common social world is that the former refers to “what is not common” (Habermas, 1984: 52) while the latter refers to a common, “intersubjectively shared world” (*ibid.*:

⁵⁸ The concept of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is analysed at length in 4.3. It may be broadly defined as a horizon of “diffuse, [...] unproblematic background convictions [which] stores the interpretive work of preceding generations.” (Habermas, 1984: 70)

⁵⁹ Consider: “There is no concept in philosophy that includes relations to the social and the subjective worlds as well as to the objective world. The Theory of Communicative Action is meant to remedy this lack” (Habermas, 1984: 45).

50). Communication based on intersubjectivity also implies that the actors are consciously aware that the objective world and their common social world do not coincide and therefore they attempt to “discursively redeem validity claims” (Habermas, 1984: 75) about truth, truthfulness or rightness of norms (ibid.) based precisely on this “decentred understanding of the world” (Habermas, 1990a; 72, 169). Habermas borrows the concept of decentration from Piaget and uses it to denote this multiple focus on three distinct worlds at the same time (Habermas, 1984: 50). And the process of relating this decentred understanding of the world to discursively redeeming validity claims is at the heart of communicative rationality (ibid.: 72).

The significance of a “decentred” perception of the world for communicative reason (and action) is twofold. Firstly, it facilitates critical judgement of validity claims. Since these “presuppose a world that is identical for *all possible* observers” (Habermas, 1984: 50, emphasis on the original), decentration of worldviews facilitates their contestation by providing new sides to such claims. A validity claim to subjective truthfulness, for example, can be contested more thoroughly and more *rationally* (according to Habermas) through the prism of the participants’ intersubjectively shared world and an objective world. The background of a “normative reality” (Habermas, 1984: 51) is also crucial for Habermas as a critical yardstick for the evaluation of beliefs and intentions. Such a normative reality, however, is difficult to determine and the objective world against which validity claims are judged is merely a conventional set of established norms that can be re-negotiated.⁶⁰

Secondly, a decentred understanding of the world “makes possible the most extensive and progressive form of learning” (Ingram, 1987: 23) and therefore “uniquely merits the title of rationality” (ibid.). For Habermas, what is crucial in this learning process is mutual understanding achieved through communicative rationality. Intersubjectivity

⁶⁰ The arbitrariness of “fact” in the following statement is a case on point:

“The objective world is presupposed [...] as the totality of facts, where “fact” signifies that a statement about the existence of a corresponding state of affairs can count as true” (Habermas, 1984: 52).

The phrase “can count as true” signifies the subjective intervention (who decides what counts as true and what does not?) in what is defined as “*the* objective world” and points to a loophole in its non-negotiable status.

based on decentred worldviews replaces individual (subjective) consciousness, and therefore understanding becomes a result of *mutual* interaction rather than personal reflection and contemplation. In this way, intersubjectivity is presented as both a prerequisite and a result of understanding through communicative rationality. It is a prerequisite because:

“Within structures of intersubjectivity are necessary conditions for individuals reaching an understanding among themselves without coercion” (Habermas, in Thompson and Held, 1982: 228).

The phrase “without coercion” refers precisely to the willingness of participants to overcome their subjective views and relate validity claims to the objective, subjective and their common social world. Only such a “decentred” understanding of the world “makes possible the most extensive and progressive form of learning” (Ingram, 1987: 23), without the coercion of imposing one’s views to another. Intersubjectivity is also a result of understanding, because an intersubjective, decentred conception of the world leads to intersubjective or “*transsubjective*” (Habermas, 1984: 9) understanding, where validity claims have the same meaning for observers and nonparticipants as they have for the acting subject (*ibid.*). Therefore, when they reach mutual understanding, communicative actors and their observers take up an “intersubjective relation [which is] paradigmatic about communicative reason” (Habermas, 1984: 392).

It is important to note that communicative rationality represents a model of linguistically embodied, “situated” reason (Habermas, 2001: 130; Habermas, in Thomson and Held, 1982: 252) that is neither absolute nor goal-oriented but contingent, communicatively based and oriented towards understanding. It is the element of communication (in the form of debate) that contributed to the paradigm shift from a subject-centred reason and a philosophy of consciousness based on the theories of the Enlightenment to a concept of language-based situated reason based on intersubjective understanding. This shift is also known as “the linguistic turn” (Habermas, 2001: 149)⁶¹.

⁶¹ Habermas’s “linguistic turn” in social science and communication studies in particular should not be confused with the one in modern Western philosophy, largely influenced by Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922): “It will therefore only be in language that the limit [to thought] can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense” (Wittgenstein, 2001 [1922]: 2).

“From the possibility of reaching understanding linguistically, we can read off a concept of situated reason that is given voice in validity claims that are both context-dependent and transcendent” (Habermas, 1992a: 139).

In this way, communicative reason distinguishes itself from “the purism of pure reason” (Habermas, 1990b: 301) by locating reason in interpersonal linguistic communication rather than the knowing subject. For this reason, Stahl argues that the linguistic turn “overcomes the solipsist dangers” (Stahl, 2004: 4331) of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

This shift towards intersubjectivity and its impact on Habermas’s model of discourse (*Diskurs*) is said to have “continued Kant’s project in its detranscendentalised form” (Baynes, 1991: 4). In his reconstruction of Kant’s critique of reason, Habermas states that Kant “explored the corresponding rational faculties as components of a transcendental subjectivity” (Habermas, 2001: 134), which was based on the “subjective maxim [...]: to think for oneself” (Habermas, 1992b: 104). For Kant, “the noumenal self is rational, reflective and (ultimately) free of moral conflict” (Baynes, 1991: 4). The term *noumenal*, as explained previously, refers to something beyond observed phenomena, as opposed to *phenomenal*. Kant’s transcendental subjectivity, therefore, has the meaning of something that surpasses individual perceptions and is therefore considered as objective. Reason according to this view is not a dynamic concept, its attributes are constant and its status not only normative but also transcendental. Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality also has a normative-critical role. He contends that “modernity stabilizes itself through reason (Habermas, 2001: 133) and that it is only reason that can give modernity its orientation (ibid.: 135). He also presents the public use of reason as the normative medium of debate in the public sphere. As a result, he has been described as “the last great rationalist” (McCarthy, in Habermas, 1984: viii). Unlike Kant’s concept of reason, however, Habermas’s model is based on intersubjective, discursive/linguistic communication and therefore does not bestow a transcendental status on rationality. It represents a shift, therefore, from “a subject-centred reason to detranscendentalised concept of a situated reason” (Habermas, 2001: 149).

4.2.2 *Argumentation and Consensus*

Habermas describes communicative rationality as the “consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech” (Habermas, 1984: 10), which means that argumentation is regarded as the medium of this model of rationality and consensus as its desired result. For this reason, it is sometimes also known as “argumentative rationality” (Devetak, in Burchill et al., 1996: 173).

Habermas defines argumentation in different ways. Firstly, he sees it as a “reflective continuation, with different means, of action oriented to reaching understanding” (Habermas, 1984: 25). The phrase “with different means” points to communicative means. The lack of force is crucial for the practice of argumentation as a “court of appeal” (ibid.). Furthermore, argumentation in this sense is central to a process which, aiming at mutual understanding, begins with an action and is perpetuated by reflective “discourse” (Habermas, 1990a: 130)⁶² as a *reaction* to the action which triggered the process. In cases where the communicative process is not triggered by specific actions but by putting forward a validity claim, argumentation requires, according to Habermas, thematising a validity claim and adopting a hypothetical attitude not based on mere experience. The validity claim in question must be tested “with reasons, and only with reasons” (Habermas, 1984: 25). Ultimately, the validity of the argument will depend on the validity of the grounds on which it is based – and for Habermas, this is an indication of rationality.

“In the contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticised, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticised, to justify his actions by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations” (Habermas, 1984: 15).

Indeed, Habermas regards behaviour during the argumentation process as a benchmark for judging rationality. Following Toulmin, he argues that if interactants are open to argument then they are rational, whereas if they are “deaf to argument” (Habermas, 1984: 25) they are not. Taking into account the definition of argumentation as a reflective continuation of action oriented to understanding (ibid.), we could assume that

⁶² Habermas’s concept of discourse (*Diskurs*) is analysed in 4.2.3.

a person who is “deaf to argument” in a communicative context is not capable of a *reflective* continuation of argumentation, that is, of counter-argumentation based on other interlocutors’ arguments, and therefore cannot reach understanding or consensus according to Habermas’s model. As a result, we could assume that argumentative speech requires attitudes that are already open to argument, otherwise the process cannot be perpetuated and consensus cannot be reached.

Secondly, argumentation according to Habermas is important in the learning process (Habermas, 1984: 22).

“Arguments are the means by which intersubjective recognition of a proponent’s hypothetically raised validity claim can be brought about and opinion thereby transformed into knowledge” (Habermas, 1984: 25).

While this may be true in some cases, it does not necessarily mean that the result of the argumentative speech is always knowledge or learning. Argument may be necessary for acquiring knowledge, however again this points to the reflective aspect of argumentative speech. A validity claim needs to be processed by way of critical reflection, and consensus on the validity claim must be reached in order for this to become knowledge. If a person rejects a validity claim, he or she will not accept it as knowledge. He or she may, however, learn something about this validity claim that was not known before – in this sense, Habermas’s claim is valid. Or, as he states, the learning process may constitute in learning from one’s mistakes (Habermas, 1984: 22), e.g. identify the reasons for the rejection of one validity claim. According to this view, acquiring knowledge is never a passive procedure involving an active transmitter of knowledge and its passive recipient. Critical reflection is key to this process and ultimately also to communicative rationality.

Thirdly, consensus in the sense of agreement is also considered as one of the normative aims of argumentation: “Communicative action involves an explicit concerted effort to reach agreement on the entire spectrum of validity claims” (Ingram, 1987: 31). In achieving consensus, argumentation aims at transforming “something collectively problematic into something collectively valid” (Klein, cited in Habermas, 1984: 27). Again, the proviso is that this consensus is reached without any form of external

coercion.⁶³ More importantly, consensus “is not merely a normative or regulative *ideal* of argumentative discourse, but one of its constitutive *presuppositions*” (McCarthy, 1995: 477):

“In everyday life, noone would enter into [...] argumentation if he did not start from the strong presupposition that a grounded consensus could be achieved” (Habermas, 1984: 19).

This needs further explication. If speakers presuppose that they will come to an agreement about something, then the purpose of their communication would be to gain knowledge from argumentation as described above. Habermas’s theory, however, implies that “without agreement about this world, social action would be impossible” (Ingram, 1987: 23). While this may be true when it comes to mobilising collective action that needs consistency and coordination, nevertheless disagreement may also trigger social action. When individuals or groups with differing worldviews and experiences engage in communication, their starting point is their disagreements about the world, even though they have to *reach* an agreement in order to engage in collective action.

Reaching consensus seems more untenable if one considers that understanding does not necessarily lead to agreement, and agreement does not always imply that interactants have reached mutual understanding.

“Agreement in the strict sense is achieved only if the participants are able to accept a validity claim for the *same* reasons, while *mutual understanding* can also come about when one participant sees that the other, in light of her preferences, has good reasons in the given circumstances for her declared intention – that is, reasons that are good *for her*” (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 320-1).

The level of agreement that Habermas seems to have in mind is highly complex. Firstly, it implies that validity claims are not only accepted, but also that such claims are substantiated by reasons – the same reasons for all interlocutors. Such a process of substantiating a claim would require further communication in order to eschew the possibility of superficial accord and instead ensure solid agreement. Still, it seems

⁶³ “Something that *patently* owes its existence to external pressure cannot be considered an agreement” (Habermas, 1990a: 134).

difficult to achieve this through communicative processes alone. In order for interlocutors to reach an agreement based on the same reasons, they need to share similar views already, before the onset of their communicative action. For instance, we may consider theft a crime but we may understand the reasons for a starving person stealing food, even though we do not necessarily agree with the action of stealing. To agree with theft per se, we must be in a way predisposed to the idea, otherwise it is unlikely that we will be persuaded of it merely through the “force of the better argument”.

In order for participants in communication to reach an agreement by accepting validity claims for the same reasons, as Habermas instructs above, as well as for them to reach mutual understanding by acknowledging each other’s substantiations of arguments, it is also important to be able to share each other’s perspective. G.H. Mead refers to this as “taking the attitude of others” (Mead, [1936] 2007: 375):

“The human self arises through its ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs [...] That is the process of thought. It is taking the attitude of others, talking to other people, and then replying in their language. That is what constitutes thinking. [...] [The individual] takes the attitude of the community towards himself” (Mead, [1936] 2007: 375-377).

For Mead, social existence comes before individual existence and consciousness, in a way that humans learn to form behaviours and attitudes from assuming different roles in society. Mead’s “self” is not static, but malleable and adaptable to each particular situation:

“What determines the amount of the self that gets into communication is the social experience itself. [...] There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience. A multiple personality is in a certain sense normal [...]” (Mead, 1934: 142)

Adopting this sort of multiple personality in order to be able to “take the attitude of others” is key in achieving agreement and mutual understanding in Habermasian terms. That is, for the same reasons, which are (ultimately) shared by all participants, or at least for reasons that are understandable and justifiable by all participants: “when one

participant sees that the other [...] has reasons that are good *for her* [...] for her declared intentions” (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 321).

Still, even in cases where “multiple personalities” are capable of “taking the attitudes of others” it remains difficult to presuppose that a debate will result in a consensus. Moreover, if agreement is reached, it is doubtful that all participants will accept a validity claim for the same reasons, but more likely, as mentioned above, to be the result of mutual understanding of others’ intentions. Habermas still identifies the rational potential in his model by arguing that even if consensus is not achieved, “the nature of these failures shows the rationality of the expressions – failures can be explained” (op.cit.: 11). As long as argumentation by way of reflection perpetuates, Habermas argues that we can still learn from our mistakes (op.cit.: 22) and therefore communicate rationally. His consensus-oriented model, therefore, will still work even if consensus is not reached, as long as argumentation is in place. This argument appears to be too vague, for, what is the point of argumentation if there is no result? And furthermore, there is no guarantee that one has truly learned from one’s mistakes and that the same mistakes will not be repeated.

Of course, one could argue that persuasion also results in consensus because once a person is persuaded of the validity of a claim by another person, then they both share the same view and therefore they agree. In practice, however, the result is not that simple. Consensus is rarely presupposed in debate and therefore communication does not conform to the above model. Instead, participants have their own agendas of interests and aim at establishing their validity. This tension between “the reality of multiple value-perspectives and the ideal of rationally motivated consensus” (McCarthy, 1995: 475) leads to the assumption that communicative rationality oriented to, and presupposing, consensus is rarely seen in practice and that it is goal-directed, success-oriented, instrumental rationality that actually governs debate in the public sphere.

In order to bridge this gap between theory and practice, Habermas concludes in his critique of instrumental rationality that the latter must be considered as an *aspect* of reason rather than a separate model and therefore its “proper place [is] part of a more encompassing *communicative rationality*” (Habermas, 1984: 390, emphasis in the original). Indeed, the telos of instrumental rationality could be anything, since the terms

'success' and 'goal' are too vague. Consensus and understanding can also be considered as goals and can also be an indication of success. In other words, because of the vagueness of the telos of instrumental rationality, communicative rationality may be considered an "improved" version of instrumental rationality, where the telos can be consensus, understanding or knowledge. In incorporating instrumental into communicative rationality, Habermas recognises that public debate is always infiltrated by vested interests and motives; he *chooses*, however, to privilege communicative rationality in the public sphere because it is based on intersubjectivity and is focused upon understanding and consensus.

The issue of individual interests as opposed to collective or general interests also needs to be addressed. The presupposition of consensus (agreeing to agree) in debate "depends on finding "universally accepted needs"" (McCarthy, 1995: 473).

"The discursively formed will may be called "rational" [when] a consensus can arise only through appropriately interpreted, generalisable interests, by which I mean needs that can be communicatively shared" (Habermas, 1976: 107-108).

Firstly, participants do not need to identify general interests, therefore, but *generalisable* ones through further argumentation which is meant to produce consensus on a set of such interests. And consensus on generalisable interests is merely a presupposition of rational debate, which is added to the list of above-mentioned presuppositions. The process of communicative rationality seems to be overburdened by too many conditions which makes it more vulnerable to criticism.

Secondly, even if a set of generalisable (not necessarily general) interests is identified, McCarthy argues that rationally-motivated consensus is still not guaranteed because "participants' interpretations of their needs cannot simply be taken at face value" (McCarthy, 1995: 472). This means that a generalisable interest is different to a general interest in that the former could be an individual interest in disguise and could mask motives and desires against other, more common interests. An individual or a group of people with a specific set of beliefs, for instance, may generalise their interests based on their own subjective interpretations of their needs and promote those as general interests, manipulating in this way other participants through argumentation. The question is whether this form of argumentation should be considered rational.

4.2.3 Discourse (*Diskurs*)

Communicative rationality also leads, in theoretical terms, to the emergence of discursive rationality (Habermas 1996a, in Cooke 1998: 309). In other works by Habermas or his critics, discursive and communicative rationality are used interchangeably. The concept of discourse in Habermas's model will be clarified in this section for a better understanding of the role of argumentation in communicative rationality and action.

Discourse (*Diskurs* in the original German text) is defined by Habermas as follows:

“[Discourse is] that form of communication [...] whose structure assures us: that the bracketed validity claims of assertions, recommendations, or warnings are the exclusive object of discussion; that participants, themes, and contributions are not restricted except with reference to the goal of testing the validity claims in question; that no force except that of the better argument is exercised; and that, as a result, all motives except that of the cooperative search for truth are excluded” (Habermas, 1976: 107-108).

According to this definition, when a speaker makes a statement he presupposes that this statement conforms to a system of validity claims - truth, rightness and truthfulness. These validity claims guide rational action (Ingram, 1987: 20) and have a “context-transcending” status (Habermas, 1996b: 323). This means that, in conditions of *Diskurs*, whenever *any* statement is made, it is presupposed that the content of this statement is true, that it conforms to established norms of rightness and that the speaker is honest and truthful. Despite their “context-transcending” (Habermas, 2001: 148) status, these validity claims can still be contested and renegotiated; this is precisely the role and function of *Diskurs* in Habermas's theory. Therefore, the medium of the discursive process (or of communicative rationality) is argumentation by way of “thematiz[ing] contested validity claims and attempt[ing] to vindicate or criticise them through arguments” (Habermas, 1984: 18). It is clear, then, that when Habermas or his analysts refer to communicative reason as a *discursive* model of rationality, they refer to a model which encompasses all the above characteristics, or rather presuppositions: the

contestation of context-transcending validity claims, without any form of coercion⁶⁴ except the “force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1976: 107-108).

Similarly, the public use of reason in Habermas’s public sphere is intended to enable the equalisation of power among participants (Habermas, 1992b: 71) through the force of the better argument. While it is true that public debate may be infiltrated by the interplay of power differentials and interests, Habermas’s theory stipulates that these should not influence rational argumentation. The force of the better argument thus presupposes a “bracketing” (Fraser, in Calhoun: 1993) of the identities or social status of the participants and places the emphasis on merits of argument to the detriment of power.

Argumentation through thematisation, redemption and critique of validity claims is further explicated by Habermas in his *Excursus On The Theory Of Argumentation* (Habermas, 1984: 22-42), where he breaks down argumentative speech into specific aspects. Firstly, he delineates certain presuppositions of argumentation “as specifications of an ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 1984: 25, my emphasis), which will enable participants to reach consensus. The ideal speech situation assumes that all participants in discourse have “equal chances to assume dialogue roles” (McCarthy, 1978: 325) and that communication should exclude any external or internal force, except the “force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1984: 25). Lukes rightly argues that with such presuppositions, “ideally rational people in an ideal speech situation cannot but reach a rational consensus” (Lukes, in Thompson and Held, 1982: 140). Indeed, Habermas describes interactants capable of “adequately understanding the meaning of [one’s] arguments and judging their truth in a definitive manner” (Habermas, 1996b: 322) as “an ideal communication community” (ibid.). He presents this as a model of “‘pure’ communicative sociation” (op.cit.: 323), which settles all conflicts without violence through “discursive opinion and will formation” (ibid.). This coincides with his definition of discourse in the framework of communicative action (cf.

⁶⁴ Cf. Habermas, in Thompson and Held, 1982: 228: “Within structures of intersubjectivity are necessary conditions for individuals reaching an understanding among themselves without coercion”. Also: Habermas sees reason as “our main alternative to violence, coercion, and manipulation as a means of conflict resolution and social coordination” (McCarthy, 1995: 477).

Habermas, 1976: 107-108). It would therefore lead to the assumption that Habermas's *Diskurs* represents an ideal form of "pure" communication, so overburdened with presuppositions that risks being characterised as utopian or merely "an illusion" (McCarthy, 1978: 325). Besides, Habermas himself states: "Even under favourable conditions, no complex society could ever correspond to the model of purely communicative social relations" (Habermas, 1996b: 326).

In order to avoid the risk of being criticised for utopianism, Habermas opts for the convenience of characterising this ideal model "a methodological fiction" (ibid.). In this way, he points to its normative function and attempts to show that, even though it can never exist under current social conditions, this model should function as a guide to existing discursive practices. How useful can this model be, however, if its key aspects, namely intersubjectivity, discourse, argumentation, are fictions? Grant argues that despite such limitations "the rational communication model can provide a useful point of reference for an examination of fictionality as a social construct" (Grant, 2000: 31).

4.2.4 Critique

Duvenage (2003) rightly argues that Habermas does not attempt to establish a "comprehensive, absolute concept of reason" (Duvenage, 2003: 89) in terms of logic, freedom of desires, passions and other "moral conflicts" (Baynes, 1991: 4). He neither suggests an abstract philosophical concept of reason nor does he make the distinction between reason and emotion. Instead, Habermas argues that there is neither "such thing as a context-transcendent reason" (Habermas, 2001: 148), nor "comprehensive reason" (Habermas, 1990b: 305), because rationality "cannot be one-dimensional" (Duvenage, 2003: 38). He explicitly states that "communicative rationality does not constitute the overarching structure of rationality" (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 309) but instead it represents one *aspect* of it. Therefore, he develops communicative rationality as a procedural model in order to demystify (or "detranscendentalise"?) reason and protect his model "against the danger of dogmatically overstating its claims [...] through being formalised" (Habermas, in Thomson and Held, 1982: 228). While he succeeds in demystifying reason, nevertheless he fails to overstate its claims in his model, for he overloads it with too many presuppositions, as previously discussed.

Furthermore, Grant argues that in *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas “neglects putatively non-rational forms of communication such as irony, jokes, fictions and other ‘distortions’” (Grant, 2000: 31). If this attempt implies the exclusion of these elements from rational-critical debate, then it would dangerously limit the boundaries of reason to organised and “dry” emotionless argumentation. Such forms of “non-rational” communication certainly have a place in critical debate, for they often mask “rational” argumentation by way of allegories, metaphors, ironies etc. Habermas neither makes a sharp distinction between reason and emotion, as Kant does, nor between reason and madness, as Foucault does,⁶⁵ but rather ascribes specific characteristics and presuppositions to his concept of reason, which have been mentioned previously. By overloading the public use of reason with such presuppositions and prerequisites (primacy of universal interests, disregard of social inequalities and power differentials, specific context), Habermas presents an overly stringent and binding character of rationality, which is not only counterfactual but may also be detrimental to public debate. Such a rigid concept of reason could paradoxically function as a barrier to free expression and thought and ultimately as an exclusion mechanism in the public sphere, even though the “general public sphere” is described by Habermas as “a medium of unrestricted communication” (Habermas, 1996b: 308).

In respect of the normative-critical status of communicative rationality, it is important to note that while Habermas opposes the notion of a “context-transcendent reason”, he states that this does not mean that “the criteria of reason themselves change with every new context” (Habermas, 2001: 148). This refers to his argument against a conceptualisation of a “superior, comprehensive reason” (Habermas, 1990b: 305), but in favour of normative *criteria* for rationality in communicative action (cf. ideal speech situation). Still, he has no illusions regarding the operability of his model.

“To be sure, the concept of communicative rationality does contain a utopian perspective; in the structures of undamaged intersubjectivity can be found a necessary condition for individuals reaching an understanding among themselves without coercion, as well as for the identity of an individual coming to an

⁶⁵ In *L'ordre du discours* (1971), Foucault makes a clearer distinction between reason and madness (*la folie*) and describes the latter as a category excluded from discourse. A detailed examination of Foucault’s critique of communicative rationality is provided in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

understanding with himself or herself without force” (Habermas, in Thomson and Held, 1982: 227-8).

This does not mean that the normative status of communicative rationality is pointless due to its non-operability. Instead, it represents an ideal for which humanity should strive, in the same way as the ideals of peace and democracy serve as an ultimate goal and do not actually represent an existing reality. It is also useful as a “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996b: 326) as discussed above.

4.3 The lifeworld

4.3.1 Preliminary definition

Habermas advocates a model of communicative rationality based on argumentation, understanding, intersubjectivity and consensus (1987: 124-126). According to this model, communication oriented towards those four components must take place against the horizon of the lifeworld. It is within the lifeworld that communicative rationality can develop, validity claims can be made and contested and understanding and consensus can be reached.

“This *communicative rationality* is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to one and the same objective world” (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 315, emphasis in the original).

In short, the introduction of the concept of lifeworld is crucial as it complements communicative rationality and action.

The concept of the lifeworld is also significant in the wider analysis of Habermas’s account of the degeneration of the public sphere and the deterioration of the public use of reason. In particular, Habermas makes a distinction between *lifeworld* and *system* as two competing and at the same time complementary facets of social existence. His model of society is based on this system/lifeworld dichotomy. The synthesis of system and lifeworld orientations is integrated with Habermas’s delineation of different forms of rationality and rationalization: systems rationality is a type of purposive-rational

rationality, lifeworld rationality is communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987: 153-198). The system/lifeworld dualism is analysed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Lifeworld is a term that Habermas borrows from Husserl (1970). Husserl first used the term *Lebenswelt* (literally “life-world”) as the framework of human existence as an *a priori* condition (Husserl, 1970). According to Husserl, the lifeworld comprises a stock of what is “pre-given valid” (op.cit.: 109) or taken for granted and may therefore work as a background for thought and action.

“[The lifeworld] belongs to what is taken for granted, prior to all scientific thought and philosophical reasoning [...] it presupposes the already existing world, namely, as a horizon of what in the given case is indubitably valid as existing” (op.cit.: 110).

Husserl used the concept of the *Lebenswelt* in order to contrast the natural world perspective of people with the mathematical laws and perspective of science⁶⁶. For Husserl, lifeworld was an essentially human accomplishment, a “universal mental acquisition” (Husserl, 1970: 113). Habermas seems to adopt a similar approach, particularly in his system/lifeworld distinction and analysis, in which the system represents the technocratic, functionalistic “steering media” (Habermas, 1987: 154) of society as apostles of instrumental reason, while the lifeworld represents the realm of human interaction and communicative reason. In the following sections, both the influence of phenomenology⁶⁷ and the departure from it on the Habermasian lifeworld will be further clarified.

Habermas initially defines the lifeworld as a “culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretive patterns” (Habermas, 1987: 124). This points to its function as a “reservoir of simple interactions” (Habermas, 1996b: 360) and

⁶⁶ Cf. “If all consciousness is subject to essential laws in a manner similar to that in which spatial reality is subject to mathematical laws, then these essential laws will be of the most fertile significance in investigating facts of the conscious life of human and brute animals” (Husserl, 1981, in Moran and Mooney, 2002: 132).

⁶⁷ Consider: “While the communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld we have been discussing gets us away from the philosophy of consciousness, it nevertheless still lies on the same analytical level as the transcendental lifeworld concept of phenomenology” (Habermas, 1987: 135).

assumptions, or as a social horizon (McCarthy, 1984: xxvi) used by participants in communication oriented to reaching understanding.

“From a perspective turned toward the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation” (Habermas, 1987: 124).

The lifeworld is therefore the “pre-given space” in which people act communicatively and interact (Habermas, 1987: 131-139) in the framework of a particular situation. It is this space that, according to Habermas, comprises the background of our existence and actions and for this reason it is considered “unproblematic” (op.cit.: 130), undisputed and “taken for granted” (op.cit.: 132). It is also “prior to any possible disagreement and cannot become controversial” (op.cit.: 131). These taken-for-granted and pre-given qualities of the Habermasian lifeworld stem from Husserl’s original analysis.⁶⁸

As soon as a situation is determined, a “segment” (Habermas, 1987: 132) of the lifeworld emerges as something that is taken for granted. Similarly, a situation represents “a segment of the lifeworld delimited in relation to a theme” (op.cit: 127).

“The lifeworld circumscribes action situations in the manner of a preunderstood context that, however, is not action situation stands undecided as a reality that is at once unquestionable and shadowy” (Habermas, 1987: 127).

This reality can be “shadowy” because it is taken for granted “culturally” (ibid.), resting on “interpretations” (ibid.); since it can be thematised, its unquestionable status is undermined. Because only a segment of the lifeworld is used in any given situation, the context within which it is used is constantly adjusted in order to meet the needs and particularities of specific situations.

“Situations do not get ‘defined’ in the sense of being sharply delimited. They always have a horizon that shifts with the theme. [...] For those involved, the action situation is the centre of their lifeworld; it has a movable horizon because it points to the complexity of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987: 122-3).

Actors therefore communicate, reflect and operate within that movable or shifting horizon. And because of such horizon adjustments to achieve contextual relevance in a

⁶⁸ “It (the lifeworld) belongs to what is taken for granted, prior to all scientific thought and philosophical reasoning” (Husserl, 1970: 110).

given situation, the lifeworld “cannot in principle be exhausted” (op.cit.: 133) despite the taken-for-granted elements which comprise the framework of “global preunderstanding” (ibid.) necessary for understanding in a particular given situation. It could be said, therefore, that the totality of the lifeworldly stock of knowledge consists of “relevance-conditioned meaning contexts” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 178).

The Habermasian lifeworld, however, is more than the inexhaustible reservoir of knowledge, assumptions and organised cultural values that are adjusted to the needs of particular situations. It is above all the “transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet” and “come to an understanding [...] about something in the objective, social or subjective worlds” (Habermas, 1987: 126). This decentred approach to understanding, (cf 4.2.1 above), marks the fundamental difference between the Husserlian and Habermasian lifeworlds. In brief, the latter has three dimensions: the objective, the subjective and the social world and how these influence communication. When communicative actors differentiate between these worlds in terms of perspective and experience they reach a decentred understanding of the world, which is at the heart of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984: 72).

The “transcendental” (Habermas, 1987: 126) nature of the lifeworld not only points to its existence in communicative action – it is “always already there” (McCarthy, 1984: xxvi) when people act. It also denotes that communicative actors belong to the lifeworld as “interpreters [...] along with their speech acts” (Habermas, 1987: 126), which inform our rational assumptions about each other, and at the same time relate to it as a social horizon and utilise it as a storehouse of knowledge and cultural patterns during social interaction. More importantly, the individual cannot step away from this background or horizon within which communication takes place and which makes understanding and consensus possible, but he or she constantly moves *within* the horizon of the lifeworld: “[T]he lifeworld forms a horizon behind which we cannot go; it is a totality with no reverse side” (Habermas, 1987: 132). In this respect, it is important to note that, as is the case with the public sphere, the Habermasian lifeworld does not refer to something that is ‘waiting to be used’. Its *a priori* status may denote that it is “already there” (McCarthy, 1984: xxvi), however only one part of it emerges with communication as the background against which communicative action takes place and communicative rationality emerges.

So far, Habermas has described the lifeworld as an unproblematically given “holistic background” (op.cit.: 130, 135) and a “horizon” (op.cit.: 132). These two seem to be contradicting each other. How can a set of beliefs and interpretations act as a background in a particular situation, and at the same time form a (shifting) social horizon for everyday communication, which marks the boundaries of communicative action? Both categorizations stem partly from the Phenomenology of Husserl.

In his analysis of Husserl and his concept of the lifeworld, Habermas states that Husserl describes the lifeworld as “an unthematically concomitant background” (Habermas, 2003: 11). This background was seen as enriching learning processes that constitute knowledge (op.cit.: 12) and giving rise to a structure of lifeworld and objective world which “corresponds to a methodological dualism of understanding [...] and observation” (ibid.). It could be said though that the lifeworld is defined as a background so as to show the contrast either between the lifeworld and the situation, in the case of Habermas’s explication of the emergence of part of the lifeworld according to a particular communication situation, or between the lifeworld and the objective world in the case of Husserl’s methodological architectonic of lifeworld and objective world. The notion of a “reservoir of simple interactions” (Habermas, 1996b: 360) or a repository of assumptions and beliefs also points to a lifeworld that exists and functions as a background.

With regard to the lifeworld as a horizon, Habermas again is using this term as a sort of phenomenological metaphor. Because only a segment of the lifeworld emerges in a specific situation, the communicative actors’ scope is limited to that particular segment. Even though Habermas states that the lifeworld is “a totality with no reverse side” (Habermas, 1987: 132), nevertheless this totality of shared meanings and understanding is not grasped or used in its entirety in everyday communication. Instead, the term horizon is used to denote its intangibility and vastness; just as we only see part of the horizon while being aware of its totality, the same applies to the lifeworld – it is always there even if we only seem to use a small part of it. Horizon also has a perspectival sense, for its boundary may be shifted according to each communication situation.

4.3.2 *One or Many Lifeworlds?*

In his analysis of the lifeworld, Habermas introduces a key distinction between the “communication-theoretic” and the “everyday” concept of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 135). The latter points to a broad-ranging concept of “the sociocultural lifeworld” (ibid.), which can be used as:

“an intuitively accessible [...] cognitive reference system [...] for descriptions and explanations relevant to the lifeworld as a whole and not merely to occurrences within it” (Habermas, 1987: 135-6).

The *everyday lifeworld* is therefore presupposed and used for cognitive purposes (op.cit.: 137) in communication, while the communication-theoretic lifeworld is developed from the perspective of participants and is used “only as the horizon-forming context of an action situation” (ibid.). This theoretical method is extremely important.

The socio-theoretical concept of the *everyday lifeworld* can be traced back to Schütz and Luckmann (1974) who defined it as:

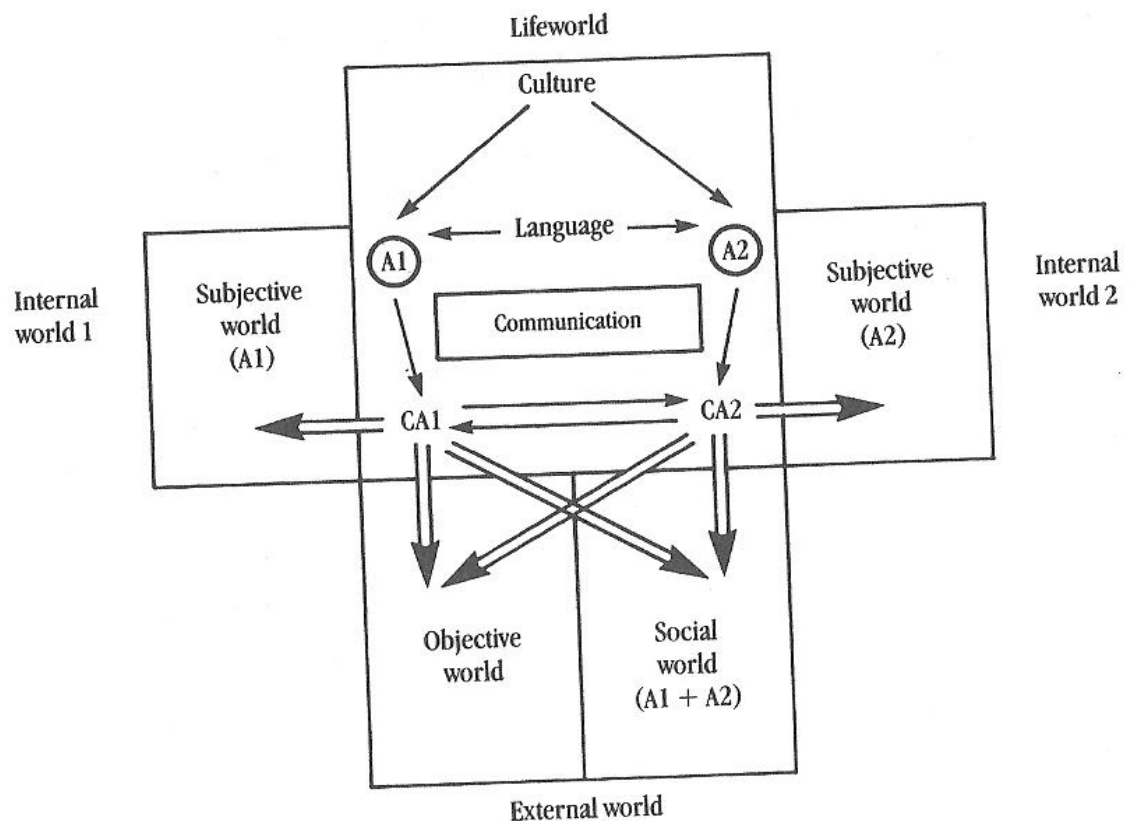
“The reality which seems self-evident to men remaining within the natural attitude, [...] in which man continuously participates in ways which are at once inevitable and patterned. What the normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 3)

According to this definition, the everyday lifeworld is the “primary reality” (op.cit.: 35), compared to “other provinces of reality with finite meaning-structure” (ibid.). As the primary reality, it is “unquestionable, unproblematic until further notice” (op.cit.: 4). In other words, it includes the taken-for-granted quality mentioned above in the attitude of “common sense” (ibid.), for it is “man’s fundamental and paramount reality” (op.cit.: 35). More importantly, Schütz and Luckmann point out that “reciprocal understanding” (ibid.) and “a common, communicative, surrounding world” (op.cit.: 3) can *only* be constituted and are only possible in the everyday lifeworld.

Based on this preliminary analysis, it could be said that the communication-theoretic lifeworld is part of the everyday lifeworld, although Habermas does not explicitly state this. Instead, he introduces the concept of “everyday” lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 135) without explicating its relevance and relation to “the” lifeworld. In fact, his premises seem rather ambiguous if we consider that he initially introduces the lifeworld from the

perspective of participants in communication and then provides a more distanced and abstract analysis. He moves from defining the lifeworld in practical and descriptive terms, as a repository of cultural knowledge and assumptions, to the “totality” (Habermas, 1987: 137) or the social horizon (McCarthy, 1984: xxvi) that shapes the behaviour of participants in communication and defines their existence, the “transcendental site” (Habermas, 1987: 126) where communicative action takes place. This ambiguity leads to the question of the topography of the lifeworld (if any) and in particular: is there one lifeworld, the everyday lifeworld that includes the communication-theoretic and is common to all participants in communication? Or are there many lifeworlds, individual and shared, within an all-encompassing meta-concept of a lifeworld? The brief analysis below will attempt to clarify whether there is *one* common everyday lifeworld and it is merely “relevance-conditioned” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 178).

World-Relations of Communicative Acts (Habermas, 1987: 127)



“The double arrows indicate the world-relations that actors (A) establish with their utterances (CA)” (ibid.)

As mentioned above, Habermas states that “speakers and hearers come to an understanding from out of *their common* lifeworld about something in the objective, social or subjective worlds” (Habermas, 1987: 126, my emphasis) and also that they are “always moving within the horizon of *their* lifeworld; they cannot step outside it” (ibid., my emphasis). In his schematic representation of World-Relations of Communicative Acts (op.cit.: 127, see figure above), he places “Lifeworld” outside (and above) participants’ subjective worlds. It is also clear from this graphic representation that there is only one lifeworld. However, he points out that this scheme is “particularly unsatisfactory” (op.cit.: 126) because it is only meant to illustrate that the lifeworld is “constitutive for mutual understanding *as such*” (ibid., emphasis in the original).⁶⁹ This is a schematic representation of the communicative role of the lifeworld and not of its internal structure, therefore it *alone* does not bear proof that Habermas advocates the existence of one common lifeworld.

Having said that, Habermas also makes references to “an intersubjectively shared lifeworld” (Habermas, 1990a: 135, 199; Habermas, 1996b: 322), arguing for a shared or common “totality”. Again, this goes back to Husserl’s concept of the lifeworld, according to which the lifeworld is “at first ‘given’ [to the individual] as his or her own” (Habermas et al, 1989: 120), however in order to count as a shared understanding it must be given to the “we” (ibid.). In order for communication to be effective and for understanding to be reached, therefore, the lifeworld must be shared. Similarly, Habermas states:

“The members of a collective count themselves as belonging to the lifeworld in the first person plural similar to that in which the individual speaker attributes to himself the subjective world to which he has privileged access in the first-person singular. Communality rests, to be sure, on consensual knowledge, on a cultural stock of knowledge that members share” (Habermas, 1987: 131).

This element of collective sharing brings out the social nature of Habermas’s lifeworld, in contrast to that of Husserl. In his extensive analysis of the limited reach of universal

⁶⁹ Later, in his critique of Schütz, Habermas rejects a concept of the lifeworld limited to the notion of mutual understanding and suggests that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding, but also of social integration and socialisation (Habermas, 1987: 139).

pragmatics, Grant (2007) points out the limitations of Husserl's Phenomenological methods in not being able to "escape the aporias of the philosophy of the subject" (Grant, 2007: 73). Grant stresses that Habermas moves away from the Phenomenological method towards "a critical-pragmatic social philosophy [...] thus recontextualising the concept as a social lifeworld" (op.cit.: 70). It is this social element of Habermas's lifeworld that is of crucial importance for his essentially communicative model.

Furthermore, as is also evident from the, albeit "unsatisfactory" (op.cit.: 126) schematic representation (see figure above), subjective worlds are "privatised" (Habermas et al, 1989: 120) as subjective worlds, while this is not the case with the lifeworld. Everyone sharing their common lifeworld has access to it and is aware that it belongs to the "we". This bears additional proof that Habermas's theory is moving away from a subject-centred, cognitive-based notion of rationality and is committed to examining how value and meaning are conveyed and validity claims are tested through communicative action *in* the participants' common lifeworld (Schmidle, 2004: 27).

Moreover, if we assumed that each person had their own lifeworld then there would be no consensus or understanding of truth or pre-established fundamental principles. This stock of cultural knowledge, assumptions and interpretations would be "privatised" (Habermas et al, 1989: 120) and therefore no references could be made to basic truths or established conventions that are common to all participants. If a segment of the lifeworld emerges within the context of a particular situation and this is shared or common to all participants, then it could be said that indeed there is one lifeworld, according to Habermas, but whose different segments need to be thematised in situations or according to situations and within which communicative action is possible.⁷⁰ These segments may also be called lifeworlds ('ours' or 'theirs') but they are shared and they form part of an overarching totality or horizon of *the* lifeworld.

⁷⁰ "[T]his domain of what can be thematised and problematised is restricted to an action situation that remains *encompassed* within the horizons of a lifeworld, however blurred these may be" (Habermas, 1987: 130-1).

4.3.3 *The Intersubjectivity of the Lifeworld*

The common lifeworld used by participants in communication, however, is not only shared but it is also intersubjective (Habermas, 1987; 1990; 1996b) since different subjects share the same lifeworld. Schütz and Luckmann explain that while the lifeworld “presents itself to me as a subjective meaning-context” (1974: 15) and it makes sense according to one’s own interpretations and subjectivity, nevertheless one interprets the behaviour of others on the basis of his or her stock of knowledge (op.cit.: 16). And since there is no such thing as an individual lifeworld, but instead one lifeworld, whose segments can be thematised and which consists of (cultural) interpretations and assumptions, then the “everyday lifeworld is therefore fundamentally intersubjective” (ibid.). In this communication-based and communication-dependent world, language mediates the lifeworld and the lifeworld mediates language in a process of intersubjectivity, or “interpenetration” (cf. Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 15-16; Habermas, 1987: 131).

“Thus, from the outset, my lifeworld is not my private world but, rather, is intersubjective; the fundamental structure of its reality is shared by us. Just as it is self-evident to me, within the natural attitude, that I can, up to a certain point, obtain knowledge of the lived experience of my fellow-men – for example, the motives of their acts – so, too, I also assume that the same holds reciprocally for them with respect to me” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 4).

The intersubjectivity of the lifeworld is justifiable if we consider the intersubjectivity and decentred understanding of the world in communicative rationality, which emerges within the lifeworld. Subjects knowingly refer to something in the objective world, “which they suppose as existing independently and as the same for everyone, from *within* the horizon of their lifeworld” (Habermas, 2003: 16, emphasis in the original. Also see previous chapter on decentration).

“The world gains objectivity only through *counting* as one and the same world *for* a community of speaking and acting subjects. The abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach an understanding among themselves about what takes place in the world or is to be effected in it. Through this *communicative practice* they assure themselves at

the same time of their common life-relations, of an intersubjectively shared *lifeworld*' (Habermas, 1984: 13, emphasis in the original).

