
**The Structural Transformation
of the Public Sphere**

An Inquiry into a Category of
Bourgeois Society

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I

Introduction: Preliminary Demarcation of a Type of Bourgeois Public Sphere

1 The Initial Question

The usage of the words “public” and “public sphere” betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings. Their origins go back to various historical phases and, when applied synchronically to the conditions of a bourgeois society that is industrially advanced and constituted as a social-welfare state, they fuse into a clouded amalgam. Yet the very conditions that make the inherited language seem inappropriate appear to require these words, however confused their employment. Not just ordinary language (especially as it bears the imprint of bureaucratic and mass media jargon) but also the sciences—particularly jurisprudence, political science, and sociology—do not seem capable of replacing traditional categories like “public” and “private,” “public sphere,” and “public opinion,” with more precise terms. Ironically, this dilemma has first of all bedeviled the very discipline that explicitly makes public opinion its subject matter. With the application of empirical techniques, the object that public-opinion research was to apprehend has dissolved into something elusive;¹ nevertheless sociology has refused to abandon altogether these categories; it continues to study public opinion.

We call events and occasions “public” when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs—as when we speak of public places or public houses. But as in the expression “public building,” the term need not refer to general accessi-

bility; the building does not even have to be open to public traffic. "Public buildings" simply house state institutions and as such are "public." The state is the "public authority." It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members. The word has yet another meaning when one speaks of a "public [official] reception"; on such occasions a powerful display of representation is staged whose "publicity" contains an element of public recognition. There is a shift in meaning again when we say that someone has made a name for himself, has a public reputation. The notion of such personal prestige or renown originated in epochs other than that of "polite society."

None of these usages, however, have much affinity with the meaning most commonly associated with the category—expressions like "public opinion," an "outraged" or "informed public," "publicity," "publish," and "publicize." The subject of this publicity is the public as carrier of public opinion; its function as a critical judge is precisely what makes the public character of proceedings—in court, for instance—meaningful. 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 baptized "publicity work" are aimed at producing such publicity. The public sphere itself appears as a specific domain—the public domain versus the private. Sometimes the public appears simply as that sector of public opinion that happens to be opposed to the authorities. 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."

A social-historical analysis of the syndrome of meanings possessed by "public" and "publicity" could uncover the essential sociological characteristics of the various historical language strata. The first etymological reference to the public sphere is quite revealing. In German the noun *Öffentlichkeit* was formed from the older adjective *öffentlich* during the eighteenth century,² in analogy to "*publicité*" and "publicity"; by the close of the century the word was still so little used that Heynatz could

consider it objectionable.³ If the public sphere did not require a name of its own before this period, we may assume that this sphere first emerged and took on its function only at that time, at least in Germany. It was specifically a part of "civil society," which at the same time established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws. Notions concerning what is "public" and what is not—that is, what is "private"—however, can be traced much further back into the past.

We are dealing here with categories of Greek origin transmitted to us bearing a Roman stamp. In the fully developed Greek city-state the sphere of the *polis*, which was common (*koine*) to the free citizens, was strictly separated from the sphere of the *oikos*; in the sphere of the *oikos*, each individual is in his own realm (*idia*). The public life, *bios politikos*, went on in the market place (*agora*), but of course this did not mean that it occurred necessarily only in this specific locale. The public sphere was constituted in discussion (*lexis*), which could also assume the forms of consultation and of sitting in the court of law, as well as in common action (*praxis*), be it the waging of war or competition in athletic games. (Strangers were often called upon to legislate, which was not properly one of the public tasks.) The political order, as is well known, rested on a patrimonial slave economy. The citizens were thus set free from productive labor; it was, however, their private autonomy as masters of households on which their participation in public life depended. The private sphere was attached to the house not by (its Greek) name only. Movable wealth and control over labor power were no more substitutes for being the master of a household and of a family than, conversely, poverty and a lack of slaves would in themselves prevent admission to the *polis*. Exile, expropriation, and the destruction of the house amounted to one and the same thing. Status in the *polis* was therefore based upon status as the unlimited master of an *oikos*. The reproduction of life, the labor of the slaves, and the service of the women went on under the aegis of the master's domination; birth and death took place in its shadow; and the realm of necessity and transitoriness remained immersed in the obscurity of the private sphere. In contrast to it stood, in Greek

self-interpretation, the public sphere as a realm of freedom and permanence. Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all. In the discussion among citizens issues were made topical and took on shape. In the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence—the immortality of fame. Just as the wants of life and the procurement of its necessities were shamefully hidden inside the *oikos*, so the *polis* provided an open field for honorable distinction: citizens indeed interacted as equals with equals (*homoioi*), but each did his best to excel (*aristoein*). The virtues, whose catalogue was codified by Aristotle, were ones whose test lies in the public sphere and there alone receive recognition.

Since the Renaissance this model of the Hellenic public sphere, as handed down to us in the stylized form of Greek self-interpretation, has shared with everything else considered “classical” a peculiarly normative power.⁴ Not the social formation at its base but the ideological template itself has preserved continuity over the centuries—on the level of intellectual history. To begin with, throughout the Middle Ages the categories of the public and the private and of the public sphere understood as *res publica* were passed on in the definitions of Roman law. Of course, they found a renewed application meaningful in the technical, legal sense only with the rise of the modern state and of that sphere of civil society separated from it. They served the political self-interpretation as well as the legal institutionalization of a public sphere that was bourgeois in a specific sense. Meanwhile, however, for about a century the social foundations of this sphere have been caught up in a process of decomposition. Tendencies pointing to the collapse of the public sphere are unmistakable, for while its scope is expanding impressively, its function has become progressively insignificant. Still, publicity continues to be an organizational principle of our political order. It is apparently more and other than a mere scrap of liberal ideology that a social democracy could discard without harm. 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.

2 Remarks on the Type of Representative Publicness

During the Middle Ages in Europe the contrast drawn in Roman law between *publicus* and *privatus*⁵ was familiar but had no standard usage. The precarious attempt to apply it to the legal conditions of the feudal system of domination based on fiefs and manorial authority (*Grundherrschaft*) unintentionally provides evidence that an opposition between the public and private spheres on the ancient (or the modern) model did not exist. Here too an economic organization of social labor caused all relations of domination to be centered in the lord's household. Nevertheless, the feudal lord's position within the process of production was not comparable to the “private” authority of the *oikodespotes* or of the *pater familias*. While manorial authority (and its derivative, feudalism) as the quintessence of all lordly particular rights might be conceived of as a *jurisdictio*, it could not be fitted readily into the contrast between private