Moreover, since the lifeworld is the only domain where mutual understanding can be reached (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 3) and understanding is intersubjective, the lifeworld has to be intersubjective as well. It cannot be subjective according to Habermas for, as mentioned above, it is not "privatized" (Habermas et al, 1989: 120) but common and shared and belongs to the "first person plural" (Habermas, 1987: 131). It cannot be objective because it "rests on interpretations" (op.cit.: 132) despite its "unquestionable" (op.cit.: 127) and "unproblematic" (op.cit.: 130) qualities. What is intersubjectively shared may be taken for granted, as a given, if it has become a custom or a convention. However, individual differences that rely on previous experiences outwith the particular situation (which have therefore not been shared, at least not in the particular situation) still have to be explained and shared in order to clarify what is intersubjectively common in our (the communicative actors') lifeworld.

"The further one retreats from an intersubjective reality, the further one leaves the everyday lifeworld behind – this being not a private world, but rather "the world of our common experience" (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: xxv).

Lastly, the lifeworld cannot be objective because it is constantly "prone to change" (Husserl, 1970: 109) as will be shown in sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5. The intersubjectivity of the lifeworld will be further clarified in the next section which focuses on the lifeworld's structural components.

It is important to note that in his later work Habermas describes the lifeworld as an addition to the three worlds that make up communicative actors' decentred understanding. More specifically, in *Autonomy and Solidarity* (1992), Habermas reiterates the three dimensions of communicative rationality – the relation of the subject to the objective world of events and facts, the relation to a social world and to its inner nature, its own subjectivity and the subjectivity of others (Habermas, in Dews, 1992: 109). To these he adds the lifeworld, "which stands behind the back of each participant in communication and which provides resources for the problems of understanding" (ibid.).

4.3.4 Structural Components of the Lifeworld

Habermas introduces culture, society and personality as structural components of the lifeworld, based on Durkheim's analysis on the differentiation of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 134). Habermas offers a critique of Durkheim's examination of the separation of culture, society and personality in the differentiation of the lifeworld (ibid.) and instead suggests that culture, society and personality are "tightly interwoven in the collective consciousness" (Habermas, 1987: 107). In introducing these structural components, Habermas attempts to move away from what he regards a uni-dimensional concept of the lifeworld which focused on cultural stimuli and interpretations.⁷¹

Firstly, culture as a structural component of the lifeworld is defined as:

"[T]he stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world" (Habermas, 1987: 138).

This definition seems to be similar to Habermas's definition of the lifeworld as a "culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretive patterns" (Habermas, 1987: 124), however there is a key difference. Culture, according to the above explanation, refers to a stock of *knowledge*, while the lifeworld refers to a stock of "interpretive patterns" of *linguistic communication*. In this respect, culture constitutes a structural component of the lifeworld inasmuch as knowledge constitutes a component of communication. This needs to be further investigated.

From the outset it would seem that the lifeworld consists solely of cultural values, customs and other such elements from which interlocutors draw their views and arguments. However, Habermas criticises culturalistic accounts of the concept of the lifeworld, which may be traced back to Phenomenology. He cautions against the "one-sidedness of the culturalistic concept of the lifeworld" (op.cit.: 139) even though, as he states, cultural bases of interpretation, assessment and critique "serve as resources for the achievement of mutual understanding [...] and [...] consensus" (op.cit.: 135). Personality, which is analysed below, also has a key role to this process. For this

⁷¹ Cf. "Whenever 'the lifeworld' has been made a fundamental concept of social theory [...] the strategies of concept formation usually connect up with the only one of the three structural components of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 138).

reason, cultural patterns of interpretation, evaluation and expression “about something in the world” (op.cit.: 138) are complemented by society and personality in the structure of the Habermasian lifeworld.

Society as a structural component of the lifeworld refers not merely to social life but, more importantly, to “legitimate orders through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity” (Habermas, 1987: 138). Society determines the status, that is, the rights and duties, of group members by way of “legitimately ordered interpersonal relations” (op.cit.: 140). It includes the rules, norms, laws and values that, unlike cultural elements, are legitimised and imposed. It consists of different types of “rule-governed action” (Habermas, 2003: 13), and these rules stem from and are legitimated through lifeworld members’ involvement and participation in society. Communicative action takes place against the background of such norms and values relating to diverse subjects. These norms and values comprise the “world” against which cultural knowledge has to “prove itself” (op.cit.: 139) when attempting to reach mutual understanding and a common interpretation of a situation. If mutual understanding and a common interpretation of a situation cannot be achieved because this is attempted *solely* on the basis of culture and language and not on legitimised social norms, it is the “formal world concepts” (op.cit.: 134) of facts, norms and experiences that free the scope of communicative action and remove the barriers to a common interpretation of a particular situation.

Society as a structural component of the lifeworld should not be confused with the social world of communicative actors. As can be seen from the above schematic representation of World-Relations of Communicative Acts (Habermas, 1987: 127), participants in communication establish relations with their subjective, objective and (intersubjective) social worlds through their utterances which are based on linguistically expressed cultural interpretations that belong to the lifeworldly stock of knowledge. It could be said that society as the sum of norms and values has a regulatory role on the interpretations, utterances and argumentation of participants, it sets the rules and boundaries in their communication, and this in turn has an impact on their common social world.

Similarly, the lifeworld should not be confused with society as a whole. Habermas notes that social theory is based on a concept of lifeworld reduced to the aspect of social

integration (Habermas, 1987: 140). For this reason, he proposes the distinction between *social* and *systems integration* in order to eschew the “fictions” that result from the identification of lifeworld with society (Habermas, 1987: 149-150). These fictions include the autonomy of actors, the independence of culture from external constraints and the transparency of communication (op.cit.: 149). According to Habermas, actors are never in total control of the action situations in which they participate and transparency of communication can never be guaranteed in a “relatively intransparent” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 169) lifeworld. This relative lack of transparency stems from the increasing complexity in society and the ‘colonisation’ of the lifeworld by forces of instrumental rationality – these will be analysed in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis, together with the distinction between social and systems integration.

Lastly, Habermas introduces the component of personality which had been ignored by Husserl and by sociologists who focused on the lifeworld as a background for the socialisation of individuals. Personality as a structural component of the Habermasian lifeworld refers to “competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby assert his own identity” (Habermas, 1987: 138). These competences are cognitive capacities of individual participants which, in conjunction with the regulation and legitimate orders and the cultural stock of knowledge determine the framework for participation in communication.

If personality is taken only as the sum of cognitive (linguistic and emotional) capacities of an individual, culture as a stock of knowledge more or less common to individuals who share them, and society as orders which all individual participants are obliged to follow in their social communication groups, then there seems to be little differentiation between segments of the lifeworld that emerge within the framework of a particular situation. In other words, if personality is taken only as the cognitive capacity to communicate, then ‘our’ lifeworld in ‘our’ situation and the lifeworld of other communicative actors with the same culture and living under the same societal norms, in different situations, would be the same. For this reason, Habermas does not define personality merely in cognitive terms but also adds *norms* and *experiences* (ibid.). These are crucial, for they mark the differences between lifeworlds in different

situations. They contribute to the individual's socialisation, which Habermas sees as the process corresponding to the structural component of personality.⁷²

It is interesting to note that personality is not included as part of the lifeworld in Habermas's schematic representation of World-Relations of Communicative Acts (Habermas, 1987: 127). As mentioned above, Habermas may consider this representation "particularly unsatisfactory" (op.cit.: 126), nonetheless the absence of personality may denote that either it is not considered as important an element or that it is incorporated into another element in the schema. The second possibility seems more plausible if we consider personality to signify subjectivity; in this case, it would be represented in the schema by the subjective world. If this is the case, however, then how can it be a structural component of the lifeworld and belong to the subjective world at the same time? The answer to this question is not evident. It could be that since the lifeworld is intersubjectively shared, the personalities of all participants constitute one of its components, and their cognitive capacities together with their norms and experiences contribute to the structure of their common lifeworld by enriching its communicative stock of "interpretive patterns" (Habermas, 1987: 124). Individual personality may denote subjectivity, however in the case of communication within an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, the personalities of all participants together with culture and social norms make up this common, shared background. In this way, communicative actors draw upon their "unshaken convictions" (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 3) of lifeworld components (culture, society, personality), further reinforcing "that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense" (op.cit.: 3-4).

The separation of culture, society and personality as structural components of the lifeworld is also significant because it points to the structural differentiation which is constitutive of a *rationalised* lifeworld. Lifeworld rationalisation (Habermas, 1984: 45, 70) is crucial for communicative rationality. For Habermas, social change occurs through the rationalisation of the lifeworld, which can only be achieved through communicative rationality and action. And the concept of communicative rationality

⁷² "Corresponding to processes of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation are the structural components of the lifeworld: culture, society, person" (Habermas, 1987: 138).

can be applied “only to the degree that structures of the lifeworld are differentiated and members develop divergent individual interests” (Habermas, 1987: 40). Instrumental rationality and strategic action according to this view would only result in irrational processes of change.

Habermas’s analysis of lifeworld rationalisation defies easy summary. He explains his understanding of lifeworld rationalisation through an analysis and critique of Weber’s study of rationalisation. In brief, Weber defines rationalisation in modern western societies as separation, differentiation and institutionalisation in the case of societal rationalisation (Habermas, 1984: 158-159). This constant move towards rational means results in every aspect of human action becoming “subject to calculation, measurement and control” (Abercrombie et al, 1994). According to Weber, this move towards rationalisation is inevitable and perilous (Habermas, 1987: 147).

Habermas rejects Weber’s pessimistic conclusions and states that Weber “geared his theory [...] to diagnosing negative developments” (ibid.). Habermas’s understanding of rationalisation is based on the fundamental distinction he makes between communicative and instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality and practices would lead to Weber’s notion of rationalisation with its perilous impact on society and culture, while communicative rationality would aim at reaching understanding and consensus through argumentation and, more importantly, critical reflection and debate (as mentioned in 4.2). In this respect, a “*communicatively* rationalised lifeworld” (Habermas, 1984: 404, my emphasis) is one that has undergone differentiation into its structural components of culture, society and personality.⁷³ This structural differentiation is based on participants’ decentred understanding of reality into objective, subjective and intersubjective worlds (see 4.2) and is achieved “through the medium of language” (Habermas, 2003: 17). The core idea is that with rationalisation, the cohesion of social orders issues more from “rationally motivated” agreement than from customary beliefs (op.cit.: 70).

⁷³ At this point, it is important to distinguish between communicative rationalisation advocated by Habermas and instrumental / system rationalisation in functionalist terms which refers to an increase in complexity. The latter is extensively analysed in Chapter 5.

What is significant with regard to lifeworld rationalisation according to Habermas is that it is not inevitable (Habermas, 1984: 404), precisely because it is based and depended on communicative rationality which involves critical reflection, argument and understanding. The contingency of these components on communicative rationality leads to the need for lifeworld rationalisation to be conditioned (ibid.); this does not occur inevitably but instead it requires effort. The significance of the rationalisation of the lifeworld is further analysed in Chapter 5, which will focus on the system/lifeworld model of society and on lifeworld colonisation by the system.

4.3.5 Functions of the Lifeworld

As a stock of interpretative patterns which also includes societal norms, cultural values and personal experiences and constitutes a shifting horizon within which communicative actors “move”, the lifeworld cannot be static. Husserl points out that the shared lifeworld is not a metaphysical concept immunized against the conditions of history and time, and is therefore “prone to change” (Husserl, 1970: 109). In their analysis of the lifeworld, Schütz and Luckmann maintain that people can engage themselves in the “region of reality” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 3) that is the lifeworld, and which they “can change” (ibid.) while operating in it.⁷⁴ In the same respect, Habermas argues against a static concept of the lifeworld in asserting that communicative actions, which take place within the lifeworld constitute processes of social integration and socialisation (Habermas, 1987: 139). Does this mean, however, that the intersubjectively shared lifeworld of participants in communication is constantly re-defined in order for it adjusted to a particular situation? In part, yes. The contents of the lifeworld may be open to revision and change because not every part of the lifeworld can be thematised, however this change is gradual. Just as language and culture undergoes changes over time, so does the lifeworld, since it constitutes a stock of cultural interpretations, which are linguistically communicated and intersubjectively shared. Societal norms and cultural interpretations are always undergoing revision and individuals are also revising their personal beliefs based on new experiences or on constant reflection and rethinking about past experiences. In other words, since the

⁷⁴ “[The lifeworld is] a reality which we modify through our acts and which, on the other hand, modifies our actions. [...] We act and operate not only within the lifeworld but also upon it” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974: 6).

structural components of the lifeworld are dynamic and liable to revision, so is the totality – “for the way we continue the traditions in which we find ourselves is up to us” (Habermas, 1987: 250).

The question that arises in this respect is, if the lifeworld is “taken for granted” (op.cit.: 132), “unproblematic” (op.cit.: 130) and “unquestionable” (op.cit.: 127) then there is no purpose or logic in changing or revising it. However, because a segment of the lifeworld emerges in a relevant and specific situation, this means that this part of the lifeworld is thematised. And thematisation requires adjustment and redefinition, which ultimately results in a loss of its unproblematic, unquestionable and taken for granted qualities.

“It is only in becoming relevant to a situation that a segment of the lifeworld comes into view as something that is taken for granted culturally, that rests on interpretations and that, now that it can be thematised, has lost this mode of unquestionable givenness” (Habermas, 1987: 132).

After all, nothing is eternally and universally unquestionable and even fundamental truths and beliefs are constantly revised and redefined through communication based on critical argumentation and reflection.⁷⁵ In Habermasian terms, value judgements and validity claims are put forward in the framework of communicative action within a communicatively rationalised, intersubjectively shared lifeworld, with the aim of mutual understanding and agreement in the framework of *Diskurs*. In other words, when revisiting and negotiating fundamental values and beliefs, the aim is to reach an agreement about these and revise them so that they can become unquestionable again and be added to the lifeworldly stock of cultural interpretations that participants share.

This task of revising and maintaining the lifeworld as an unquestionable framework, within which participants communicate, falls upon communicative action. It is through communication that the lifeworld is reproduced and maintained, so that a “context of relevance” (Habermas, 1987: 124) is renewed by way of connecting up new situations

⁷⁵ Consider: “The unproblematic character of the lifeworld has to be understood in a radical sense: qua lifeworld it cannot become problematic, it can at most fall apart. [...] the elements of an action situation concerning which participants want to reach some consensus by means of their communicative utterances must also be open to question” (Habermas, 1987: 130).

with the existing conditions of the lifeworld “in the semantic dimensions of meanings or contents as well as in the dimensions of social space and historical time” (op.cit.: 137-8). In other words, the lifeworld is constructed and reproduced as participants engage in dialogue and this reproduction comprises continuation or break and renewal of tradition (op.cit.: 139), i.e. the suspension of what is simply taken for granted.

The reproduction processes of the Habermasian lifeworld correspond to each of its structural components, which means that culture, society and personality are reproduced by the specific lifeworld reproductive processes of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation of its members (op.cit.: 140). These activities function as “transmitters of the lifeworld” (Chambers, 1995: 241).

Firstly, the cultural reproduction of lifeworld ensures “continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge” (Habermas, 1987: 140) in order for traditions and cultural meaning to be passed down and for communicative action to fulfil its function of communicative critique and lifeworld renewal. Knowledge transmission itself involves critical debate and reflection, for it has to be accepted as valid before it is included in the shared lifeworld, therefore again communicative action is key. A significant obstacle to knowledge transmission and coherence is what Schütz and Luckmann call the “intransparency of the lifeworld” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 169).

“Every experience entering into the stock of knowledge is limited by the situation of the acquisition of knowledge. There “residua” of opacity which can be demonstrated in every element of knowledge, announce the intransparency of the lifeworld” (op.cit.: 169).

For this reason, critical debate and negotiation act as filters which determine the knowledge to be included in the lifeworldly stock. This seeming intransparency, therefore, is “only relative” (ibid.) despite limitations to the stock of knowledge in the lifeworld. In other words, the lifeworld is “experienced as only relatively intransparent, but in principle transparent” (ibid.) since knowledge can be revised and renewed through communication and critique.

Secondly, the social integration of the lifeworld ensures that “newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the dimension of social space” (ibid.). In this way, rules and social norms of cooperation and interaction can be

renegotiated according to established activities and new institutions and practices can be legitimised and added to the lifeworldly stock of knowledge. The (re)affirmation of social norms and regulations will also eventually lead to the “stabilisation of group solidarity” (Habermas, 1987: 137). This process of social integration and solidarity is so significant that Durkheim originally based social theory on “a concept of the lifeworld reduced to the aspect of social integration” (op.cit.: 140).

Thirdly, the socialisation of the individual members of a lifeworld is the reproductive process corresponding to the structural component of personality and ensures the connection of newly arising situations to previously existing situations but “in the dimension of historical time” (ibid.). The socialisation of communicative actors as lifeworld members aims at the formation of unique identities “both as collectives and as [responsible] individuals” (Chambers, 1995: 241). All the above processes ensure the endurance of lifeworlds and social groups through time.

Based on the above analysis, the functions of the lifeworld could be encapsulated as follows:

Firstly, it is the lifeworld that determines the structure and content of discussion in a particular situation. It functions as a stock of shared assumptions, cultural interpretations and background knowledge that shape the conversation. In cases when shared context is not thematised, that is, it remains in the background and is not used in debate, then its function is still performed but its effect may not be evident. This means that even when a segment of the lifeworld is brought to the fore in a particular situation, the rest of the intersubjectively shared lifeworld is still implicitly taken into account. In addition, given that the lifeworld “stores the interpretive work of preceding generations” (Habermas, 1984: 70), it also functions as a “conservative counterweight to the risk of disagreement that arises with every actual process of reaching an understanding” (ibid.). Constant revisiting and renegotiation of the lifeworld means that its members not only act within it but also “operate upon it” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 6) in order to ensure intersubjectivity and minimise the risks of disagreement and misunderstanding.

Indeed, the second function of the lifeworld as a background and a platform for communicative action, which is intersubjectively shared between its members, is that it constitutes the fundamental prerequisite of agreement. Of course, disagreement and

misunderstanding are still possible since actors base their mutual understanding on their own interpretations (Habermas, 1987: 133), however any consensus feeds back into the lifeworld and contributes to its revision and renewal, thus making possible shared or coupled interpretations which eventually lead to mutual understanding and agreement. There seems to be a cyclical process whereby the lifeworld fosters communicative action and the latter “provides the medium for the reproduction of lifeworlds” (Habermas, 1984: 337) and sustains them by topping up the fund of shared knowledge. Schmidle describes this as a process of “cyclical intelligibility” (Schmidle, 2004: 28).

“While the lifeworld is necessary for communicative action to be rendered intelligible, communicative action is also necessary for the constitution and maintenance of the lifeworld” (ibid.).

An intersubjectively shared lifeworld is therefore essential for a decentred understanding of the world which is necessary for understanding and consensus-oriented communicative rationality and action, and communicative action is also necessary for the emergence and reproduction of the lifeworld. It could be argued, therefore, that the lifeworld also functions as a balancing force in society, or as a safeguard against social disintegration.

Thirdly, as mentioned above, the lifeworld functions as a “force for social integration” (op.cit.: 52) with its reproductive mechanisms that ensure group solidarity and re-establishment of social norms and rules that govern communicative action. Hence Habermas’s view that communication constitutes nothing less than the “principle of lifeworld sociation [or] reproduction” (Habermas, 1984: 337). It also functions as a medium of the cultural reproduction of society, since it helps to revisit and pass on traditions and to critically evaluate and transmit knowledge. Lastly, its role in social integration means that the “legitimation of validity claims arises from lifeworld (or the public), not from [...] any other world” (Habermas, 2003: 17). The significance of the lifeworld is therefore evident. Habermas emphasises its central (normative) role in communicative rationality and action and urges for its protection against colonisation by the system, which is examined in the next chapter.

“What remains for philosophy is an illuminating furtherance of lifeworld processes of achieving selfunderstanding, processes that are related to totality. For the lifeworld must be defended against extreme alienation at the hands of the

objectivating, the moralizing, *and* the aestheticizing interventions of expert cultures”
(Habermas, 1992: 18).

CHAPTER 5

Systems Theory and Communicative Rationality: The Habermas / Luhmann Debate

5.0 Introductory remarks

In an extensive analysis of his concept of lifeworld, Habermas cautions that this concept alone, which constitutes the lifeblood of communicative action, “has only limited analytical and empirical range” (Habermas, 1987: 118). He suggests the conception of societies “simultaneously as systems and lifeworld” (ibid.) mainly for empirical and methodological reasons, in order to separate lifeworld rationalisation from the “growing complexity of societal systems” (ibid.) and thus facilitate empirical analysis. Only in this way can the theorist come to a full grasp of social reality and thereby open up the possibility for emancipatory critique. This chapter examines Habermas’s model of society based on the lifeworld/system dichotomy, the concepts of rationalisation and complexity, and the impact of the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system on communicative rationality in the public sphere. This is followed by the challenge of Luhmann’s Social Systems Theory to Habermas’s concepts of communicative rationality and publicness. Luhmann’s critique of Habermas’s theory is relevant, as it offers functionalist alternatives to concepts such as intersubjectivity, understanding, consensus, meaning, reason and publicness and directly challenges the normative grounding of Habermas’s model of communicative rationality in the public sphere. The Chapter ends with a critical evaluation of the Habermas/Luhmann debate.

5.1 Habermas’s System Theory

5.1.1 Society as System and Lifeworld

Habermas’s conception of society can be summarised as follows:

“[A]n entity that, in the course of evolution, gets differentiated both as a system and as a lifeworld. Systemic evolution is measured by the increase in a society’s steering capacity, whereas the state of development of a symbolically structured

lifeworld is indicated by the separation of culture, society and personality” (Habermas, 1987: 151-152).

Systems and lifeworld therefore not only coexist in this societal model, but they also evolve in parallel in a form of a concomitant progressive differentiation.⁷⁶ On the one hand, there is “systemic evolution” (ibid.) through the development and increasing influence of “steering media”, and “system differentiation” (op.cit.: 154) with the constant creation of new social structures in the form of the state complemented by “media-steered subsystems” (ibid.). The latter constitute the core of Habermas’s notion of the system and of his version of systems theory. The system according to Habermas’s model corresponds to the economic and political domain and “depends on performativity and self-referentiality” (op.cit.: 152), as opposed to the lifeworld, which corresponds to the social and cultural domain and “depends on the (presumed) rationality of intersubjective communicative reciprocity” (ibid.). It could be argued, therefore, that system and lifeworld represent the conflictual coexistence of instrumental (strategic) and communicative rationality.

Habermas conceives of systems both as complementary and as counter to the lifeworld. His dual model of society explains social crises through a border conflict between system and lifeworld. Systemic mechanisms function through “steering media” (Habermas, 1987: 171) such as money and administrative power. These constitute the driving force behind the “subsystems” of the market and state (op.cit.: 310) and are governed by instrumental rationality, as opposed to the lifeworld which is characterised by communicative rationality. And, since societies are conceived simultaneously as systems and lifeworld according to Habermas, there is constant tension between the functioning of purposive/strategic and communicative, or “substantive rationality” (Weber, 1968: 85-109). The steering mechanisms of money and administrative power form “systematic distortions” (Habermas, 1987: 152), affecting communication in the lifeworld.

⁷⁶ “I understand social evolution as a second-order process of differentiation: system and lifeworld are differentiated in the sense that the complexity of the one and the rationality of the other grow. But it is not only qua system and qua lifeworld that they are differentiated; they get differentiated from one another *at the same time*” (Habermas, 1987: 153, my emphasis).

The steering media of systems which also determine systemic evolution, according to the Habermasian model of a society comprising systems and lifeworld, are money and administrative power. Money is described as an exchange mechanism which “transforms use values into exchange values” (Habermas, 1987: 171), but “has structure-forming effects only when it becomes an intersystemic medium of interchange” (ibid.). Such effects are described as the shaping of the economy as a “monetarily steered subsystem” (ibid.) on which the state becomes increasingly dependent. The results are twofold: systemic differentiation with the forming of “complementary environments”⁷⁷, which will be analysed below, and the replacement of linguistic communication with the medium of money.

“Media such as money and power attach to empirically motivated ties [...] they encode a purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value. They do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but *replace* it with a symbolic generalisation of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favour of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action.” (Habermas, 1987: 182-183, emphasis in the original).

The replacement of linguistic communication with money means that the latter assumes the role of a “special code” (Habermas, 1990: 351) used in conditions of exchange “without having to lay claim to the resources of the lifeworld” (ibid.). Decisions for action are therefore conditioned in such a way that they secure the fixed “preference structure of supply and demand” (ibid.). Lifeworld action based on consensus and mutual understanding is displaced “in the trading of commodities and in the execution of hierarchically organized activities” (Bausch, 1997: 321), which ultimately leads to a “systematically induced reification of everyday practice” (Habermas, 1990: 351).

Since everyday communicative practice is embedded in the lifeworld, if the medium of this practice is changed from communicative-rational to purposive-rational (i.e. money

⁷⁷ “Complementary environments take shape as the production process is converted all over to wage labour and the state apparatus is connected up with production by the field from taxes on those employed. The state apparatus becomes dependent upon the media-steered subsystem of the economy. This forces it to reorganize and needs among other things to run a simulation of power to the structure of the steering medium power becomes assimilated to money” (Habermas, 1987: 171).

and/or power), this would lead to a structural transformation of the lifeworld itself. However, as Habermas sees it, there would not be a need for this, for the lifeworld would no longer be needed at all (op.cit.: 183). Communicative rationality, mutual understanding and consensus in the Habermasian sense require increasing “expenditure of interpretive energies” (op.cit.: 182) and also involve “the risk of dissensus” (ibid.), while the substitution of rational, or indeed of any linguistic communication, with money “decreases both the expenditure of interpretive energy and the risk of a breakdown in mutual understanding” (op.cit.: 261). Communicative action is therefore transferred to these media and such a significant reduction of risk appears to be a “conditioning of decisions in expanded fields of contingency [...], a technicizing of the lifeworld” (op.cit.: 281).

5.1.2 Uncoupling / Rationalisation

According to Habermas’s model, system and lifeworld in traditional, tribal societies were originally identical (op.cit.: 154). Power and exchange relations belonged to the realm of the family in such a way that there was no notion of distinction between system and lifeworld. Once production started to shift to the market and an economic power structure started to emerge, the system also started to detach itself from the lifeworld. The market economy, as opposed to family structure, adhered to different rules, which required different, more relevant mechanisms. In this way, the system began to uncouple its bureaucratic institutions and processes. This development, described by Habermas, seems similar to the one of the structural transformation of the public sphere (see Section 2.5).

This gradual detachment of the system from the lifeworld results in a situation where the steering media (money and power) of the market and state subsystems “function as an alternative language of coordinating economic and political transactions” (Bausch, 1997: 321). Having no need for lifeworld resources, social subsystems thus get progressively detached from the lifeworld, which leads to the eventual “uncoupling” (Habermas, 1987: 263) of system and lifeworld according to Habermas’s theory. In particular, as the system becomes increasingly detached from the lifeworld, the cultural and social structures that form the latter’s basic components become more distant from people. The system thus gradually exercises more steering capacity over the lifeworld,

which “gets overloaded” (Habermas, 1987: 155) and ultimately replaced by “delinguistified media” (ibid.).

“[T]he social system definitively bursts out of the horizon of the lifeworld [and] escapes from the intuitive knowledge of everyday communicative practice” (Habermas, 1987: 173).

As a result, previously common understandings of the world become increasingly differentiated and the system ultimately “uncouples” (ibid.) itself from the lifeworld.

This differentiation of common understandings of the world leads to a further differentiation of the various parts of the lifeworld, so that the culture, social, and personality components and relationships become separated. In this way, “action oriented to mutual understanding gains more and more independence from normative contexts” (Habermas, 1987: 155). At the same time, the subsystems of the market and economy also become increasingly separated, following socio-economic transformations. This “segmental differentiation of society” (op.cit.: 161) into smaller subsystems on the one hand and into the separate elements of the lifeworld on the other, increases social complexity (ibid.). New systemic mechanisms and their corresponding levels of complexity lead to the uncoupling of system and lifeworld being “depicted in such a way that the lifeworld, which is at first coextensive with a scarcely differentiated social system, gets cut down more and more to one subsystem among others” (Habermas, 1987: 154). In particular, differentiation of society urges systemic differentiation on two levels: coordinating action orientations and state organisations (op.cit.: 164) which creates an institutional complex “that anchors a newly emerging mechanism of system differentiation *in the lifeworld*” (op.cit.: 166, my emphasis). The uncoupling of system and lifeworld that Habermas describes, therefore, does not imply the separation or radical split between system and lifeworld, but rather their independent evolution (in the form of differentiation, internal segmentation etc.) *within* the lifeworld, at least at this stage.

More specifically, the “trends in the alteration of lifeworld structures” (op.cit.: 288) that result from the differentiation of its individual components of culture, society and personality is what Habermas describes as the “rationalisation of the lifeworld” (ibid.). Habermas borrows the concept of rationalisation from Weber (1968), whose theory of rationalisation was geared towards analysing negative developments in society

(Habermas, 1987: 147). Weber sees capitalism and bureaucracy as the “two great rationalising forces” of society (Weber, 1978: 698; 1116), and rationalisation as the constant differentiation, separation and institutionalisation of society (and culture).

“In Weber's view, bureaucracies are cages in the sense that people are trapped in them, their basic humanity denied. Weber feared most that these systems would grow more and more rational and that rational principles would come to dominate an accelerating number of sectors of society. Weber anticipated a society of people locked into a series of rational structures, who could move only from one rational system to another. Thus, people would move from rationalized educational institutions to rationalized work places, from rationalized recreational settings to rationalized homes. Society would become nothing more than a seamless web of rationalized structures; there would be no escape” (Ritzer, 1996: 21).

Habermas sees Weber’s rationalisation theory as overly negative and pessimistic. Unlike Weber, he wishes to separate strategy from rational communication in his model of communicative rationality, and therefore considers progressive rationalisation as a *potential* for a flourishing society. He explicitly states that lifeworld rationalisation “can be understood in terms of successive releases of the potential for rationality in communicative action” (Habermas, 1987: 155). Still, this potential is not always realised. Lifeworld rationalisation involves progressive structural differentiation which requires an enhancement of knowledge and a release from traditionalism (Habermas, 1987: 148; 173).

A further crucial point is that lifeworld rationalisation is accompanied by system rationalisation, in the form of specialisation which results in further segmentation and the profusion of differentiated systems and subsystems, as mentioned above. Instead of this enhancing the development of further life possibilities, however, and helping “progress in the rational shaping of the conditions of life” (op.cit.: 287-8), it leads to strategic imperatives taking over the communicative rationality of the lifeworld, and socio-cultural structures developing a formal (systemic, instrumental) rationality.

“[T]he rationalization of lifeworld makes possible a heightening of systemic complexity which becomes sort of hypertrophied that it unleashes system imperatives that burst the capacity of the lifeworld they instrumentalise” (Habermas, 1987: 155).

In short, as social systems become more dense and complex, the Habermasian lifeworld becomes more “provincial” (op.cit.: 173).

In this way, the concomitant rationalisation of lifeworld *and* system, the uncoupling of system and lifeworld, increasing social complexity and lifeworld/system rationalisation contribute to the deterioration of Habermas’s concept of the lifeworld as a realm of communicative action. Habermas sees these processes as leading to the eventual “colonisation” (Habermas, 1987: 196) of the lifeworld by the system. This, however, appears paradoxical, as it is lifeworld rationalisation which makes systemic complexity possible in the first place, which in turn leads to the uncoupling of system and lifeworld, and lifeworld colonisation.⁷⁸

5.1.3 Colonisation of the Lifeworld

The colonisation of the lifeworld by the system is described by Habermas as the final stage of the process of lifeworld/system rationalisation, combined with their detachment from one another and the eventual domination of the systems’ steering media over the lifeworld. It could be said that Habermas’s entire theory of social systems is largely based on the colonisation of the lifeworld by the increasingly complex system (Habermas, 1987: 118). Colonisation does not imply the destruction of the lifeworld, but rather the taking over of its resources and structural components by systemic mechanisms and imperatives. Indeed, the system needs the resources of the lifeworld in order to operate, and ironically, also to colonise it. Public opinion⁷⁹ can only be generated in the framework of communicative action, otherwise steering media would have nothing to manipulate. In short, systemic media can influence the lifeworld to a great extent, but they cannot produce lifeworld mechanisms. In a way, therefore, the system is legitimated through the lifeworld which it seeks to colonise and systemic media of money and power have no legitimacy except that which the lifeworld grants.

⁷⁸ Consider Habermas, 1987: 186: “the rationalisation of the lifeworld makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself”.

⁷⁹ As examined in 2.4.4 above, public opinion in Habermasian terms has significant communicative and political power “as something that, friction-like, might offer resistance to governmental and administrative practice and that [...] can be diagnosed and manipulated by appropriate means” (Habermas, 1992b: 243).

For Habermas, both lifeworld and system constitute essential parts of society. When the latter becomes increasingly complex and highly differentiated, economic and political subsystems emerge which provide a means of communication through steering media (money in the case of the economy and power in the case of politics). Systemic mechanisms therefore invade and gradually replace the integrative mechanisms of the lifeworld – understanding, consensus, agreement, in a way that “lifeworld activities are subjugated to systems’ imperatives” (Bausch, 1997: 323) and in a differentiated and complex social system, the lifeworld “seems to shrink to a subsystem” (Habermas, 1987: 173). Communicative lifeworld practices are gradually swallowed by instrumental-functional imperatives of the economy and bureaucratic state. Lifeworld structures such as family or even the public sphere are gradually infiltrated by consumerism through the system’s steering media.

“In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas placed, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas, the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of a colonisation” (Habermas, 1987: 196).

This “*rape* of the lifeworld by the forces of economic and bureaucratic efficiency” (Bausch, 1997: 323; emphasis on the original) points to a more general tendency of instrumental rationality, essentially strategic and purposive (cf. section 4.2 on communicative rationality), thriving over communicative rationality and its fundamental principles of argumentation, mutual understanding, agreement and consensus.

“[T]he *system* is the domain of formal rationality, while the *lifeworld* is the site of substantive rationality. The *colonization of the lifeworld*, therefore, involves a restatement of the Weberian thesis that in the modern world, formal rationality is triumphing over substantive rationality and coming to dominate areas that were formally defined by substantive rationality” (Ritzer, 1996: 549).

As society becomes more systematised in the form of specialisation and differentiation, the economy and bureaucracy penetrate and dominate people’s everyday lives to the detriment of the lifeworld as the realm of communicative action. Money and power, rather than critical rationality, understanding and consensus, are increasingly becoming the driving forces and ultimate *teli* of communication. This “technocratic purgatory”

(Bausch, 1997: 322) gradually transforms the citizen into a “client of the state” (Habermas, 1987: 319; 364)⁸⁰, regulates and progressively objectifies interpersonal activities (Bausch, 1997: 322) and places efficiency above “all other values such as honesty, justice, mutual consent” (ibid.).

Habermas understands this colonising force as a “systemically induced reification” (Habermas, 1987: 306) or “loss of freedom” (ibid.) impelled by “juridification” (op.cit.: 317; 334) and commodification. This means that the market is responsible for transforming individuals into consumers, and to some extent also citizens into clients. As the private life of individuals becomes more and more commodified, material possessions which belong to the sphere of the system acquire increasing importance to the detriment of communicative rationality based on consensus and generalised interests in a way that “possessive individualism [...] freed from the pressures of rationality” (op.cit.: 325) prevails. In the same respect, citizens view themselves as consumers, or clients (ibid.), of state services for which they pay through taxes and other forms of contributions. The relation between citizen and state is in this way reduced to a contractual relation between a service provider and a client / consumer. In this context devoid of communicative rationality, the public sphere becomes increasingly irrelevant.

Against this backdrop, the welfare state shifts from a promise to a “compromise” (Habermas, 1987: 349) between the instrumental requisites of market economy and its normative egalitarian function. This intensifies the service provider / client relations between state and citizen and also amplifies “lifeworld pathologies” (Habermas, 1987: 197; Habermas, 1990: 348). Lifeworld pathologies are manifested in many ways, such as “loss of meaning” in society (op.cit.: 325-326; Habermas, 1990: 348), “conditions of anomie or psychopathologies” (ibid.) that ultimately constitute “disturbances of a communicatively mediated social integration” (Habermas, 2005: 81). Such pathologies are not a direct result of systemic functions as such, but rather of the imbalance in the lifeworld/system model of society which leads to lifeworld colonisation.

⁸⁰ “The more the welfare state [...] spreads a net of client relationships over private spheres of life, the stronger are the anticipated pathological side effects of a juridification that entails both a bureaucratization and a monetarization of core areas of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987: 364).

Lifeworld pathologies inevitably affect intersubjectivity. Loss of meaning in society assumes the form of “structural violence” (Habermas, 1987: 187) and “systematic restriction on communication” (ibid.) that distorts the decentred understanding of the world required for intersubjectivity and understanding. Instead, the relation between the objective, subjective and social worlds “gets prejudged for participants in a typical fashion” (ibid.). Without intersubjectivity based on the decentration of worldviews, the goals of understanding and consensus in the framework of communicative rationality are unattainable according to Habermas (see previous chapter, 4.2).

A further repercussion of the excessive differentiation and specialisation of system/lifeworld structures driven by the “economic and bureaucratic rationality” (ibid.) embraced by the market and the state is loss of meaning. Confusion and increased contingency in communication are inevitable in such circumstances of “meaninglessness”, in which people face the risk of a “fragmented consciousness” (Habermas, 1987: 353), not being able to interrelate their various identities resulting from the differentiated roles and aspects of their lives.

Even though lifeworld pathologies affect the components of culture and personality in particular (Habermas, 1987: 386), D’Entrèves points out that it is societal rather than cultural modernisation that is responsible for such pathological syndromes (D’Entrèves, 1996: 3). He explains that the crucial difference between the two is that societal modernisation refers precisely to progressive systemic autonomy with the profusion and differentiation of subsystems steered by money and power, while cultural modernisation involves differentiation of cultural value spheres such as science or art, which represent “different rationality structures (cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, aesthetic-expressive)” (ibid.). It is societal modernisation, therefore, which leads to the colonisation of the lifeworld and to its subsequent pathologies.

The conception of Janus-faced societies comprising systems (with their subsystems) and lifeworld does not necessarily imply colonisation of the latter by the former. Technological advances, which feed the subsystems of money and administrative power in a capitalist framework, may also facilitate communication in the lifeworld, as conceptualised by Habermas in the form of a matrix comprising culture, personality and society. Moreover, systemic-functional thinking can be used to challenge and revise the “taken-for-granted” (Habermas, 1987: 132) practices of the lifeworld. In colonisation,

however, systemic rules go so far as to displace communicative rationality in “norm-free social structures” (op.cit.: 185), leading to the social agents’ inability to contest the systemic rules which govern their actions.⁸¹ Habermas argues that the coexistence of system and lifeworld may be successful only if systemic mechanisms are “anchored in the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987: 154) and sufficiently “institutionalised” (ibid.). This can only be achieved in an adequately rationalised lifeworld which will facilitate the establishment of basic institutions. In other words, for Habermas the conciliation of system and lifeworld may be successful only if it takes root within the horizon of the lifeworld itself.

5.1.4 Critique

Bausch (1997: 329) sees the separation between systems and lifeworld in the Habermasian concept of society as existing on two levels. Firstly, at an action level, the dichotomy is made between action oriented to success (referring to the instrumental action in the system) and action oriented to understanding (referring to the communicative action in the lifeworld). This points to the identification of systems as the realms of strategic / instrumental rationality and of lifeworld as the realm of communicative rationality. Secondly, the dichotomy is made between “mechanisms of activity coordination” (ibid.) through money and power, which regulate systemic exchanges with the systems’ environments (Habermas, 1987: 159-160), and decision-making based on consensus and mutual understanding, e.g. common action through bargaining, and democratic procedures (Bausch, 1997: 329).

Meehan (1995: 6-7) points out that Habermas’s distinction between system and lifeworld is similar, although not identical, to that between public and private spheres. Fraser (in Meehan, 1995: 21-56) provides a detailed analysis of the two distinctions. She explains that the lifeworld *sensu* Habermas comprises the private sphere of the family, which is linked to the economic system (cf. Habermas, 1992: 20-25) and the public sphere of critical debate and opinion formation, which is linked to the state administrative system (Fraser, in Meehan, 1995: 31). The system includes the state or public system (administrative power) steered by the private subsystem of capitalist economy. According to this account, system and lifeworld both comprise parts of public

⁸¹ Of course, these structures remain linked with everyday communicative practice via basic institutions of civil or public law (Habermas, 1987: 185).

and private spheres in the Habermasian sense, in a way that each of these are coordinated with the other in axes of exchange (op.cit.: 32). The first axis demarcates the private sphere and the exchange relations between private system and private lifeworld, that is, economy and family, and the second axis marks the public sphere and the exchange relations between public system and public lifeworld, that is, state administration and public opinion formation through critical debate (ibid.). Fraser argues that against this backdrop the individual assumes the private roles of worker and consumer and the public roles of citizen and client.

This cross-cut overlap between the dichotomies of public/private spheres and system(s)/lifeworld leads to a parallelism between lifeworld colonization by the system and the “refeudalization” of the public sphere (Habermas, 1992: 152-159). The latter is described as the result of the merging of state and society, which is manifested in citizen apathy, consumerism and leisure in lieu of debate according to Habermas’s early theory. It is also manifested in the infiltration of organisations and interest groups into the public sphere in its early stages of development, which resulted in discussion as a form of sociability giving way to “the fetishism of community involvement as such” (Habermas, 1992: 158) – cf. 2.5.2 on the Refeudalization of the Public Sphere. Lifeworld colonisation in modern societies has similar effects in modern public spheres according to Habermas.

Such pessimism on the future of critical-rational communicative practices in modern capitalist societies, coupled with a persistent desire to separate strategy from communication urges for a rethinking of the system/lifeworld model of society. Canon (2001) argues that Habermas’s dualistic model of society rests on the “quasi-ontological” distinction between ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ forms of reproduction (Bronner, cited in Canon, 2001: 124), where the system commodifies material resources and the lifeworld protects symbolic ones (Canon, 2001: 124). He dismisses such a distinction because of the exchanges and the interplay between system and lifeworld. Breen criticises the lifeworld colonisation thesis in particular for relying on an “ontological spatialization” (Breen, 2005: 34) of the system/lifeworld dichotomy, which splits society into “free and fallen realms” (Breen, 2005: 101) and ultimately idolises communicative rationality.

Instead, the degree to which the lifeworld is colonised by the system is “a matter of social judgement rather than ontological difference” (Canon, 2001: 6). Indeed, according to Honneth, the conception of systems and lifeworld standing over each other as autonomous spheres of action leads to “two complementary fictions” (Honneth, cited in Canon, 2001: 125) of norm-free organisations of action⁸² and power-free spheres of communication (ibid.). Instead, actions that belong to the system (i.e. performed in administrations or management) depend on practices of social understanding and normative consensus formation.⁸³ Habermas’s colonisation of the lifeworld by the system, therefore, which would signal the absolute domination of the strategic rationality of steering media over communicative rationality, seems to be exaggerated. Interestingly, this points to a clash between normativity and historiography similar to that in the case of *Structural Transformation* (Habermas, 1992b). It seems that both in *Structural Transformation* and *Theory of Communicative Action 2* Habermas offers historical accounts of the development of the public sphere and the lifeworld respectively and attempts to establish a normative theory based on these concepts. Since these concepts are volatile and dynamic, however, their normative content needs to be constantly revisited. The process of lifeworld colonisation only started with the advent of capitalism according to Habermas’s analysis, but it is unclear whether the colonisation thesis is descriptive of contemporary capitalist society or constitutes another “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996b : 326).

To support the ‘methodological fiction’ case, it could be argued that the concept of the system with its colonising effects on the lifeworld was introduced by Habermas as a methodological tool, a heuristic concept in order to account for transformations in modern societies through higher levels of social integration. Even though the system is considered to have developed from within the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 396), nevertheless the lifeworld alone, conceptualised by Habermas as culture, society and personality, would not have the capacity to manage the complexities of modern

⁸² Cf.: “Norm-conformative attitudes and identity-forming social memberships are neither necessary nor possible in these spheres; they are made peripheral instead” (Habermas, 1987: 154.)

⁸³ “Habermas fails to appreciate the degree to which workers are imbedded in a rich and complex network of normative relationships that mediate between the world of work and the system imperatives that regulate it” (Canon, 2001: 126).

capitalist societies. For this reason, McCarthy argues that Habermas introduces the concept of social systems in his theory, which nevertheless creates confusion, for Habermas does not explicitly state whether it constitutes a heuristic device or an existing entity (McCarthy, 1978).

Furthermore, Habermas's theory suggests that the consequences of the uncoupling of the system and lifeworld, which seems to be inevitable in modern societies, may be mitigated if systemic mechanisms steered by money and administrative power remain "anchored in the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 154). In order for this to be achieved, the lifeworld must be sufficiently rationalised for the establishment of the appropriate institutions. All these requirements must be met within the framework of a society simultaneously conceived as lifeworld, which has to constantly defend itself against the system and its colonising forces, and as system, which "has to fulfil conditions for the maintenance of sociocultural lifeworlds" (op.cit.: 151-2). While the theory attempts to illustrate the need of rescuing the lifeworld from colonisation, and consequently also communicative rationality, culture, society, and to an extent the public sphere, it creates confusion with regard to bringing a balance between the lifeworld and system in society. The system is presented as the root of all evil, unless it is anchored in the lifeworld and not completely uncoupled, or separated from it. Evidently, this requirement does not solve the problem of lifeworld/system imbalance and it remains a challenge to reconcile the "normativity that is unavoidable" (Habermas, 2005: 2) for participants in the lifeworld with the "contingency of sociocultural forms of life" (ibid.).

5.2 The Challenge of Social Systems Theory to Habermas's Communicative Rationality and the Public Sphere

5.2.1 Systems and environments

Luhmann's theory of social systems defies easy summary. Unlike Habermas's system/lifeworld model of society, Luhmann's theory is based on a notion of society as a complex of systems of communication and their environments, but not a lifeworld in the Habermasian sense. Luhmann defines systems as follows: "Every social contract is understood as a system, up to and including society as the inclusion of all possible contracts" (Luhmann, 1995: 15). Society in Luhmann's theory does not constitute a

system itself, but rather the aggregate of all systems, which are “ecologically linked which each other” (Baecker, 2001: 64) without an overarching “supersystem” (ibid.) directing them. It also constitutes an epistemology of differentiation, and does not claim to have empirical correspondence.

By including every social contract in his concept of system, Luhmann’s theory claims “universal validity for everything that is a system” (Luhmann, 1995: 12;15), which include systems “of analytic and epistemic behaviour” (op.cit.: 15). It is based on the existence of self-referential systems that establish relations with themselves and differentiate them from relations with the environment (ibid.). This differentiation between systemic identity and systemic relations with their environments is precisely what constitutes a social system in Luhmann’s theory. Instead of providing an explicit definition (the term “social contract” is too vague), he outlines its boundaries by differentiating it from its environment. The system, in other words, is defined through its difference from its environment, or through their boundary; it is given unity through difference.

Systems are therefore conceived together with their environments and there can be no system without an environment.⁸⁴ Similarly, the environment constitutes a system-relative concept without a precise definition; Luhmann describes it as “simply everything else” (Luhmann, 1995: 181). A system’s environment may include other systems, but these are oriented to their own environments (op.cit.: 18) in a way that any system is always oriented towards its own environment. If a system fails to maintain its distinction from its environment, then it ceases to exist as a system and is absorbed by its environment (op.cit.: 15). The maintenance of boundaries between system and environment thus signifies system maintenance, as boundaries both separate and connect system and environment.

System/environment boundaries are not fixed, but are constantly redefined through communication. The difference between system and environment, which constitutes the

⁸⁴ Still, Luhmann mentions that in exceptional cases a system’s environment may only have significance through specified channels or may have no significance at all (Luhmann, 1995: 6). These are limit cases of “closed systems” and are of no interest to systems theory, as it “concerns itself only with open systems” (ibid.).

system's unity and ensures its survival, is used by every communication in the system and contributes to setting or altering the system's boundaries (Luhmann, 1995: 29). In this way, "anyone who initiates communication is extending the system's boundaries" (op.cit.: 195) through the exchange of information imported from the environment. In order to regulate communication and attain a "*relative invariance*" (Rossbach, 2000: 5, emphasis in the original) of such boundaries, certain systems have established admission and membership criteria (Luhmann, 1995: 196). Determining boundaries, therefore, is essentially a "process of negotiation" (ibid.), which leads Baecker to define systems as "a highly precarious "dance" of ensuring a distinction between the system and its environment" (Baecker, 2001: 63).

While Habermas's theory focuses on communicative *action* and the language-based rationality of communicative *actors* (participants in debate), Luhmann's social systems theory is observer-dependent and subject-free. This means that it is not based on a subject-object model of communication in which a subject would observe objects or another subject, but rather on self-referential systems (including cognitive systems) observing other self-referential systems. Furthermore, Luhmann does not consider language as part of communicative action but a switching between observations.⁸⁵ Humans are not considered elements of a social system, instead communications are.⁸⁶ In Luhmann's words,

"[o]nly communication can communicate and what we understand as action can be generated only in such a network of communication [...] Humans cannot communicate [...] only communications can communicate" (Luhmann, 2002: 156; 169).

Humans are therefore regarded neither as action carriers, nor as observers in Luhmann's theory. It is systems which observe other systems and themselves ("self-observation", cf. Luhmann, 1995: 37) but cannot observe their own environments, or the

⁸⁵ "[...] Kunst [ist] wie auch Sprache eine Vermittlung zwischen Beobachtungen" (Luhmann, in Huber, 1991: 123).

⁸⁶ "A human being may appear as a unity, but he is not a system, neither is a collection of human beings. The human being cannot even observe what occurs within him as physical, chemical and living processes. The living system is inaccessible to the psychic system" (Luhmann, 1995: 40).

environments of other systems. The centrality of observation in Luhmann's system theory will be further analysed below.

5.2.2 Self-reference and autopoiesis

As mentioned above, social systems theory replaces the concept of the subject with that of "self-referential systems" (Luhmann, 1995: 28). Luhmann describes self-referential systems as follows:

"One can call a system self-referential if it itself constitutes the elements that compose it as functional unities and runs reference to this self-constitution through all the relations among these elements, continuously reproducing its self-constitution in this way. [...] self-referential systems are *closed* systems, for they allow no other forms of processing in their self-determination" (Luhmann, 1995: 33).

This means that the self-referential system itself constitutes the elements, processes etc. that shape it and function as its unities, and they "cannot be obtained by the environment" (Luhmann, 1995: 28). If a system drew its constitutive elements from its environment, it would be neither operationally closed nor differentiated from its environment, which would lead to its collapse. The functional premise of self-referential processes is therefore difference (op.cit.: 17) and self-reference is the only way systems can differentiate themselves from their environments and from other systems (op.cit.: 9). The opposite of self-reference would be allo-reference (Grant, 2004: 221), in this case reference to the environment or other systems.

Self-referential systems, by Luhmann's definition, reproduce their self-constitution by self-reproduction or "autopoiesis" (op.cit.: 33; 40). The term "autopoiesis" was originally coined by cognitive biologists Maturana and Varela (1979), to describe the self-reproduction of biological cells in living systems.⁸⁷ Luhmann adapts the concept of

⁸⁷ "An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components which: (i) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the

autopoiesis to social systems theory to refer to the self-reproduction of systems by producing systemic unity. This is achieved by “a continuously reproduced refusal to further problematise or decompose the entities serving as elements or, in general, as unities” (Rossbach, 2000: 15). It prevents input of unity into the system and output of unity out of the system (op.cit.: 13), maintaining self-reference, differentiation from the environment and ultimately survival. For this reason, the main goal of systems and society in Luhmann’s theory would be to survive by reproducing itself (Baecker, 2001: 61) through copying its difference from its environment.

Self-referential systems as self-defined and operationally closed systems are therefore characterised by autonomy and self-reproduction (autopoiesis) through communication (Luhmann, 1990: 3). In this way, communication has an autotelic function in that it is concerned with its own reproduction (Knodt, in Luhmann, 1995: xxix). If communication stops, the system can no longer reproduce itself, loses its autonomy and ultimately collapses. As a result, communication is not only crucial to the survival of the system because it keeps it alive by differentiating it from its environment, but also because it is responsible for its autopoiesis.

In order to ensure the accurate reproduction of the system’s elements “as elements of the system and not anything else” (Luhmann, 1995: 37) and sustain self-reference, each system has its own defining “binary code” of communication (Luhmann, 2000: 16), such as yes/no, have/have not, legitimate/illegitimate, democratic/undemocratic etc.

“[T]he legal system operates with a code of legal and illegal. The economy uses property and money to distinguish clearly between possession and non-possession, so that long-term possibilities of the transfer of commodities and money can be organized and calculated, and politics is guided by the questions of power that accompany governmental authority and which are put to the vote using ideological codes like conservative versus progressive or restrictive versus expansive” (Luhmann, 1989: 36-37).

Binary codes not only identify each system, but they also impose a selectivity which makes up the system’s boundaries. Coded information is accepted as information in the topological domain of its realization as such a network” (Maturana and Varela, 1979: 78). Luhmann uses this model, designed to apply to living systems such as biological cells, in order to describe the functions and purpose of social systems.

communication process, whereas uncoded information is discarded as “noise” (Luhmann, 1995: 142). By filtering out what is irrelevant to the system, binary codes, functioning as boundaries, maintain the distinction between self- and allo-reference (Grant, 2004: 221).

Furthermore, self-reference implies that each system is identified through its binary-code boundaries and from its elements. The latter are viewed qualitatively and relationally (Luhmann, 1995: 22), that is, no elements exist outside relational connections and in the same respect there are no relations without elements (*ibid.*). However, Luhmann states that a boundary “separates elements, but not necessarily relations” (*op.cit.*: 29). This does not mean that systems can determine the system/environment relations of another system (it can only do so by destroying them, cf. Luhmann, 1995: 18), but rather that systems’ boundaries maintain a certain degree of “porosity” (Grant, 2000: 65). Autopoietic systems may be self-referentially closed, however they communicate with their environment (although they do not input or output *unities* from it), redefine their boundaries through negotiation processes and thereby produce openness. Paradoxically, this openness that is produced in the evolution (through autopoiesis) of a system is based on self-reference and operational closure.

Systemic self-reference as a result of autopoiesis is undermined because of this paradox. Luhmann’s theory suggests that systems’ boundaries produce openness on the basis of closure and they are extended and redefined when communication is initiated (Luhmann, 1995: 29; 195). This ostensible plasticity of boundaries seems to be in opposition with the rigidity of binary codes which define them. If boundaries are extended and/or redefined with communication, what happens to the codes? Grant maintains that while systems maintain internal self-reference, the communications that establish them are essentially porous (Grant, 2004: 224).

“Communications are not bound to internal system self-reference, but are always polycontextual and porous. Frontier sensitivity must also take into account those phenomena, which are not reducible to one or other side of the frontier” (Grant, 2000: 66)

Grant’s porosity thesis moves away from Luhmann’s binary conception, towards a “non-binary” (*op.cit.* 65), “polycontextual” (*op.cit.* 66) view of communication. He argues that binary conceptions of communication “tend to exaggerate the autonomy of

systems” (ibid.) and at the same time result in “dangerous reductionism” (ibid.). Porosity and polycontextuality therefore go hand in hand, and the same could also be argued for self- and allo-reference (Grant, 2004: 221). The system would maintain its self-reference for its survival, but porosity would also ensure allo-reference and redefinition of boundaries for the system’s development and evolution, rather than merely its survival and reproduction.

5.2.3 Complexity: world, environmental and internal

Luhmann analyses three different types of complexity throughout his work. Although he does not use specific terms for them, they are examined in this thesis under the terms world, environmental and internal complexity.

World complexity refers to the structure of systems and subsystems together with their respective environments in society. This notion of world complexity derives from his account of three distinct stages in the evolution of society as a matrix of systems with their environments. The first is “segmentation” (Luhmann, 1984: 64) and it involves systems identifying and observing other systems in their environment. The second is “stratification” (ibid.) and it refers to systems establishing relations with their environment while being aware of other systems and subsystems, which may not be equal to them. The third and final stage is “functional differentiation” (ibid.), which involves system differentiation on the basis of their specific functions. It is manifested through the repetition of system formation within systems and the profusion of specialised subsystems, which are both differentiated and interdependent and contribute to the increase of world complexity.

A large part of Luhmann’s work is devoted to the analysis of complexity in relations between systems and its environment (environmental complexity). The system’s environment is always more complex than the system and in fact, any environment is always more complex than any system.

“There is [...] no point-for-point correspondence between system and environment (such a condition would abolish the difference between system and environment)” (Luhmann, 1995: 25)

Indeed, the difference in complexity between system and environment is regarded as “the fundamental problem for systems theory, the ultimate point of reference of any

functional analysis” (Luhmann, cited in Outhwaite, 2003: 659). A system’s environment is not only more complex but also more volatile. It develops and changes regardless of the system, which challenges the latter to maintain the “*relative invariance*” (Rossbach, 2000: 5, emphasis in the original) of its boundaries in an increasingly communicatively complex environment. The system makes this communicative complexity (information) accessible and attempts to manage it by internalising it. Since it cannot internalise the totality of its environment’s complexity (for it would cease to differentiate itself from it and collapse), the system is therefore forced to select those aspects of complexity (pieces of information) to which it can respond (Luhmann, 1995: 24-25). This method of reducing complexity by internalising it into manageable parts is also described as “enforced selectivity” (Luhmann, 1990: 82) and constitutes the procedural model on which systemic communication is based. It is crucial as a counter-model to Habermas’s communicative rationality and *Diskurs* model:

“Communication grasps *something* out of the actual referential horizon that it itself constitutes and leaves *other things* aside. Communication is the processing of selection... The selection that is actualized in communication constitutes its own horizon; communication constitutes what it chooses, by virtue of that choice, as a selection, namely, as information. What is uttered is not only selected, but also already a selection—that is why it is uttered... Selectivity as such attracts further communication: it recruits communications that direct themselves to aspects that selectivity has excluded” (Luhmann, 1995:140).

In order for complexity to be selected and internalised, it must “cross” binary-coded boundaries and therefore conform to the system’s code. For this reason, Luhmann introduces the concept of meaning (*Sinn*).

Luhmann’s concept of meaning (*Sinn*) is dependent on communication, but not on language per se. Instead, Luhmann views *Sinn* in terms of complexity – both as its representation and as a criterion for its reduction through information selection (1985: 101-102), that is, both as a process and a result (Bausch, 1997: 316). Unlike Habermas, Luhmann offers a pre-linguistic concept of *Sinn* as a “cumulation of past selections made in the course of a system’s survival” (op.cit.: 317), which functions as a “referential context of actualisable possibilities” (Habermas, 1990: 369). Again, the subject and action are absent from Luhmann’s theory and his concept of meaning in particular. It is communications that create meaning, and a person’s actions acquire

meaning in comparison with past selections, through previous selectivity patterns. Bausch argues that this concept of meaning illustrates the main concern of Luhmann's theory, that is, how to make social systems function better (Bausch, 1997: 317).

The process of creating meaning through past selections of communications constitutes the *modus operandi* of social systems.⁸⁸ Systemic operations are treated as selections so that they can be categorised and stored for future reference. In other words, systems operate by processing and accumulating meaning in this way. Meaning in the form of referential contexts also serves as a boundary which constitutes and determines the system's code: "Only when meaning-constituted boundaries make available a difference between system and environment can there be a world" (Luhmann, 1995: 207). The system needs to be less complex than its environment in order to maintain their difference, and meaning ensures this by helping to reduce systemic complexity imported from its environment through selection. It is meaning, therefore, both as a process and a result, which ultimately maintains the system's boundaries and ensures its survival according to systems theory.

Again, the volatility of systemic boundaries implies that meaning rests upon problematic foundations (Habermas, 1976, cited in Bausch, 1997: 325). Meaning, however, is not conceptualised as being constant and fixed, but as also being volatile. As a referential context, it expands with new "actualisable possibilities" (Habermas, 1990: 369) and combinations, which may be innovative and "can be codified in principle" (Leydesdorff, 2002: 130). In this respect, selectivity as a meaning process may be considered as a codification of the medium (*ibid.*), where medium refers to meaning as a medium of communication in social systems (Luhmann, 1995: 140).

Internal systemic complexity refers to the relations between elements within a system. As the system reproduces itself and redefines its boundaries, the number of elements that must remain connected within the system increases until it is impossible to connect

⁸⁸ Cf. Leydesdorff, 2000: 277: "The social system operates in terms of meaning and not in terms of (biological) life. Although the social system is disturbed by events at the biological level, it is not steered by them nor causally dependent on them. The biosphere provides only a context for the social system. Self-organizing systems use contexts as potential resources."

each element with another. When such connections are no longer possible, the system is characterised by internal complexity.

“We will call an interconnected collection of elements “complex” when, because of immanent constraints in the elements’ connective capacity, it is no longer possible at any moment to connect every element with every other one” (Luhmann, 1995: 24).

In conditions of internal complexity, the system does not have adequate information in its disposal to become aware of environmental and its own complexity. For this reason, connections between the relations of elements must be conditioned (ibid.) and complexity reduced, in order to maintain the differentiation of the system from its more complex environment and to attempt to manage internal complexity. This may be done through enforced selectivity, as described above, and further codifications of the medium through recombinations of meaning (Leydesdorff, 2002: 130). Paradoxically, the internalisation of more complexity would lead to the reduction of internal complexity, since the system would need to select amounts of information from its environment in order to recombine meaning and build on its contextual stock.

What is crucial in Luhmann’s concept of complexity is that the purpose of systems is not to eradicate complexity, but rather to reduce it by transforming unorganised into organised complexity (Knodt, in Luhmann, 1995: xvii). It is complexity that enforces selectivity for the reduction of complexity. On the one hand, the complexity differential between system and environment needs to be maintained for the survival of systems, but on the other hand, if there is no systemic complexity there would be no systemic operations, no struggle for survival through autopoiesis, no recodification of meanings – in short, no system. Complexity, therefore, is what drives the system’s operations and keeps it ‘alive’. What the system aims at is organised internal complexity in order to be able to acquire the information necessary to observe itself.

5.2.4 Contingency and Risk

All types of complexity force the system to resort to selectivity. This enforced selection of complexity (in the form of information) involves risk. The system may well select the wrong pieces of information from its environment, or make the wrong conditioning of its elements internally. As mentioned above, the system does not have adequate

information on the scale of its own or of environmental complexity. This lack of information means that knowledge of one element in the system does not lead to knowledge of the whole system (Luhmann, 1990: 81-82) and it is therefore possible that the system may make the wrong selection. Continuous wrong selections would ultimately threaten the system's integrity or further increase complexity, which would endanger its survival in a complex environment. Complexity, therefore, puts pressure on systems to make selections, which results in contingency. This contingency is experienced by the system in different ways. If it interprets its environment as a resource, it experiences contingency as dependency (Luhmann, 1995: 186). The system's selections would depend on its environment and contingency would therefore result in reduced systemic autonomy. If it interprets its environment purely as information, then it experiences contingency as uncertainty (ibid.). Selecting information from a highly complex environment in order to achieve organised internal complexity would involve the uncertainty and risk of making the wrong selection.

5.3 Consequences for Communicative Rationality? Habermas vs. Luhmann

Luhmann's theory of social systems directly challenges the Habermasian norm of communicative rationality in the public sphere. Concepts of action, intersubjectivity, consensus and understanding, which form the basis of communicative rationality, are refuted and replaced respectively by observation, systems, autopoiesis and selection. Habermas and Luhmann engaged in a long debate over their theories of action and observation and Bausch notes that they sometimes altered their positions as they attempted to respond to each other (Bausch, 2001: 66). Bausch points out that Habermas's concept of society as system and lifeworld was inspired by Luhmann's systems analysis (ibid.). Likewise, Luhmann incorporated concepts of meaning (*Sinn*), analysed system/environment relationships and issues of conflict and rationality in *Social Systems* (1995). While the debate influenced the theories of both Habermas and Luhmann, nevertheless the fundamental differences between these most influential scholars remain. As regards Habermas's concept of communicative rationality, this is challenged by Luhmann's questioning of (inter)subjectivity, understanding and consensus, a discussion of which follows below. Finally, Luhmann presents a different model of publicness, which is radically different to Habermas's public sphere (cf. Luhmann, 1990; 2000 and other late works).

5.3.1 (Inter)subjectivity

As mentioned earlier, Luhmann's social systems theory is observer-dependent and subject-free, as communications rather than humans are considered elements of social systems ("Humans cannot communicate [...] only communications can communicate" (Luhmann, 2002: 169)). Luhmann explicitly states that when it comes to his theory, he is not interested in people.

"[I]ch lehne alle Einladungen ab, die mich veranlassen wollen, über den Menschen zu sprechen. Menschenbilder, sowas Grausliches. Also der Mensch interessiert mich nicht, wenn ich das so hart sagen darf" (Luhmann, in Huber, 1991: 132)⁸⁹

Human subjects, therefore, cannot be considered as action carriers since it is self-referential systems who self-reproduce (autopoiesis) and observe other self-referential systems. Furthermore, meaning (*Sinn*) is not created by the communication of subjects per se, but by systemic operations which accumulate past selections for future reference and demarcations of meaning. Subjects are therefore not considered parts of communication in Luhmann's terms. He replaces the (Cartesian) concept of the knowing subject with that of system,⁹⁰ in contrast to Habermas, who also rejects it but instead argues for intersubjectivity (cf. previous chapter on communicative rationality). It could be said that Habermas's intersubjective relations of individuals are replaced in Luhmann's theory with "functional connections" (Habermas, 1987: 358) of elements in a system. Intersubjectivity, in terms of decentration of worldviews for the purposes of communication and understanding, is replaced in Luhmann's theory by the *autopoiesis* of social systems for their survival and therefore the perpetuation of communication.

⁸⁹ (My translation): I reject all invitations which attempt to make me talk about human beings. Concepts of humans, such horror. Well, humans are of no interest to me, if I may put it crudely.

⁹⁰ Luhmann's model of society as a system relates to its environment "in functional analogy to the way that the Cartesian subject relates to the material world" (Bausch, 1997: 325).

5.3.2 Understanding

For Luhmann, communication constitutes a synthesis of three selections: information, utterance and understanding (Knodt, in Luhmann, 1995: xx). Understanding is not considered as one of the normative goals of communicative rationality, as is the case in Habermas's theory, but as a selection process performed by the system. The latter observes past selections of codifications of the medium (Leydesdorff, 2002: 130), that is, meaning, and links them to current communications in the system. When past selections, which constitute results of observations, are recognised, these are selected anew by the system in order to create understanding and new meaning (Luhmann, 1995: 140). In this way, Luhmann's communication model involves a set of constant selections made by the system rather than actions performed by an actor. This is in complete contrast to Habermas's model of communicative rationality, which involves actors communicating through the medium of communicative rationality (argumentation, intersubjectivity, etc.) for purposes of understanding and consensus. Rather than understanding, the ultimate goal in system's theory is system survival through autopoiesis, achieved by communication as a set of selections which *include* understanding. Against this backdrop, understanding does not constitute the normative goal of communication but a selection process which helps to stimulate communication for system survival but is not central to an observer-dependent theory.

5.3.3 Consensus

Based on the theory of autopoietic systems, Luhmann also engages in a critique of Habermas's consensus-oriented communicative action. When consensus is reached through argumentation, the debate ends for there is nothing left to say. The system no longer reproduces itself through communication and ceases its autopoiesis. Therefore, in order for the system to continue its operations, "communication must dissent" (Knodt, in Luhmann, 1995: xxix).

"The system reorganises itself as conflict to save its autopoiesis. In the case of serious problems of understanding, social systems very often tend to avoid the burden of argumentation and reasoned discourse to reach consensus – very much to the affliction of Habermas. Instead, they push the matter into rejection to embark on the easy vessel of conflict" (Luhmann, 1990: 14).

As a result, “consensus can only be local or temporal” (ibid.) and cannot constitute the normative goal for debate. In the same respect, understanding would also signify the end of communication and therefore the collapse of the system, which would reinforce Luhmann’s view that it does not constitute the normative goal of communication.

Increasing levels of all types of complexity constitute a further obstacle to consensus. While Habermas advocates that social action requires consensual decision-making, Luhmann argues that complexity hinders consensual communication and instead social activities “require impersonal systemic regulations” (Bausch, 1997: 315). Contrasting the theories of Habermas and Luhmann, Bausch notes that Luhmann considers impersonal systemic laws as “the safeguards of individual and community rights” in a complex society (op.cit.: 316) and rejects the usefulness of personal norms in social contexts. In other words, only the system is able to manage complexity and this is done through selection and not consensual communication. The latter would mark the end of communication and it could also be argued that even in cases when this is local or temporal, it would reduce selectivity options. Moreover, communications that are of no use to the system are discarded by it and absorbed from its environment. Consensus as a *telos* of communicative rationality is disqualified, therefore, because of the need for conflict in system survival and for systemic regulations in social action.

5.3.4 Reason vs. Function

In reconstructing Luhmann, Bausch argues that modern complexity and time constraints result in a situation where “reason has ceased to be a means of communication” (Bausch, 1997: 317). According to this view, systems theory sacrifices the notion of reason for the practicality of function. It proposes an essentially technocratic conceptualisation of society as a set of functionally independent systems devoid of rationality, which is seen merely as a code like any other code used by systems for their survival (rational/not rational). The idealistic content of normative theories in this way “evaporates under the sun of social science” (Habermas, 1996b: 329).

While the debate between Habermas and Luhmann may be regarded as a dispute between theories of reason and function, Luhmann does not reject rationality altogether, as Bausch seems to contend. In an interview conducted in Luhmann’s late years, he

stated that he opposes “traditional notions of rationality” (Thyssen, 1995: online) in light of modern situations of complexity. Instead of rejecting it and replacing it with function, Luhmann argues for a new definition of rationality (ibid.).

“I do not deny the possibility of rationality, and I do not deny the function of the concept. But I have in mind [...] a more complex definition of rationality based upon the idea of a re-entry of the system/environment distinction into the system. In a sense you differentiate by throwing the environment out, you have no contact with the environment. But then you re-introduce or copy the difference into the system, so it is a kind of contradiction to your starting point. This seems to give some hope of defining a new concept of rationality” (Luhmann, in Thyssen, 1995: online).

Luhmann’s suggestion of a new concept of rationality is based on autopoiesis, that is, the copying of the system/environment difference into the system. In order for autopoiesis to work, this copying must be done in such a way that the distinction between system and environment is maintained for the system’s survival, that is, by maintaining code-defined boundaries. Rationality in this sense could signify the system’s efforts to maintain its differentiation from its environment while reproducing itself as a system *and* environment duo – all this in conditions of increasing complexity at all levels.

“Functional systems burden other functional systems via the environment. [...] [T]he principle of differentiation makes the issue of rationality all the more urgent, and all the more unsolvable” (Habermas, 1990: 376).

Again, maintaining system differentiation would presuppose selection of those elements (communications), which should be maintained and reproduced. The rest would be discarded into the environment as noise. The capacity of a system to make selections which involve the least risk and contingency and therefore *reduce complexity* could be considered as a measure of the system’s rationality according to Luhmann’s suggestion. In this respect, the disagreement between Habermas and Luhmann is not one between reason and function but rather between models of communicative and functionalist rationality. The implications of these on models of publicness are examined below.

5.3.5 *Öffentlichkeit*⁹¹

Luhmann's objections to Habermas's model of communicative rationality are also significant for the latter's theory of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). Firstly, Habermas's model is based on the public use of reason, which, as discussed above, constitutes the conceptual predecessor of communicative rationality. If this model of reason is replaced by Luhmann's functionalist model of rationality based on autopoiesis, then the public sphere is inevitably reconceptualised in systemic terms. Bridging the two theories in this way is not possible, considering their diametrically opposed epistemological bases (action v. observation, intersubjectivity v. system logics, system/lifeworld v. system/environment etc.). On his part, Luhmann developed his own concept of *Öffentlichkeit* within the framework of systems theory.

Unlike Habermas's model founded on the public use of reason, Luhmann proposes a definition of *Öffentlichkeit* in essentially systems-theoretical terms as "the socially internal environment of social subsystems, of all interactions and organisations of social function systems and social movements" (Luhmann, cited in Grant, 2000b: 73). Instead of a site for the public use of reason and communicative action, Luhmann's *Öffentlichkeit* is a site of *social self-reflection* and *observation*.

"Public life is therefore a general social medium of reflection which registers the non-exceedability of boundaries and, thus inspired, the observing of observations" (Luhmann, 2000: 105).

Luhmann thus reduces the public into a largely *inactive* entity by abandoning the notion of individual and collective agency. He leaves no place for human reason in his theory⁹²

⁹¹ The original term *Öffentlichkeit* is used here in order to avoid confusion between the terms "publicness" and "public sphere". Both Habermas and Luhmann used the term *Öffentlichkeit* to refer to a concept translated into English as "public sphere" in Habermas's case, and as "publicness" in Luhmann's case (an analysis of this translation choice is also made in Chapter 2 of this thesis). Habermas's *Öffentlichkeit* was translated as "public sphere" in order to denote its spatial dimension (also public realm, public space), as opposed to Luhmann's *Öffentlichkeit*, which is based on the activity (I use this term with caution) of observation. In order to illustrate that both theorists refer to one, even though not necessarily the same, concept, the original term *Öffentlichkeit* is used in this section.

and ultimately cuts the ties between rationality and normativity, rendering rational discourse obsolete in *Öffentlichkeit*. Therefore, his model of *Öffentlichkeit* as systemic observation of interactions within a system “promotes a depoliticisation of the public sphere by defining practical questions from the start as technical questions” (McCarthy, 1991: 133-134). In the same respect, legitimation in Luhmann’s theory constitutes a task of the (political) system rather than the public sphere of citizens in Habermas’s sense.

5.3.6 Habermas and Luhmann: Epistemological Differences

Based on the above analysis, Luhmann does not appear to concern himself with democracy or citizen participation as regards publicness, but only with self-referential systems. Systems theory, just like the systems it analyses, does not seem to have “the power nor the intention of transcending functional contexts of systemic self-maintenance” (Habermas, 1990: 371) and can therefore only observe and analyse itself in a self-referential manner. In short, systems theory can only explain systems. For this reason, Luhmann’s conception of society as a closed autopoietic system has been criticised as overtly technocratic and functionalistic (Schmidt, 1995; Mingers, 2002; Habermas, 1990; Habermas, 1996b; McCarthy, 1991). In particular, McCarthy argues that if systems theory remains disconnected from action theory, it becomes “empirically questionable” (McCarthy, 1991: 123), as it merely re-states problems without helping to resolve them (*ibid.*). Habermas insists on the significance of normative concepts and goals for the resolution of problems such as complexity, lifeworld colonisation and other “pathologies”, and notes that the disregard and rejection of normative concepts and goals in Luhmann’s systems theory render it “insensitive to the inhibiting normative constraints imposed on a constitutionally channelled circulation of power” (Habermas, 1996b: 335).

In the same respect, however, Habermas’s essentially hermeneutic lifeworld theory poses similar limitations. It explains the symbolic reproduction of lifeworlds “from the internal perspective of participants” (Habermas, 1987: 151), however it cannot explain the functioning and reproduction of society as a whole in an adequate manner (Bausch,

⁹² Cf.: “Luhmann’s version of systems functionalism radicalises Nietzsche’s critique of reason by withdrawing any kind of claim to reason along with the relationship to the totality of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1990b: 358).

1997: 319):⁹³ “Communicative actors are always moving *within* the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it” (Habermas, 1987: 126, emphasis on the original). In Habermas’s case of “hermeneutic idealism” (op.cit.: 148) therefore, the lifeworld/system model of society is viewed and analysed from the perspective of internal participants who are unable to step outside of it, while in Luhmann’s case society is objectified as a system with its environment which can only observe and be observed by other systems (but not its environment). In the first case, participants are internal while in the second case, observers are both external but also identical with the system, when a system observes itself. Both theories involve limitations, which makes them difficult to reconceptualise without entirely dismantling their theoretical and epistemological bases.

It is impossible to reconcile the communication models proposed by Habermas and by Luhmann, for they essentially belong to different epistemologies; in any case, this is not the purpose of this Chapter. Luhmann’s theory succeeds in pointing to weaknesses on the normative grounding of Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality, such as intersubjectivity, understanding, or consensus, however its own claim to universality on systemic/functional terms (Grant, 2007: 98) is unfounded. While systems theory, and the model of society as a system with its subsystems and their environments, constitutes an operative category “of observation and selection” (op.cit.: 88) and is not supposed to correspond to actual social conditions, it is still overly reductionist with regard to communication or ‘publicness’ (*Öffentlichkeit*). Communication is not binary (Grant, 2000b: 65-66), but rather complex and contingent. *Öffentlichkeit* cannot be reduced to “the socially internal environment of social subsystems, of all interactions and organisations of social function systems and social movements” (Luhmann, cited in Grant, 2000b: 73) without any reference to people. Humans (citizens) are at the core of dynamic communicative spaces that constitute public spheres, and they may act as participants, reflective agents or observers. Rationality, in this respect, cannot be reduced to functional/systemic terms unless it refers to systemic logic. While Luhmann’s systems theory is an exemplary sociological model with extensive use and applicability, it cannot explain communication in a public sphere aiming at generating public opinion, making decisions and monitoring authority through public debate.

⁹³ Habermas himself admits that “sociopathological phenomena cannot be reduced to systemic disequilibria” (Habermas, 1987: 292).

CHAPTER 6

The Challenge of Foucault's theory of power to Habermas's model of communication

6.0 Introduction: The Foucault / Habermas debate

The work of Michel Foucault is central to the analysis of communication in the public sphere. Foucault engaged in a long debate with Habermas on power, reason and modernity among others. The Foucault/ Habermas debate is known as a dispute between consensus and conflict (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 211), between critical theory and historical materialism (Olssen, 2006), or between critical theory and postmodernism. Habermas considers one of his tasks to be the completion of the “project of Modernity” (Habermas, 1990b: 303, 327; D’Entrèves, 1996), which began during the Enlightenment. He argues that this project, largely based on scientific rationality and the rise of capitalism, can only be redeemed through his normative theory of communication. Its redemption and successful completion constitutes one of the main goals of his critical theory, for modernity establishes a “potential for reason” which has not yet been realised (White, 1986: 422). Foucault, on the other hand, rejects the identification of reason with emancipation and progress and attempts to move away from the conceptual framework of “transcendental traditions of the nineteenth century” (Foucault 1991: 120). He opts for a historiographic as opposed to hermeneutic method of analysis (while Habermas adopts both methods), and he vehemently rejects universal norms and values, including reason. His theory of power as omnipresent and capillary in communication and society are in direct opposition to Habermas’s normative theory of the public sphere, which presupposes a disregard of power differentials – even if these were subsequently reviewed by Habermas.

As analysed in previous chapters, Habermas’s model of communicative rationality involves an “ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 1984: 26, 42; Habermas, 1990b: 323), in which the power of reason is what drives communication and validates arguments in debate. In such conditions, power differentials between participants as well as personal interests are bracketed for the sake of a generalised interest, which is regarded as the

common interest of participants in debate.⁹⁴ The generalised interest is agreed upon by a similar communication process based on rational-critical debate. When consensus on the common interest is reached, then further debate can be conducted on how to achieve the common interest (cf. Chapter 3.2). In the case of the public sphere, debate on generalisable interests would generate public opinion for evaluation and contestation of authority (cf. Habermas, 1976).

Habermas's 'ideal speech situation' is summarised in five procedural requirements of discourse ethics. Firstly, no party affected from the subject discussed should be excluded from the discourse; secondly, participants should have equal opportunity of discussing and criticising validity claims; thirdly, discussion should be carried out with the "satisfaction of everyone's interests" in mind (Habermas, 1990a: 65) so that participants desist from strategic action; fourthly, existing power differences should not affect the outcome of the discussion and should therefore be neutralised; lastly, the approval of "all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse" (op.cit.: 66) is needed for consensus (cf. Habermas, 1993: 19-40). Flyvbjerg adds the sixth presupposition of "unlimited time" (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 213). Indeed, it would seem that the processes of ensuring generalisable interests through consensus, monitoring transparency, equality of participation through the "force of the better argument" (Habermas, 1990a: 198) and equal opportunity to voice opinions requires additional time and effort than other forms of debate which allow strategic action or are infiltrated by power. Still, Habermas's paradigm constitutes indeed "a regulative ideal" immanent in all communication (Ingram, 1994: 5), a benchmark against which existing forms of debate in the public sphere are evaluated. Its normative intent means that the validity of all its presuppositions is not context-bound but context-transcendent (ibid.; Habermas, 1996b: 323; Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 13; Grant, 2007: 99).

The objections to this model raised by Foucault, which are pertinent to this study, focus on these core concepts: power neutrality, transparency, equality in participation, common interests, rationality and the normative content/universal validity of the ideal model itself. Before examining these in detail, an outline of Foucault's epistemological premises is essential. In *Foucault Contra Habermas* (1999), Ashenden and Owen

⁹⁴ Habermas argues: "the deontological force of moral obligation prohibits exceptions, we are always required to set aside our selfish interests when they conflict with the universal interest" (Habermas, cited in Ingram, 1987: 21).

identify three axes of analysis in Foucault's work: knowledge, which refers to reflection on oneself and others, power, referring to action on the action of others, and finally ethics, concerning action on the action of oneself (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 8). This analysis will focus on the axis of power, which, as it will be shown, is inextricably linked with Foucault's analysis of reason.

6.1 An Outline of Foucault's Theory of Power

6.1.1 Historical study: Reason and Madness

Foucault's analysis takes on the form of a historical study, which began with his work *Madness and Civilisation* ([1961] 1988). In this study, he traces the gradual exclusion of mentally ill or "mad" people from society in Europe, from exile to institutionalisation during the "Great Confinement" in the 17th century (Foucault, 1988a: 38). Foucault then describes the thematisation of madness in the 18th and 19th centuries as "a reflex image of the constituting of reason" (Habermas, 1990b: 240). As the opposite of reason, madness had to be treated and cured often with brutal methods such as freezing showers or later with electric shocks (op.cit.: 162, 265). This form of "regulatory reason" (Habermas, 1990b: 245) aimed not only at subjugating madness (ibid.), but also at establishing a clear boundary between reason and madness, which was seen as a mechanism of exclusion on which rational speech is constituted (op.cit.: 247; Schmidt, 1996: 153; Rabinow, 1984: 8). From the outset, therefore, Foucault sees reason as a regulatory force that aims at excluding "the other" (Habermas, 1990b: 306) in order to prevail. In this sense, reason is seen as a form of power.

6.1.2 Foucault's Concept of Power

In his subsequent works, Foucault further developed his analysis of reason in the framework of power. Unlike Habermas's argument in favour of communication, based on rational-critical debate and the sole force of the better argument, free from distortions which include power differentials, Foucault contends that power and its "distorting effects" (Foucault, 1980: 96,101) are omnipresent in discourse (Foucault, 1988b: 11, 18). Indeed his concept of discourse refers to a historically situated truth, inextricably linked with power (and knowledge).

“We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1990: 101).

It would therefore be “meaningless” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 216) for Foucault to study a concept of communication in which power is absent.

Foucault considers power “a relationship, not a thing” (Olssen, 2006: 22). According to his analysis, power is not possessed by any participant in communication (op.cit.: 19), but rather constitutes “a machinery that no one owns” (Foucault, 1980: 156). It “circulates” (Foucault, 1980: 98) in a way in which individuals become vehicles of power, rather than its “point of application” (ibid.). In this respect, power may be considered as a relationship that emerges through and circulates with discourse, rather than something that is owned by certain people and exists independently of human interaction. Foucault stresses that power must be analysed as something which is “neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and it only exists in action” (Foucault, 1980: 89). It constitutes a “mode of action on the action of others” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 9-10), that is, its aim is to regulate the conduct and possible actions of others.

Since power is exercised and not owned according to Foucault’s conceptualisation, it cannot be identified with the state apparatus or with any form of legislation (Foucault, 1980: 158). He states that power is “quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus” (ibid.). Instead, it comes “from the bottom up” (Olssen, 2006: 19)⁹⁵ in the form of multiple, complex power relations which are so dense and pervasive that render power “capillary” (Foucault, 1980: 96). This characteristic, combined with its definition as a relationship rather than an acquisition, signifies the deeply unstable and volatile nature of power as both a complex flow and a

⁹⁵ “Power [...] is exercised from innumerable points in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations [...] Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (Foucault, 1990: 94).

set of relations between different groups and areas of society, transforming itself with circumstances and time (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: xiv).

“[Power is] never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth [but instead] employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (Foucault, 1980: 98).

Indeed, Foucault’s concept of power is “more ubiquitous [and] diffuse” (Ingram, 1994: 219), circulating between different participants in communication which act as its channels. Yet, this concept of power is not abstract. Paradoxically, Foucault’s notion of power may be omnipresent, diffuse, bound in communication and never localised, yet it is at the same time “corporeal” (Ingram, 1994: 219). In his critique of Foucault’s concept of power, Habermas also argues that it “invades the bodies rather than the heads” (Habermas, 1990b: 283) under the form of “biopower” (Foucault, 1990: 144).

6.1.3 Biopower and Foucault’s concept of society

This section examines Foucault’s concept of society and the role of “biopower” in shaping and regulating modern capitalist societies. The aim of this analysis is to contrast societal mechanisms as presented by Foucault, such as “biopower” and “normalisation” with Habermas’s model of society as lifeworld and system, comprising mechanisms such as lifeworld colonisation and rationalisation. This contrastive analysis will tease out the differences between the two theories that are pertinent to Habermas’s communicative rationality and the public sphere (Section 6.3 examines these differences in detail as challenges to Habermas’s model). The term “biopower” was coined by Foucault and refers to an essentially “regulatory and corrective mechanism” (Foucault, 1990: 144) of modern capitalist societies aimed at subjugating bodies and controlling populations (Habermas, 1990b: 217). This is achieved through a regime, which puts emphasis on the protection of human life, the growth and care of the population as a central concern of the state (Rabinow, 1984: 17). Health regulations and habits, family planning, legislation on sexuality and more generally the notion of the state as a “body” (Foucault, 1980: 55-62) itself all constitute elements of an “insidious” (White, 1986: 421) biopower that transforms human life into a “substrate of empowerment” (Habermas, 1990b: 285). This produces asymmetries between processes of power and “the bodies that are crushed within them” (ibid.).

Regulatory mechanisms in the form of “biopower” (Foucault, 1990: 144) are governed by an imposed force similar to Habermas’s rationalising forces of society, which lead to the colonisation of the lifeworld (cf. previous chapter). Instead of rationalisation, Foucault uses the term “normalisation” (Foucault, 1980: 61, 116, 121), that is, the implicit enforcement of norms and regulations in order to construct ‘normal’ models not only of bodies but also of behaviours and attitudes. Normalisation refers to a strategy of discipline adopted by the state, the media, or large corporations, and imposed on discourses. More specifically, normalisation is imposed through the imposition of norms that equate people in order for them to fit into and belong to the category of ‘normal’ (Foucault, 1990: 104), this including both their bodies and minds. Examples of this are national standards for education, health, social behaviour, as well as public statistics on “labour and commerce, the welfare and poverty of the population” (Habermas, 1990b: 271). Normalisation places people who live in capitalist societies around norms relating to health, lifestyle, even their body, in a way that “does away with all forms of natural spontaneity” (Habermas, 1990: 285) and ultimately suppresses any elements that do not conform to modes of “normal” behaviour.

“We should not blind ourselves to [...] the normalising regimes of institutions, including political institutions, that constitute modes of “normal” behaviour” (Foucault, 1990: 104).

This “controlled distribution” (Rabinow, 1984: 20) of individuals around a norm is key to the system of normalisation which operates under conditions of Foucault’s concept of biopower. Not only the body, but also life ultimately become subject to “explicit calculations” (Foucault, 1979: 11) for the purpose of manipulation.

At this stage, it is important to note that while Foucault does not identify power with the state, legislation, or any other form of authority per se, his concepts of biopower and normalisation evidently refer to attempts of the state to subjugate or at least “regulate the actions” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 10) – as well as the bodies – of individuals. A distinction could therefore be made between Foucault’s notion of power in discourse and his notions of biopower and normalisation imposed by the state on individuals. He considers the state as consisting in the “codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible” (Foucault, 1984: 64), even though he does not identify power with any entity and therefore does not consider that power is being owned by the state, but rather exercised by it.

6.1.4 Colonisation v. normalization

There are similarities between Habermas's lifeworld colonisation thesis and Foucault's argument of increasing normalisation (White, 1986: 422). Lifeworld colonisation by the system aims at system stability, establishing systemic mechanisms of money and administrative power into social life and communication. Colonisation according to Habermas therefore results in the distortions of communication through the appropriation of the realm of communicative rationality that is the lifeworld (cf. previous chapter). Similarly, Foucault's concepts of biopower and normalisation refer to state strategies aimed at establishing state control and power over the practices, preferences and in general the lives of individuals. Despite the similarities between these two theories, Foucault's concept of normalisation also takes on the form of coercion on the body itself ("material coercion" cf. Foucault, 1990: 104), rather than on the methods, purpose and distorting factors of human communication in the case of Habermas's thesis described in previous chapters. Interestingly, Foucault illustrates the corporal nature of his concept of power by considering the choice of the term 'body' to refer to the state, institutions, organisations etc (e.g. the state body, institutional bodies). He explicates this view in *Power/Knowledge* (1980).

"The King's body wasn't a metaphor, but a political reality... Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" (Foucault, 1980: 55).

The choice of the term 'body', therefore is not coincidental according to Foucault, but rather demonstrates the material and corporal nature of (bio)power in society, and its impact on the very bodies of individuals, through processes of normalisation. Foucault also refutes the communicative power that Habermas attributes to consensus. This will be analysed in section 6.2.1 below.

6.2 Foucault's challenge to Habermas's theory

Foucault's concept of society, where power is omnipresent in everyday communication and it is also exercised by the state apparatus on individuals, poses a challenge to Habermas's normative model of the public sphere. Against the backdrop of biopower, with its capillary, controlling, normalising characteristics, communication cannot be regulated by the force of the better argument. Furthermore, validity claims cannot be tested and truth cannot be reached in conditions of teleological (strategic) action aimed at control and domination. Instead, power differentials and strategic goals will always act as distorting factors in debate and participants will not be able (or willing) to identify common interests. In actual fact, they are not only inevitable but also necessary in communication according to Foucault, for they produce discourses and knowledge in the first place. Habermas's altruistic form of debate in which participants communicate based on the gnomon of the common good, aiming at reaching consensus, understanding, and at providing a critical voice to counter state authority does not seem to convince Foucault. In particular, Foucault maintains different notions of subjectivity, discourse and its aims, truth and reason, which derive from an epistemology different to that of Habermas. These are analysed in the following sections.

6.2.1 Conflict and Consensus

Broadly speaking, the Habermas/Foucault debate could be described as one between consensus (Habermas) and conflict (Foucault). For Habermas, the normative method of debate conforms to his model of communicative rationality (or "the public use of reason" when referring strictly to communication in the public sphere), according to which debate should be aimed at mutual understanding and consensus. Consensus also constitutes one of Habermas's presuppositions for debate, in the form of consensus on generalisable interests. This means that participants need to identify generalisable, but not necessarily general, interests and agree to use them as the common interest that will govern the discussion ('agreeing to agree'). In stark contrast to this theory, Foucault considers power as an omnipresent, capillary force in communication which cannot possibly be disregarded or bracketed. The purpose of debate in Foucault's case would be to acquire more (communicative) power or to weaken the other participants; in other words, to win the conflict. For this reason, Rabinow describes the basic metaphor in

Foucault's model as "one of battle" rather than conversation (Rabinow, 1984: 6). In such a setting, debate becomes a play on power differentials, where participants assume or appropriate power when arguing, and cede power when they agree or choose not to argue... "and so the battle continues" (Foucault, 1980: 56).

Furthermore, Habermas considers consensus in the framework of the public sphere as catalytic in producing and legitimising public opinion, which should help to shape and challenge governmental and institutional decision-making if necessary. Foucault dismisses this and instead insists that social and governmental bodies are the result "not of consensus" (Foucault, 1980: 55), but of exertion of power on the individual.

"Relations of power that function in a society such as ours essentially rest upon a definite relation of forces that is established at a determinate, historically specifiable moment, in war and by war. [...] The role of political power, on this hypothesis, is perpetually to reinscribe this relation through a form of unspoken warfare; to re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and everyone of us" (Foucault, 1980: 90).

While Habermas sees conflict as something that has to be avoided or at least reduced in debate through mutual understanding and eventually the achievement of consensus (cf. Habermas, 1979), Foucault sees it as the defining feature both of debate and of social and political institutions. In a rather Hobbesian statement, Foucault argues that the state itself also constitutes a substrate for power.

"Isn't power a sort of generalised war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it" (Foucault, 1984: 65).

It seems that Foucault's model of conversation as a battle does not only apply to individual communication, and that Foucault also regards the political sphere as a battlefield. This agonistic view (cf. Benhabib, 1993) of public communication is in stark contrast with Habermas's view of communication in the public sphere, which is carried out in the form of rational-critical debate within an intersubjective lifeworld, aiming at understanding and/or consensus on general(ised) interests for the formation of public opinion. Power differentials have no place in Habermas's normative model.

Having said that, power structures in societies and public spheres are not entirely

disregarded by Habermas. In his recent work, he specifically examines the power structure of contemporary public spheres and the dynamics of mass communication, and identifies four ensuing categories of power: political, social, economic and media power (Habermas, 2006a: 418-419). Political power requires legitimation which is granted by public spheres generating public opinions; social power derives from “positions within functional systems” in a stratified society (op.cit.: 418) and economic power is the transformation of such a social power into a dominant form of pressure on the political system, which is in need of legitimation (ibid.). Lastly, media power seems to be the most influential of all the above according to Habermas's analysis. It does not need legitimation in the same way as political power because of its functional “independence” (op.cit.: 419), which results in its “self-regulation” (ibid.) according to its own normative code. This sort of independence is what makes media power not only extremely influential, but also risks degenerating into a “colonizing mode of communication” (op.cit.: 420) if citizens do not participate by responding to it.

6.2.2 Subjectivity / Intersubjectivity

Foucault's views on the effects of power on both social bodies and the bodies of individuals also points to a fundamental difference between Habermas's communicative rationality, a paradigm based on intersubjectivity, and Foucault's thesis, which is based on the “aesthetic subject” (White, 1986: 423). Ingram (1994: 218) notes that both Foucault and Habermas reject the Enlightenment concept of the Cartesian subject, which refers to a “fixed and universal foundation prior to experience” (ibid.)⁹⁶ and opt for reconceptualisations of the subject and subjectivity in relation to society (Foucault) and communication (Habermas). Their analyses, however, are far from similar. Even though Foucault maintains that subjectivity is “something constructed or constituted within discursive practices” (Foucault, 1980: 204), his conception of a mainly aesthetic subject of thought and action is rather “minimal” or “thin” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 9). It is centred around “the body, spontaneity, and expressiveness” (op.cit.: 424) rather than discursive practices per se. This is in direct contrast to Habermas's *intersubjectivity*, which he describes as the “noncoercively unifying, consensus-

⁹⁶ Ingram notes that both Foucault and Habermas regard the “rational, self-determined unity” (Ingram, 1994: 217), attributed to the isolated subject by Descartes and Kant as erroneous, and instead consider subjectivity a social construct.

building force of a discourse in which the participants *overcome their at first subjectively based views* in favour of a rationally motivated agreement” (Habermas, 1990b: 294, 315, my emphasis). Intersubjectivity is based on a decentred worldview of subjective, objective and social worlds and emerges through communication with the presuppositions of his model of communicative action (cf. Chapter 4.2). There is nothing material or corporeal in Habermas’s concept of intersubjective communication, in contrast to Foucault’s concept of power-infiltrated communication between aesthetic, tangible subjects.

Subjects according to Foucault also constitute the effects of “strategies of power” (Foucault, 1980: 204).

“There are two meanings of the word *subject* [...] subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience of self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1980: 212).

Foucault argues that subjects in the sense of individuals with their own conscience and identity are at risk of losing their conscience and identity, and therefore their very subjectivity, in societies where biopower is at work. This is because, instead of nurturing individuality, “spontaneity and expressiveness” (White, 1986: 423), biopower with its normalizing upshots crushes subjectivity and “does away with all forms of natural spontaneity” (Habermas, 1990b: 285). Its controlling and regulatory mechanisms convert subjects in the sense of individuals into subjects in the sense of inferior or subjugated entities. The task of individuals and society, according to this analysis, would be to salvage “the subject with his body and life” (Habermas, 1990b: 271) and maintain its identity and individuality against the normalising effects of biopower and “biopolitics” (ibid.). Conversely, the task of individuals and society according to Habermas would be to maintain intersubjectivity in the sense of a conscious decentred understanding of the world through protecting the lifeworld and ensuring that conditions of debate are met according to Habermas’s paradigm of communicative action.

6.2.3 *Discourse and Diskurs*

As examined in 4.2.3, Habermas's concept of discourse (*Diskurs*) is processual and includes the prerequisites of communication according to the ideal speech situation. These prerequisites include: clarification and focus on the exclusive object of discussion, that is, "bracketed validity claims of assertions, recommendation, or warnings" (Habermas, 1975: 107); unrestricted communication in principle, regulated merely by the aim of testing the validity claims in question, without the use of force except of that of the better argument; the ultimate aim of testing validity claims should be the "cooperative search for truth" (op.cit.: 108). In direct contrast to Habermas's notion of *Diskurs*, Foucault maintains that "all discourses can be shown to have the character of hidden power and derive from practices of power" (Schmidt, 1996: 152). He links his concept of discourse with the actual social practices that surround it (Rabinow, 1984: 10), which he sees as inevitably impregnated with power, since it is power that produces discourse in the first place (Habermas, 1990b: 255). In fact, his concept of socialisation itself refers to "the investment with power of concrete, bodily mediated interactions" (Habermas, 1990b: 243). Power, however, is not the only difference between Habermas's normative *Diskurs* model and Foucault's concept of discourse. The crucial difference between the two models is in fact epistemological and lies in Habermas's normative as opposed to Foucault's "historically contingent" (Ingram, 1994: 224) approaches.

Foucault's *episteme* (or structure of knowledge) is fundamentally different from that of Habermas. He defines it as the total set of relations that unite discursal practices at given periods (Foucault, 1989: 191). For Foucault, these relations of discursive practices are actually tied to a specific time period; they are not transcendental, but factual (ibid.). This is in direct contrast to Habermas's context- (and time) transcendent counterfactual ideals, which were analysed in 3.2.7. Following Foucault's *episteme*, his concept of discourse is therefore "situated [...] in local and historically contingent practices governed by strategic power relations" (Ingram, 1994: 224), rather than constituting a normative procedural model of communication, as is the case of Habermas's *Diskurs*. In this respect, the task of the critical theorist becomes identifying the processes through which power relations arise through discursive practices (in Foucault's sense), throughout different historical periods (White, 1986: 421).

Discourse in Foucauldian terms, therefore, constitutes the product or the result of some form of exercise of power. In his analysis of discourse formation, Foucault uses his method of genealogy to trace historically and study different strands of discourse and also coherences within such historically constituted discursive formations (Olssen, 2006: 13). Foucault's attribution of a historical basis to discourse formation, as well as its established nexus with power, an essentially volatile concept in Foucault's terms, result in a similarly volatile concept of discourse – at least in Foucault's later works. In his critique of Foucault's genealogy, Habermas notes that by using this method, Foucault aims at uncovering the “contingent beginnings” (Habermas, 1990b: 250) of discourse formations. Such “beginnings” in the form of random events in the framework of any given power struggle result in tentative discourses which would easily be subject to change, or which could have ended differently. Habermas's *Diskurs*, on the other hand, is less intuitive and more robust, at least conceptually, as a model of “pure ‘communicative sociation’” (op.cit.: 323) based on the disregard of power differentials and the equalisation of participants through the force of the better argument. Foucault's methodology is further analysed in 8.2.2.

6.2.4 Foucault's epistemes - against universals

Foucault's *episteme* does not only apply to his concept of discourse. Foucault vehemently opposed universal theories and normative ideals in general, and instead formulated his theories and based his analyses on historical investigations. For this reason, he is regarded as the philosopher of *wirkliche Historie* (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 211) as opposed to transcendental arguments.

“Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation. [...] The historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical.” (Foucault, 1984a: 45-6).

Foucault's stated aim is not to formulate a transcendental argument that remains static throughout history, but to base his socio-political critique on a situated, historical analysis (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 7; Foucault, 1984: 59). While Habermas's theory involved a distinction between the *form* of transcendental reason and the *content* of historical reality (Ingram, 1994: 216), Foucault's analysis focuses exclusively on the content. This is explained in detail below.

Madness and Civilisation ([1961] 1990a), Foucault's first analytical study of reason, constitutes an example of his approach to research and criticism, that is, that it "should be guided by an 'attitude' [...] not a system of principles" (Kolodny, 1996: 70). Apart from being presented as part of the history of reason, this historical investigation of methods of treating the insane also identified the "simple antinomy between reason and un-reason" (Foucault, 1980: 51), upon which inclusion and exclusion procedures were based at the time.⁹⁷ Such investigations attempt to locate historically and analyse practices dealing mostly with "the subject, knowledge and power" (Rabinow, 1984: 7).

At first sight, this method of analysis through historical investigation may seem comparable to Habermas's historical analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas, 1992). While the two methods may appear similar, they are in essence entirely conflicting. Habermas's critical theory is largely based on his contemporary version of hermeneutics, which focuses on the interpretation of socio-political trends through human communication and the production of meaning. Habermas's aim is to lay the foundations for a normative ideal through the interpretation, analysis and critique of socio-political phenomena arising from "lifeworld pathologies" (Habermas, 1987: 197; Habermas, 1990b: 348) and "systematically distorted communication" (Habermas, 1979: 120; Habermas, 1990a: 188).

"[In] Habermas's way of thinking [...] critique orients communication to the *ideal communication community* (the transcendental ideal): it articulates this orientation in communication in terms of *enlightenment* (the project of striving to reconcile the real and the ideal) in which the *public use of communicative freedom* subjects itself to the regulative constraints of performative consistency, that is, to the *universal rules of rational argumentation* (the lawful use of reason)" (Owen, 1999: 29, emphases on the original).

⁹⁷ Other examples of historical investigations include: *The Birth of the Clinic* (1974), where he traces the evolution of the medical profession; in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* ([1977] 1991) he examines the development of carceral and penal systems from medieval to contemporary times; and in *The History of Sexuality* ([1976] 1990b) he offers an extensive analysis of the relationship between sexuality and power from ancient Greek and Roman, to early Christian and finally modern times.

As for Foucault, he used the method of “archaeology” in his earlier works and “genealogy” in his later investigation (Olssen, 2006: 9). Archaeology was his method of analysing the historical bases of a given system of thought (ibid.). His later method of genealogy was inspired by Nietzsche’s work (cf. *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887) on the attribution of contemporary morality in relationships devoid of morality, based on power struggles and selfishness. Foucault’s genealogy is also heavily focused on power and the body, in particular processes of normalisation. It attempts to expose the works of power operating in “structures of thinking and behaviour that previously seemed to be devoid of power relations” (White, 1986: 421).

Unlike Habermas’s aim of developing a universal, normative/counterfactual framework of communication, Foucault’s genealogy constitutes:

“ [...] a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (Foucault, 1984: 59).

As this form of history does not presuppose a constant “history-writing subject [or] his contemporaries” (Habermas, 1990b: 249), it marks Foucault’s “parting with hermeneutics” (op.cit.: 250). It aims instead at demystifying the illusion of constant, static, universal points of reference or standards and at revealing the historical basis of practically everything (op.cit.: 275). Indeed, Foucault’s consistent response to claims to universal truths has been to reaffirm the uncertainty that is associated with them (Rabinow, 1984: 5).

“It seems to me that the critical question today [is]: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints?”(Foucault, 1984: 45)

Since the existence of universals has not been demonstrated according to Foucault, analysis of social phenomena should be carried out without recourse to universal theories and truths (Rabinow, 1984: 4). If everything depends on and changes with history, then Foucault argues that “all ‘isms’ should be evacuated” (Habermas, 1990b: 275) and the contingency of putatively universal and timeless truths exposed.

6.2.5 Truth

According to Habermas's ideal speech situation, the "cooperative search for truth" (Habermas, 1975: 108) constitutes the normative aim of testing validity claims in debate. In fact, truth constitutes a transcending validity claim for Habermas (Habermas, 1987: 134) and it is intersubjectively related to an ideal communication community. His notion of truth refers to an idealised agreement resulting from logical and impersonal thinking (Habermas, 1987: 134) and "harmony of minds" (Habermas, 1987: 72). This does not mean necessarily that there can only be one truth, but that there is one agreed (generalised) truth as a result of rational-critical debate. Power depends on this (quasi-)transcendental concept of truth according to Habermas's criterion of success in action.

"Power is that by which the subject has an effect on objects in successful actions – success in action depends upon the truth of the judgements that enter into the plan of action; via the criterion of success in action, power remains dependent on truth" (Habermas, 1990b: 273).

In other words, Habermas states that there can be no *effective* relations of power between people if human action is not guided by truth, conceived as the validity claim resulting from reflection and rational-critical debate, based on an intersubjective understanding of the world, and having transcendental status. Power, in this sense, is the ability for action and for change, but it can be counter-productive, or ineffective at best, if it is not based on a consensus on truth ("harmony of minds"). This normative conception of the relation between power and truth, which advocates a more or less collective and consensual form of power, seems overtly idealistic, however Foucault's critique below does not offer a better alternative.

Indeed, the search for truth, as explicated by Habermas, appears futile if examined through Foucault's argument. As is the case with the concept of discourse, Foucault also rejects the transcendence and universal validity of truth. Truth is produced by discourse which is contingent, historically-based and not freely circulating but rather directed by power in Foucault's model. This means that truth itself is not constant but precarious and volatile, which is not only a result of its own contingency on power, but also of the heterogeneous multiplicity of discourses: In his critique of this model, Habermas rightly argues that this "chaotic multitude" (Habermas, 1990b: 253) of emerging and obsolete totalities of discourse, which constitute the focus of the "cynical gaze of the genealogist" (ibid.) leaves no place for any "overarching meaning" (ibid.). This results

in a model of multiple discourses, multiple meanings and multiple truths. If Foucault's aim to detach the power of truth from "the forms of hegemony" (Foucault, 1980: 75) were fulfilled, this would still not affect the contingency of truth on history and on the multiplicity of discourses in his model. Even if truth were detached from practices of power, therefore, which would be impossible nonetheless according to Foucault's analysis, truth could not have a transcendental meaning in Foucault's analysis due to its contingent (historical and discursive) basis.⁹⁸

Furthermore, Foucault argues that any truth is context-bound and that context is historical. No truth is certain and timeless, and there is no such thing as universal understanding that is "beyond history and society" (Rabinow, 1984: 4). Instead, "truth is a thing of this world" (Foucault, 1980: 72). The only certain point of reference is "our sociality and history [...], the only solid ground under our feet" (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 222), which is fully adequate for socio-political analysis according to Foucault. In other words, we can only be certain about the truths that exist in our time, those truths that we experience and which directly affect our lives and bodies. For this reason, when universal truths are assumed, Foucault states that they must be questioned; his analyses of theories of discourse, reason, power and sexuality do precisely that. They attempt to "historicise grand abstractions" (Rabinow, 1984: 4) and demonstrate the historical context that every claim to truth should allegedly have.

To accuse Foucault of relativism based on this conceptualisation of truth would not do justice to his intentions. He did not seek to introduce a new theory or a new norm, he strongly opposed universal norms. He did not argue that there is no such thing as truth, but rather that there are many contingent, historically situated truths, as in the case of

⁹⁸ In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard also rejects universal truths in the form of grand narratives and argues for "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv) as a result of technological progress. For Lyotard, metanarratives such as truth, or the "emancipation of the rational" (op.cit.: 111) are generalist and defunct. It should be noted, however, that, unlike Foucault, Lyotard does not preclude the existence of truth - "science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth" (op.cit.: xxiii). He believes, instead, that despite technological advancement, knowledge of truth is unattainable because of the fallibility of humans, which in turn leads to a plurality of small competing narratives (op.cit.: 60, 75).

discourse. He also conceptualised truth in relation to power, in a way that truth, historically, had to coincide with what authority (power) dictated. Indeed, according to Foucault's rationale, any claim to truth also implies a claim to power, because truth can only be produced by power.⁹⁹ This statement derives from his historical investigation and extensive analysis of the nexus between truth and power (Foucault, 1984). Foucault explains that in 19th century bourgeois society the "establishment of truth was the absolute right and the exclusive power of the sovereign" (Foucault, 1991: 35). The highest order of truth was considered to descend "vertically" (Ingram, 1994: 220) from the monarch and the putative unitary will of the people, however, Foucault regards the latter as a "pretense" (ibid.) and sustains that "truth is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint" (Foucault, 1980: 72). He insists on the unbreakable dependency of truth on power and argues that 'truths' in general are produced when there is a "will to power" (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: xv) by particular social or political groups in order to support, benefit or valorise them (ibid.). This reinforces Foucault's rejection of one stable, impersonal truth (Habermas, 1987: 134) in favour of multiple contingent truths. In this respect, Foucault states that each society has its own regime or "general politics" of truth (Foucault, 1980: 73), which is produced from a will to power and at the same time produces regular effects of power (ibid.).

At the same time, Foucault's concept of truth also produces regular effects of power itself. He explains this in the following way: truth is a system of ordered procedures "for the production, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1980: 74), which is different for every society. That is, each society has its own "regime of truth" (op.cit.: 74; 131), which comprises "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (op.cit.: 131). In such a system of truth, systems of power exist, which produce and sustain truth. Following this point, Habermas notes that Foucault's analysis reverses the notion of power's truth dependency into the power-dependency of truth (Habermas, 1990b: 273). However, this dependency of truth on power is not absolute. Foucault states that truth is linked with systems of power in a "circular relation" (ibid.) where power generates truth and also truth induces and extends power.

⁹⁹ "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth" (Foucault, 1980: 133).

He adds that truth also makes the laws and produces the discourses “which are the bearers of the specific effects of power” (op.cit.: 94).

“We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. [...] We must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit” (Foucault, 1980: 93).

In such a model of society and communication, reason also operates against the backdrop of power and conflict. Based on this, the challenge according to Foucault’s rationale is not to emancipate truth from every system of power, but rather to isolate “the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural” (Foucault, 1980: 75) – in other words, to give the power of the production of truth back to citizens.

Foucault’s conceptualization and truth in relation to power, albeit not relativistic, is too loose because of its historical contingency. His persistence on power and historical situatedness make his model surprisingly monolithic, which is contrary to his intentions. If discourse and truth are all contingent on history, that is, the specific time period of the validity of the truth claim, and on power, as mentioned above, then power and history could be considered as the constants, as the meta-concepts upon which truth and discourse depend – much to Foucault’s affliction. For this reason, Foucault’s challenge to Habermas’s universal claim to truth and *Diskurs* is not convincing. His explication of the way society works, of the effect of biopower and the relation between power, knowledge and truth, is descriptive and intuitive and therefore does not succeed in undermining Habermas’s normative claims.

6.2.6 Reason

Foucault’s rejection of hermeneutic methods and universal claims also applies to analyses of language and reason itself (Olssen, 2006: 11). On one hand, Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality represents a model of linguistically embodied, “situated” reason (Habermas, 2001: 130; Habermas, 1992a: 139), which is located in interpersonal linguistic communication rather than the knowing subject (Descartes). What differentiates Habermas’s theory of rationality from previous subject-centred

conceptualizations is precisely this “linguistic turn” (Habermas, 2001: 149), the advocacy of a form of rationality based on linguistic communication (cf. 4.2 on Communicative Rationality). Conversely, Foucault rejects the conceptualization of language, and reason, as free of power. Insisting on his genealogical method of analyzing those concepts, he aims at tracing ruptures between discursive systems throughout history (Olssen, 2006: 11) and views language as a means of establishing power relations.

“Language, it is played [...] Relations of power, also, they are played; it is these games of power (*jeux de pouvoir*) that one must study in terms of tactics and strategy, in terms of order and of chance, in terms of stakes and objectives” (Foucault, quoted in Olssen, 2006: 17).

The way language is “played” constitutes a significant feature of Foucault’s view of modernity (Habermas, 1990b: 282-283), also considered as being impregnated with ubiquitous, capillary forms of power. In such conditions of modernity, language functions only as an instrument of asserting and establishing power, as a medium of strategy and power games rather than communicative reason in Habermasian terms. The dependence of language on power and also its role in the establishment of power add it to the list of concepts which cannot have a universal form according to Foucault.

Based on the above analysis, it becomes clear that the fundamental components of Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality are not considered by Foucault as having universal or transcendental value. These elements include language, discourse, understanding, intersubjectivity, truth, and ultimately reason itself (Olssen, 2006: 125). Again, Foucault uses his method of genealogical analysis, involving a historical account and an examination of relation with power, for an analysis of reason.

“There is the problem raised by Habermas: if one abandons the work of Kant or Weber, for example, one runs the risk of lapsing into irrationality. I am completely in agreement with this, but at the same time, our question is quite different: I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century, has been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question, What is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by

intrinsic dangers? One should remain as close to this question as possible, keeping in mind that it is extremely difficult to resolve” (Foucault, 1984: 249).

What is crucial in the above statement is that Foucault does not reject reason altogether. On the contrary, he acknowledges the significance of reason in society but argues for a different analysis of it, focusing on its risks and rejecting its universal form. Again, contingency seems to be an important element in Foucault’s study, and his aim is understood as exposing the risks and contingencies of concepts deemed universal. In short, Foucault does not reject the concepts per se, but instead he rejects their universality (Rabinow, 1984: 4). Again, although this does not constitute proof of relativism, it still masks a claim for the universality of power, since reason and truth are considered to be contingent upon it. It almost elevates power, in all its forms, to a meta-level.

Indeed, Foucault’s method of historical analysis places emphasis on the plurality of forms that reason may assume in social practice and eschews generalisations or universal claims of reason which could be used as a normative tool for evaluation. In other words, for Foucault there is no meta-concept of reason that could function as a critical yardstick against which communication practices could be gauged. Reason includes different forms of rationality which is contingent and subject to social transformation, similar to truth, language, and power. Therefore Foucault rejects the privileging of one form of rationality over another and instead views all forms as merely different narratives.

“I am not prepared to identify reason entirely with the totality of rational forms which have come to dominate at any given moment, in our own era and even very recently – in types of knowledge, forms of technique and modalities of government or domination [...] For me, no given form of rationality is actually reason. [...] I can see multiple transformations, but I cannot see why we should call this transformation a collapse of reason [...] there is no sense at all in the proposition that reason is a long narrative which is now finished, and that another narrative is under way” (Foucault, cited in Olssen, 2006: 133).

At this point it is crucial to note that, even though Foucault’s concept of reason as a narrative and the rejection of its normative status are contradicting Habermas’s theory, the plurality of forms of reason (rationalities) constitutes a view shared by both Foucault and Habermas. The latter stresses in his analysis of communicative rationality that there

are indeed different concepts of rationality, he provides an extensive critique of instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1984) and constructs his own model of communicative rationality as the best alternative. In other words, Habermas does not claim that his model is the only one, but he does bestow normative status upon it. Foucault's objection is precisely on this normative status, which he argues disregards both its contingency on history and social transformation and the risks and dangers that are associated with it. In other words, he does not reject reason, but refuses to see it as "either our hope or our nemesis" (Rabinow, 1984: 13).

If reason does not have a normative or universal status, as Foucault argues, then what role does it have in communication? Foucault does not want to be absolute and get involved in "the arbitrary and boring part of either the irrationalist or the rationalist" (Foucault, 1980: 210). Instead, he insists on linking reason with power and therefore rejects the view that reason is the singular means of generating and guaranteeing truth.

"If power insinuates itself into the very discipline constitutive of rational self-identity, then it is impossible to know rationally one's true humanity independent of power's distorting effects" (Foucault, 1980: 96,101).

This illustrates Foucault's critical reflection on the "theoretical problematic of occidental reason" (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 9), that is, how individuals govern themselves and others by the production of truth (ibid.). The answer that Foucault gives to this is, again, power. He sees reason as a victim of the ubiquitous power in discourses, making it impossible to be conceptualised or analysed on its own. It can only be analysed in specific historical contexts, always taking into account the power differentials and dynamics in communication and society.

6.3 Foucault contra Habermas

Foucault's challenges to Habermas's theory of communicative rationality as the normative "methodological fiction" (Habermas, 1996b: 326) of communication in the public sphere have been examined. It seems that Foucault rejects the validity and usefulness of every aspect of Habermas's model. It remains to determine whether his criticism is justified and if so, whether Habermas's theory would benefit from a reconceptualisation along the lines of Foucault's critique. This section starts with Foucault's argument that Habermas's theory should incorporate the concept of power,

otherwise it will remain utopian with no relevance or usefulness for contemporary society. A critique of Foucault's analysis follows, with Habermas describing it as "presentist, relativistic and cryptonormative" (Habermas, 1990b: 276), and the final part of this section examines whether the Habermas/Foucault debate is really based on a misunderstanding of the aims and objectives of each other's theories.

6.3.1 Habermas's claim to universality and the 'bracketing' of power

It is evident from the above analysis that Foucault's main objections to Habermas's model of communication are the latter's claim to universality and disregard of the role of power in communication and in society. Habermas's approach of establishing normative criteria for communication results in a series of concepts which are regarded as context-dependent and at the same time context-transcendent (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 13). According to Habermas, these criteria "may be presumed to be universal because they are unavoidable" (Habermas, 1987: 196). These universal principles also guarantee the context-transcending power of reason. In this way, Ingram notes that communicative (rational) action according to Habermas is guided both by factual beliefs, formed as a result of argumentation on validity claims, and "normative, expressive and evaluative beliefs with their claims to rightness, sincerity, authenticity and appropriateness" (Ingram, 1987: 20). The question is whether these normative beliefs grant reason with a context-transcending power; in short, whether Habermas's theory can truly be regarded as universal.

The fact that Habermas bases his early theory of the public sphere (Habermas, [1962] 1992b) on a historical account of its structural transformation has led to a questioning of the normative status of his theory and its universal application. The historical account investigates the emergence and evolution of the *bourgeois* public sphere in Western Europe (in particular France, Germany and Britain). His later model, which acknowledged the existence of more public spheres, incorporated communicative rationality and was tied to his conception of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996b; 2001), was still based on a Western-type society. For this reason, it has been criticised as being limited to western experience and blind to cultural difference and different models of social structures. In *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2*, Habermas examines the structures of tribal societies (Habermas, 1987: 56-75), however he only

does so in order to point out the ‘only’ social structure in which lifeworld and system coexisted in balance. In his model of society, the system constantly attempts to colonise the lifeworld in order to establish strategic aims and fulfil the goals of money and power (cf. previous chapter). Again, this model disregards non-Western social structures where lifeworld colonisation may not apply. Even after Habermas revised his earlier theory (Habermas, in Calhoun, 1993; Habermas, 1990b; 1996) in an attempt to make it more inclusive in terms of scope, it is still criticised for disregarding “identity, cultural divisions, non-discursive ways of safeguarding reason that are being developed by so-called minority groups and new social movements” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 218).¹⁰⁰

In his attempt to justify the universality of his norms, Habermas argues:

“[Validity norms] can be applied without qualification only to standard situations whose salient features have been integrated from the outset into the conditional components of the rule as conditions of application” (Habermas, cited in Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 14).

Ashenden and Owen do not consider the above argument convincing (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 14), as it involves too many caveats to be considered truly universal – “*only to standard situations ... whose features have been integrated into conditional components ... conditions of application*” (ibid., my emphases). The above statement may also be seen as an attempt by Habermas to justify his universal pretensions by introducing limitations to them. A similar attempt was evident in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where Habermas described his model a “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996b: 326) to be used for heuristic purposes, rather than a universally normative model of communication. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1990), he concludes that “even basic concepts that are starkly universalist have a temporal core” (Habermas, 1990b: 301). Ingram sees this as an acknowledgement of the temporal nature of his own putative universal concepts (Ingram, 1994: 227). He argues that both Foucault and Habermas regard “the social conditions under which identities, needs and interests [as] historically constituted” (op.cit.: 218), and concludes that Habermas’s concept of “communication and its evolutionary logic are [in fact] themselves contingent on external historical forces” (op.cit.: 227). As regards the issue of universality as opposed to historical contingency

¹⁰⁰ The public spheres of minority groups and social movements have been analysed in 3.1.3 of this thesis.

of concepts, Foucault's argument stands, as "normative claims and historical accuracy develop an antagonistic potential" (Grant, 2007: 58). It is important to note, however, that lack of universality alone does not necessarily undermine the validity of Habermas's concepts, albeit for certain types of societies and under specific circumstances.

6.3.2 Habermas's Model of Communication as 'Utopian'

Foucault considers a model of the public sphere, of communication and of society which disregards the pervasive influence of power as having no practical use. He therefore deems Habermas's theory utopian:

"[in Habermas's work] there is always something which causes me a problem. It is when he assigns a very important place to relations of communication and also a function that I would call "utopian". The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint, and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopia. It is being blind to the fact that relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free oneself. I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power... The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination (Foucault, 1988b: 18).

This brings us back to Foucault's view that power is not necessarily a disciplinary feature of society but also productive. According to this view, power differentials produce discourse, truth and knowledge. Foucault argues that Habermas ignores this aspect of power completely and therefore decides to disregard the concept of power from a normative model of communication altogether. White agrees with Foucault's argument and states that critical theory should take into account "the possibility that its own concepts make it blind to some dimensions of power and self-deception" (White, 1986: 424). Rasmussen asks whether Habermas "has, so the critics seem to suggest, robbed social and political thought of its human and passionate content" (Rasmussen, 1990: 7) by excluding power differentials and the promotion of personal interests in

normative conceptions of public communication. Bernstein argues that even in cases where all participants are committed to rational argumentation in the Habermasian sense, societies “must have some procedures for dealing with conflicts that cannot be resolved by argumentation” (Bernstein, 1992: 221). In short, there seems to be a critical consensus that Habermas disregards the salient role of power from his normative communication model.

Flyvbjerg is particularly critical of Habermas and argues that he lacks the concrete understanding of power relations that is needed for political change (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 215). In his paper, Flyvbjerg examines the Foucault/Habermas debate on communication practices in the public sphere and civil society. He staunchly supports Foucault’s side of the debate, dismissing Habermas’s communicative rationality as mere utopia (ibid.) and urging instead for an understanding of “the realities of power” (op.cit.: 219) as the only way of achieving more democratic practices. While such an understanding is indeed necessary, to reject all normative conceptualisations of public debate on the basis of a notion of power that is omnipotent and omnipresent would result in a theoretical impasse. Communication in the public sphere would be reduced, in this case, to harnessing the capillary effects of power; and, while such cases practically occur, it would be wrong to translate that into a swooping generalisation and reject the normative properties of Habermas’s model as utopian. Instead of dismissing the latter by hypostatizing power and generalising its influence, which is what Foucault is doing, it would be more useful to take into account power relations, not just between people, but also between citizens and the media, or between citizens and organisations, in the framework of Habermas’s theory. This is further analysed below.

As regards the public sphere, Flyvbjerg again supports the Foucauldian argument that a political sphere which cannot be subverted by power in Habermas’s terms cannot be conceptualised as free of power, because publicness in Habermas’s model was established through conflict and a claim to power in the first place (op.cit.: 227). The 18th century bourgeois established a sphere of communication, initially in coffeehouses and table societies and later with the written press, with the purpose of generating public opinion which would act as a counterbalance to the representative publicity of the time (cf. Habermas, 1992: 211, 236-243). With this in mind, Flyvbjerg insists that “power is needed to limit power” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 227) and adds that even if Habermas’s discourse ethics were applied in real-life practices, this would not result in an end to

power, but instead “it would be a way to regulate power [...]. Agreement would, in this sense, be forced” (ibid.). This illustrates Foucault’s conception of public communication and debate as fundamentally a conflict and a play on power differentials. Again, this illustrates the tension between a descriptive and essentially agonistic account of public communication.

Habermas’s later conception of his model of communication as a “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996b: 326) aimed at eschewing its characterisation as utopian or unrealistic. A methodological fiction is conceptualised in order to fulfil certain heuristic functions (cf. Grant, 2001). In Habermas’s case, it purports to a “strongly idealised regulative idea against which actual games inundated by relations of power can be evaluated in the name of freedom” (Tully, cited in Ashenden & Owen, 1999: 130). Moreover, the counterfactual normativity of Habermas’s model (cf. 3.2.7 of this thesis) denotes precisely the fact that it does not respond to factual, or actually existing circumstances. Instead, it is supposed to function as a guide to improving them by offering an idealised version of debate. Still, Flyvbjerg is not convinced and criticises him for describing “the utopia of communicative rationality but not how to get there” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 215).

In light of such criticism against Habermas for developing a utopian model which disregards the catalytic influence of power in communication, Habermas attempted to incorporate it in his subsequent work to *Structural Transformation*. In *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 2* (1987), he developed a model of society as system and lifeworld, based on Parsons’s concept of the social system but deviating from Luhmann’s (cf. previous chapter). In this model of society, the system is governed by the media of money and power. Relations between system and lifeworld are purely antagonistic and the lifeworld is seen as being under constant threat of colonisation by the money and power-oriented system. Despite the fact that the influence of Parsons and Luhmann is more evident than that of Foucault’s,¹⁰¹ nevertheless the notion of a system of strategic power attempting to colonise the realm of public communication resembles a Foucauldian conception of power – at least on the level of “biopower” attempting to

¹⁰¹ As seen in Chapter 5, Habermas developed a model of society in systemic terms, comprising system and lifeworld, following Luhmann’s systems theoretical critique of Habermas’s concepts of communicative rationality, publicness, meaning etc.

normalise discourses and attitudes. Foucault's concept of normalisation in particular bears similarities with Habermas's colonisation thesis (cf. 6.2.3). The system-lifeworld model, which incorporates and extensively analyses the notion of power in society is not normative per se. However, its analysis by Habermas aims at strengthening his case for the salvation of the lifeworld (that is, the realm of communicative rationality and of the idealised version of the public sphere). It seems that Habermas's incorporation of power in his theory has not changed its fundamental normative goals for which it has been criticised as utopian.

6.3.3 Habermas's critique: Foucault's "totalising theory of power"

Habermas devoted two chapters of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1990b) on Foucault's critique. He provides a thorough analysis of Foucault's methods of historiography through archaeology and genealogy and concludes that this form of "radical critique of reason" (Habermas, 1990b: 247) suffers from "cryptonormativity" (op.cit. 276) and is in fact "caught in the aporias" of its own self-referential undertaking (op. cit.: 247).

Firstly, Habermas criticises Foucault for his "totalising theory of power" (Owen, 1999: 28), which leaves no room for the examination of other elements in discourse and social action. For Habermas, Foucault develops a critique of reason through a theory of ubiquitous, pervasive, capillary power in such a way that he presents power as "the other of reason" (Habermas, 1990b: 337). The latter cannot constitute a historical category in Habermas's view, since reason does not constitute a historical concept, while power may be seen by Habermas as a distorting factor and an impediment to rational-critical debate, therefore, it cannot be considered as the other of reason. Instead, he mentions "nature, human body, fantasy, desire, feelings, insofar as reason has not been able to appropriate it" (Böhme and Böhme, quoted in Habermas, 1990b: 306). Habermas also notes that Foucault's almost exclusive focus on power and its effects on communication and society largely ignores the rational subject (Ingram, 1994: 215). Rational subjects are seen as having their identity, discourses, truths and socio-political life constructed by power through processes of normalization in a way that they seem helpless and unable to resist. Foucault does not suggest a solution to this, and he certainly does not regard reason as "our hope" (Rabinow, 1984: 13). Habermas argues that, unlike Foucault, he moves beyond historiography and develops a model of

communicative reason as a way to tame power in all its forms which threatens rational-critical debate based solely on the force of the better argument and the negotiation of validity claims.

6.3.4 Foucault's "cryptonormativity"

Habermas considers Foucault's critique of reason as a form of "historiography of the human sciences" (Habermas, 1990b: 254). He criticises this form of critique of reason as paradoxical, for Foucault must at the same time "retain for his concept of power the transcendental meaning of a condition of the possibility of truth" (Habermas, 1990b: 256). It is evident from the above analysis that Foucault did not aim at retaining a transcendental meaning for his theoretical model. For Foucault, there are no meta-concepts of meaning or truth, but rather multiple meanings and multiple, historically contingent, truths, deriving from a multiplicity of discourses which "emerge like events" (ibid.). The question examined in this section is whether Foucault's rejection of universals, normative theories and transcendental concepts is genuine and absolute, and if so, whether his theoretical concepts in this Chapter can retain their validity without normative grounding.

Still, Habermas discerns traces of transcendental qualities in Foucault's approach, in particular in his notion of power, which is conceived as "something particular that strives against all universals" (ibid.). He argues that through Foucault's genealogical/historic critique, power is actually raised to a "basic transcendental-historicist concept of historiography" (op.cit: 254). Ironically, Habermas himself has been criticised of founding his own normative theory of the public sphere on historiography (cf. Habermas, 1992b; Grant, 2001; Mc Carthy, 1978). Habermas's criticism of Foucault, however, is different. He argues that Foucault's "radical historiography" (Habermas, 1990b: 252) is in fact transcendental, albeit in a weak sense:

"Genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as the *presentist, relativistic, cryptonormative* illusory science that it does not want to be. Foucault's putative objectivity of knowledge is itself put into question by the unavoidable *relativism* of an analysis related to the present that can understand itself only as a context-dependent practical enterprise" (Habermas, 1990b: 276).

Habermas, therefore, sees Foucault's concepts performing the "irritating double role" (D'Entrèves, 1996: 19) of both empirical and transcendental claims, of both relativistic and 'cryptonormative' conceptualisations. The contradiction that Habermas attempts to expose is the following: Foucault is a relativist, focusing so heavily on contingency tied to history that he ignores and ultimately rejects the need for a transcendental argument, however his alleged "anti-theory" (Piscioneri, 2003: 368), constructed on the basis of rejection of universal and transcendental values, masks in fact normative pretensions. By attempting to show the impact of power on communication and society, Foucault presents the taming of certain forms of it, such as biopower and normalisation, as the normative task of contemporary society.¹⁰² Kolodny agrees that an implicit quasi-normative programme is in fact detectable in Foucault's work (Kolodny, 1996: 67-8). Fraser is more critical and describes Foucault's approach as a "mixture of empirical insights and normative confusions" (Fraser, 1989: 17).

Habermas's case against Foucault's cryptonormative theory is reinforced by the argument that Foucault's rejection of universal and normative values is in fact "self-defeating" (Osborne, 1999: 45). The contingency, which Foucault sees in "practically everything" (Habermas, 1990b: 275), also applies to Habermas's analysis. Indeed, Biebricher argues that Foucault's "Nietzschean" genealogy by definition does not aim at raising strong truth claims, since it does not claim to be "detached and objective" (Biebricher, 2005: 25). Instead, the genealogist considers himself as providing "one among many more or less biased interpretations of (historical) reality" (op.cit.: 10). After all, Foucault advocates the multiplicity of historically contingent truths and meanings. Therefore, he should not even consider his own analysis as one of transcendental or universal validity because he disapproves of the devotion of Western political philosophy to "abstractions, first principles, utopias" (Rabinow, 1984: 5).

Instead, Foucault recommends a particular conception of power, communication and society and privileges his own interpretation, thus violating his own basic methodological canon (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 257-8; White, 1986: 423). He

¹⁰² "What Foucault calls 'the political task' is "to criticise the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" (Chomsky and Foucault, 1974: 171).

attempts to “persuade (not convince)” (Biebricher, 2005: 12) the readers to adopt a new perspective rather than merely presenting another perspective on the contemporary status quo, by placing emphasis on the significance of power in all its forms in contemporary society. Osborne argues that for Foucault, “power is everywhere; and yet clearly Foucault wants to supersede power, to go beyond it, to speak in the name of the oppressed” (Osborne, 1999: 45). Herein lies the “normative confusion” (Fraser, 1989: 17). If no interpretation can claim a transcendental or normative status, then what is the purpose of his criticism of other interpretations and the bias in favour of his own? Foucault does raise normative validity claims with his analysis of power, despite his claim for the contrary (hence the cryptonormativity), by establishing power as the omnipotent guiding principle of all communication and by claiming the validity and prevalence of his own theory over others. If his argument were not transcendental at all, then his entire analysis and “the entire undertaking of a critical unmasking of the human sciences” (Habermas, 1990b: 279) would be pointless. It would “raise validity-claims only to renounce them” (op.cit.: 336) as merely one interpretation among others of a historically defined reality.

Schmidt (1996) observes a further side to Habermas’s accusation of Foucault of cryptonormativity. Foucault’s allegedly relativistic theory should be viewed, according to Habermas’s critique, as “an inadequate justification for the normative rightness of an action” (Schmidt, 1996: 166). In this respect, Habermas does not only want to expose the inherent contradiction in Foucault’s epistemology but also to prove that Foucault’s “aporias” (Habermas, 1990b: 273) can only be resolved by what Foucault opposes so fervently – a universal, normative model similar to that of Habermas.¹⁰³ The cryptonormativity of Foucault’s theory in this case refers to the normative model of communicative rationality as the only solution to Foucault’s relativism and theoretical paradoxes. Fraser agrees and states that “only with the introduction of normative notions” (Fraser, 1989: 30) can Foucault make a plausible case on the perils of the modern power/knowledge regime and why we should oppose it. Indeed, without a normative basis, Foucault’s claims constitute merely historical findings, pertinent to a

¹⁰³ Schmidt also adds “depth hermeneutics” as one of the options that Foucault foreclosed but which is seen by Habermas as one of the solutions to Foucault’s aporias (Schmidt, 1996: 166).

specific time and type of society and therefore cannot offer a comprehensive critique of a normative, counterfactual model.

6.3.5 A case of misunderstanding?

In order to conclude on the critical challenge of Foucault's theory to Habermas's models of the public sphere and communicative rationality, it is important to examine the view that the Habermas/Foucault debate was in fact "a case of severe miscommunication" (Biebricher, 2005: 1). In his paper, Biebricher argues that Habermas's description of Foucault's approach as relativist and cryptonormative is the result of a "misreading" (op.cit.: 2) of Foucault's work and a misunderstanding of genealogy as a research method. The self-defeating contradictions that Habermas (1990) identified in Foucault's conceptualisation of power undermine Foucault's theoretical basis. Habermas's account of Foucault's genealogy, however, is considered by Biebricher as "mistaken or at least impoverished" (Biebricher, 2005: 6) as it "misses the unique character of Foucault's hybrid approach that blends science and literature" (op.cit.: 2).

The misunderstanding, according to this view, lies in the assumption that Foucault is making a transcendental claim. Schmidt sees merely a 'historical' or 'causal' analysis (Schmidt, 1996: 157), which points to the nexus between knowledge in the form of human sciences and power in the form of disciplinary technologies. Foucault does not claim that his account is the only one or that it is unbiased (Biebricher, 2005: 25). His genealogical approach means that, contrary to what Habermas assumes, his study is meant to be purely historical and have no intended transcendental value.

"Habermas's account of Foucault's development is plausible only if one assumes that Foucault was attempting to respond to a set of problems that he does not appear to have been asking. The aporias vanish once it is recognised that Foucault is willing to live with the consequences of a view of history that sees values as contingent and historical. There might be good reasons for preferring Habermas's approach to that of Foucault, but it depends on what we see as the proper questions. ... In the end, we are faced, not with aporias within Foucault's work, but rather with a set of fundamental disagreements between Foucault and Habermas" (Schmidt, 1996:167).

In line with this view, therefore, Habermas based his critique on a “distorted version of Foucault’s genealogy” (Biebricher, 2005: 25) and assumed that Foucault was attempting to construct a new normative model of reason and communication which includes a particular concept of power. Such an assumption contradicts the principles of genealogy as a research method (op.cit.: 8). Still, it does not preclude the possibility of Foucault’s theory being cryptonormative, intentionally or not. Flyvbjerg states that while Foucault’s theory *has* norms, these are not universal. They are instead “based on a historical and personal context” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 221). Based on this view, Foucault’s theory may still be described as crypto- or quasi-normative, albeit based on historically bound norms of power, reason, discourse, knowledge and truth formation. Attributing the entire debate between Habermas and Foucault to a misunderstanding of Foucault’s genealogy by Habermas seems to be overly simplistic. Similarly, Foucault could also be criticised for misconstruing Habermas’s theory as utopian instead of examining its conceptualisation as a counterfactual norm (Habermas, 1996b: 4) or a “methodological fiction” (op.cit.: 326). Rather than a case of miscommunication and misunderstanding, the debate between the two scholars may more plausibly be described as a debate between different epistemologies, which exposes the weaknesses of both.

6.3.6 Conclusion

Habermas’s model has been described by his critics as an example of “ethical-political quietism” (White, 1986: 430), which is “weak in its understanding of actual political processes” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 219). Foucault offers a diametrically opposite alternative of a more thorough understanding of *Realpolitik* (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 220), which seems almost Hobbesian. For Foucault, it is power rather than reason that governs all discourses, and therefore instrumental rationality supervenes on communicative rationality. Foucault does not reject reason altogether, but rather sees it as contingent on two crucial parameters: power and history. The rational subject “remains subject to the power of others” (Ingram, 1994: 216) and the criteria of its rationality change over time with socio-political transformations, therefore reason can never attain the normative status that Habermas intends. For this reason, Flyvbjerg argues that “in order to enable the public sphere to make a serious contribution to genuine participation” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 230), it must be reconceptualised along the lines of Foucault’s notions of “conflict, power and partisanship” (ibid.). However, this would strip Habermas’s project

of its normative purpose and would destroy its foundations. It would mark a shift from “ethical-political quietism to blind actionism” (White, 1986: 430), which would dramatically reduce the potential for reaching understanding that Habermas sees as inherent in his model of communication. Despite the flaws of Foucault’s analysis of power and the radical differences between his and Habermas’s concepts of reason, discourse, language and truth, his objections to communicative rationality and to a model of the public sphere unsubverted by power should not be overlooked. Instead of adopting Foucault’s approach (which belongs to a different epistemology), Habermas needs to examine “how communicative rationality gets a foothold in society in the face of massive non-communicative forces” (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 218). He needs to take into account the objections raised by Luhmann and Foucault on the centrality of power and strategic interests in publicness, if he wishes his methodological fiction to be functional. Otherwise, his normative model will risk being labelled as nothing more than a utopia.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion: Theoretical and Epistemological Implications

7.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the significance, implications and consequences of the critical work presented in previous chapters for the reconstruction of public sphere theory and of the various counter-proposals reviewed in previous chapters (Foucault, Luhmann, Benhabib). It encapsulates the critical work of the thesis so far and maps out the main points of critique that need to be addressed in the reassessment of the theories of the public sphere and communicative action. As in previous chapters, it is crucial for heuristic purposes to differentiate between Habermas's original account, first-order critique by his main critics examined above (McCarthy, Fraser, Benhabib, Foucault, Luhmann) and second-order critique of both the original Habermasian works and those of his critics, attempted in this thesis. This clear differentiation is paramount in order to minimise the risk of eclipse of Habermas's original work, mainly *Structural Transformation* and *Theory of Communicative Action*, amidst the vast volume of secondary literature.

With this in mind, the guiding questions of this discussion chapter are: firstly, the ways in which public sphere theory can be reworked to take account of the implications of the following issues:

- a) The critical reconstruction of Habermas's original theory laid out in previous chapters. There is a need to return to Habermas's original principles and justify their critical exploration as well as their need for reconceptualisation.
- b) Developments in *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), in particular with regard to the change in the theoretical structure and role of rationality with Habermas's more complex and conceptually self-contained model of communicative rationality.
- c) Developments of Habermas's ideas in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), in particular with regard to deliberative politics and his study of the increasingly complex contemporary network of public spheres (informal and formal, institutionalised publics).

- d) The contribution of Habermas's critics and what remains of value in their work. Section 7.2 distinguishes Habermas's main critics according to the overarching theme of their critique and their contribution to the argument of the thesis.

The second guiding question of this discussion chapter is to delineate the main points in the reconstruction of Habermas's theoretical and conceptual framework, as well as the normative project of public sphere theory, and specify ways in which these can be reworked (sections 7.3 – 7.6). The discussion of these theoretical and epistemological implications will help to establish the contribution of this thesis to public sphere theory (7.7).

7.1 Implications of Critical Reconstruction of Habermas's Theory

It is difficult to distinguish between Habermas's original theory, its reconceptualisations and their critiques; not least because of the significant revisions by Habermas himself, but also "the secondary literature on Habermas is [very] difficult to survey [...] because Habermas's theory extends into considerably more disciplines" (Honneth, 1991: xxviii). For this reason, it is crucial to tease out the *relevant* key concepts that are pertinent to this thesis from Habermas's vast literature. The key concepts that form the foundations of this critical study are the public sphere, communicative rationality and normativity both of the individual concepts, as well as of the model in general. Chapter 2 focused mainly on *Structural Transformation* and its relevant secondary works by Habermas, including *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* (1993a), *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article* (1974) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), in order to critically reconstruct Habermas's theoretical premises of the (bourgeois) public sphere and of the public use of reason, as a manifestation of communicative rationality. The chapter examined the changing concepts of publicness, public use of reason and public opinion, which are inextricably linked and together form the basis of the public sphere's legitimating power as well as its power to contest authority. The reason for the lengthy critical reappraisal of these core concepts was twofold: firstly, because they form the basis of the public sphere's normative status, as formulated by Habermas; and secondly, to demonstrate their volatile status through explicating their evolution as described by Habermas himself. Underlining the already questionable foundations of a normative theory contributes the first step in challenging its normativity.

7.1.1 Critical Reappraisal of Structural Transformation and Theory of Communicative Action

For the sake of clarity, it is useful to point out the implications of the critical analysis of *Structural Transformation* ([1962] (1992b)) and *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987) in order to demonstrate the continuity in Habermas's work and to tease out the main points in reworking Habermas's theory. Habermas's original normative theory stems from his disillusionment from what he sees as the degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere. For this, he blames increasing industrialisation, modernisation and the impact of the mass media. His original theory also stipulates that power differentials, private interests and economic matters should be "bracketed" (Fraser, 1993: 35), that is to say, set aside in debate. The only form of authority in public sphere debate according to this should be the force of the better argument. Public debate must take place in a critical-rational manner, through the medium of the public use of reason. So, the functions of Habermas's normative (bourgeois) public sphere are the generation of public opinion and the contestation of authority.

What is crucial is that this original conception of a bourgeois all-male public sphere attributed normative status at variance with its historical existence (cf. 2.5.6 and 3.2). In other words, Habermas originally used a model of the public sphere that did not actually exist, at least not in the conditions that he describes, and hypostatized it into a normative ideal. Honneth puts this well:

"Habermas attempts to take the temporally and spatially localised processes of development that he had studied in the contradictory institutionalisation of the bourgeois public sphere as a model for the logic that controls the dynamic of social evolution as a whole" (Honneth, 1991: 247).

As a result, Habermas's main line of idealising thought becomes "too deeply entwined with the representation of a historical process" (ibid.) to the point that both empirical and normative models are weakened.

On the critique of Habermas's model of communicative rationality, it has already been argued that this model is overburdened with too many presuppositions from the outset (cf. 4.2.4). This results in an overly restrictive concept of rationality, which in fact hinders rather than facilitates uninhibited expression and reflective participation in public sphere debate – contrary to Habermas's aspirations for a public sphere as "a

medium of unrestricted communication” (Habermas, 1996b: 308). Taking this initial criticism further, it is important to note that communicative rationality is presented not only as the alternative, but also, more importantly, as the *antidote* to the forces of instrumental rationality. This polarisation of instrumental against communicative rationality (and action) is superficial (cf. Goffman on strategic communication, 1981). Of course, what separates instrumental and communicative rationality is not only their orientation in terms of strategic goals or understanding and consensus – after all, the latter could also be described as *teli* and in this respect communicative rationality could be described as instrumental, consensus-oriented. Communicative rationality also works, according to Habermas, in an intersubjectively shared lifeworld as *Diskurs* (see 4.2.3). Systems forces that govern the latter are seen as “colonising” (Habermas, 1987: 118) the lifeworld that feeds the former as a cultural backdrop or an “organised stock of interpretive patterns” (op.cit.: 124). Communicative rationality is seen as pure and immaculate, while its adversary is seen as corrupted by increasing systems complexity. It is argued here that the two are in fact intertwined.

Honneth points out that in *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas attempted to extend the dualism of communicative and instrumental rationality by the “third dimension of aesthetic-expressive rationality” (Honneth, 1991: 281; cf. Habermas, 1987: 326). This type of rationality emerges out of the “spectrum of social rationalisation” (Honneth, 1991: 282) and refers to the relationship of humans with their inner perceptions and experiences. It aims at connecting rationality in the sphere of art to “the truthfulness of expressions formed within it” (ibid.), while being independent of the “practical aspects of aesthetic cognition” (Fleming, 2004: 195). This is what separates it from aesthetic-practical rationality and makes it expressive (ibid.). Despite Habermas’s attempts to include different types of rationality in his theory, however, the superficial polarisation between communicative and instrumental rationality persists.

Consequently, the first theoretical implication of Habermas’s work is that his model of communicative rationality implies narrow rationality. Anything that belongs to the sphere of purposive / strategic rationality is governed by systems forces that are “non-normative” (Honneth, 1991: 298). According to Habermas’s polarised conception of communicative against instrumental rationality, the systems domain of the latter constitutes “a norm-free, purely technically organised sphere of action”. This alludes to Habermas’s “technocracy thesis” according to Honneth (op.cit.: 248). It refers to the

apparently nefarious consequences of technological progress for social communication based on Habermas's archetype of communicative action. It views the "irresistible autonomisation of technology" (ibid.) as a major threat to pure, "undistorted communication" (cf. Habermas, 1970; 1979) in the lifeworld, which ultimately subordinates "social evolution to the causal constraints of technical operations" (Honneth, 1991: 248). Furthermore, it suggests the creation of a distinct, "self-expanding technical sphere" (ibid.) which evolves into the System, characterised by "truncated rationalism" (Honneth, 1991: 249) and operating in a threatening and antagonistic manner to a normatively regulated lifeworld. In this way, Habermas strips his own concept of System in the System/Lifeworld model of society of any normative component. Against this backdrop, he develops his thesis on the colonisation of the Lifeworld by the System, ensuring that the conceptual boundaries between the "non-normative" System and the "normative" Lifeworld are not only emphasised but also maintained (Feenberg, 1994: 88).

The 'technocracy thesis' is not entirely unfounded and technological progress is indeed transforming communication in contemporary social spheres. However, this does not mean that organised economy and state administration as "embodiments of purposive-rational rules of action" (Honneth, 1991: 298) constitute norm-free spheres, even if they are "no longer directed to the practices of moral understanding" (op.cit.: 297). People may have "become mere cogs in the social machinery, objects of technical control" (Feenberg, 1994: 94) according to the technocracy thesis, however, as Honneth rightly points out, the very "incorporation of humans into a technical system implies certain normative conditions that are absent where the object of control is a thing" (Honneth, cited in Feenberg, 1994: 94). So even if societies develop a "technical code" (Feenberg, 1994: 94) or increasingly rely upon "delinguistified media of communication" (Habermas, 1987: 181), still, their criteria of efficiency may be "*normatively* biased" (Feenberg, 1994: 94, my emphasis) towards power and control. Even if this, as Habermas would argue, ends up "systematically diminishing agency and participation, hence also communicative rationality" (ibid.), it is nevertheless still based on processes of normative consensus formation.¹⁰⁴ In other words, purposive-rational organisations

¹⁰⁴ Also consider Honneth's argument: "Actions produced in organisations such as management and administration [...] are [...] bound to a process of normative consensus formation in the sense that their specific domain of operation and their

can be “codetermined by moral practical viewpoints” (Honneth, 1991: 274) that derive from processes of communicative action. State-organised power, based on ‘delinguistified media’ of communication is still dependent on a normative consensus among members of society, albeit indirectly (op.cit.: 297).

The second theoretical implication of Habermas’s work is the attribution of normative status to a theoretical concept through a *sui generis* historiography. As in the case of Habermas’s account of the historical evolution of the public sphere, in *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas again unfolds his theory based on a historical evolution of the “uncoupling of system and lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987: 154-173; also see 5.1.2 of this thesis). In this historical account, he describes the structure of traditional tribal societies, where system and lifeworld were “originally identical” (Habermas, 1987: 154) because power and control of exchange relations belonged to the sphere of the family. He eventually laments the uncoupling of system and lifeworld, which he attributes to the rise of bureaucratic administrative institutions and processes. He also warns of the eventual “colonisation of the lifeworld” by the system (op.cit.: 196) where the steering media of money and power take on the role of an “alternative language of economic and political transactions ” (Bausch, 1997: 321). In this way, his communicative rationality thesis emerges as a normative project to rescue the realm of the lifeworld from what he considers as the evil threat of system colonisation.

There is a clear nexus between historiography and normativity in Habermas’s thought, which constitutes a problematic method. In both cases of communicative rationality and the public sphere, it exposes an “internal contradiction” (Honneth, 1991: 294) in his theory by introducing “historically relativised” (ibid.) uses of the concepts of system, lifeworld, public sphere and at the same time pointing out allegedly factual differences “justified from the perspective of universal history” (ibid.). While Habermas had initially considered these concepts as “universal components in social evolution” (ibid.), he later views them as “historical results of a process of differentiation” (ibid.).

particular form of organisation are continuously being dealt with from a new perspective [...] neither management, nor administration can be made independent from normative agreement of its members to the degree that the systems-theoretic sociology of organisations supposes” (Honneth, 1991: 298).

It is important to emphasize that Habermas does not confer equal counterfactual status on the public sphere and communicative action / rationality. In public sphere theory, there is almost an empirical claim that the idealised public sphere *actually existed historically*, creating the tension between historiography and normativity. In this way, the counterfactual status was not explicitly presented in Habermas's early conception of public sphere theory. By contrast, Habermas does not base communicative rationality strictly on existing practices, even though he does start from a historical account of the uncoupling of system and lifeworld with weaker empirical and stronger normative claims. He does not highlight the sociological relevance of communicative action theory as he does with public sphere theory, but instead he develops the former largely on the basis of stronger counterfactuals such as argument, consensus, understanding and intersubjectivity.

In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), Habermas states that the basis of the communication process in the public sphere is "counterfactual" (1996b: 4), that it is formed by a set of "unavoidable idealisations" (ibid.), that it "overtaxes itself with its idealising presuppositions" (ibid.), nevertheless "only in the light of this innerworldly transcendence can learning processes take place at all" (op.cit: 5). In *Truth and Justification* (2005), he argues that "counterfactual presuppositions are rooted in the facticity of everyday practices" (17-18), and in *Justification and Application* (1995) he claims that "even the counterfactual assumptions of communicatively acting subjects can expect to meet with support from the side of social reality" (165).¹⁰⁵ Above all, he is convinced that in order for communication "to prevail, interlocutors cannot but undertake such idealisations" (Habermas, 2005: 18). So, he makes a case for a counterfactual normative theory of communication in the public sphere, but the counterfactual claims are stronger in his communicative rationality theory rather than the theory of the public sphere itself. Communicative rationality, ex post facto, recentres public sphere theory with weaker empirical but stronger counterfactual claims.

It is important to stress that there is continuity in the concept of communicative rationality throughout Habermas's work; in the form of the *public use of reason* in the early stages of public sphere theory, as the mode of communication in an

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted here that there is a shift towards empirical grounding in these two more recent works by Habermas.

intersubjectively shared lifeworld in the context of communicative action, or as a basis for his discourse ethics matrix in his conceptualisation of an “ideal communication community” (Habermas, 1996b: 322). However, the two models of rationality that are of interest to this thesis, namely the *public use of reason* examined in Habermas’s development of his public sphere theory and the concept of communicative rationality concept developed in *Theory of Communicative Action*, are certainly not identical. This is not because the latter is conceptually more self-contained, as demonstrated in 4.2 of this thesis, but also because they do not carry the same counterfactual force, as explained above. Therefore, the rational communication model in Habermas’s public sphere-related work does not map directly onto the broader rational communication model.

Furthermore, the public sphere, and consequently also its medium of communication in the form of the *public use of reason*, constitutes *the* normative model as well as *the only* model in Habermas’s model of the bourgeois public sphere, whereas communicative rationality is presented as a normative model in direct opposition to that of instrumental (purposive/strategic) rationality. While both concepts of the public use of reason and of communicative rationality are privileged by Habermas, communicative rationality is presented as *one* type of rationality *among others*, whereas the public use of reason is presented as the *only* medium of communication in the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1996b: 27). When trying to examine communicative rationality in the context of the public sphere, therefore, we are faced with the challenge of trying to place a largely counterfactual and ahistorical concept, at least in Habermas’s formulation, into a historically situated model which has nevertheless been hypostatized into a normative ideal type. Habermas seems to have developed both the public sphere and communicative rationality (not only in the public sphere, but in *all* communication), starting from one type of public sphere or rationality, bourgeois in the former case and communicative in the latter, and aiming to establish it either as the *only* type or as the *normative* one respectively. This makes it an empirically questionable ‘grand narrative’ (Lyotard, 1984).

A further theoretical implication of Habermas’s privileging conceptualisation of communicative rationality is its status as a power-free sphere of communication (Honneth, 1991: 298). According to his Janus-faced concept of society, and of communication, relations of power and domination exist only in a systems theoretic

context. They are exclusive to 'delinguistified media of communication' so that the lifeworld is independent of such practices (ibid.). Moreover, this strict separation between what Habermas sees as power-dependent (or power-corrupted) and power-free spheres of communication seems to have been established from the outset. The weakness is that he ignores the contingencies of the games of everyday communication (cf. Goffmann, 1981: 38-39 and Lyotard, 1984: 15-17). As Honneth observes, Habermas's rationale leads to the assumption that "all attempts at the success-oriented completion of interests [in the public sphere] are already excluded at the conceptual level" (Honneth, 1991: 300), since the lifeworld is reproduced independently of the practices of strategic influences. Only 'delinguistified media of communication' are "structurally suited for the steering of purposive-rational actions" (op.cit.: 298) according to Habermas's grounds, and these have no place in communicative action oriented to understanding and/or consensus. In the same respect, however, communicative action is conceived as a "reflexive mechanism for coordinating success-oriented action" (Honneth, 191: 301). This is problematic.

Habermas makes a clear distinction between types of action (and rationalities) oriented to mutual understanding and to success. Throughout his work, he distinguishes between social integration and system integration and he maintains a strict conceptual separation between them. Moreover, in order to ensure that his model of communicative rationality with all its theoretical components (lifeworld, intersubjectivity, argumentation, consensus, *Diskurs*) is not contaminated by the nefarious influences of power, he advocates the "autonomisation of the lifeworld" (ibid.) from purposive-rational systems of action. Habermas seems to be so preoccupied with the 'technocracy thesis', that he focuses on the independent growth of "power complexes that have become autonomous" (Honneth, 1991: 302) and falsely concludes that the normative concept of communicative rationality is power-free. This not only precludes the study of power at levels of social integration against the backdrop of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, or as a means of coordination of social action. It also blocks the potential for an understanding of society as a "communicative relation" (op.cit.: 303) that develops between different realms "through the medium of social struggle [...] [where] power is asymmetrically distributed" (ibid.).

The study of power struggles, power differentials and their role in Habermas's theory, as well as in communication in general, would offer a more justified and balanced

critique of “concrete forms of organisation of economic production and political administration” (ibid.). In particular, power needs to be seen in a different light to that of the ‘technocracy thesis’ and, instead of being excluded or “bracketed” (Fraser, 1993: 119), power needs to be incorporated in a re-worked version of public sphere theory. The crucial issue of power differentials, their role, as well as ways of its inclusion in a reconceptualised model is revisited in the next section in a detailed discussion of Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms*.

To sum up, it is argued here that the issues arising from this account of the implications of critical reconstruction of *Structural Transformation* and *Theory of Communicative Action* are: Firstly, reason and the force of the better argument as the normative medium of communication in the public sphere, its successor concept of communicative rationality and its different counterfactual role in Habermas’s theory, as well as issues of power in the use of reason which have been wrongly neglected by Habermas, at least in the above works; secondly, socio-political developments which increase complexity in public spheres and result in greater diversification of publics, and also of their practices of critical-rational debate; thirdly, the all-encompassing issues of power and Habermas’s normative project in general, which are emerging throughout his work due to their intrinsically problematic conceptualisation. Before tackling these issues, it is necessary to consider Habermas’s seminal work *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b) and examine the development of his ideas in response to these issues, particularly the notions of complexity and institutionalisation, as well as the changing role of power and normativity.

7.1.2 Critical reappraisal of Between Facts and Norms

Chapter 3 of this thesis examined certain conceptual clarifications offered by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), such as explanations of the nature and role of the public sphere as a general concept, the recognition of multiple, diverse, transnational public spheres, his advocacy for increasing inclusivity in the matrix of increasingly complex and differentiated public spheres, as well as their contextualisation within his system/lifeworld model of society. A critical reappraisal of the development of Habermas’s ideas in this seminal work is paramount for a consideration of ways in which public sphere theory can be reworked.

The significance of *Between Facts and Norms* extends to the fact that it is where Habermas conceptually refines his public sphere theory (including communicative rationality). In response to his critics, he also attempts to tackle issues of power and counterfactuality and, more importantly, he brings out the relationship between the philosophy of Law and political theory. In fact, *Between Facts and Norms* constitutes an attempt to formulate a universal political philosophy based on the application of communicative rationality to the field of Law and its legitimation, which Habermas bases on processes rooted in the “ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 1984: 25, Habermas, 1996b: 228, 322; cf 4.2 of this thesis). It highlights the problematic nature of the state based on the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*) in democratic conditions, with a well-developed network of public spheres and civil society. It suggests a conceptual and functional distinction between informal and formal publics within the public sphere, which is highly criticised here for undermining popular sovereignty and formalising public sphere communication in such a way that it hinders participation from the grassroots. Instead of the distinction between informal and formal publics, responsible for opinion- and will-formation respectively, this chapter argues for a distinction between ‘emergent’ and ‘systems publics’ (cf. Grant, 2012 - *forthcoming*). This is analysed in 7.3.3.

With regard to the public sphere, Habermas categorically states that it “cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organisation [...] not even a framework of norms” (Habermas, 1996b: 360). This statement probably comes as an attempt to ‘soften’ the earlier, normatively (over-)charged conception of the public sphere presented in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. From the outset, the public sphere is conceptualised as a space that emerges through communication and has a less organised and more diffuse nature, which differentiates it from civil society. It is not tied to a specific pre-existing forum and it is inherently communicative, which gives it a particularly loose character in the sense that it may change and adapt to new conditions.

Yet two caveats are introduced in this respect. Firstly, Habermas emphasises that public spheres cannot be arbitrarily “manufactured” (op.cit.: 364) without at least a previously developed public which “stands on its own and reproduces itself *out of itself*” (ibid., emphasis on the original). In this sense, it can be said that the public sphere is self-referential. Secondly, Habermas later implicitly suggests that the public sphere’s role

may (or should) be taken over by increasingly institutionalised forms of publicness (*Öffentlichkeit*):

“[O]ne should seek the conditions for a rational political will-formation not only at the individual level of the orientations and decisions of single actors but also at the social level of institutionalized processes of deliberation and decision making” (Habermas, 1996b: 340-1).

In stressing deliberative process and in the context of new socio-economic conditions of increasing complexity, Habermas separates institutionalised processes of public deliberation from the public sphere. It seems that he regards complexity as weakening the (loose and spontaneous) public sphere, in requiring a strengthening of institutionalised forms of publicness (parliaments, committees, courts etc).¹⁰⁶ However, social and institutional complexity should not be seen as a threat to the diffuse and spontaneous nature of the public sphere and it certainly should not lead us to favour institutionalised forms of public debate over non-institutionalised ones. Habermas sees legal institutionalisation of public deliberation not only as a response to social differentiation but also as a way of tackling the ‘technocracy thesis’ and countering the mechanisms of money and administrative power in social integration (Habermas, 1996b: 363; 354). The challenge is to make decision-making transparent in institutionalised mechanisms of publicness in such a way that the public sphere is not excluded from deliberations, and so that decision-making overall still remains essentially public (Bohman, 1996: 165). This challenge is addressed in 7.3.3.

In his conceptual mapping of complex societies, Habermas focuses on the increasing complexity of public spheres in the sense of the multitude of their overlapping fields and topics of debate, ranging from international to subcultural (Habermas, 1996b: 373). The expansion of topics of debate to cover “generalised” interests in advanced societies is ensured by a “substantive differentiation of public spheres that are [...] still accessible to laypersons” (ibid.). Habermas states that this accessibility is achieved through the porosity of their boundaries:

¹⁰⁶ An example of this may be found here: “[In certain cases], the communication structures of the public sphere may *relieve the public of the burden of decision making*; postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalized political process” (Habermas, 1996b: 362).

“Segmented public spheres are constituted with the help of exclusion mechanisms; [...] In other words, boundaries inside the universal public sphere as defined by its reference to the political system remain permeable in principle” (Habermas, 1996b: 374).

According to this rationale, the level of differentiation in the nature of publics has resulted in a range of publics, such as “episodic” (op.cit.: 361) publics consisting of people frequenting spaces of public gathering, “occasional or arranged publics” in the sense of spectators of an event taking place in a certain physical space or “abstract publics” as observers of events through virtual spaces. These publics, Habermas argues, “remain porous to one another” (ibid.) by way of providing the context for each other’s texts or through building “hermeneutical bridges” (ibid.) from each other’s texts. In this way, publics are widened through mass communication through an empirically questionable “unrestricted inclusion and equality” (ibid.).

Grant (2000; 2004) extends this porosity thesis to Luhmann’s social systems theory (see 5.2.2) and argues that social systems have porous boundaries with their environments. This results, according to Grant, in communications being “always polycontextual and porous” (Grant, 2000: 66) despite systemic self-reference and operational closure. An even more complex image of the public sphere, with myriad actors and reasons, consequently emerges. In the same respect, Habermas’s schema of a “universal public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 374), which includes smaller segmented public spheres that are communicatively interconnected and porous appears to be closer to social systems theory than his original model. This suggests the influence of Luhmann’s critique on Habermas’s public sphere theory, which is also evident in Habermas’s conception of society as System and Lifeworld (cf. 5.1).

After establishing the porosity of boundaries of diverse public spheres, Habermas clarifies their relation to civil society¹⁰⁷ and to the state. His theory of “deliberative politics” (Habermas, 1996b: 258) in contemporary societies is based on a balanced

¹⁰⁷ Habermas defines civil society as “a network of voluntary associations and a political culture that are sufficiently detached from class structures [...] composed of more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organisations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 175, 367).

combination of formal, institutionalised deliberative institutions, such as parliaments and committees, and a network of informal dialogues which develop within civil society in an open public communication space (Kavoulakos, 2008: 237). This balance ensures that public communication processes can take place “with less distortion the more they are left to the internal dynamic of a civil society that emerges from the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1996b: 375). Civil society acquires a more fundamental role in Habermas’s revisited model as an ensemble of “more or less spontaneously emergent associations” (op.cit.: 367) which “distil and transmit” (ibid.) private reactions to public matters to the public sphere. It then “institutionalises problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest in a framework of organised publics” (Habermas, 1996b: 443-4). In this way, civil society is coupled with private spheres of the lifeworld and at the same time it “anchor[s] the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld” (op.cit.: 366). It works in tandem with the public sphere and is closely connected to it, an image which is different to its analysis and development in Habermas’s earlier works, where civil society was detached from public matters, represented private autonomy and was wedded to the private sphere of economy (see 2.4.5; 2.5.7).

Against this backdrop, the public sphere, or more precisely the network of public spheres,¹⁰⁸ feeds off the civil society through informal dialogues in public communication spaces – mostly in both traditional media and the Internet and other new media. In turn, this network of public spheres monitors and feeds the institutionalised political system with ideas and public opinions. The latter then processes and legalises the “raw material of citizens’ communicative power” (Kavoulakos, 2008: 237). This order of “widely differentiated autonomous public spheres and legally institutionalised procedures of democratic opinion and will formation” (Habermas, 1996b: 363) results

¹⁰⁸ It is clear from chapter 3 of this thesis that it adopts post-bourgeois conceptions of multiple public spheres, as opposed to the singularity of the bourgeois public sphere in comprising a single unified public. Any reference to a singular public sphere in this chapter will refer to the aggregate concept of the public sphere as a complex network of multiple, overlapping, unequal and antagonistic spheres. It does not imply that this study accepts a monistic concept of one encompassing public sphere. Moreover, the original German term *Öffentlichkeit* is uncountable; it only exists in the singular as an aggregate concept.

in a “decentralised, pluralistic society which is no longer established around the state” (Kavoulakos, 2008: 237). In such a society, “communication flows and mediated influences [...] emerge from civil society, via democratic processes, into communicative power” (Habermas, 1996b: 532-3). The nature of this kind of power is less coercive for the public sphere than Habermas’s original concept of power in *Structural Transformation and Theory of Communicative Action*. In these works, power was associated either with the administrative power of authority, or as a coercive force that acted as a distorting factor in communication and had to be “bracketed” (Fraser, 1993: 119).

Habermas’s later concept of communicative power is based on Arendt’s idea of power as “the potential of a common will formed in noncoercive communication” (Habermas, 1996b: 147), as opposed to the “violence [of] instrumentalising another’s will for one’s own purposes” (op.cit.: 148). The conceptualisation of this positive type of power stems from Habermas’s recognition of the “duality of normative and instrumental perspectives” in the political sphere (op.cit.: 483), which leads to his distinction of “*communicatively generated* power and *administratively employed* power” (ibid., emphasis in the original). The former is produced in communicative spaces of civil society and of public spheres, it is “fluid” (op.cit.: 136) and it “bind[s] the administrative power of the state apparatus to the will of the citizens” (ibid.). More importantly, it is communicative power that gives law its legitimacy, which in turn provides state power its binding force. One of the fundamental roles of law in Habermas’s theory is to transform communicative power, which can only guide administratively employed power in specific directions (op.cit.: 300), into administrative power. The risk, as discussed below, is that institutionalisation hinders the emergence of new publics and opinions in the attempt of reducing complexity.

That said, Habermas introduces an important caveat in his schema of the transformation of communicative into administrative power through legislation, which suggests a clear separation between power and influence. According to this, influence develops in the public sphere and “becomes the object of struggle” (Habermas, 1996b: 363) in the form of debate, but it cannot be transformed into communicative power without passing through more formal, institutionalised procedures (Habermas, 1996b: 371).

Again, Habermas considers institutionalized forms of publicness such as parliaments as imperative in order for public spheres to fulfil their roles. Certainly, he argues that social administrative power cannot be dependent on communicative power only by means of thematising social issues and introducing them into the political system via parliaments or courts (Habermas, 1996b: 358-9). Instead, he insists that initial opinion formation must take place through spontaneous processes, in public spheres “anchored in the voluntary associations of civil society and embedded in liberal patterns of political culture and socialization” (op.cit: 358). These lifeworld structures are crucial for Habermas, because they “elude legal regulation, administrative control, or political steering” (ibid.). At the same time, however, he argues that without the “strong publics” (Fraser, 1993: 134) of sovereign parliaments or judicial institutions, “weak publics” (Habermas, 1996b: 307) within the “general public sphere” (ibid.) can only generate influence without any substantial results. This would be unproblematic if parliaments or other opinion-forming institutions had the same agenda or the same normative role as the public sphere. Instead, parliaments consist of representatives elected by the public, the majority of whom form part of the state apparatus, as they form a majority government.

Ensuring that the political parties that participate in parliaments faithfully represent the general public’s opinion and disregard their own claims to acquiring or maintaining power is impossible. It constitutes, in fact, one of the main challenges to democracies. Certainly, members of parliaments, as well as the rules that govern parliamentary procedures, are elected or decided by the public – directly or indirectly. There is no guarantee, however, either in actual circumstances or in Habermas’s reconceptualised normative model, that these members or the rules that guide them will not be influenced by the acquisition of administrative power or by their desire to overthrow it in order to acquire it.

For this reason, Habermas’s distinction between formal and informal publics within the public sphere, in a way that informal publics generate influence through opinion-formation while formal publics such as parliaments and courts transform this into administrative power and will-formation, is considered problematic here. Instead, this thesis argues that Habermas’s formal publics constitute in fact ‘systems publics’. These have a hybrid status: they have executive, judicial, or administrative roles, they have the power and obligation of decision-making and will-formation, but they are answerable to

the public and they work for the interests of the general public in a direct or indirect manner. Habermas's informal publics correspond to what this thesis considers as 'emergent publics' (non-institutionalised, more diffuse publics; see 7.3.3 on the case for systems and emergent publics).

The diffuse and largely unregulated character of emergent publics in the public sphere matrix is the lifeblood of its publicness, but it may also expose publics to risks. Smaller and weaker emergent publics may be swallowed by better-organized ones, resulting in the former's interests and opinions collapsing into those of larger, better organized or more popular publics. Generating public opinion as part of a 'deliberative majority' (Bohman, 1996) is an increasingly challenging task in light of the profusion of new publics and discourses. Systems publics are institutionalized, hierarchical. But their opinions and their reasons are institutionally protected, in contrast to those of emergent publics, that are increasingly heterarchical, in an agonistic public realm.

“[T]he general public sphere is more vulnerable to the repressive and exclusionary effects of unequally distributed social power, structural violence and systematically distorted communication than the institutionalised public spheres of parliamentary bodies” (Habermas, 1996b: 307-308).

Moreover, Habermas's model tells us that debate in a public sphere about a topic of that sphere's generalised interest would generate influence on that topic, however this would have to be processed by parliamentary procedures. If approved, it would be turned into communicative power. It is that form of power that has the potential of legitimating political decisions and contesting administrative power, *not* public influence per se. Certainly, in the contemporary political arena emergent publics increasingly go beyond mere influence and exert real pressure on power, as in the cases of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in the 2011 popular revolts. Paradoxically, in established Western democracies such pressure on authority is not manifested with such impact.

In this respect, it is clear that Habermas focused on undistorted communication in the (aggregate) public sphere so much that he neglected to consider distortions that would threaten or alter the public interest once public opinions are communicated from 'weaker' to 'stronger publics'. It could undoubtedly be argued that the same distorting factors to rational-critical debate in the public sphere described above apply in institutionalised publics such as parliamentary bodies. There is certainly no inherent

mechanism in such bodies that blocks unequally distributed power, personal interests and the “steering” (Habermas, 1987: 196) influence of money and control. The only issue that makes ‘weaker publics’ within the aggregate public sphere more vulnerable is the uncertainty that their public opinions and influence will reach ‘stronger publics’ so that they can be properly considered.

Habermas recognises the need to investigate how the power of social subsystems, large organisations and public administration reaches the “systemic infrastructure of the normatively regulated circulation of power” (Habermas, 1996b: 328), as well as the degree to which “the unofficial circulation of [...] unlegitimated power encroaches on the constitutionally regulated circulation of power” (ibid.). Yet he does not provide answers as to *how* the circulation of power should (or could) be regulated between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of publicness *within his normative model*. This challenge is examined further in 7.4.

Furthermore, Habermas clarifies that meaning, which he considers as a “scarce resource” (op.cit.: 359), functions as “a limiting value for social spontaneity” (ibid.). If meaning is deliberatively processed at the core of ‘stronger publics’, then their role is not merely that of filtering or of complexity reduction (Luhmann, cf. 5.2). Instead, the role of ‘stronger publics’ is much deeper, towards favouring institutionalized procedures and the binding force of law. By introducing the caveat of the dependence of the public sphere on ‘strong publics’ for the generation of communicative power and ultimately the legitimation and validity of political decisions, Habermas attempts to respond to the demands of increasing social complexity and differentiation, which he sees as a threat to his normative model:

“[T]he normal business of politics, at least as it is routinely conducted in Western democracies, cannot satisfy such strong conditions. [...] Many of these communications flowing in the opposite direction serve to relieve the burden of unavoidable complexity from the official circulation by breaking problems down into smaller components” (Habermas, 1996b: 356-7).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Consider also: “The links between decentred, sufficiently autonomous social sectors loosen in the course of progressive functional differentiation. There is thus a growing need for integration that [...] stimulates the public sphere and makes accelerated learning processes necessary” (Habermas, 1996b: 358).

Instead of responding to social changes, Habermas's reconceptualised model of the public sphere is left unable to perform its basic functions and its entire normative claims shift to a formalised model. Bohman (1996) is highly critical of Habermas's over-pessimistic view of social complexity as a detriment to popular sovereignty and to democracy in general. This issue is analysed extensively in 7.3.

In addition to Habermas's two-track model of political opinion and will-formation (informal and formal publics respectively), he suggests two further solutions to the 'threat' of complexity and the overwhelming of democracy by powerful institutions: law and a system of rights (Habermas, 1996b: 82-131). These are problematic because they imply an over-formalised system of law with inherent bureaucratic constraints, leaving little room for grassroots publics to flourish. Before this is analysed, it is essential to clarify Habermas's view of the role of law and a system of rights as an answer to what he sees as the perils of complexity.

For Habermas, law as an institution has the necessary resources for dealing with issues of increased complexity. It functions as a medium for social integration (cf. Habermas, 1996b: 66-81) in a way that the 'steering mechanisms' of money and power are "anchored via legal institutionalisation" (op.cit.: 40) in the lifeworld, which is integrated socially through communicative action (ibid.). Law is therefore also a medium of restricting the power of systems mechanisms in the form of the economy and administrative authority. As a core structure of integration and of protecting the lifeworld for society, law has the means to "transmit solidarity into [...] institutionally mediated social relationships" (Bohman, 1996: 174). In this way, social integration requires the existence of law in the form of a regulative framework. As an essentially regulative, and not punitive, instrument, law provides a necessary and critical-functional complement to morality (Outhwaite, 1995: 141; Kavoulakos, 2008: 236). Lastly, law is necessary for the attainment of collective autonomy, because it derives its legitimacy from the collective will of the participants.¹¹⁰ In this way, lawmaking and the legitimation of law have their roots in critical-rational public deliberation and in the

¹¹⁰ "Only those laws may claim legitimacy that meet with the agreement of all citizens in a discursive law making process that is itself legally constituted" (Habermas, cited in Outhwaite, 1995: 141).

justification of moral rules based on the “universability of interests” (Outhwaite, 1995: 137). This principle is unproblematic.

In order for law to fulfil all the above functions, harness complexity and safeguard democratic practices, it must be “reflexive” (Habermas, 1996b: 94; 117). It should always be based on “discursive structures” (op.cit.: 185) to be able to monitor and redefine itself through public deliberation. It is these ‘discursive structures’ that link the public with the legislature (Bohman, 1996: 181). At the same time, political decision-making and institutions must be oriented to the making and revision of laws (Bohman, 1996: 174). This “structuralist approach” (Habermas, 1996b: 185) on the role of law in public opinion and will-formation is encapsulated by Habermas as follows:

“If the communicatively fluid sovereignty of citizens instantiates itself in the power of public discourses that spring from autonomous public spheres but take shape in the decisions of *democratically proceeding* and *politically responsible* legislative bodies, then the pluralism of beliefs and interests is not suppressed but unleashed and recognised in revisable majority decisions as well as in compromises” (Habermas, 1996b: 185, emphasis in the original).

With this proceduralist conception of reflexive law, Habermas establishes a further normative condition in his theory of the public sphere. Relations between formal and informal publics in a constitutional state (*Rechtsstaat*) are regulated by law in an attempt to alleviate the burden of decision-making on increasingly complex issues from the informal public sphere. The rule of law, combined with institutionalisation, are meant to help the public sphere to enable deliberation, and complex societies to integrate. Habermas’s espousal of law and institutionalisation as determining features of an effective public sphere needs to be viewed with caution, however. There are inherent constraints in law and institutionalisation on a large scale, ranging from bureaucracy or time constraints to the serious undermining of popular sovereignty if too much power is handed over to such institutions. This issue is critically examined in 7.3.3.

Habermas’s second solution to the risk of complexity overload is a “system of subjective rights” which derives from the discursive character of lawmaking (Habermas, 1996b: 82-131). These include rights to participation, equal access to processes of opinion and will-formation, social welfare, membership in a community of free citizens and others. They aim to guarantee private autonomy so that citizens are able to

collaborate in deliberative lawmaking and thus to limit the power of institutions in encouraging democratic forms of power. Habermas does not specify in which way these rights are safeguarded, however. It can be assumed that they are established and maintained through law, which leaves his model with an extremely formalised status. It is difficult to make normative theory empirically plausible by introducing more formalisation, even if Habermas claims that this new refined model is closer to empirical practices. The establishment of a ‘system of subjective rights’ is not enough, because its guarantees are loosely based on nominal legal procedures. Furthermore, it does not answer the question as to how the ideals of deliberation can be realised in complex societies in a practical manner that follows the emergence of social dialogue. The tension between facticity and validity that Habermas aims at minimising is evident in this case. Instead of safeguarding popular autonomy and sovereignty, Habermas risks undermining it.

It is also important to highlight the role of the mass media that is included in Habermas’s revised analysis of his public sphere theory. Mass media are recognised as a tool with an extremely “powerful position in the competition for public influence” (Habermas, 1996b: 378). Habermas focuses on “*information processing strategies within the media*” (op.cit.: 377, emphasis in the original) in the form of news selection and broadcasting rules and argues that these strategies aim to “depoliticise public opinion” (ibid.). His overly pessimistic view of the media that was evident from *Structural Transformation*¹¹¹ continues to prevail in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b), even though he recognises the media as important participants in the formation of communicative power. He continues to view “the relatively new phenomenon of the mass media’s powerful position in the competition for public influence” (Habermas, 1996b: 378) as threatening and urges for their power to be “neutralised” (ibid.).

The issues arising from the above analysis of Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms* may be categorised as follows: firstly, a sharp distinction between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of publicness, “informal public spheres”, and other characterisations of “weak publics” (Habermas, 1996b: 307) leads Habermas to suggest that institutionalisation of procedures in the public sphere constitutes a viable response to increasing socio-political complexity and the threat of systemic forces. The idea is

¹¹¹ See 2.3.5 on the impact of mass media on the bourgeois public sphere.

that the communicative presuppositions for a public sphere based on rational-critical debate are institutionalised so that parliamentary bodies filter arguments and “give legitimacy-producing reasons a privileged chance to come into play” (op.cit.: 340). While the spontaneously generated clusters of public opinion need to be categorised and processed in order for them to be effectively presented and used for the purposes of contesting administrative power, performing checks and balances or promoting a generalised interest, there is no guarantee in Habermas’s model that institutionalised, ‘strong’ publics are capable of fulfilling that requirement without giving up some of the normative spirit of deliberative procedures in ‘weak publics’. Opinion- and will-formation in parliamentary and judicial bodies can be anything but “impartial” (ibid.), contrary to Habermas’s expectations. In fact, it is argued in 7.3.3 that over-reliance on institutionalised procedures against the spontaneous processes of debate and opinion-formation can be as dangerous as Habermas’s feared usurping of public sphere mechanisms by systemic mechanisms. Habermas is trying to over-formalise, over-proceduralise and over-institutionalise an essentially deliberative model which should be more spontaneous and diffuse.

Secondly, this brings us to the issue of normativity, which is a common issue throughout Habermas’s work and one of the core concerns of this thesis. *Between Facts and Norms* explores tensions between facticity and validity in law, but also in deliberative procedures in the public sphere. According to Habermas’s revised model (1996b, 1998), there are two opposite processes that operate in the political public sphere, which cut across each other and also “interpenetrate” (Habermas, 1996b: 483). These processes are: firstly, the “communicative generation of legitimate power” (ibid.), which leads to spontaneous opinion formation, and secondly the “political-systemic acquisition of legitimacy” (ibid.), which results in a reflexive form of administrative power in a way that it is always anchored in the aggregate public sphere. These processes need to be included in Habermas’s revised model, however not without making its normative understanding empirically relevant.¹¹² A different understanding

¹¹² Habermas himself acknowledges this when examining the two competing forms of power mentioned above, namely the generation of legitimate power in relation to the political-systemic acquisition of legitimacy, by which administrative power becomes reflexive: “Insofar as this distinction comes to have any empirical relevance, the

of normativity needs to be introduced in order for Habermas's theory to continue to have at least some normative grounding and retain some of its original functions and aims; otherwise its purpose will be purely descriptive.

Thirdly, *Between Facts and Norms* also raises the issue of power, which is also an overarching issue throughout Habermas's theory. In the earlier version of his public sphere theory, the influence of authoritative power or power differentials between participants were not included in rational processes of debate and instead had to be set aside as distorting factors. In his revised version, he examines the formation of public influence within the public sphere, its transformation into communicative power and their relation to social institutionalisation and administrative power. As discussed above, Habermas's attempt to include an account of power in his public sphere theory has resulted in a radically different model, not only in terms of its normative role, but also in its understanding of the issue of complexity. Habermas seems to have given up on the capacity of the public sphere as a "sphere of private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1992b: 27), even as an aggregate concept including multiple, differentiated public spheres, to function *independently* for generation of public opinion, promotion of generalised interests, legitimation and contestation of authority. For this, he blames increasing socio-political complexity and new forms of power (including the mass media) (cf. Habermas, 1996b: 343). This thesis argues that instead of lamenting the nefarious consequences of (systemic) power on the public sphere, power should be included in Habermas's reworked model. Power differentials are inherent in public debate, so integrating them is better than attempting to invent mechanisms to avoid them or displace them to a putatively "power-free" sphere (Honneth, 1991: 298). By articulating power differentials within the public sphere, its idealising presuppositions will turn into functional preconditions for effective critical debate.

Fourthly, complexity in the form of an increasing liquefaction of society (structures, identities, etc.), functional differentiation and diversification of publics and civil society is also seen by Habermas as an enormous challenge to his model of the public sphere and to democratic procedures in general. Habermas's distinction between informal/weaker and formal/stronger publics (1996b) comes as a response to this

normative understanding of a democratic self-organisation of the legal community must also change" (Habermas, 1996b: 483).

challenge. In contrast to Habermas's view of increasing complexity as a threat to democratic practices, this thesis argues that complexity should not be seen as a threat to rational-critical public deliberation. Moreover, excessive formalisation of procedures and disproportionate institutionalisation may in fact be detrimental to popular sovereignty in the context of a vibrant public sphere.

Finally, the above implications have an impact on the role of reason/rationality in Habermas's public sphere. Rationality in terms of rational communication (and not practical rationality, as seen in Chapter 4) is at the core of Habermas's model as the normative medium of communication in public spheres, the basis of debate and decision-making at an institutional level. In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas introduces the distinction between bargaining and arguing, as developed by Elster, in an attempt to explain "what it means to be truly deliberative" (Saretzki, 2009: 153). "As long as normativity and rationality exclude each other" (Habermas, 1996b: 338), Habermas states, rational debate is reduced to the "bargaining - negotiation of compromises" (ibid.). When rationality ceases to be the normative basis of debate, the tension between arguing and bargaining becomes more evident in Habermas's view, as rational argumentation is subject to criteria of validity, while bargaining in the form of "threats and promises" (Elster, cited in Habermas, 1996b: 338) is subject to criteria of credibility. In this way, the distinction between bargaining and arguing points to that between strategic and communicative action respectively.

Moreover, in the same way that communicative action may be described as strategic or teleological, if success is defined in terms of understanding or consensus, bargaining may also be described as an alternative form of arguing, not entirely stripped of its normative content. Indeed, instead of claiming that in contemporary societies arguing is progressively swallowed and replaced completely by strategically-oriented bargaining, Habermas emphasises that "discourses and bargaining processes intertwine" (op.cit.: 339) as the main vehicles of deliberation in public spheres. This results in "normatively regulated bargaining processes as a *combination* of rational calculations of success with social norms that contingently steer from behind" (op.cit.: 338). Therefore, the normative element is still present, but it has shifted from governing critical-rational debate to regulating bargaining in the form of negotiation and compromise. This new form of reason, which is "detranscendentalised" (Habermas, 2001: 149) to an even greater degree, is examined in 7.5 and 7.6.

This section has explored the implications of the critical reconstruction of Habermas's original theory and subsequent developments in *Theory of Communicative Action* and *Between Facts and Norms* and has identified key concepts which should be reworked in order for Habermas's public sphere theory to fulfil its stated aims of generating public opinion, promoting generalised / universalised interests, as well as monitoring, legitimising and challenging authority while retaining at least *some form* of its normative status. In particular, it examined the deliberative model of democracy that Habermas developed in *Between Facts and Norms* from the perspective of the role of the public sphere and from the perspective of the importance of institutionalisation, law and rights in light of increasing social complexity. In deliberative democracy, the state is based on the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*) and this is seen by Habermas as the necessary institutional framework for forms of communication aiming at political opinion and will formation (Habermas, 1996b: 361-2). Law also mediates between public spheres and institutions in this revised model. The next section clarifies what remains of value in the work of Habermas's most significant critics examined in this thesis: Luhmann, Foucault, Fraser, McCarthy, Grant, as well as Bohman, before all the heuristically separated implications are brought together and the specific proposals for reworking Habermas's theory are presented.

7.2 What remains of value in the work of Habermas's critics?

7.2.1 Luhmann and post-Luhmannian Systems Theory

The most significant challenge, not only to Habermas's public sphere theory and its foundations in communicative rationality, but also to his communication theory itself, has unquestionably been that of Luhmann's social systems theory. As already examined in detail in Chapter 5, Luhmann's theory rejected all normative claims to Habermas's communication model by reducing reason to a code of communication specific to particular systems, similar to other codes of meaning in legal, scientific, academic systems etc. He also incorporated in his model the issue of complexity on three different levels: world, environmental and internal /systemic complexity (see 5.2.3), which altogether affect systems with enforced selectivity, increased contingency and risk. These are paradoxically counterbalanced with more complexity in the form of further organised differentiation (5.2.4).

Luhmann's functional model of social systems suffers from radical reductionism. Communication is not binary, it does not circulate in self-less systems and its risks and contingencies cannot be prevented or regulated by organised complexity alone. In short, functionalism is not a panacea (see 5.3.6). Rather, Luhmann's contribution to a reconceptualisation of Habermas's model is of a methodical nature. Luhmann's schematic representation of a society constituted of social systems is similar to Habermas's schematic description of formal and informal public spheres in *Between Facts and Norms*. It seems that, following Luhmann's direct challenge to Habermas's theory (and epistemology), he refined his public sphere model by deepening it and adding further dimensions. By introducing the interplay between formal and informal publics, or 'strong' and 'weak' publics in Fraser's terms, he also indirectly introduces the factors of increased complexity and contingency in his conceptual model. Communicative rationality seems largely inadequate in such a framework: how can a lifeworld be intersubjectively shared between formal and informal publics, how can understanding and consensus constitute the normative goals of debate in an elected parliament, where more often than not private interests outweigh public interests, how can we guarantee that the interests of formal and informal publics are the same "for the same reasons" (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 320-1)? A reconceptualised model would need to borrow elements of pragmatic functionalism similar to that of systems theory in order for such issues to be dealt with dispassionately.

According to post-Luhmannian systems theory, "communication is increasingly seen in social terms as a dynamic of uncertainties" (Grant, 2007: 97). Considering the introduction of complexity in publics, their purpose, their communication within and between each other, as well as the impact of the mass media, it would be useful for Habermas to view his model under such a prism and attempt to incorporate conceptual mechanisms that would attempt to manage such uncertainties. Grant proposes:

"a theory of multiple contingencies across agents, media and environments where distinctions between true and false cannot be made, but where such uncertainty is not the result of our ignorance, but the uncertain dynamic of form and non-form" (Grant, 2007: 97-98).

The thematisation of such multiple contingencies, which are rooted in complexity of all levels, will eschew superficial or absolutist solutions to the issue of public sphere

communication. True and false, public and non-public, legitimised or not, rational and irrational, are all difficult to define, even in Habermas's refined but still idealised model in *Between Facts and Norms*. Certainly, both Luhmann and Habermas may be accused of absolutism in the sense of representing two diametrically opposing epistemologies and perspectives of society and communication. But Luhmann's (and his successors') approaches, which are detached from normativity and closer to more pragmatic, uncertainty management issues are useful in attempting to develop an empirically grounded view of normativity for Habermas's model, as will be seen below.

7.2.2 Foucault and Historical Materialism

What remains of value with regard to Foucault's challenge to Habermas's theory may be summarised in two core concepts: power and normativity in the form of universal validity. A third concept, that of heterotopias, was examined in 3.1.4 and is also useful in terms of reworking the public sphere's composition and role. Foucault's heterotopias entail a sense of "otherness" (Foucault, 1984) that is important for the public sphere and its role as the mouthpiece of the public as well as the site of generalisable interests. Certainly, heterotopias are not accessible to everyone and they function as counterpublics in this respect. As argued in 3.1.4, however, Habermas's stringent existing normative model of the public sphere resembles more a 'homotopos', as it is conceived as a space of sameness with regard to norms, goals and functions and with wider accessibility. Heterotopias provide an example of alternative public spaces, which are not homogeneous and have a stricter internal hierarchical order. Such spaces (universities, theatres, care-homes) also have a place in the wider political public sphere and their opinions should be voiced in the wider debate, through appropriate channels.

It is Foucault's peculiar historically-anchored methods that are of interest to this investigation, which explains why the debate is not extended to Habermas and postmodernism. Foucault is more than a postmodernist: he is a historical materialist, which alludes to a form of critical historicism. As seen in Chapter 6, Foucault's historical materialism, and his methods of genealogy and archaeology in particular, demonstrate his rejection of universal truths and normative validity. Foucault's direct challenge to Habermas's model of communication in the public sphere consists of his focus on power as the driving force behind individual actions and society in general. Power is seen in relation to knowledge, discipline, truth and discourse. According to

this underlying principle, critical-rational communication can never be undistorted, consensus is utopian and instead conflict is the standard, the subject is aesthetic rather than cognitive, norms are replaced by historical facts. Foucault has been heavily criticised for his lack of faith in individuals whom he sees as feeble and defenceless in the face of capillary forces of power, for his “disquieting contradiction between theoretical claims and material investigations” (Honneth, 1991: xxvi) which alludes to his crypto-normativity and for historical relativism. Still, what is crucial in Foucault’s work for the purposes of this thesis is his idea of power as capillary but not necessarily threatening. Power in Foucault’s view is not owned by anyone, it merely exists as a relationship rather than a tool (see 6.1.2). It exists not only in forms of punishment or state control in the form of biopower (see 6.1.3), but also in the production of knowledge and in everyday human relations. With this in mind, power can be included in a reworked version of the public sphere in a more manageable, if not positive, perspective. What should change is the perception that power is an evil that must be avoided or excluded; instead, it should be managed and utilised in communicative action.

More importantly, as in the case of Luhmann, Foucault also offers something of methodical interest as a challenge to Habermas’s theory. He does not claim to offer a normative theory but a historically situated investigation of power, and is accused of cryptonormativity (6.3.5). Habermas claims to offer a counterfactually normative theory, initially based on a historically idealised category, yet is accused of utopianism. Habermas needs to explicitly recognise that the core of his normative project is based on historiography and later hypostatized in a counterfactual manner. While he recognises the counterfactuality in his theory, he does not touch upon the tension between historiography and normativity. The two may seem irreconcilable, yet in Foucault’s case an essentially historical and descriptive study offers a different version of normativity, which could be experimentally considered for Habermas’s model.

7.2.3 Fraser, Benhabib and McCarthy: Plural Publics and Normative Implications

The contributions of Fraser, Benhabib and McCarthy have been examined in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 and are brought together here for the sake of clarity. Fraser’s main criticism of Habermas’s theory focuses on post-bourgeois perspectives of the public sphere as

consisting of multiple but unequal publics, with a particular emphasis on “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser, 1993: 123; cf 3.1.3 of this thesis). In her work, Fraser maintains that the Habermasian bourgeois public was never in fact the public and forced Habermas to recognise the existence (albeit not the importance) of the plebeian public sphere in the development of the bourgeois public sphere in Calhoun’s seminal 1993 volume. Instead, she introduces the distinction between strong and weak publics (Fraser, 1993: 134), which echoes Habermas’s distinction between formal and informal publics. Fraser insists on a more inclusive model and on bringing out the importance of counterpublics in public deliberation.

Benhabib’s critique comes from an egalitarian, in particular feminist perspective and, similarly to Fraser’s critique, argues for a more inclusive model. Benhabib places more emphasis on issues of power struggles, in juxtaposing Habermas’s discursive public sphere model with Arendt’s agonistic model of public space (Benhabib, 1993), she thematises the struggles that are inherent in public spheres and urges for a reconsideration of identities, social status and power dynamics in general. Benhabib also points out the despatialised element of public spheres in that they emerge with communication. This is not the case with Habermas’s formal parliamentary or judicial publics and the question that is examined in the next section is how and why a reconceptualised inclusive model would go so far as to include such formal publics.

McCarthy’s contribution has been explicating Habermas’s core views and bringing out their “idealising elements intrinsic to social practice” (Outhwaite, 1995: 153). He focuses his critique on the role of reason in Habermas’s theory, exposing the tension between historiography and normativity, between ideals and practice (McCarthy, 1995: 475) and between general and generalisable interests (op.cit.: 472). He compares Habermas’s concept of the public use of reason against Rawls’s ‘non-public reasons’ (see 3.2.2). These are practised in associations such as universities, churches or professional groups, so their venues are official, but their agenda of debate is limited with respect to the wider political society (Rawls, 1997: 94). Habermas’s concept of public reason, McCarthy argues, is more robust because it is not dependent on such official venues, it is not limited by any agenda or interest other than the general(ised) public good. Nevertheless, McCarthy does not agree with Habermas’s stronger, all-encompassing notion of reason. He criticises Habermas for placing too much faith on the potential of his model of communicative reason, with regard to leading to consensus

in an ideal communication community. McCarthy does not fully agree with Rawls's model either, yet he uses it to demonstrate the plurality of reasons that circulate in public communication and must be taken into account together with the plurality of public spheres. Indeed, the "last great rationalist" (McCarthy, in Habermas, 1984: viii) refined his theory in terms of informal and formal public spheres, but not in terms of the communicative reason(s) as their medium of communication. If public spheres are formal and informal, with and without decision-making powers respectively, this would mean that their reasons could also be different because of different interests and different procedures. This issue is examined below as part of reworking Habermas's model.

7.2.4 Bohman: Social Complexity and Normative Implications

On the issues of complexity and contingency in Habermas's refined model presented in *Between Facts and Norms*, Bohman (1996) has crucial contributions that need to be considered before a detailed reworking of Habermas's model is attempted. Bohman's most important criticisms of Habermas's theory constitute a response to *Between Facts and Norms*. They focus on his pessimistic and unidimensional views on complexity and his problematic distinction between opinion and will formation in informal and formal publics respectively (Bohman, 1996: 182).

Firstly, Bohman argues that complexity and democracy are not inherently incompatible and that, conversely, democracy needs a certain degree of complexity in order to function. The interplay between the two becomes problematic and detrimental to democracy when complexity surpasses a certain threshold and becomes 'overcomplexity', which is characterised by 'hypercomplexity' and 'hyperrationality' (Bohman, 1996: 154-166). These are examined in 7.3 below.

Secondly, Bohman disagrees with Habermas's strong distinction between formal and informal publics, responsible for will- and opinion- formation respectively. Instead, he argues for a stronger focus on popular sovereignty in increasingly complex and pluralistic societies: "When institutions and normal politics fail, the sovereignty of citizens over their institutions is of paramount importance" (Bohman, 1996: 194). Bohman is right in arguing that popular sovereignty should not be dependent on formal institutions but rather it should be formed on the basis of citizens' deliberation. For this

reason, mechanisms need to be introduced that “promote the agency of citizens and the uptake of their public reasons” (op.cit.: 191). He encourages the active participation of “social critics” in public spheres (op.cit.: 194) and in general aims at expanding the scope of public deliberation “beyond merely representative and legislative institutions” (op.cit.: 191). Against this backdrop, he maintains that society-wide forms of integration continue to operate in the light of increased complexity and polycentrism in modern societies.

Lastly, Bohman exposes a normativity dilemma in Habermas’s theory between two extremes: On the one hand, he considers purely normative positions as “sociologically naïve” (Bohman, 1996: 176, cf. Habermas, 1996b: 9) yet on the other hand he dismisses descriptive theories such as Luhmann’s as examples of “legal positivism” (ibid.). Bohman accurately observes that Habermas’s own theory suffers from both of these trends: naivety, in the case of the idealistic features of his model of deliberative democracy based on a complex network of public spheres; and positivism (which detaches law from ethics or morality) in the case of his largely empirical consideration of large-scale institutions and their relation to the normative public sphere. Habermas shifts between these two extremes and attempts to combine normative and empirical analyses of social practices without explicating the shifts in the normative character of his own theory. This thesis does not defend either of the two extremes mentioned above, but advocates a new type of normativity for Habermas’s public sphere theory which successfully incorporates empirical analyses while avoiding both “impractical and unattainable ideals” (Bohman, 1996: 176) and inconsistencies between “democratic self-rule and political equality” (ibid.).

7.2.5 Reworking Habermas’s Conceptual Framework: the Main Points

Based on the above analysis, the main conceptual points in the reconstruction of Habermas’s theoretical and conceptual framework, as well as the normative project of public sphere theory, are as follows:

- a) A reworking of *complexity*, which includes internal public sphere complexity, as well as differentiation and external complexity in the form of relations with other public spheres and the state. Section 7.3 on complexity includes the institutionalisation debate and argues for more emphasis on informal forms of *Öffentlichkeit* and popular sovereignty.

- b) A reworking of *power* and its inclusion in the public sphere in a non-coercive light. Section 7.4 on forms of power argues that power can be used to the public sphere's advantage rather than dismissed or avoided as a colonising and contaminating force on the pure practices of the public sphere.
- c) A reworking of *communicative rationality* and its refined role in actual deliberation practices. The concept of plurality of reasons is advocated in section 7.5 in light of complexity, and the reconceptualised role of power and its original idealising presuppositions are detranscendentalised to an even greater degree than Habermas's 'situated reason' of communicative action.
- d) A reworking of *normativity* and its empirically relevant status. Section 7.6 questions the value of a counterfactual normative theory and proposes a more grounded version of normativity, closer to actually existing practices.

The next sections suggest ways in which these problematic points can be reworked.

7.3 Complexity and its Theoretical Implications for Public Sphere Theory

7.3.1 The Internal Structure of the Public Sphere

Based on the analysis in Chapter 3 on the internal structure of public spheres, as well as on the discussion of the theoretical implications of the critical reconstruction of Habermas's theory, the following case can be made on the internal structure of the public sphere. Firstly, the public sphere refers to a despatialised (Thomson, 1993) aggregate concept that includes a multitude of unequal and often competing public spheres, which make up a complex communication network. It is a-topian (non-spatial) because it does not need a pre-existing physical space for its functioning and also because its spatial characteristics are dependent on communication. It is not that the public sphere does not exist when it is not being used, but instead it remains dormant in the consciousness of every active citizen (Keenan, 1993: 132-133) and is activated with communication, including both formal and informal media. This can be easily illustrated with virtual public spheres in the form of electronic forums or public blogs and with increased abstraction and fluidity of structures.¹¹³ Public spheres are unequal

¹¹³ "For the public infrastructure of such *assemblies*, performances, presentations, and so on, architectural metaphors of structured spaces recommend themselves: we speak of forums, stages, arenas, and the like. These public spheres still cling to the concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered. The more they detach themselves

because of the agonistic character of the public sphere. Deliberative and agonistic publics are not mutually exclusive, as the analysis of the distinct models of Habermas and Arendt may imply (cf. Benhabib, 1993). The public sphere in conditions of complexity is an agonistic site where diverse public spheres and counterpublics communicate in order for their discourses to dominate and move to more formal sites of the political arena, such as local councils or members of parliament. Furthermore, the more complex the public sphere network, the more difficult it will be for state power to attempt to reunify all social spheres (Bohman, 1996: 153). Faced with a complex entity, the “power of an independent state and its bureaucracies” (ibid.) over that entity is harnessed.

Secondly, different public spheres should not be expected to be equal on grounds of differing complexities, environments and patterns of social emergence. This is not empirically plausible for practical reasons such as lack of funding for instance. Most importantly, this is not actually necessary. Publics may be unequal in terms of support, public and financial, or in numbers of participants, but their influence may still be considerable (e.g. deaf public sphere, public sphere of the disabled etc). There would be no need to compete for access to formal institutions, but also there would be no need for them to cooperate for the same reason. In short, a certain degree of inequality between publics is desirable because it would keep the aggregate public sphere ‘alive’ by constant debate, redefinition of boundaries, re-evaluation and regrouping of priorities.

7.3.2 Socio-Political Complexity

As seen in Chapter 5, complexity at a social level involves ‘segmentation’, ‘stratification’ and ‘functional differentiation’ (Luhmann, 1984: 64). These refer to systems differentiating on the basis of specific functions. At the same time, systems aim at maintaining their own organised internal complexity in order to be able to acquire the information necessary for their functioning and observation. Functional differentiation refers to a polycentric state of power and authority, involving different delegated

from the public’s physical presence and extend to the virtual presence of scattered readers, listeners, or viewers linked by public media, the clearer becomes the abstraction that enters when the spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into a public sphere” (Habermas, 1996b: 361).

institutions of power and control with clearly differentiated but “interdependent” functions (Zolo, cited in Bohman, 1996: 272, n.6). Zolo observes that this diffuse and polycentric activity moves away from hierarchical structures in the way that, for instance, political campaigns are dependent on requirements and regulations of the media, while the media are subordinate to relevant legislation as well as the advertising market etc. (Zolo, 1992: 5). Bohman rightly poses the question as to how modern democratic societies can be “both differentiated and unified at the same time” (Bohman, 1996: 156). He notes Hegel’s scepticism that democracy is adequate for the task (*ibid.*) and so it seems is Habermas, as he sees increasing complexity as a threat to his concept of the public sphere and to democracy in general (cf. 7.1.2). Zolo is correct in arguing, though, that the view of complexity as being detrimental to democracy constitutes a “fiction of consensus” (Zolo, cited in Bohman, 1996: 272). Indeed, the relationship between complexity and social organisation, of which the core is an active public sphere is as intertwined as the relation between public emergence and formalisation.

Habermas argues that institutions were designed “to reduce complexity, but also to preserve it by compensatory adjustment [...] to stabilise the tension between facticity and validity” (Habermas, 1996b: 535). However, Habermas sees complexity in a reductionist form, and rejects it as a threat to society, which must be reduced in order for public institutions to deliberate freely. By contrast, Bohman goes deeper in his analysis of complexity, acknowledging that, instituting internal complexity in the political system limits the escalation of political power by “permitting diverse types of public input at various levels” (Bohman, 1996: 162). Bohman rightfully recognises that such mechanisms of complexity are “necessary in any well-ordered society” (*ibid.*) and that freedom and pluralism constitute positive outcomes of social complexity. Complexity only becomes problematic when it reaches unmanageable levels according to Bohman’s rationale. To clarify this, he makes the fundamental distinction between social complexity, which is unavoidable, and overcomplexity, which is manifested by hypercomplexity and hyperrationality, and refers to the “loss of human control over social processes” (*op.cit.*: 154). It is important to examine this distinction in order to substantiate the argument that incorporating some level of complexity in the concept of the public sphere and the theoretical framework surrounding it will help reconsider issues relating to power, reason and normativity.

Overcomplex systems, as opposed to merely complex systems, are the ones that have anti-democratic consequences according to Bohman. This is because their complexity is harnessed by adopting anti-democratic measures (Bohman, 1996: 160) in the following manner. Hypercomplexity as a manifestation of overcomplexity is embodied in issues such as “terrorism [or] demographic pressures” (ibid.), as issues that need more sophisticated mechanisms than the ‘linear’ democratic ones (ibid.). The market is another example of a hypercomplex, “tightly coupled” system¹¹⁴ (op.cit.: 164) because it needs optimising behaviour, state intervention and specialised expert knowledge in addition to public input (op.cit.: 159, 164). Critical-rational public decision-making is practically impossible under those circumstances because of lack of expert knowledge, time constraints, access to specialised or confidential information and time constraints. Attempting to reduce this sort of complexity so as to manage it would mean excluding the public from deliberation and opinion-formation on these issues and delegating them to experts. A further way of reducing complexity would be by “restricting or eliminating the inputs of civil society” (Bohman, 1996: 156) in order to reduce the plurality of inputs and opinions. In this sense, complex political systems become essentially ‘oligarchic’ (op.cit.: 160) in restricting democracy in their attempt to reduce complexity.

Based on this observation, Bohman argues that democracy can only “take” a certain amount of complexity (op.cit.: 161). This is not entirely accurate, however. Sophisticated mechanisms that make use of expert knowledge and optimising behaviour may function well in a complex democratic society, as long as they feed their findings and suggestions into the public for deliberation. It is true that the role of the public should not be overestimated in a way that we could assume that publics can deliberate about any topic and form opinions without the help of the media (including the Internet), or experts in a particular topic (finance, taxation, defence and national security etc.). An intersubjectively shared lifeworld is not enough, unless this lifeworld is constantly redefined and enriched with filtered information from the media or even from

¹¹⁴ Bohman describes ‘tight coupling’ as “a mechanism through which functional differentiation undermines public deliberation and shows that certain forms of complexity are not always desirable” (Bohman, 1996: 159). Tightly coupled systems require monitoring because of “increased risks associated with excessive complexity” (op.cit.: 158).

authority itself. In conditions of (hyper)complexity, the public need to use any resource possible to receive new information, to update their lifeworld with new stocks of knowledge and opinions. Certainly, new validity claims need to be tested before they can be used or adopted. However, just as the public's capacity of opinion formation should not be overestimated, it should not be underestimated either. All that is needed is *access* to sophisticated mechanisms in hypercomplex conditions so that the public may process information deliberatively. This is in agreement with Habermas's position on the role of the public and its critical-rational potential. However, despite the public's critical potential, it is crucial to connect the norms and processes of the framework in which critical debate is conducted with actually existing practices (see 7.6).

The example of terrorism used above is representative of hypercomplexity in contemporary societies. If too much information with regard to a counter-terrorist strategy is made available to the public, this could prove disastrous in the light of an invisible, unknown threat. In such cases, two issues determine the efficacy of the final outcome: firstly, the issue of trust in institutions, committees and government experts. Again, trust is something that is built through deliberation, negotiation and redefinition of roles and decisions. It is also based on precedent, in the form of previously successful monitoring and evaluation mechanisms after a policy has been implemented. The public can negotiate via the public sphere, Internet fora, even policy lines, referenda and opinion polls (although these are not infallible and rarely represent public opinion). In this way, it still retains its critical role in monitoring and evaluating policies and decisions retrospectively. Secondly, what is more important is the *expectation* of participation. The public would be more likely to trust state mechanisms and policies if it is given the opportunity to participate, regardless of the scale of participation. However, in well-established systems of crisis management within the state, the public should also be protected against hypercomplex issues, even if this means that it is denied access to certain sensitive information on policy. In general, access to and availability of information are fundamental in creating favourable conditions for informed opinion formation by the public. Moreover, the expectation or the principle at least of such access and availability is vital for establishing relations of trust.

Bohman introduces 'hyperrationality' as a further, more significant consequence of overcomplexity. He describes hyperrationality as a form of "excessive rationalism" (Bohman, 1996: 157) according to which any problem can be resolved with the power

of reason alone – a principle not far from Habermas’s views. This does not allow for a critique of reason itself, it ignores issues of uncertainty and ambiguity and considers reason as a panacea in a reductionist way. According to Bohman, this “pathological version of public reason” (ibid.), which does not recognise failures of rationality, contradicts the Kantian maxim: “The first task of reason is to recognise its own limitations and draw boundaries within which it can operate” (ibid.). Hyperrationality in this respect overwhelms critical-rational debate in such way that it is left unable to perform its functions. Put simply, every problem cannot be solved through rational deliberation alone; again, terrorism is a case in point.¹¹⁵ This does not mean that rationality should be dismissed altogether, but instead that its limits be acknowledged in conditions of hypercomplexity and “escalation of hierarchical power necessary for carrying out political decisions” (op.cit.: 162). In increasingly complex and globalised societies, multiple competing rationalities exist in essentially agonistic public spheres. This results in a sense of contingency in Western rational tradition, which undermines the normative status of rationality as *the* normative criterion of debate (cf. 7.5 and 7.6). In addition, Bohman is right in observing that certain public processes such as participation or revision of decisions can become “routinised as a consequence of hyperrationality” (Bohman, 1996: 170). Routinisation of procedures can seriously undermine the deliberative character of the public sphere in a way that debate would work almost mechanically. ‘Excessive rationalism’ in this case, not in the sense of the omnipotence of reason, but in the sense of blind application of rules of rationality in order to perform certain complex functions, is not only counterproductive but also detrimental to original thought and to the public’s critical ability.

Overall, this section has examined the role of internal public sphere complexity and differentiation, as well as socio-political complexity in reworking public sphere theory. It has suggested that the despatialised, aggregate concept of the public sphere, which comprises a multitude of differentiated, unequal publics, should be seen as an agonistic space, albeit without stripping its essentially deliberative character. Critical debate

¹¹⁵ Grant (2007) examines terrorism in his study of “global mediaterror” as an example of “the intertwining of connectivity and contingency” (Grant, 2007: 175). He analyses essentially strategic instruments of media policy and intervention sponsored by the US government as “complexity coping strategies attempting to respond to this new form of uncertainty of mediapolitics” (op.cit.: 175-179).

remains a medium of communication, however due to the inequality and complexity of the publics, the purpose of debate is to compete for influence in dominant public spheres and formal institutions. 'Agonistic' is not considered here as an alternative to 'deliberative', but instead it defines the process of deliberation. It is essential for the public sphere to hold some form of internal struggle, because debate and polemic are its lifeblood, in a similar way that conflict is what keeps Luhmann's systems 'alive'.

With regard to socio-political complexity, this section has followed Bohman's line of argumentation in rejecting the view that complexity is detrimental to democracy. It recognises the dilemma that democratic regimes must face in conditions of hypercomplexity, hyperrationality and competing rationalities, but rejects the pessimistic view that democracy cannot cope with the latter. It also acknowledges that rational debate and deliberation alone are not a panacea. Yet it suggests that critical-rational debate can fulfil its function of informed opinion-formation (not will formation) on conditions of availability of expert knowledge and specialised information on specific topics, accessibility to this type of information and trust in authority that no relevant information is withheld or distorted. Trust can never be guaranteed in absolute terms, but it can be cultivated through transparency of information and practices on the part of the government and its institutions, availability and accessibility to information and to sources of knowledge and through monitoring and evaluation of government decisions by the public sphere (and thus also in the media). This is extremely challenging in practice, but not unattainable. It retains reason as the core of deliberation, however with a more empirically relevant status, tied to actually existing practices. It recognises and incorporates the role of the media, including the Internet, in enriching the lifeworld with knowledge and information vital for keeping the public informed and involved on common interests; and, in some cases, in acting as platforms for public spheres themselves. In short, it makes the public sphere more relevant while still keeping faith in its potential, even in conditions of overcomplexity, provided that, firstly, the above mechanisms are in place and secondly, that popular sovereignty is not undermined. The issue of popular sovereignty, its importance and its undermining in conditions of increasing institutionalisation are discussed in the next section.

7.3.3 Institutionalisation and Popular Sovereignty: the Tension between Emergent and Systems Publics

Habermas's two-track model of political opinion and will formation described above, which combines formal and informal publics, constitutes his response to what he sees as the perils of increasing social complexity at all levels. According to the Luhmannian paradox, reducing complexity in this way would result in increasing complexity. The separation of powers manifest in Habermas's two-track political system would constitute a mechanism for increasing or at least preserving complexity in the form of a more strictly organised structure of opinion and will-formation and ultimately also of lawmaking. This distinction between formal and informal publics, however, as well as the clear separation of deliberation and decision-making that it entails, is problematic and should be rejected for the following reasons.

Firstly, it assigns the task of will-formation (decision-making) exclusively to formal publics such as parliaments and judicial authorities, leaving informal, non-institutionalised publics unable to contest or influence such decisions. It favours formalised and bureaucratic procedures of will-formation that are detached from citizens, who can only participate in informal publics.

Secondly, it assigns the tasks of deliberation and opinion-formation exclusively to informal publics, or the "general public of citizens" (Habermas, 1996b: 307), thus stripping formal publics of their potential deliberative character (Bohman, 1996). In this model, there is no sharing of deliberation and decision-making between publics, no real popular sovereignty without any power to contest decision-making and no role in deliberation for 'stronger publics'.

Thirdly, Habermas's 'formal publics' are not composed of average citizens who participate in public debate, but of elected, appointed, or hired officials, either by the citizens themselves or by administrative bodies. Their primary concern is to acquire or retain administrative power as members of parliament, judges, senators, board members etc., and then to work for what is perceived as public interest. The input of 'weaker' publics, in Habermas's terms, is crucial in this respect, because the notion of 'public interest' is usually determined by the system itself. Governments may often defend controversial measures, such as higher tax rates, as being introduced for the interest of

the public. Priorities in agenda setting by state media may also be organised on the basis of sometimes loose and contentious interpretations on what constitutes a ‘public interest’. With too sharp a separation between formal and informal publics, especially in terms of decision-making, the general public is left unable to contest the limits and scope of what the state or formal publics define as public interests. As examined in 2.4.1 of this thesis, one of the original functions of the public sphere according to Habermas was the contestation of authority as part of a system of checks and balances. This function is not fostered or encouraged by Habermas’s distinction between institutionalised and non-institutionalised publics *within* the aggregate public sphere.

Fourthly, Habermas’s two-track model undermines popular sovereignty. His initial theory of the public sphere ([1962]1992b, 1993) celebrated popular sovereignty, but it was designed on a smaller and more confined scale. When he attempted to adapt it to complex societies, he took away part of the popular sovereignty of the public sphere and handed it into ‘formal publics’. With no significant power over decision-making, the informal public sphere is left to carry the burden of public deliberation on its own. At the same time, Habermas’s two-track institutional model places too much faith in procedures and institutions:

“To the degree that practical reason is implanted in the very forms of communication and institutionalized procedures, it need not be embodied exclusively or even predominantly in the heads of collective or individual actors” (Habermas, 1996b: 341).

According to this formulation, rationality could be proceduralised to such an extent that it can be applied to institutionalised procedures so that the public itself does not need to demonstrate it. What is implied here is that the public could actually employ public reason only through specific rationalised institutional procedures, not as a result of its own critical capacity. This is a serious departure from Habermas’s original model, which included a stronger, critical-rational public that presupposed a willingness to argue in the framework of *Diskurs* and an intersubjective lifeworld. If procedures are made to become a routine to such an extent that the public can use them blindly and non-critically, then any notion of public autonomy and sovereignty is seriously undermined. The public become merely users, or clients, of a well-organised system. Habermas’s two-track model is already challenged by the fact that it cannot be truly deliberative if the public is given only an opinion-forming, advisory and retrospectively

critical role. If the public is denied its critical-rational role together with any meaningful participation in decision-making, then the public sphere loses its spontaneity, sovereignty and solidarity as a space where private people come together as a public, it becomes formalised, systematised and ultimately absorbed by the system.

Popular sovereignty should be protected and allowed to flourish in a way that excessive institutionalisation and formalisation of procedures does not threaten to 'colonise', to use Habermas's term, the informal public sphere. Formal and informal publics in principle share public deliberation. A public sphere that only has the task of decision-making based on the deliberation and opinion formation of other structures, which is Habermas's conception of 'strong publics' such as parliaments, loses its defining feature of critical-rational debate and ceases to be considered as a public sphere. In this case, institutions become too powerful and their link with the public is severed. If informal, non-institutionalised publics cannot participate in decision-making processes, this means that the decisions are not a collective product and are therefore not representative of 'the public'. Certainly, tackling the consequences of overcomplexity by making complicated social interdependencies more democratic is fundamentally an issue of preserving popular sovereignty, at least in principle (cf. Bohman, 1996: 152). As in the case of democracy, popular sovereignty is not incompatible with socio-political complexity. It becomes clear, however, that neither popular sovereignty can be guaranteed nor complexity managed unless we move away from Habermas's institutionalisation thesis, which overpowers formal publics and undermines informal ones. This urges for a new conceptualisation of emergent and systems publics (Grant, 2012 - *forthcoming*).

Emergent publics are not merely informal, grassroots publics. They are essentially diffuse, multiple and competing and often constitute media publics. Indeed, the media have a key role in emergence, particularly new media in the form of Internet fora and public participation through social networking sites. It is becoming increasingly easier for citizens of democratic societies with access to technology to form new virtual publics and engage in deliberation. Such forms of new media are in this way safeguarding the public sphere as a principle by creating virtual platforms for spontaneous, informal and vibrant debate. The role of emergent publics is still generating public opinion, legitimating, monitoring and contesting state decisions; but

in order to achieve this, they must cooperate with civil society and systems publics. Again, the media have a key role in this respect.

Systems publics largely correspond to Habermas's formal, institutionalised publics, such as parliaments, courts, congress etc. The crucial difference with Habermas's formulation is that systems publics essentially constitute a hybrid form of publicness in the sense that they are deliberative in character, they belong to the administrative system but they are answerable to the public. This means that it is the responsibility of the general public, in the form of a network of unequal, competing, emergent publics, to monitor the decision-making procedure and results of systems publics through existing monitoring mechanisms.¹¹⁶ Their role is to enable both the public sphere and the state to cope with overcomplex problems described in the previous section and to be able to manage the different actors whose interplay affects public issues, such as the media, quangos, civil society associations, global corporations etc. Managing overcomplexity is largely the task of systems publics in cooperation with administrative institutions.

The importance of such a task is brought forward by Bohman in his discussion of modern constraints on deliberative democracy with regard to decision-making, such as: "information and decision costs, asymmetries of competence and expertise, uneven distribution of knowledge in the public sphere, [...] polycentric power" (Bohman, 1996: 173). Habermas also acknowledges that modern societies have indeed become so complex that they can no longer be analysed on the basis of a simple distinction between a society centred on a state and one composed of individuals (Habermas, 1996b: 80). For this reason, systems publics are needed in complex societies to transform the special language of law, science, or other forms of specialised knowledge into "ordinary language" (op.cit.: 354) so that they can be accessible, comprehensible and usable by the public. Likewise, they would translate the language of the public into a suitably codified language so that it can be received by the respective codes of autopoietic systems (Luhmann: systems that self-reproduce through communication; cf 5.2.2). Systems publics could also act as a general source of information about administrative or legal issues that become increasingly relevant. If we considered a society "structured entirely through the deliberation of free and equal citizens, without any external or internal limitation" (Bohman, 1996: 166) then the result would be

¹¹⁶ Such mechanisms are explicated in 7.4.1.

chaotic. Public communication could not possibly perform its integrative role on its own (Bohman, 1996: 174) without any mediation institutions in the form of systems publics.

The question is to what degree systems publics should intervene in the work of emergent publics in the public sphere. If legitimacy depends on the will of the people and derives from citizens' participation in decision-making, then it can "only be elaborated in terms of a comprehensive conception of political equality" (op.cit.: 151). Such a conception would be centred on popular sovereignty by maintaining the spontaneity and diffuse nature of the emergent publics without drowning it in regulative institutions. It would give emergent publics a 'voice' in decision-making procedures, while at the same time making institutions in the form of systems publics "an open and political public sphere" (op.cit.: 189), so that will-formation and lawmaking truly derives from the public. Systems publics need to be closer to emergent publics, otherwise the latter may not identify their common interests and view the former with suspicion, or they may be disillusioned with their diminished sovereignty and lose interest in participation through public deliberation altogether. In this case, conditions of complexity would undermine democratic processes in a way that emergent publics would *feel* their weaknesses and limitations. This would lead to a situation similar to Kant's "criticise, but obey" (Kant, cited in Bohman, 1996: 153). Majority rule should be a matter of the public deliberation of citizens (Bohman, 1996: 152), not about decisions made exclusively by overformalised or over-proceduralised institutions. Excessive regulation and over-institutionalisation would lead to emergent publics not feeling "ownership" of the public sphere, but instead they would consider it as an organ of the state, as overcomplicated, overregulated, bureaucratic and tedious. The public in its aggregate form needs to feel that they are "authors of their decisions" (op.cit.: 153). Certainly, emergent publics need to be guided, but not stripped of initiative and freedom of choosing their own agenda and policies about issues that are crucial to *them*.

Again, the *expectation* of popular sovereignty is important for reasons of trust. Bohman suggests the establishment of processes of public input in the form of citizens committees to monitor decision-making (Bohman, 1996: 150). A truly public form of administration, according to Bohman, would be based on citizens being regarded as significant "sources of information and judgments" (op.cit.: 189). It would be built on relations of trust between administrators and the public, or between systems and emergent publics, otherwise the former would be too close to the state system or too

detached from the latter. Their collaboration should be fostered by protecting popular sovereignty established in emergent public spheres, not by creating “a counter-administrative set of institutions” (op.cit.: 190). Decision-making and lawmaking processes should promote deliberation and be open to public input in order for them to be able to claim legitimacy and fairness.

This brings us to the distinction between unanimity and participation in decision-making. Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality, which governs his theory of the public sphere, is focused on a certain type of consensus as a regulative ideal. Habermas’s notion of consensus presupposes that participants agree on a validity claim “for the same reasons” (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 320-1). In practice this is extremely rare and difficult to monitor, hence counter-productive. Consensus should act as an instrument for opinion formation and subsequent action, but even as a regulative ideal, this is problematic. Bohman suggests the willingness of citizens to cooperate as an alternative to Habermas’s consensus manifested by unanimity (Bohman, 1996: 273, n.22). More importantly, conditions of increased pluralism and social and institutional complexity urge for an alternative to consensus through unanimity in the form of “deliberative majorities” (op.cit.: 180). These achieve two things: firstly, they abide by the basic principle of collective opinion-formation, and secondly they specify “the subject [...] or agent of political deliberation” (ibid.).

Certainly, deliberative majorities do not imply a ‘tyranny of the majority’. In principle, deliberative minorities must at least have the opportunity and the right to influence majorities and ultimately the state. Majority rule applied after the consideration of multiple conflicting opinions and arguments (not purely in an aggregative but still in a deliberative manner) would ultimately determine deliberative outcomes. As Bohman puts it, “[e]ven when they are losers, citizens need only have the reasonable expectation that they will be able to affect the outcome of future deliberation” (Bohman, 1996: 273, n.22). Again, the media have a crucial role to play in this respect in providing a space for deliberative minorities to voice their opinions and concerns. In addition to the traditional media of television and the press, new media provide a more direct, cost-effective deliberative platform. In many cases, the spiralling effect of social networking with regard to campaigns, petitions or virtual gatherings, results in a larger impact of minority discourses. To modify Bohman’s proposal, therefore, rather than the willingness to cooperate, the alternative to consensus in Habermas’s model should be

the *opportunity* and ultimately the *expectation* of participation in the ongoing public and legislative process. Citizens should be given the right to participate in principle; they need to expect that their participation is influential and productive. Otherwise, they will become disillusioned and lose interest and faith in the public sphere as a series of interlocking contexts of emergence. This modified principle would also agree with Habermas's fundamental rule that the legitimacy of law derives from a "participatory process that is fair and open to all citizens and includes all their public accessible reasons" (Bohman, 1996: 183), at least in principle.

The guiding rule behind these alternative proposals of Habermas's model is to suggest a vibrant, informed, interested and active public at an informal, spontaneous, diffuse and mediated level. It is at this level that social solidarity is manifested and fostered and where initial opinions are formed before they enter more formalised procedures. Emergent public spheres should not be procedural, but unstructured in a way that idea and opinion generation are obstacle-free. A plurality of informal associations and emergent publics limits the power of an independent state and its bureaucracies. Moreover, contrary to Habermas's denunciation of the nefarious consequences of the media in public life, the media can safeguard the public sphere by providing new, alternative deliberative spaces. If barriers are placed at informal levels and formalisation takes over, opinion generation will be sterile. More importantly, it would contravene the core principles of democracy in a way that too much democratic self-governance would be surrendered to institutions to achieve their integration (Bohman, 1996: 177).

By offering institutionalisation as a way of harnessing socio-political overcomplexity, and by arguing for more institutionalised public spheres with decision-making responsibilities, clearly distinct from informal forms of publicness responsible for opinion formation, Habermas "loses [...] the communication-theoretic approach he had initially opened up: the potential for an understanding of the social order as an *institutionally mediated* communicative relation" (Honneth, 1991: 303, my emphasis) between integrated publics engaged in social struggle. Honneth's argument is crucial: if institutions and systems publics are seen by the public as a medium, or as a means to an end in influencing and contesting state authority, relations between loosely formed and institutionalised forms of publicness would become more cooperative and there would be more of a sense of social solidarity. In this way, popular sovereignty may still be maintained "even in institutions with high social complexity" (Bohman, 1996: 165).

Outhwaite (1995) agrees that despite the importance of law and politics as institutional forms, they both rely heavily on “more informal processes” (Outhwaite, 1995: 151) of public deliberation. He adds a further consideration in relation to the reinvigoration of social solidarity in modern societies: the role of the mass media both as a dividing and a unifying force for the public (ibid.). The role of the media is indeed different to that of political institutions, as already seen above. The media can take many forms and assume diverse roles. They can function as sources of information, as well as a platform for debate and opinion-formation to such an extent that they can become public spheres themselves. They can also function as the mouthpiece of institutions, of key social, political and cultural actors and in some cases also of state authority. In this way, the media can indeed bring together or divide publics, as Outhwaite contends. The reason for this is that in contemporary complex societies, it is through the media that opinions, formal or informal, rational or not, are voiced and presented for processing by the public or by institutions. It is through the media that public spheres organise their campaigns, present their arguments and try to influence public opinion.

Habermas’s pessimistic view of the media is simplistic. He chooses not to elaborate on the usability of the media by publics as platforms of debate, but instead focuses on their distorting and manipulating effects on public opinion. An updated conception of the public sphere should include the sphere of the media as interlinked with formal and informal publics, political and legal administrative institutions and the state. They should be conceptualised as a platform, a means of communicating the emergence of public opinions to other public spheres and to authorities. Their potential for acting as public spheres per se should also be emphasised.

Lastly, it should be noted that opinion formation and public opinion generation in emergent publics are also fostered by “a vibrant political culture favourable to open participation” (Habermas, 1998: xx). Habermas acknowledges this by arguing that “spontaneity cannot be compelled by law; it regenerates itself in associative relations of a liberal political culture” (Habermas, 1996b: 130-131).¹¹⁷ As argued in 3.2.4 of this

¹¹⁷ Also consider: “A public sphere that functions politically requires more than the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state; it also needs the supportive spirit of

thesis, no level of institutionalisation or regulation can ‘teach’ someone to debate critically and “rationally” in Habermasian terms if they are not culturally predisposed to it (cf. Toulmin’s “open / closed to argument” thesis in Habermas, 1984: 25). Instead, political culture must be considered here as a lifeworld process. It is therefore a question of how democratic practices of socialisation emerge from within the lifeworld, and are formalised from above in response to the lifeworld. Since Habermas considers the lifeworld as the core of his theory of the public sphere, as the communicative horizon within which intersubjective communication takes place, it should be his task to ensure that it maintains its qualities of ‘educating’ citizens in critical-rational practices. The functional components of the lifeworld as culture, society and personality have a crucial role in cultivating and preserving popular sovereignty. In complex societies, the culture and society components of the lifeworld become overburdened and unmanageable by participants in communication. Polycentric hierarchies, global actors, technical rationalities, excessive specialisation and the impact of the mass media as culture-carriers and transmitters, as well as putative depictions of society, all call for a certain degree of complexity management. Systems publics, in the form of parliaments or local committees ensure the smooth running of lifeworld processes and facilitate the work of the lifeworld as the public’s repository of knowledge (Habermas, 1987: 137).

Overall, this section has argued that Habermas’s two-track conception of the public sphere in democratic societies undermines the spontaneous and diffuse character that distinguishes the public sphere from institutionalised forms of publicness. Following Bohman’s argument, it has also shown how Habermas’s structuralist approach demonstrated a blind faith in institutions to such a degree that it ultimately undermines popular sovereignty. By strictly separating opinion and will-formation *within* this concept of his public sphere and delegating the former to informal public spheres and the latter to formal public spheres such as parliaments or administrative courts, Habermas strips formal public spheres of any deliberative role and informal ones of any influence. With popular sovereignty diminished in conditions of over-institutionalisation and over-formalisation of public debate, the public sphere’s emancipatory potential that Habermas advocates is seriously undermined. To avoid this, a distinction between emergent and systems publics is proposed instead of Habermas’s

cultural traditions and patterns of socialisation, of the political culture of a populace accustomed to freedom” (Habermas, 1993a: 453).

formal/informal publics distinction. According to this, emergent publics are more spontaneous and diffuse and increasingly comprise media publics, while systems publics are part of the executive branches of government but are deliberative in nature and are answerable to the public through existing monitoring mechanisms (e.g. green/white papers). In addition, Bohman's solution of including popular sovereignty as one of the defining principles of democracy is adopted, while Bohman's second solution of replacing Habermas's concept of consensus with that of willingness to participate is taken further. It is suggested instead that consensus is substituted by the opportunity and the means to participate. The ultimate goal should be for citizens to continue to "cooperate in deliberation rather than merely comply" (Bohman, 1996: 187) with rules imposed from above that may disregard their public role.

7.4 Integrating Power

The issue of power and its relation with and influence on the public sphere is a still unresolved issue between Habermas and his critics. In revisiting such a concept, it is argued that the reworked model would integrate power as a constructive force. As Foucault argues, "relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State" (Foucault, 1984b: 122). In this respect, power needs to be broken down and analysed in its different forms. In his 2006 essay on the impact of normative theory on empirical research, Habermas identified the following forms of power: political power, which requires legitimation by default; social power, granted by people's social status in a stratified society; economic power, which refers to a dominant sort of social power that exerts pressure on the political system and therefore also needs legitimation; and media power, in the sense of the media intervening in the formation of public opinion and the "distribution of influential interests" (Habermas, 2006a: 418-419). Taking into consideration the critical appraisal of Habermas's revisited theory and the contributions of his critics, the public sphere is exposed to the following forms of power:

- a) power as conflict, in the agonistic sense of social struggle,
- b) influence as a form of power,
- c) power as authority, in the form of the state, or globalised economic power,
- d) the power of the mass media.

7.4.1 Power as Conflict

As argued in the previous section, conflict in the form of critical-rational debate in the public sphere, or in the form of social struggles of publics for recognition of their views and opinions, is essential for a vibrant public sphere. In cases of conflict between public sphere participants, power differentials should be integrated and articulated instead of disregarded and seen as a distorting mechanism in debate. As Honneth succinctly argues,

“[i]n contrast to the normativistic tradition of social theory, in a model of social conflict grounded in a theory of communication the process of social integration is conceived as a process that assumes the form of a *struggle* among social actors for the recognition of their identity until all groups and individuals possess the equal chance to participate in the organisation of their common life” (Honneth, 1991: xvii, my emphasis).

Habermas’s model of society based on a “power-free” (Bohman, 1996: 178; Honneth, 1991: 298) lifeworld is “greatly simplified [...] still static and free of any internal conflict” (Honneth, 1991: 243). His concept of the force of the better argument as a determinant of rational opinions in debate is not only overly idealistic; it is also non-functional. Having said that, struggle should not be “made into a universal feature of all social evolution” (Honneth, 1991: xvii). Instead, social struggles should have a realisable goal based on “the moral claims of individuals” (op.cit.: xviii). If Habermas’s normative public sphere goal of contesting authority for the interest of the common good is to be brought up to date, then opinions need to be further examined from the perspective of personal, corporate or in general strategic interests, not to assume that such interests do not exist or that they are set aside for the sake of debate on more equal terms. This condition cannot be fulfilled if power differentials are not exposed and taken into account so that opinions are contextualised.

At the level of society, conflict and power differentials are more complex because of the multiplicity of actors, and of hybrid forms of publicness such as systems publics. When consensus breaks, power differentials are brought to the surface and this is manifested by conflict. But any power differentials can be seen as precarious in the face of moral consensus. Honneth contends that power complexes are in fact “fragile constructions that remain dependent for their existence on the moral consensus of all participants”

(Honneth, 1991: 303). Bohman agrees that power can be seen as a “fragile and open-ended product of strategic conflicts between subjects” (Bohman, 1996: 155). This means that power differentials change and evolve, not only with the developments of public will-formation but also with decision-making and consensus mechanisms in society.

The question is how to share such power when it is unevenly distributed in the first place – smaller, emergent publics are unequal among each other and in relation to systems publics. Sharing unevenly distributed power is best achieved with the establishment and use of monitoring mechanisms of public feedback. Decisions made by systems publics, or by the government as the sphere of authority, must be fed back to the public for legitimisation, to use Habermas’s term. This can be done through existing public monitoring mechanisms such as ‘green papers’, aimed at public consultation on a particular topic of public interest, or ‘white papers’, which are more specifically oriented to decision-making or to changing a law. Such good practices, which exist in certain democratic countries, should be included in a revised public sphere model as constitutionally established mechanisms of the network of public spheres. Their advantage is twofold: firstly, they legitimate decisions ultimately made by systems publics or by the government and secondly they contribute to a more balanced sharing of power between systems publics, emergent publics and the state.

The establishment of such mechanisms is not enough, though, because these operate within the public sphere, or between systems and emergent publics and are generated and controlled essentially by systems publics. Independent bodies need to be established within the sphere of civil society as a means of harnessing and monitoring the power of systems publics, as well as of the state. Their tasks would be to ensure that: as many representative opinions as possible are included in processes of will-formation; popular sovereignty is maintained; power is not usurped. These mechanisms should be free and independent in principle, however their interests and motives should still be critically monitored by the public. Transparency is key in both independent and state mechanisms and this can be achieved by the continuous involvement in well-established procedures of public monitoring, such as electronic government, publicising ‘white’ and ‘green’ papers to encourage public input and a strengthened role for local Ombudsmen.

7.4.2 Power as Influence in Competing Publics

Section 7.1.2 examined Habermas's distinction between power and influence, according to which the influence that builds up in the public sphere "becomes the object of struggle" (Habermas, 1996b: 363) and can only be transformed into communicative power through formalised institutional procedures. The influence that develops in the public sphere is neither considered here merely as a precursor to communicative power nor as dependent on institutionalised procedures for its transformation into communicative power. Instead, influence is seen as a necessary tool used in debate in order to reach a common decision to put pressure on authority on issues belonging to a respective public sphere's interest. In an essentially agonistic public sphere, publics compete amongst each other in order to gain influence and for their interests to be recognised and promoted. Lobby groups, which may equally belong to emergent or systems publics, are an example of such struggle for the promotion of their interests and their consideration by parliaments. Formalised institutional procedures are not the only means of establishing their interests as generalisable. The media have a crucial role in providing a platform for promoting or contesting the strategy of such publics. Non-institutionalised media of mass communication such as the Internet constitute in such cases a unique communication space in which publics unfold their strategies of promotion of their interests. Awareness and publicity in the sense of exposure to public consideration are the means in which certain publics attempt to increase their influence in the political sphere. In this case, before emergent publics, lobby groups or counterpublics consider competing with systems publics, they already compete for influence *within* the aggregate public sphere. The lack of regulation and formalisation in non-institutionalised media such as the Internet means that the public sphere may be unable to filter certain of these opinions.

As Honneth argues, it is important for contemporary critical social theorists to "comprehend both the structures of social domination *and* the social resources for its practical overcoming" (Honneth, 1991: xiv). In this case, the resources for overcoming the burdening of the public sphere with added mechanisms of influence can be found in these non-regulated mechanisms themselves. Deliberation and critical evaluation of opinions can – and should – also take place in virtual public spheres. Such spheres would not in principle have many differences from Habermas's initial conception of coffeehouse publicness, at least in terms of exclusivity, access or regulation. Exchange

of opinions needs to be kept alive, even if publics compete for political influence. The profusion of new publics, which constitutes an inevitable consequence of social complexity, spurs the profusion of new interests and an increased competition for influence and communicative power. A more complex network of public spheres, which maintains close communicative ties with civil society associations, would be able to manage this plurality of opinions and interests as long as the aforementioned mechanisms of public monitoring of decision-making and of deliberation at a higher level of systems publics function effectively.

7.4.3 The Power of the Mass-Media and Power as Authority

Certainly, in light of the crucial role and potential of the mass media in citizens' formation of "*considered* political opinion" (Habermas, 2006a: 414, emphasis in the original), the power of the media should not be ignored. For any piece of news or opinion presented in the media, alternative interpretations can also be offered "through channels of an intermedia agenda setting" (op.cit.: 421). For this reason, media power is monitored through media regulation, but this is not enough.

"Mediated political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments, and if anonymous audiences grant feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society" (Habermas, 2006a: 411-412).

Again, as Habermas himself notes in his more recent work, public feedback mechanisms are crucial. Habermas argues for the "relative independence" (Habermas, 2006a: 419) of the media from political and economic systems, which would be normatively ideal, however in actual fact it is impossible to achieve. Transparency of procedures, identification of media ownership and a reflexive legal framework governing the media would form the basis of effective public monitoring at all levels – emergent publics, civil society associations and systems publics.

Lastly, power as authority is exercised by the state, administrative institutions or political parties. It also includes Habermas's category of economic power (op.cit.: 418) in the form of large corporations, employers' associations or rotary clubs. Contrary to Foucault's view of power as something that is not owned by anybody but merely flows

in a capillary way in human relations (Foucault, 1980: 96), this type of power is owned and exercised. One of the key purposes of the public sphere is to harness and contest this type of power through: public opinions; a multitude of institutionalised and non-institutionalised public monitoring mechanisms, including the media of mass communication, which function as “feedback loops” (op.cit.: 421); against the backdrop of a lifeworld oriented to critical deliberation for the promotion of public interests.

Despite authoritative forms of power, we must move away from both Foucault’s “monistic concept of power” (Honneth, 1991: 153) and Habermas’s reductionistic concept. Instead, we must consider power as something that can be utilised in communicative action if certain conditions are fulfilled in terms of enriching the lifeworld and of establishing closer relations between publics, publics and the state, and publics, the state and the media. An understanding of relations of power is needed for public sphere communication and political change (cf. Flyvbjerg: 2001). Only in this way can “the peculiar reflexivity of a public sphere that allows *all* participants to reconsider what they perceive as public opinion” (Habermas, 2006a: 419) be safeguarded.

7.5 Challenging Communicative Rationality as a Model of Public Deliberation : Normative Implications

The issue of the normative value of reason in the public sphere points to the quality of democratic discussion. The way this is determined, as well as the ultimate decision as to what should be qualified as reasonable and what should be rejected cannot easily be theoretically mapped, because it raises empirical questions on the actual practices of deliberation (Outhwaite, 1995: 144). Bohman states that citizens use practical reason cooperatively in a common public sphere and deliberative institutions (Bohman, 1996: 184). In particular, political deliberation needs to employ certain aspects of practical reason according to Bohman’s argument: It needs to be *pragmatic* in the sense of achieving practical ends, *moral* in the sense of fairness in conflict and *ethical* in terms of cultural values and identities (op.cit.: 175, my emphasis). In a framework of plurality of reasons with the introduction of new actors in the political sphere (media, large corporations, lobbies, quangos), these preconditions seem to be rather ambivalent. Practical ends, morality and ethics can be challenged and adapted in contemporary societies and using them as guidelines for political deliberation may lead to additional

confusion in terms of clearly defining morality, for instance, before debating on a controversial issue of public interest. As Outhwaite observes, there are many cases in which people are faced with a pragmatic choice to be made between alternatives, which leads to negotiation and compromise (Outhwaite, 1995: 143) – or as Habermas would argue, bargaining (Habermas, 1996b: 338). This process would eventually lead to “an accommodation (*Vereinbarung*) which balances out conflicting interests” (Outhwaite, 1995: 143-144). Yet the fairness with which such negotiations and compromises are carried out is indeed a moral question (*ibid.*), and morality in Bohman’s set of preconditions is volatile. In the same way as it is difficult to establish whether an argument is reasonable, despite the set of conditions in the communicative rationality matrix, it is as difficult to establish whether a compromise is fair and moral. Instead, fairness should be determined through different criteria, in the framework of a general public interest and open to scrutiny through different moral codes, publics and law.

In this framework of public reason as an aggregate form of “a plethora of at best loosely connected and fragmented discourses” (Bohman, 1996: 179), a socially coherent critical evaluation of opinions and argumentation becomes increasingly difficult. Opinions and reasons need to be contextualised and thematised according to the principle of “collective opinion-formation” (Bohman, 1996: 180). This would ensure fairness (hence morality, according to Bohman’s rationale) through including “minority opinions” (Bohman, 1996: 194) and making them public without any fear, prejudice or ignorance (*ibid.*). For this reason, communication should not be subjectless and anonymous. This constitutes a necessary process in debate in order to establish the existence of bias or of a different moral or ethical code. Fairness is in this way protected, not risked. Irrespective of moral codes, inclusion of more diverse voices in public debate (cf. Habermas, 1998) is a positive step towards fairness in the sense of the possibility of convergence of different moral codes so that the end result is considered translatable as being moral or fair.

Before determining how such a plethora of public reasons is filtered in the public sphere and formalised institutions for decision-making, it is necessary to examine ethics and the public sphere more closely. In early bourgeois conceptions of the public sphere, ethics in terms of cultural values and identities, according to Bohman, would have been more or less standardised and uniform. This is not the case in contemporary societies. The lifeworld is constantly being enriched with new experiences and cultures, which

means that ethical values are challenged and redefined amidst the flux and new connectivities of globalisation. Ethical and unethical, and similarly reasonable and unreasonable, are increasingly difficult to establish. Religion is a case in point, which still occupies a predominant place in the public sphere; it cannot be 'bracketed', disregarded, or obey the same principles as other public issues. Cultural and religious values are acquiring an ever superior and more powerful status in public debate, pushing the 'force of the better argument' to the background. Issues of political correctness with regard to religious matters are a good example, and inclusion of such caveats in public debate is as important as it is controversial. Indeed, public spheres should in principle evolve in line with the society in which they operate, especially in cases when such issues move from the social to the political sphere, to the legal sphere (e.g. Holocaust denial) and dominate the political agenda. These developments bring up the issue of the public sphere and religion, in particular with regard to the public use of reason in religious matters that find their way into the public domain.

Habermas explored this issue, which is characteristic of contemporary multicultural democratic societies, in his 2006 essay *Religion in the Public Sphere*. His guiding question was how the constitutional separation of state and church influences the role of religion in civil society and the political public sphere, particularly in citizens' opinion and will-formation (Habermas, 2006b: 3). Habermas draws on Rawls's "values of public reason" (Rawls, cited in Habermas, 2006b: 5) to reaffirm that in secular states legitimacy of political decisions derives from justification "in the light of generally accessible reasons [...] vis-à-vis religious and non-religious citizens, and citizens of different confessions" (ibid.). So ideally, on the one hand, the standards of reasoned argumentation should also apply to religious issues when these enter public debate and are processed through public communication channels such as public spheres, civil society and systems publics. On the other hand, Habermas argues that separation of church and state stipulates that the state should be impartial vis-à-vis religious communities and not privileging one side at the cost of another (Habermas, 2006b: 6). For Habermas, it is the constitution and the rule of law that should supersede and govern all citizens, irrespective of their religious affiliations or convictions. He argues that prior to everything else, religious citizens accept the "the constitution of the secular state for good reasons" (op.cit.: 9), since religious homogeneity does not exist in contemporary democratic societies.

Yet the discourses of major religions have “pre-political origins” (op.cit.: 18), which means that they are not applicable to deliberative criteria. In Islam and Christianity, for instance, deliberation about fundamental religious issues within the same religious or dogmatic system may in some cases be discouraged. When such issues enter the public domain, the purpose of debate changes. Religious groups, minorities or majorities, behave in the public domain as counterpublics, seeking their voice to be heard in the general public domain and for their interests to be safeguarded through established institutions. While religious beliefs and religious freedom are protected by Constitutions in the same way as minority rights, what distinguishes religious groups from counterpublics is that religious beliefs are sacrosanct for those who espouse them and cannot be changed or challenged by other groups without impinging on their freedom of religion. Habermas supports an attitude of agreeing to disagree, in line with constitutional principles (Habermas, 2006b: 12).

Such containment is difficult to maintain in cases of direct conflict, such as the ban on hijabs in French schools or the banning of minarets in Switzerland. In most cases, controversies arise when religious and public spheres use different communication codes in the Luhmannian sense. For this reason, Habermas urges religious citizens to “translate” (op.cit.: 9-12) their arguments into a secular language that is accessible to all citizens to give them all the opportunity to participate in debate. Again, what is presupposed in such a process is that “religious as well as secular citizens already have undergone complementary learning processes” (op.cit.: 16), which would avoid polarisation of worldviews as well as the emergence of extremist views. This connects with the dynamic, emergent regeneration of the lifeworld in response to changed conditions in society. As argued above, education is crucial in this respect, as well as assistance by institutions, the media and religious groups themselves in this process of “translation” (op.cit.: 9-12) of religious into secularised public discourses. This can only be achieved if the purpose of such public debate about religious issues is clarified as a generalised public interest that upholds constitutional principles.

The above brief analysis of religious matters that enter public debate can apply to broader ethical issues and has serious implications for the normative status of reason in Habermas’s public sphere. Contemporary societies not only have diverse publics with diverse reasons and discourses, but also with different moral and ethical codes some of which remain fundamentally unchallenged and in certain cases constitutionally

protected. A certain form of “bounded rationality” (Bohman, 1996: 156) results from such interdependence and systems-like differentiation. Habermas acknowledges that such a newly emerging “multi-dimensional concept of reason” (Habermas, 2006b: 16) is no longer “fixated on its reference to the objective world but becomes self-critically aware of its boundaries” (ibid.). He also acknowledges that post-metaphysical thought eschews rationalist presumptions of determining the rationality of religious doctrines (op.cit.: 17). He compares religion to aesthetics from the point of view that they can “only be circled but not penetrated by philosophical reflection” (ibid.) and rational discursive thought. Communicative reason in this case is ineffective, which leaves law and the constitution (institutionalised procedures) as the decisive criterion for decision-making.

As regards the qualitative criteria of public deliberation, Bohman’s conditions for public deliberation examined above (pragmatic, moral and ethical - Bohman, 1996: 175) do not suffice. Neither does Rawls’s original distinction between public and non-public reasons, as these are no longer useful in determining the quality of political debate, because of the increasing dissolution of boundaries between private and public. Civil society belongs neither to the private nor to the economic sphere, and large corporations increasingly contribute to public debate as influential actors. A different approach to the public/non-public distinction should be made according to whether political deliberation is oriented towards the public interest or towards private interests. This would include ethical and religious issues that cannot be resolved on the basis of communicative rationality principles – intersubjectivity, argumentation, consensus and understanding.

In addition, argumentation in a reworked version of the public sphere implies a further criterion. Public debate needs to be informed and “considered” (Habermas, 2006a: 414), in the sense of availability of knowledge in order to treat a specific issue in an informed manner. Functional differentiation in contemporary societies has given rise to more complex issues entering public deliberation. Examples of this include GMOs, stem-cell research, and even religious issues. None of the qualitative criteria for public deliberation examined above would be effective in achieving a balanced, fair and constructive debate, if participants do not have sufficient knowledge of respective issues, specialised or not. Again, access to relevant sources of information is key, especially in cases where expert knowledge is vital. As argued previously, the media, NGOs or lobby groups may offer erroneous or ambivalent information to the public in

their attempts to guide them towards a particular opinion and ultimately influence will-formation. Moreover, the Internet, which is increasingly being used as a source of information and communication, is in many cases unreliable due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation of its content. Informed debate presupposes that citizens have the critical capacity to distinguish impartial and biased sources of information and knowledge.

The importance of “considered” debate is also raised by Habermas in his discussion of empirical applications of his normative theory (2006a). Habermas uses an experimental study by Neblo on “the expected impact of deliberation on the formation of considered political opinion” (Habermas, 2006a: 414, emphasis in the original). This study investigated how trial groups learn through deliberation on political issues in the following way: participants were firstly asked for their opinions on key political issues; 5 weeks later, they were asked to debate these questions in a group and reach collective decisions; 5 weeks after that, they were asked again to offer their individual opinions. The resulting individual opinions were found to be “quite different” (ibid.) from their initial opinions prior to deliberation. According to the study, this change reflected “improved levels of information and broader perspectives on a clearer and more specific definition of issues” (ibid.). There was also “increasing trust expressed in the procedural legitimacy of fair argumentation” (ibid.). Habermas uses the example of other similar studies that offer empirical evidence for “the cognitive potential of political deliberation” (ibid.). While there is still research to be done in this field, the empirical evidence that Habermas cites in his paper demonstrates that political deliberation has significant learning potential for participants. In short, the more we deliberate, the more knowledge we acquire, which lowers the possibility of “polarisation of opinions” (ibid.). These findings are in agreement with Habermas’s conception of communicative rationality as something that emerges and develops through communication as opposed to an inherent capacity of humans (Habermas, 1996a, in Cooke, 1998: 315).

It is important to note that the stipulation of informed debate does not imply that participants who are not adequately informed about a certain issue should be excluded. This stipulation points more to the availability and opportunity given to participants to inform themselves of key socio-political issues so that they can make informed decisions about ways in which to pressure authority for change. Certainly, awareness of major issues is, ideally, the duty of responsible citizens, however it is the task of the

state, the media, civil society and pressure groups to make knowledge and sources of information available to citizens. Participants who are not adequately informed or even who are misinformed about certain issues could actually benefit from participation in public debate in developing more “considered” (Habermas, 2006a: 414) and balanced views, as the above empirical studies have shown. The criterion of informed debate, therefore, is not elitist, as it does not imply the exclusion of participants with limited knowledge or experience. It is more directed to bodies outside the public sphere with the duty of making knowledge available to the public, so that citizens formulate considered opinions and make informed decisions. The requirement therefore is for informed debate, rather than informed citizens.

As the “last great rationalist” (McCarthy, in Habermas, 1984: viii), Habermas’s goal with the conception of his complex model was to foster conditions of public deliberation, both at grassroots and at institutional level, “that at least make it more likely that political decisions will be based on reasons that would correspond to those that would emerge from a discourse under ideal conditions” (Bohman, 1996: 181). Despite Habermas’s intentions, however, his model of rationality overlooks the state of contemporary overcomplex societies that involve a multitude of reasons, ethical and cultural codes, as well as plurality of sources of information such as traditional and electronic media, lobby groups and increasingly complex administrative institutions, including the state. Socio-political complexity means that issues that are put forward for discussion in the public domain cannot be strictly separated into political, or public, and religious, or ethical, for instance, because in most cases the two are intertwined. Law and constitutions represent formalised regulatory mechanisms, which do not cover all aspects of public life, let alone deliberation. It becomes clear that reason in the form of communicative rationality can no longer be the normative medium of debate in contemporary public spheres, at least not in Habermas’s terms.

Instead, this thesis suggests a set of conditions of political deliberation in the framework of a reconceptualised network of public spheres proposed in 7.2.5 and 7.3. These would follow principles of practical reason but would neither be centred on reason nor would they hypostatise it as the normative medium or prerequisite of debate. These conditions are: Bohman’s stipulations of political deliberation as pragmatic, moral and ethical, in line with certain aspects of practical reason; the inclusion of bargaining and negotiating procedures in political debate, as a necessary mechanism of forming balanced opinions

and reaching balanced decisions; the requirement of informed debate for purposes of “considered” (Habermas, 2006a: 414) public opinion and ultimately informed decision-making. This shift in the conceptual role and structure of reason also denotes a shift in the normative core of Habermas’s model, which is examined in the next section.

7.6 Redefining Normativity

This section questions the value of Habermas’s counterfactually normative theory and proposes a more grounded view of normativity, which is more closely connected with emergent communication from the grassroots. This view follows the reconceptualised model of the public sphere proposed above as a response to socio-political challenges and increasing complexity. The guiding argument is that it is still possible to make Habermas’s model empirically plausible if we consider the above revisions. A normative theory can indeed be reworked without denying its normative force, but this would essentially result in a different conception of normativity. As the core concepts of the public sphere, reason and power, had to be reconceptualised in light of increased socio-political complexity and change, the notion and status of the normative also needs to be reconsidered. A concept of the public sphere comprising emergent and systems publics, including parliaments and other opinion-forming institutions, cannot have the same normative criteria and emancipatory potential as its earlier conceptualisations. These involved mostly face-to-face deliberation, or communication via traditional mass media, in a political sphere where public and private interests, rational and irrational arguments were more clearly defined. In contemporary complex public spheres, parliaments, courts, large corporations do not have the same agenda or share the same normative role as emergent publics. Habermas himself acknowledges the need for a different understanding of normativity in light of the intertwining processes of communicative generation of legitimate power and “political systems acquisition of legitimacy” (Habermas, 1996b: 483). Normative theory does not have to be non-pragmatic and belong to the sphere of the ideal and unrealistic. It should maintain its guiding role without claiming moral or ethical supremacy without detaching itself from the realm of the empirical. This version of normativity is developed in this section.

In response to critics dismissing his public sphere theory as utopian, Habermas attempted to refine his concept of normativity. As Honneth points out, Habermas initially maintained that “science is a pure undertaking, freed from practical interests”

(Habermas, 1965, cited in Honneth, 1991: 203). Equally, in *Between Facts and Norms* he states that “the concepts of the political public sphere and civil society [...] are not mere normative postulates but have empirical relevance” (Habermas, 1996b: 373). In the same work, he clarifies that the essentially discursive character of public opinion and will formation implies that “we cannot hypostatise the normative content of general presuppositions of rational discourse into an ideal model of purely communicative social relations” (op.cit.: 322). What is normative, according to this rationale, is not the public sphere as an overall concept but instead the presuppositions of critical-rational discourse that should take place in the public sphere. Indeed, Habermas insists that even though “no complex society would ever correspond to the model of purely communicative social relations” (op.cit.: 326), we must make the presuppositions put forward in his theory as if such ideal conditions actually existed (Habermas, 1995: 164).¹¹⁸

This bounded normativity in Habermas’s theory, which is against the conceptualisation of a “superior, comprehensive reason” (Habermas, 1990b: 305), but in favour of normative *criteria* for rationality in communicative action (cf. 4.2.4 of this thesis), is impracticable. It is not even useful as a “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996b: 326), as examined previously.¹¹⁹ Habermas himself acknowledges that this epistemologically hybrid model of normative and non-normative conceptualisations of social practices “assumes a society of law and politics and projects the democratic idea of self-organisation onto society as a whole” (ibid.). Furthermore, Bohman argues that Habermas’s methodological fiction of pure(ly) communicative sociation, which suggests a society without political power or institutions, “also suggests that there will be no need for democracy either” (Bohman, 1996: 167). Nonetheless, Bohman claims

¹¹⁸ Also consider: “Communicative language use still commits participants to strong idealisations. By orienting themselves to unconditional validity claims and presupposing each other’s accountability, interlocutors aim beyond contingent and merely local contexts. But these counterfactual presuppositions are rooted in the facticity of everyday practices. As long as communication and communicative action, which reproduce the lifeworld, are to prevail, interlocutors cannot but undertake such idealizations” (Habermas, 2005: 17-18).

¹¹⁹ The inadequacies of Habermas’s “methodological fiction” are considered in 4.2.4, 5.1.4 and 6.3.2 of this thesis.

that Habermas's abstraction of his communicative form of sociation as a methodological tool is useful "for gradually reintroducing "actual" social conditions of complexity and pluralism into the experiment until the facts of modern social complexity are reached" (op.cit.: 166). To achieve this and make this methodological tool indeed useful, its normative role needs to be reconsidered.

Before examining an alternative normative role, it is important to consider whether normativity is simply a legacy of Habermas's original conceptualisation of the public sphere. It becomes clear that Habermas's attempts to justify the normative criteria governing critical-rational debate in his public sphere theory as methodologically useful have not been successful. His "reticence about practical issues of political organisation" (Outhwaite, 1995: 154) still undermines the operability of his theory. Despite several revisions and reconsiderations of core aspects of his theory,¹²⁰ including clarifications to his concept of normativity, he seems to insist on the counterfactually normative and emancipatory potential of his public sphere theory.¹²¹ This should not lead us to dismiss the normative role of Habermas's public sphere in its entirety, however, and opt for the opposite extreme of "objectivistic approaches which filter out all normative aspects" (ibid.).

A purely descriptive theory is useful in defining, explaining or anticipating actually existing practices from which paradigms or hypotheses may derive. As regards political discourse in democratic societies, however, this must take place in a normative framework that would serve as a set of guidelines. The problem with Habermas's

¹²⁰ Note Habermas's revisions with regard to the following issues: from a single public sphere to multiple public spheres, inclusion of more diverse publics, clarification of relations with state mechanisms and civil society, enriching his initial theory with the distinction between 'weaker' and 'stronger publics', institutionalised publics, issues previously considered as private such as religion, clarification of the role of law in the public sphere and in politics in general.

¹²¹ Critics have attempted to attribute Habermas's insistence on normative presuppositions for public debate on personal experiences of 'the horrors of unreason' in Nazi Germany. See "The Theologian of Talk", interview with J.Habermas by Prof. M. Stephens, published on the Los Angeles Times on 23/10/1994:

http://articles.latimes.com/1994-10-23/magazine/tm-53927_1_jurgen-habermas/10

model, as has been extensively argued, is twofold: firstly, it is too detached from the actual practice of political deliberation and secondly, his updated model (1996b) combines normative and non-normative spheres in his public sphere network and assumes that they all abide to the same normative rules. Indeed, even though in *Theory of Communicative Action* the conceptual boundaries between the non-normative, strategic realm of the system and the normative sphere of the lifeworld were too strict, in the model presented in *Between Facts and Norms*, informal and institutionalised publics, civil society and administrative bodies became intermeshed with the normative public sphere in a way that normative and non-normative became almost indistinguishable. Moreover, in the model proposed here, the normative can track or match different social practices and views as these emerge. In Habermas's traditional view of a normative theory that is blind to the contingencies of the media, competing rationalities or reasons and social meanings and other 'colonising' effects, the reconceptualised public sphere matrix that is presented here does not have emancipatory potential. In the same way as Habermas attempted to "combine normative and empirical analyses of social practices" (Bohman, 1996: 176) in order to make his theory more robust, however, it is equally important to rethink the status of the normative in light of the circumstances of social overcomplexity and increasing uncertainty.

As a rule, normative theory has to do more than be prescriptive. It must not be detached from practical life concerns or from contemporary issues; otherwise it runs the risk of becoming self-referential. Kavoulakos states that in political philosophy, "the strict universality of theory demands the removal of all the historically relative, empirical-casual elements and the persistence on a clearly typical-universal view" (Kavoulakos, 2008: 238). A reconceptualised theory of the public sphere needs to move away from such sterile positions. A theory such as that of the public sphere, which includes non-static concepts such as communicative reason, the lifeworld, civil society, the media, informal publics and publicity itself, needs to be brought down to earth and become more connected to the everyday contemporary world, which is constantly evolving. In the face of new challenges such as multicultural societies with different moral and ethical norms, commercialised societies with changing values and ensuing legal and constitutional modifications to accommodate such radical changes, the purpose and role of this toned-down conception of normativity needs to be justified.

As Outhwaite points out, there are political sociologists who have “given up on normative theories of democracy in favour of more “realistic” pluralist, economic or systems theories” (Outhwaite, 1995: 146). He uses Elster’s model, which includes the distinction between bargaining and arguing (*ibid.*), as one example of this shift away from normativity. Still, processes of arguing and bargaining, which constitute an integral part of political deliberation and therefore should form part of the revised model, should be governed by (detranscendentalised normative) criteria. In particular, the conditions for public political deliberation proposed in the previous section (pragmatic, ethical, moral, including negotiation procedures, oriented to public interest and benefit, informed debate) have a particular normative role as a dynamic normativity constantly tested against shifting social practice and not locked in time.

Such norms do not “possess conclusive validity” (Honneth, 1991: 281), as is the case with Habermas’s universal standards of rationality. Their role is to go beyond the contingent. As Rehg argues, a solely communicative solution to all conflicts is practically impossible (Rehg, in Habermas, 1996b: xv) if it is not anchored in “the rules of compulsory laws backed by sanctions” (*op.cit.*: xi). Likewise, “mutual understanding of subjectively intended meanings” in public deliberation “cannot be artificially produced in administrative ways, but can only be achieved communicatively in a continuously renewed understanding” (Honneth, 1991: 224). In other words, the public sphere as an emergent communication space on one hand and law, systems publics and public monitoring mechanisms as normative, regulative spheres of socio-political pursuits on the other hand, must function in tandem because they are mutually vital and inextricably linked. Absolute, binding normativity only exists in law, which is both positive and compelling (Habermas, 1996b: 58). Communicative modes of sociation are governed by a looser version of normativity, which tracks practice and acquires reflexivity (Grant). This type of normativity, advocated here for the status of a reconceptualised public sphere, does not bestow on its respective theory a meta-status. After all, social norms are merely “institutional embodiments of communicatively-produced knowledge” (Honneth, 1991: 259).

In addition, post-systemic conceptions of society and communication have brought to the surface the increasing uncertainty that accompanies overcomplexity (*cf.* 7.2.1). As Grant argues, “if all we communicated were certainties (intentions, [...] a common horizon of understanding), then [...] communication would no longer be necessary”

(Grant, 2007: 106). Uncertainty is inherent in communication and is manifested by “mounting interconnectedness” (op.cit: 174) in a “world communication society” (ibid.). The changing structure of the public sphere, as well as its enhancement with new actors and institutions as well as the media, trigger even greater contingencies and uncertain communication in the public sphere. This cannot but reduce its original counterfactually normative status to a less strict normative status. Idealising presuppositions cannot be made in light of such circumstances without risking crossing the fine line between counterfactuality and impracticality. A presupposition of universal communicative rationality with emancipatory potential is of no use, if the task is to work towards an empirically plausible public sphere.

As noted in 7.1.2, the revised notion of porous public spheres masks an implicit attempt by Habermas to introduce functionalistic elements in his theory in order to make it more empirically relevant. Habermas makes a more pronounced attempt in his later works to justify the counterfactual normativity of his theory by reiterating that all these idealising conditions constitute a methodological fiction with empirical relevance. He attempted to demonstrate this relevance in his paper on the impact of normative theory on empirical research (2006a). The aim of Habermas’s paper was to “build a bridge between normative theory and political reality” (Habermas, 2006a: 412). However, instead of using his complex model of communicative rationality as the basis for empirical findings, he used a simplified version of normative political theory. The empirical findings on learning or changing attitudes through deliberation, for example, were based on a set of principles such as the private autonomy of citizens, inclusion of free and equal citizens in the political community and an independent public sphere as an intermediary between state and society (ibid.) – not on his communicative rationality model specifically. A “bridge between normative theory and political reality” (ibid.) was indeed built, albeit not on the basis of *his* normative theory. Despite the usefulness of Habermas’s theory in “analysing the forms of integration in late-capitalist societies” (Honneth, 1991: 202), its function as a normative theory, as it stands, is non-applicable, even as a methodological fiction. For this reason, this thesis proposes stripping Habermas’s public sphere theory from idealising presuppositions and introducing concepts with a detranscendentalised form of normativity, empirically plausible, connected to emergent communication practices. The key points that would remain in a revised model and would withstand the above theoretical and empirical criticisms, as well as the modified points, are encapsulated below.

7.7 Conclusion : the Contribution to the Normative Project of Public Sphere Theory

This chapter has examined the main points in reconstructing Habermas's theory and his normative project. Firstly, the analysis of internal and socio-political complexity led to a redefinition of public sphere structure. The more diverse and agonistic the public sphere is, the more difficult it will be for mechanisms of authoritative power such as the state, media or large corporations to take control or mislead it. A unified public sphere without divisions, disagreement or struggles is unthinkable in a pluralist democracy. Having said that, social struggle should not be viewed as "the exclusive basis of a social theory" (Honneth, 1991: 174).

Secondly, Habermas's distinction of public spheres into formal and informal is problematic for two reasons. It involves a strict functional separation of decision-making and deliberative responsibilities, and it places too much trust in institutionalised publics with regard to will formation. Habermas's implicit advocacy of over-institutionalisation and over-formalisation of procedures undermines the core of public sphere theory, which remains unchanged: a spontaneous, diffuse and diverse network of publics. The spontaneity of non-institutionalised publics needs to be safeguarded in order for these publics to generate opinions, provide feedback, challenge authority and manifest their social solidarity. Excessive formalisation of procedures and meaningless bureaucratic tendencies should not penetrate non-institutionalised forms of publicness. To solve these problems, Habermas's distinction of informal/formal, stronger/weaker publics is rejected and instead the categories of emergent and systems publics are proposed.

Systems publics, according to the argument of this thesis, would share will-formation with emergent publics in the form of the wider, unelected and unappointed public, through already established monitoring mechanisms of public feedback. Such mechanisms already exist in certain countries, but they should be streamlined and incorporated in the public sphere model as essential means for legitimising decisions. Only if decisions proposed by the competent publics are fed back to the wider public for feedback and ratification can they be legitimised as truly deliberative. This would avoid the perception of the wider public that its contribution to political decisions is not as

important as that of systems publics. It would ultimately cultivate relations of trust between the public and administrative bodies to encourage further public participation.

Additionally, the public sphere as an aggregate concept is undergoing constant redefinition of boundaries and is being enriched by new publics and counterpublics. Socio-political and economic developments since Habermas's original conception of the public sphere have resulted in a network of public spheres with multiple external influences and interconnections. These include the civil society, informal and formal media, which should cooperate more closely with the public sphere in terms of forming networks of generating dialogue. They also include lobby groups and other forms of pressure groups with a clear agenda that does not necessarily claim to promote public or common interest; large economic corporations that promote purely economic interests and influence the state and powerful individuals to a great degree; an increasingly influential technical sphere with specialised discourses. More importantly, they include the media of mass communication that are both traditionally hierarchical and heterarchical (cf. the 2011 protests in Morocco, Egypt, Lybia in particular). Any normative conception of the public sphere "must now include an understanding of various communication media in social and political processes" (Grant, 2007: 174). Their main roles and functions are to facilitate public communication through providing a platform for debate, as well as to function as filters for agenda setting. The criteria used for such filtering processes are outlined below. The major caveat with regard to the media, however, is the fact that they can never be characterised as independent. As argued in 7.3.3, media of mass communication always belong and are answerable to someone, from the state to big corporations to private individuals. This includes forms of new media, however their use can be subversive and capillary.

Relations of power in the revised public sphere model proposed in this thesis are not as polarised and uni-dimensional as in Habermas's theory. Power is not something that can, or should, be set aside, avoided or ignored as detrimental to debate. Instead, it manifests itself in terms of conflict, influence through negotiation mechanisms or socio-economic clout in the face of the government or the media. A pragmatic and purposeful model of the public sphere should include an understanding of these multiple forms of power and their relation with the public sphere both within systems and emergent publics and between them, where emergent interests become generalized. The public sphere should benefit from opportunities to use power in all its forms for opinion- and

will-formation. Forms of power are there to be utilised, not bracketed; in cases where such forms of power are in direct confrontation with the public sphere, they should be managed through mechanisms of public monitoring discussed above. The power and influence of the media in particular make it an excellent platform for smaller publics, minority or counter-publics. More organised public spheres and civil society associations have media strategists managing the latter's influence to their advantage. The same applies to institutionalised or simply larger publics. Smaller publics may coalesce with them or use them as a platform for the promotion of their interests into the public agenda.

As regards power differentials in communication, instead of disregarding them in favour of the force of the better argument, as Habermas contends, this thesis argues that they should be acknowledged and integrated. Power differentials in terms of socio-economic status or other hierarchical and heterarchical forms should be contextualised, brought to the surface and constitute an integral part of opinions and arguments.

Additionally, multiple public spheres with multiple and diverse participants in debate result in multiple reasons, such as different religious or ethical codes, corporate interests, minority groups. Habermas's original model of communicative rationality, as well as his theory of society as system and lifeworld is out of touch with these developments, even if it is counterfactual and even if it is merely intended as a "methodological fiction" (Habermas 1996b: 323; 326). The lifeworld as a separate concept, representing both the "horizon-forming context of an action situation" (Habermas, 1987: 137) and the shared repository of cultural knowledge, beliefs and assumptions (cf. 4.3) is useful in the revised public sphere model proposed here. It can be enriched by the emergence of social actors by way of fostering a deliberative and critical attitude to political issues, incorporating principles of public deliberation and the importance of public participation in education, as well as cultivating an attitude of tolerance and respect towards other moral and ethical codes in public debate. Still, in the model suggested here, the lifeworld would not constitute the privileged space of the normative that is under attack by the strategic and technocratic system. The schema of society as system and lifeworld is overly simplistic and serves little empirical purpose. The boundaries between public and private, consensus-orientated and strategic-orientated, normative and non-normative, are distorted and becoming increasingly porous.

In such a context, argumentation, consensus and understanding as conceptual components of communicative rationality risk denying communication dynamics. Argumentation is infiltrated with power relations, negotiation procedures of “bargaining and arguing” (Elster) and specialised discourses. Publics need to be agonistic, they need to question, clarify, justify, contest and challenge opinions and information fed to them by various sources, if social emergence is to be taken seriously. This is not only because of communication uncertainties but also because of the increasing diversity of participants of all forms attempting to mediate public opinion. Instead of presupposing that all participants work towards a common interest, as Habermas suggests, we must instead presuppose that participants aim at promoting their own (or their group’s) private interests. Only in this way can participants truly adopt a critical attitude to debate and communicatively seek the optimal solutions for the promotion of common (or generalisable) interest. While Luhmann considers understanding to be a selection process performed by the system, it is argued here that this selection process is performed by the participants themselves in a collective manner. Understanding is therefore viewed as collective procedure, procedurally similar to Habermas’s original conception, which is necessary for opinion formation and further argumentation. The process is agonistic – in and between publics – in the sense of promotion of public interests and the contestation of authority.

Within this revised public sphere model, the proposed conditions for public political deliberation are as follows. Firstly, Bohman’s three conditions of political debate are adopted, namely the requirement that debate is pragmatic, ethical in the sense of respect of different cultures and identities, and moral (Bohman, 1996: 175). In this way, institutionalised publics and the state can have a clear roadmap to reaching a solution to a particular issue, with the amendment of laws, adoption of new laws or structural changes in administration as a recursive process. This condition is becoming increasingly relevant in contemporary multicultural societies where such issues are also legally codified. Moral refers to fairness in conflict, which also alludes to opportunities for equal participation and transparency of procedures. Secondly, debate has to be informed for the formation of considered public opinion. This condition is not aimed at being elitist and exclude uninformed participants from debate. Instead, it refers to access to information, communication forums, government papers and to availability of information in the media, so that citizens have the opportunity to inform themselves of

salient issues and argue about them in public spheres. Debate needs to be informed as a rule, however uninformed citizens should also be encouraged to participate in order to enrich their lifeworld. Finally, bargaining and negotiating procedures are also an integral part of debate, which is neither based on the force of the better argument nor on pure reason. The ultimate goal is balanced, informed public opinion formation and decision-making, as well as effective monitoring of proposed decisions in and between publics.

With the concept and structure of reason altered, the normative character of publics must also change. The previously rigid concept of rationality resulted in a rigid conception of normativity, despite Habermas's insistence for the contrary. Counterfactual normativity is more pronounced in Habermas's communicative rationality model and advocated in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1996b: 4) as an epistemological principle. But when it is largely based on "historically relativised use" (Honneth, 1991: 294) of the concepts of the public sphere, system, lifeworld and the media, it becomes contingent as one selection of communication amongst others. Instead of relying on historical accounts of previously glorified and presently degenerated concepts and urge for their regeneration, it is more useful to demarcate a theory with a notion of normativity that is empirically relevant and tied to actually existing practices of emergent communication. The rigidity of Habermas's concepts of rationality and the public sphere as a purely normative space threatened by non-normative forces functions as a barrier to free expression, diversity in communication and communication with bodies outside the public sphere. This is why this thesis advocates a view of normativity that is constructed in the agonistic interplay of citizens and systems.

The challenge for public sphere theory is to reconcile "apparently utopian notions of emancipatory knowledge and practice" with "the grubby reality of self-interested conduct, self-serving instruction and political horse-trading" (Outhwaite, 1995: 137). The intermeshing of normative and non-normative spheres in the public domain with the introduction of new actors such as large corporations, administrative institutions and new media, results in a paradigm, which reflects the overcomplexity of society and increasing social and communicative uncertainty. Despite the empirical challenges and theoretical counter-proposals analysed above, this thesis maintains that public sphere theory has not been entirely crushed.

Chapter 8

Concluding Methodological Reflections

8.0 Meeting the Challenge

This concluding chapter provides a reflexive interrogation of working method, which includes the method's strengths, weaknesses and how these affect the implications and significance of analysis. To this end, the aims of the chapter are twofold: firstly, to offer a critical self-reflection on the methods adopted in the thesis and the results of the comparison between Habermas and his critics, mainly Luhmann and Foucault – but also Fraser, Benhabib, McCarthy and Bohman; secondly, to present an explicit evaluation of the originality and significance of the thesis for communication theory.

8.1 Method of Critical Reconstruction

This thesis constitutes an interdisciplinary theoretical investigation and uses theoretical data in its study of the public sphere and communicative rationality. For this reason, its methodology is a qualitative discussion of bodies of theoretical work. Methodology does not only suggest “research techniques or [...] inferential procedures, but also [...] the epistemological reasons for their choice” (Gebhardt, 1978, cited in Morrow and Brown, 1994: 61, n.2). When there is a theoretical critical study of the normative potential of a theory, the need to articulate and justify the methods used is even more crucial. This requires an articulation of epistemological questions and an exploration of new methodological combinations of secondary critiques. Morrow and Brown explain that “the humanities employ distinctive methods” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 4), opting for “knowledge claims [...] as opposed to constructing scientific explanations” (ibid.). Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of this study inevitably results in a “multi-method” approach (op.cit.: 200), within the core methods of synchronic comparative analysis of critical responses to Habermas and diachronic critical reconstruction of Habermas's original works over time. Before examining this methodological approach in detail (8.3), it is necessary to articulate the core methodological strategy of this study. This comprises the following:

- a) critical diachronic reconstruction of Habermas's theory of the public sphere,

- b) critical diachronic reconstruction of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality,
- c) critical reconstruction of these theories' developments and revisions, as well as its main critics,
- d) results of the discussion of antecedents, comparisons and epistemological claims and counter-claims used to reconceptualise the original theory, with implications for the theory of communication and for the normative project of public sphere theory,
- e) reintegration of a new form of normative communicative action into a theory of the public sphere that is up to date.

The rationale behind this core method is, firstly, to separate Habermas's original insights from the vast secondary literature. Even though Habermas's work has paradigm status, his original insights are in some cases swamped by secondary literature - hence the need to separate the critical reconstruction of Habermas's early theory ([1962]1992, 1974) and its subsequent developments in later key works (1987, 1993, 1996, 2001, 2006). This helped to define and critically analyse the theoretical evolution over time of fundamental concepts such as publicity, publicness, public opinion, civil society, lifeworld, public use of reason and communicative rationality (cf. Chapters 2 and 4).

Secondly, this particular method of critical reconstruction integrates the multiple revisions of communicative rationality made by Habermas himself. In particular, it looks at the public use of reason ([1962] 1992b) as the normative project from which Habermas's concept of communicative rationality emerged. In this way, communicative rationality as part of Habermas's theory of communicative action is fed back into public sphere theory in exploring the latter's normative communication contents.

Thirdly, this method brings out the neglect of media in public sphere theory, as well as the gap between normativity and empirical relevance. In particular, the critical reconstruction of Habermas's theory in Chapter 2 (esp. 2.3.5 and 2.5.1) and Chapter 3 (esp. 3.2.4) demonstrates that Habermas has consistently regarded the media as a distorting influence in public communication. In his early theory ([1962] 1992b), he blamed the commercialisation of the press for the deterioration of a "culture-consuming" to "culture-debating public" (Habermas, 1992b: 159; see 2.3 of this thesis). In later works (1993, 1996b), he continued to ignore their potential both as platforms for

communication between public spheres and, most importantly, as public spheres themselves. As regards the disparity between normativity and empirical relevance, this is demonstrated in the aporias of the normative claims of Habermas's public sphere (3.2), as well as in 5.1.4 in the critical reconstruction of Habermas's concept of society as System and Lifeworld. The results of the analysis of this disparity and of the counterfactuality of Habermas's theoretical model are used in 7.5 and 7.6 in reworking normativity.

8.2 Research Methods of Main Critics

The thesis critically reconstructs the theories of the main critics of Habermas's public sphere theory. The critics selected – mainly Luhmann, Foucault, but also McCarthy, Fraser, Benhabib and Bohman – have canonical status in their own right and are largely responsible for framing the critical reception of Habermas's work. In this sense, their selection makes a claim to some level of representativity. The rationale for selecting the contributions of these critics to Habermas's theory is explicated in detail in 7.2. The broad range of sources is selected with a view to integrating different approaches to public sphere theory and thus forming a rounded re-interpretation of the theory's communication contents. In order to establish this re-interpretation, this section focuses on the methods adopted by Habermas's main critics in their own analyses and examines their strengths and weaknesses. This would help establish the connection between theory and method, as well as the methodological implications of this critical reconstruction.

8.2.1 Luhmann: Systemic Method of Functional Analysis

Luhmann's social systems theory adopts a method of functional analysis that is based on observation as opposed to action (cf. 5.3.6). Here, society consists of social systems and their environments, which are not defined in terms of human subjects but in terms of communications (Luhmann, 2002: 156; 169; cf. 5.2.1). Systems' role is to self-reproduce (autopoiesis) through communication, to maintain their boundaries and observe other systems and themselves (self-reference). Luhmann's functional method is therefore distinguished by its "unit of social analysis" (Banakar and Travers, 2005: 198), which is communication instead of social action. His approach is one of abstraction, systematic categorisation and "thick" (op.cit.: 54) descriptive analysis of a

complex theory of social systems in order to produce “radically accurate theoretical concepts” (op.cit.: 55) of complexity, self-reference, meaning and systems in general.

This method results in the development of a dense, precise, well-structured and succinct theory. The method is also self-referential in the sense that all its concepts and arguments are centred on a society composed of systems and their environments, in which anything that does not serve the systems’ survival and autopoiesis through complexity management and boundary redefinitions through meaning (*Sinn*) is ignored or rejected. As a result, reason is regarded merely as one of many systemic codes and is rejected in favour of function, which ensures system survival (cf. 5.3.4). In this respect, Held points out that on Luhmann’s “level of systems analysis a theory and methodology [can] be found which is adequate to the rational control of society” (Held, 1990: 456, n.24). Indeed, Luhmann’s strict functional method is fundamental in an often counterfactual critique of Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality as a regulative ideal and of a public sphere largely based on rational as opposed to functional (strategic/instrumental) deliberation. It is based on this method that Luhmann can make his case against rationality, in arguing the following: firstly, that “the real danger of society is systems overload” (ibid.) as opposed to the colonisation of the lifeworld (Habermas) by overcomplex systems (Bohman); secondly, that the “administrative system must not be required to respond to participatory input, since democracy is no longer rational” (Held, 1990: 456, n.24) and thirdly that human input is not relevant in systemic communication (Luhmann).

Luhmann’s epistemological counterpoints to Habermas’s communication theory are: a) an observer-dependent and subject-free theory that does not consider humans as elements of social systems, as opposed to Habermas’s communicative action theory based on human communication in an intersubjective lifeworld; b) a view of rationality as merely a functional code of certain systems for their survival, in direct contrast to Habermas’s normative conception; c) a rejection of consensus as fatal to systems’ survival, since systems maintain and reproduce themselves through communication and conflict; d) an essentially functionalist view of society, where *Öffentlichkeit* is a site of social self-reflection and systemic observation.

Luhmann’s systemic method of functional analysis is useful because of its succinct grounding of concepts and its distinct separation from Habermas’s reason-based public

sphere theory. The boundaries of Luhmann's theory and method are clear: systems integration, based on autopoiesis and self-reference, is "independent of social integration" (ibid.), based on (human) critical-rational communication in the lifeworld (Habermas). This lack of ambiguity, which grounds Luhmann's approach and makes it "radically accurate" (Banakar and Travers, 2005: 54-55) results in a more easily 'digested' theory, in stark contrast to Habermas's arduous formulations and less clear-cut arguments.

That said, the strict functional analysis and self-referential approach to his theory also constitute significant weaknesses in Luhmann's method. It is difficult to critically evaluate Luhmann's theory for two reasons. Firstly, rejection of one concept of such a methodologically tight (closed) theory could mean rejecting *in toto* its epistemological and methodological bases – observation and functionalist/systemic analysis. Secondly, the high level of abstraction of social practices into system/environment schemata means that the necessary tools for any critical evaluation should be found in the theory itself. Luhmann's method is evidently focused on "building rather than testing theory" (Strauss and Corbin, cited in Banakar and Travers, 2005: 55), which makes it difficult to critique, as well as to evaluate empirically (cf. McCarthy, 1991: 123). As a variant of positivist theory (Morrow and Borwn, 1994: 54), Luhmann's functionalism limits analysis to "functional contexts of systemic self-maintenance" (Habermas, 1990: 371). This self-referentiality of Luhmann's method restricts it to such a degree that limits its applicability to functional/technocratic contexts and makes it difficult to combine with different theories and methods in interdisciplinary research. Ultimately, it limits its empirical usability.

8.2.2 Foucault: Genealogy, Historical Materialism and Contextualism

Foucault has used different methods in his various theoretical pursuits. In his examinations of discourse and culture, his methodology was largely ethnological, as he considered ethnology a "counterscience [...with a] privileged position among human sciences" (Honneth, 1991: 105-6). As noted in 6.2.3 of this thesis, Foucault also used the methods of "archaeology of knowledge" and later "genealogy of knowledge" (Olssen, 2006: 9) as part of his structuralist methodology (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 135). This methodology involves the "study of history of systems of thought" (ibid.) on the basis of structures as opposed to experience (op.cit., 128), in way that it presents a

“midway point between relativism and idealism” (op.cit.: 135). Foucault’s genealogy of knowledge reflects his approach for the “analysis of the discourses of expert knowledge as “disciplinary” power relations that have defined modern social subjects” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 192). This forms the methodological basis of his theory of power, its capillary effects and manifestations in the forms of biopower and normalization induced by the state (see 6.1 for an analysis of this theory). It also makes Foucault’s contribution empirically ‘closer’ than Habermas’s.

Foucault’s methodological focus on history for the analysis of power, as well as his studies of the “historical genesis of social structures and culture [and ...] scientific disciplines” (op.cit.: 135) result in his rejection of universal theories and norms (cf. 6.2.4). In particular, he regards the universal grounding of norms as “catastrophic” to society and democracy (Foucault, cited in Flyvbjerg, 2001: 100), because it would result, in his view, in “ethical uniformity [and...] utopian visions of the good” (ibid.). Instead, Foucault focuses on “how” institutions can be changed and used more democratically (op.cit.: 102), rather than merely prescribe that they must. In that sense, he is a “bottom-up thinker” (ibid.), who places great emphasis on “social conflicts as pillars of democratic society” (op.cit.: 106). The agonistic view of public spheres advocated in this thesis (cf. 7.4), as well as the case for a renewed concept of a less stringent form of normativity (cf. 7.6), follow Foucault’s approach. Because of his rejection of universal theories, Foucault is mostly classified as a postmodernist. However, his analysis of power relations is quite distinctive and equally concerned with “questions rooted in critical structuralism” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 132-133).

The fact that Foucault’s approach is meant to be non-universal led Habermas and other critics to accuse him of relativism. As argued in 6.3.5, this does not in fact reflect Foucault’s methodological or theoretical intentions. Biebricher attributes Habermas’s rejection of Foucault’s theory to a “misreading” (Biebricher, 2005: 2) on Habermas’s part. Flyvbjerg is far more critical and discredits Habermas’s argument altogether. Flyvbjerg argues that Foucault is actually a “contextualist”, not a relativist in the sense that “anything goes” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 99). According to Flyvbjerg, Foucault considers universal solutions as part of the problem of “political violence” (op.cit.: 102), however he does advocate norms in his theory, which are “contextually grounded” (op.cit.: 99). His “situational ethics” (op.cit.: 99), which form part of his contextualist approach, have an essentially critical intent and focus on the analysis of various forms of power and

domination, “resistance, struggle and conflict” as opposed to consensus (op.cit.: 102) and advocate “difference, diversity and politics of identity” (ibid.) through methods of genealogy / historical analysis. There is continuity in Foucault’s work with regard to these themes, which demonstrates that Foucault is indeed more of a ‘contextualist’ rather than a relativist. His unorthodox methods of social critique, however, led to his method being described as “critical antisociology” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 135).

The major strength of Foucault’s methodological approach is the focus on contextually sensitive and therefore empirically credible “relations of power that shape social reality” (op.cit.: 59). The difference with hermeneutic approaches, such as Habermas’s methodology, is that such approaches largely ignore questions of power “because they exclude the analysis of external socioeconomic structures” (ibid.). They focus instead on historical investigations and interpretive analysis of meanings as “the only form of social inquiry” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 58). Foucault’s methods are also critical in intent, despite their focus on historical analysis and contextualism (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 132-133). With his distinct methodology, Foucault achieves an outright rejection of universalizing principles without resorting to relativism. His contextualist view of norms and his focus on “how” (op.cit.: 102) institutions can be changed in concrete terms marks a shift away from transcendental, prescriptive normativity, which formed the basis of this thesis’s alternative view of normative theory.

Yet, Foucault’s methodology presents certain weaknesses. Honneth (1991) argues that his complete rejection of a theoretical reference to norms leads to the lack of perspective and moves him closer to relativism (Honneth, 1991: xxiv). It would be wrong to label Foucault a relativist overall, despite Habermas’s claim that his work “through the renunciation of normative judgements” (ibid.), oscillates between relativism and “cryptonormativity” (Habermas, 1990b: 276; cf. 6.3.4). Fraser argues that Foucault’s method constitutes a “mixture of empirical insights and normative confusions” (Fraser, 1989: 17), which may prove to be “self-defeating” (Osborne, 1999: 45) in the sense that it is against universals, but it still advocates its own validity. This may lead to confusion with regard to his critique of Habermas’s normative model, on whether he is advocating a norm-free theory (and society) or a theory based on his own historically contingent norms. Finally, Foucault’s methodological focus on power and his radical interpretation of society as a realm of biopower and state domination leaves little room for the development of a theory based on cooperation (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 136), similar

to Habermas's communicative rationality. Despite these differences, Habermas's engagement with Foucault's work has been markedly more explicit – and increasingly so – than with Luhmann.

8.2.3 Fraser and Benhabib: Critical Feminism

Fraser and Benhabib contribute to the critique of Habermas's theory from a political theory and sociology tradition, but their distinctive method could best be described as critical feminism. Both theorists adopt a feminist methodology, which constitutes a “critical methodology whose identity stems from its focus on gender/power issues as the object of inquiry” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 268). In particular, Fraser's argument for a post-bourgeois conception of the public sphere is aimed at exposing Habermas's neglect of gender and minority issues in his initial conception of the public sphere. In line with feminist theory's model of societal organization, Fraser's method of analysis is based on the idea that “gender, like class, is a pervasive system of stratification” (Lengermann, cited in Morrow and Brown, 1994: 191). This leads Fraser to argue for a conception of the public sphere that includes feminist counterpublics (Fraser, 1993). In her method of critique, she introduces the distinction between strong and weak (Fraser, 1993: 134). Together with Squires' (also a critical feminist) distinction between weaker and stronger publics (Squires, 2002: 457), these classifications contributed to the case made in this thesis for emergent and systems publics (cf. Grant, 2012 - *forthcoming*).

Benhabib's critical feminism is more akin to “socialist feminism” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 191), because of her stronger emphasis on agonistic perspectives on the public sphere and power dynamics in general (cf. 7.2.3). Benhabib's method of analysis is not only focused on gender, but also on identity and social status issues. Her analysis of Arendt's agonistic model of publicness (Benhabib, 1993) contributed to this thesis's argument for a model of public spheres in agonistic terms (cf. 7.3 and 7.4). It is important to note that neither Fraser nor Benhabib adopt empirical methods in their feminist critique of Habermas's theory (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 232). As Morrow and Brown point out, feminist theory in general has brought forward “the importance of non-empirical methods in contemporary research” (ibid). This thesis draws on the critical, egalitarian, agonistic and essentially theoretical, as opposed to empirical, methods of Fraser and Benhabib. Fraser and Benhabib's critical feminist methods are crucial for their sensitivity to issues of identity, equality and inclusion and their

emphasis on social struggle and power differentials as an integral part of democratic societies.

8.2.4 McCarthy: Critical Hermeneutics

McCarthy's critique is rooted in the tradition of social and political philosophy. It merits attention given McCarthy's key role in opening Habermas's work to the Anglo-Saxon world. His method focuses on reconstructing Habermas's core views on public reason and communicative rationality. He juxtaposes these views with Rawls's model of public and non-public reasons and criticizes Habermas for placing too much emphasis on the potential of reason, of consensus and of the ideal communication community (cf. Chapter 4 and 7.2.3 of this thesis). Such a method of analysis is essentially hermeneutic, but also comparative and critical. Hermeneutics is considered by Habermas as part of his version of critical theory, which uses historical analysis in order to "reveal sources of domination and distortion in communication" (Habermas, cited in Held, 1990: 315).

McCarthy is not a critical theorist; he is actually sceptical of Habermas's version of critical theory (cf. McCarthy, 1978). However, he shares with critical theorists a critical hermeneutic method of analysis, in a way that it attempts to explore the meaning of a theory through detailed, reflexive reconstruction and interpretation, in order to evaluate and reconsider its premises with the same methodological tools. He does not use empirical or sociological methods in his review of Habermas's theory, for instance. Instead, in addition to his comparative analysis, McCarthy combines "analytic and hermeneutic methodologies" in a way that is crucial to social science (Habermas, 1988, cited in Morrow and Brown, 1994: 143). This method of critical reconstruction of theories in order for them to be reflexively interrogated is applied in this thesis. McCarthy's rejection of reason as the normative basis of public sphere theory is also used as part of this thesis's critical reconsideration of the role of reason(s) in public sphere and communication theory.

8.2.5 Bohman: Critical Social Science

In contrast to McCarthy, Bohman's critique of Habermas's theory that is relevant to this thesis is rooted in contemporary social scientific analysis and not in the philosophical tradition. Bohman's method focuses on the analysis of complexity as a distinctive phenomenon in contemporary society in order to reject Habermas's normative claims.

This method avoids the complexity of critical hermeneutic approaches and is empirically ‘closer’ than Habermas’s. While Bohman’s approach to complexity and his views on rethinking public sphere theory are applied in this thesis’s reconsideration of publics and reason(s), his method would not suffice to reconceptualise Habermas’s theory as a whole. However, it is crucial for rethinking the role of normativity beyond idealizing presuppositions. It also urges for an ‘update’ of public sphere theory in line with transformations in contemporary society.

In particular, Bohman’s method focuses on the elements of public sphere theory that have a direct correlation to actual practices, rather than philosophical or epistemological investigations. He examines complexity as a multi-faceted contemporary phenomenon with impact on socio-economic organization and practices. Bohman uses empirical examples in his argumentation (e.g. terrorism) and is interested in the usability of public sphere theory in contemporary conditions of complexity and contingency, which he sees as inevitable but manageable. His suggestions for safeguarding popular sovereignty by rejecting Habermas’s two-track model of formal and informal publics (1996b) forms the basis of the argument of this thesis away from Habermas’s distinction, towards emergent and systems publics. Bohman’s methods, based on critical social science, are vital for this thesis’s argument towards an empirically relevant reconceptualisation of normativity, in reworking power and reason through the prism of social complexity and in placing more emphasis on informal forms of *Öffentlichkeit* and popular sovereignty.

8.3 Methodology

The variety and the fundamental differences in methods used by Habermas’s critics urges for a multi-methodic approach when attempting to combine them into one single research study. This section examines the methods used in this thesis separately, chapter-by-chapter. Its aim is to explore the methodological implications of the “multiparadigmatic” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 6) approach adopted in this thesis. Additionally, this section aims to re-establish the link between method and theory. A methodology refers to the “presuppositions of methods [and] their link to theory and implications of society” (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 36). In this sense, methodology is “prescriptive” (ibid.), as it aims at legitimating (ibid.) the use of particular methods in line with the development of a particular theory. Moreover, Galtung (1977) affirms that “to work with any methodology [...] is a political act” (40, cited in Morrow and Brown,

1994: 201) and that “the choice of a methodology is implicitly the choice of an ideology” (ibid.). This is evident in the case of feminist, systemic/functional, or postmodernist methods, but less obvious in the case of hermeneutics or critical sociology methods. This thesis has borrowed aspects of all these methods in its general methodology of critical reconstruction of Habermas’s theory and its main critics for a reconceptualisation of Habermas’s theory with implications for its normative project and communication theory in general.

Chapter 1 constitutes the introduction to the thesis and it is structured in the form of a thesis outline. It defines the research aims and research scope of the thesis and encapsulates the analyses and arguments of each chapter for an outlook on the main argument of the thesis. It explains the rationale of separating the analysis of Habermas’s original theory from the analysis of his critics’ arguments, for reasons of hermeneutic accuracy. This points to the distinction between first-order and second-order analysis and critique: First-order *diachronic and synchronic reconstruction* refers to analysis of original works as opposed to analysis of critique of works; therefore it is essentially “uncritical” (Jackson, 1996: 19). First-order *critique*, which is the reconstructive method used in Chapter 2, is a critical form of first-order analysis, or “a critique of knowledge” (Kortian, 1980: 28). By contrast, second-order *comparative critique* is “purely critical” (Jackson, 1996: 19) and it refers to the reflexive analysis of a critique of works, or of texts about other texts. In this respect, second-order critique may also be erroneously labelled as *meta-critique*.¹²² In effect, meta-critique refers to a deeper, third-order level of critique that goes beyond “just the critique of critique” (Kortian, 1980: 29). Instead, meta-critique, which is considered here as third-order critique, involves a higher level of abstraction and systematization of reflections (Held, 1990: 324). It involves moving beyond the critique of knowledge so that critique becomes rigorous and indiscriminate (Kortian, 1980: 29). These terms will become clearer below.

¹²² Morrow and Brown define meta-theory as a “form of rational inquiry or argumentation concerned with the theory of theory, or theory about theory” (1994: 46). In this respect, meta-critique would be a, second-order, critique of critical works, in a way that it would claim to be once beyond critique but also itself critical (Jackson, 1996: 12).

The working method in Chapter 2 consists of the reconstruction of Habermas's original work, mainly *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, in the form of first-order critique. The aim of this method is to reconstruct Habermas's original views as a separate body of work in order better to understand and justify the varied reception of Habermas's work. The dividing line between first-order reconstruction and first-order critique is drawn in this chapter in order to avoid confusion between Habermas's original theory, his own reconceptualisations and his critics' contributions. As mentioned above, this is a real risk in Habermas's complex and much revised theory of the public sphere.

The working method of Chapter 3 is critical evaluation in the form of second and third-order critique. The chapter is divided into two main sections, examining public sphere topography and normativity respectively. The focal point of second-order critique in the first section is social/political theory. It draws on the critiques of feminist critics such as Fraser, Benhabib and Squires, as well as literature on counterpublics in general such as Warner (1993; 2002), for these approaches are contextually more sensitive (cf. also Grant, 2010). The second section, on normativity, is largely focused on Rawls and McCarthy, but also Calhoun and revisions by Habermas himself. The critics' hermeneutic methods result in shifts between second and third-order critique in the attempt to evaluate Habermas's revisions on normativity and their reception by critics. As argued in 7.2.3, 8.2.3 and 8.2.4, these sources and their methods were selected because of their contribution to a more inclusive and egalitarian approach to the public sphere, their thematisation of counterpublics and strong criticism of Habermas's conception and emphasis on rationality.

Chapter 4 focuses on *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984; 1987). This chapter breaks the concept down to its constituent concepts and evaluates each one (intersubjectivity, understanding, argumentation, consensus, *Diskurs*) before examining the lifeworld separately. The lifeworld is examined separately because it is used in all subsequent works by Habermas, even outside the context of communicative rationality. From *The Theory of Communicative Action* onwards, the lifeworld and communicative rationality constitute fundamental concepts in Habermas' communication theory.

It is important to note that this, more dense, approach adopted in Chapter 4 could not be used in Chapter 2 with relation to the critical reconstruction of Habermas's public sphere, because of the subsequent refinements and revisions of that concept by Habermas himself. It would be difficult to offer a critique of concepts that evolve and are subject to change, such as publicness, public, civil society or public/private distinction. In the case of the public sphere concept (Chapter 2, reconstruction), the entire work had to be reconstructed (1992b), while in the case of Chapter 4 (communicative rationality), it was sufficient to tease out the core concepts for a more focused analysis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the challenges of Systems Theory and adopts a method of contrastive analysis. The chapter is divided in two main sections: firstly, Habermas's own systems theory is reconstructed and evaluated; secondly, Luhmann's Social Systems Theory is presented and juxtaposed with Habermas's systems theory and, more importantly, his public sphere theory. As in the case of Chapter 4, the core concepts of Luhmann's theory are contrasted with the corresponding concepts of Habermas's theory in a critical comparative manner (e.g. reason v. function). The challenge is epistemological as well as methodological (cf. 5.3.6). It is important to emphasise that although the Luhmann/Habermas debate has already been revisited, it would be a serious omission to exclude a reconsideration of it from any critique of Habermas's theory of the public sphere / communicative rationality. Luhmann introduces a new paradigm, which poses major challenges to normative assumptions of communication, society, reason and publicness. Moreover, it points to the question later considered by Bohman (1996), on whether Habermas's theory is still relevant in conditions of increasing complexity. Luhmann's contribution to public sphere critique has been overlooked in English-speaking academic literature and needs to be further advanced.

Chapter 6 focuses on the challenge of Foucault and also uses contrastive analysis. Foucault's theory of power, as well as his epistemology against universal norms and principles, are firstly critically reconstructed (first-order critique). As in chapters 4 and 5, the core concepts of Foucault's theory are then contrasted with the corresponding concepts of Habermas's theory in a critical comparative manner (e.g. conflict v. consensus). Foucault engaged directly with Habermas, particularly on the issue of power and conflict as opposed to consensus and on the normative claims of Habermas's theory. As argued in 8.2.2, Foucault's distinctive methods of genealogy of knowledge,

historical materialism and contextualism (but not relativism) result in very different conceptions of power, discourse and norms.

As Flyvbjerg rightly observes on the Habermas/Foucault debate, there is “no meta-theoretical perspective within which these differences could be integrated into a common framework” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 88). The differences are clear and fundamental. The purpose of Chapter 6 is not to reconcile the two theories or indeed methods, but instead to expose a radical alternative to Habermas’s normative claims and to bring forward the issue of power in communication. Flyvbjerg notes that while both Habermas and Foucault acknowledge that misuse of power is a crucial contemporary issue, they “disagree as to how one can best understand and act” in relation to it (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 107). Foucault’s methodological focus on conflict and power formed the basis of this thesis’s argument for an agonistic conception of the public sphere and for the exposure of power differentials in debate. It also helped develop issues of communicative contestation of power between systems and emergent publics. Furthermore, Foucault’s opposition to universal, context-transcendent norms, contributed to the proposal in this thesis for a concept of normativity closer to empirical practices.

Chapter 7 discusses the theoretical and epistemological implications of the critical work presented in the previous chapters. Firstly, it reflects on the implications of first- and second-order critique, with an emphasis on Habermas’s refinement of his public sphere model in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996b). It then establishes and categorises the contributions of Habermas’s critics in order to identify the main points in reworking the conceptual framework of Habermas’s public sphere theory. It introduces Bohman’s critique in a separate section because of its different approach and methodology, in particular: Bohman’s categorisation of different types of social complexity; his emphasis on complexity and contingency in contemporary mechanisms of public debate; and his critique of Habermas’s theory from a perspective closer to empirical conditions. Bohman’s approach, together with the different contributions of the other critics, are then used to rethink the following problematic themes in Habermas’s model: complexity, power, communicative rationality and normativity. The contribution to communication theory, as well as the innovativeness of the research, are established by highlighting the proposed concept of de-idealised, empirically relevant normativity, the de-transcendentalisation of reason in conditions of multiple ethical and moral norms in

contemporary societies and the emphasis on fostering non-institutionalised forms of publicness and enhance public involvement in decision-making.

8.4 Methodological Reflections and Implications for Communication Theory

This section reflects on the methodology of the thesis as a whole and attempts to evaluate it through strict reflexive interrogation. It also articulates the implications of this thesis for public sphere theory and for communication theory in general. It is divided into three sections: on the method's strengths, the method's weaknesses and concluding reflections on the overall significance of the thesis.

Overall, several methods were used in this thesis. The reasons for this, as mentioned above, are the interdisciplinarity of the research, the richness of sources with differing methodologies and epistemologies and the fact that, by definition "social theorising has distinctive, implicit methods" (Baldamus, 1976, cited in Morrow and Brown, 1994: 223, n.1). Moreover, the richness in methodologies reflects a richness in theoretical approaches and is characteristic of "multiparadigmatic" research (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 6). The relationship between theory and method, as Galtung pointed out (in Morrow and Brown, 1994: 201) is demonstrated in this analysis. In "more scientific" social sciences (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 4), theory and method are strictly separated. In non-empirical research, which aims to rework a theory with theoretical tools, the relationship between theory and method needs to be tighter and more explicit. This is the case in Habermas's work, where hermeneutics has the role of both theory and method, and also in the work of Fraser and Benhabib, where critical feminism has the same dual role. Because of the tight connection between theory and method used and developed this thesis, its distinctive methodology is more akin to critical hermeneutics. This is because it engages in:

- a) first-order reconstruction and critique in original work (Habermas, [1962]1992b, 1974),
- b) first-order critique of revisions of original work made by the author himself (1993, 1996b, 2001 etc.),
- c) second-order critique of the critical receptions of the (revised) original work by Habermas's main critics (Luhmann, Foucault, Fraser, Benhabib, McCarthy, Bohman etc.),
- d) comparative critique of second-order approaches above,

- e) third-order critique of the receptions/critiques of Habermas's critics by Flyvbjerg, Morrow, Grant, Leydesdorff etc.). This level of critique takes on the role of meta-critique (cf. Kortian, 1980: 29).

The key to the hermeneutic horizon of the methodology in this thesis is that it goes beyond first- and second-order critique, or production and reception of works, but more importantly, it engages in meta-critique (Kortian) of *both* original works *and* their critical receptions. It also reconciles diachronic reconstruction as Habermas's works evolved through time and synchronic critique. It understands the interweaving of epistemology and methodology.

8.4.1 Strengths of this approach

One of the major strengths of the methods employed here is the extensive critical review of original works and critical receptions across methods. It is also the meta-critique of the receptions of Habermas's main critics, which adds a further dimension to the critical hermeneutic method used here. Each chapter has a clear introduction and clear (preliminary) conclusions. In addition, with regard to coverage and depth, it approaches Habermas from a range of different methods and theoretical traditions. This, together with its methodological diversity (cf. 8.2, 8.3), also contributes to the originality of the thesis.

With regard to the interdisciplinarity of this research, the thesis's novelty stems from the fact that it reintegrates communication theory and public sphere theory. It combines the sociologically salient concept of the public sphere and the communication theoretically salient concept of communicative action, by studying communicative rationality in relation to the public sphere. In this way, it bridges Habermas's theories of deliberative democracy and communication (1996b, 1998) with communicative rationality (1984, 1987, 1996a) and the public sphere ([1962]1992b, 1974, 1993).

Furthermore, this complex method of critical hermeneutics offers a multi-layered reappraisal of Habermas's public sphere theory and its normative claim based chiefly on communicative rationality. It exposes the weaknesses in Habermas's theory and method in relation to its normative foundations, its over-pessimistic conception of power which paralyzes his theory and its neglect of the media in redefining the public sphere. Instead, this thesis achieves in reworking public sphere theory while managing to avoid the

stringent counterfactual normativity of Habermas, the defeatism and scientism of Luhmann or the arbitrariness and nihilism of Foucault.

Finally, in redefining normativity and making public sphere theory more empirically relevant, this thesis succeeds in including some empirical contrast in its analysis, mostly from second-order examination of critics. These include findings from Habermas's investigations on the public sphere and religion (2006b), the quantitative results from his empirical study of political deliberation (2006a, cf. 7.6) and Bohman's empirical illustrations of hypercomplexity (1996).

8.4.2 Weaknesses of this approach and of results of analysis

The lack of empirical investigations in this study of communicative rationality in Habermas's public sphere means that the theoretical refinements are not tested in case studies in existing communication environments. Results in purely theoretical investigations are not as straightforward, particularly in this thesis, which uses critical hermeneutic methods on three levels (first-, second-, third-order critique). Morrow and Brown acknowledge this flaw in interpretive methods; they warn of the "paradox of the *hermeneutic circle*" (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 238), which corresponds to "an endless process of interpretation [which] precludes any absolutely "correct" one" (ibid.). Despite this, there is a strong commitment to the empirical credibility of theory throughout. This explains the refinement of the concept of normativity and the critique of public sphere theory in complex society.

In particular, the redefinition of normativity suggested in this thesis may be interpreted as an attempt to construct a moderate theory in order to eschew criticism. The thesis's suggestions for reworking Habermas's public sphere theory are not as radical as those of Luhmann or Foucault, for instance. That said, the theories under investigation (Habermas, Luhmann, Foucault and others) are canonical and highly complex in their own right. An absolute rejection or espousal of their premises without extensive analysis through different layers of critique would not do justice to the significance of their work. Instead of gaining in clarity, it would lose in substance and depth.

Furthermore, the scale of the critical reconstruction of original works, combined with the range of critical work and the need for it to be re-visited in the form of meta-critique runs the risk of over-burdening the work. Reconstruction covers Chapter 2 and significant parts of Chapters 4, 5 and 6. First-order analysis and critique on such a large scale runs the additional risk of appearing apologetic of Habermas's theory. Against this backdrop, it is a challenge to clarify that the aim of these lengthy reconstructions (esp. Chapter 2) is heuristic: to tease out the components of Habermas's initial theory and to demonstrate how his ideas were developed, revisited or changed in his subsequent works. For instance, Habermas developed his System/Lifeworld model of society in response to Luhmann's systems theoretical criticism. He moved away from the idea of a bourgeois public sphere and recognised the significance of the plebeian public sphere in shaping democracy and society (Habermas, 1993a: 426-7), in response to criticism by Calhoun et al (1993). In response to criticisms by feminist critics of an elitist, all-male, exclusionary view of the public sphere, he acknowledged and recognised the need for a conceptualisation of multiple publics in the framework of a more inclusive concept of the public sphere (1993, 1998).

With regard to method, the methodological diversity of the thesis in its "multiparadigmatic" approach (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 6) may be detrimental to the clarity of the main argument of the thesis, or its aims. The change of method from first and second-order critique in the first three chapters to second and third-order critique and contrastive analysis in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, as well as the change from lengthier to shorter and more focused reconstructions in the second half of the thesis may point to an imbalance in terms of consistency. However, this sort of imbalance is necessary given the nature of the analysis. If the same methods were used, then first- and second-order critique would dominate the thesis to the detriment of its originality and critical value. Habermas's theory is used as the main focus, so a selection of core concepts of opposing or challenging theories had to be used to fulfil the requirements of this thesis with regard to the depth of critique and the viability of the reconstruction.

On the whole, the weaknesses and risks examined in this section have been considered to be manageable. The method may be complex, but its contribution outweighs this flaw. The thorough reconstruction and investigation of Habermas's theory throughout its different stages is immensely useful as a reference point. It is also crucial for a profound and focused reworking of public sphere theory and its normative status. The

contributions of all critics examined in this thesis are valuable to the solid reworking of the original theory. As argued above, a less complicated approach would not do justice to the intentions and the clout of the original theory; it would lack in depth and risk being dismissed as simplistic.

8.4.3 Concluding Reflections on the Value of this Study

Overall, this study has proposed:

1. a timely reintegration of the canonical concepts of the public sphere and communicative rationality.
2. a reconceptualisation of the public sphere as emergent and systems publics
3. a reconceptualisation of communicative rationality and deliberation.

In presenting a detailed chronological evolution of the theory of the public sphere in Habermas's work between 1962 and 2006, this thesis reintegrates communicative rationality into public sphere theory before proceeding to make a series of counter-proposals, studying communicative rationality as the normative form of deliberation *in* the public sphere. It has mapped conceptual changes to public sphere structure with the profusion of new publics and the impact of traditional and new media and it has reconceptualised the public sphere as a complex network of emergent and systems publics, working together for opinion- and will-formation and for monitoring and contesting authority, even though systems publics form part of the state mechanism. Being answerable to the emergent publics means that, in elected systems publics such as parliaments, emergent publics have the collective power to contest for communications take place in micro and macro-contexts and communication systems are always open to capillary intervention. The thesis also explored alternatives to normativity in the functionalist theory of Luhmann and the historical materialism theory of Foucault and argued for a detranscendentalised form of normativity. Finally, this study is a work of scale whose contribution also lies in offering an in-depth survey of a range of critics such as Benhabib, Luhmann, Foucault, Bohman and Honneth. Despite the critiques of the above, this thesis remains committed to a concept of normativity that is more empirically plausible.

The renewed case for normativity in communication theory and public sphere theory proposed in this thesis involves certain caveats. A grounded view of normativity, which eschews idealising presuppositions and claims, is less stringent and absolute and is more

closely connected to emergent communication from the grassroots may be criticised as descriptivist or relativist. The response to both criticisms would be similar. Relativism, as well as descriptivism, does not involve any level of normativity *at all*. The normativity proposed in this study is merely de-idealised, but not to the point of relativism. Norms still exist, but they are tied to actually existing practices and refer directly to them. It is a sort of an updated version of normativity, in line with the updated version of rationality and the public sphere developed in Chapter 7, which involve multiple, complex public spheres, multiple reasons, multiple ethical and moral codes. A revisited and reworked theory cannot abide to a normative framework that was developed 40 years ago based on dated concepts. The concepts have evolved (and this thesis has demonstrated this in great detail), so the normative status of the theory must be altered as well. The norms may have changed, but their binding nature is still preserved. They must be contextually relevant, as Fraser and Foucault propose.

Taking into consideration the concluding reflections discussed here, in particular with regard to methodology, its distinctiveness as critical hermeneutic and its inextricable link to theory, it is evident that this work is original in: its theoretical scope; its integration of two major fields in communication theory; its various methods that seek to combine hermeneutic sensitivity with contextual awareness; and in its commitment to a refined model of normativity and also empirical ‘proximity’ (cf. Bohman, Luhmann). It makes contributions to a number of fields, primarily communication theory but also sociology, political theory and philosophy (on the concept of normativity). For its meticulous first-order reconstructions of Habermas’s original theory and the heuristic separation between ‘early’ and ‘later’ conceptions of the public sphere and reason, as well as between original works and critiques, this thesis seeks to be a useful reference point. Its interdisciplinary critique of unusual depth and scope, including first-, second- and third-order critique, navigates through key concepts and methods; it ultimately proposes a revised public sphere theory for the contemporary media age, based on a thorough reworking of public sphere theory and a thorough interrogation of communication theory in that reworked model.

Finally, the research presented in this thesis paves the way for a new set of empirical analysis and overcomes the divide between theory and data. It opens new pathways of empirical research, such as communicative rationality as a model of debate, which could also be empirically tested according to its parameters, examined in Chapter 4:

argumentation, consensus, understanding and intersubjectivity. An empirical model of 'measuring' and assessing communicative rationality could be developed based on those parameters in order to evaluate new forms of public communication such as online public spheres in the form of political fora or social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace, which function more and more as public spheres, television programmes as public spheres etc. Such models, either theoretical or empirical, would also contribute to the evaluation of other forms of shared communication, such as team working in organisational or business communication. by opening new possibilities of research, both empirical (e.g. complexity, applied communicative rationality in different settings etc.) and theoretical. More importantly, from a political theory perspective, the emergent/systems publics division proposed in this thesis could be applied to transitional democracies and investigated empirically in the form of case studies.

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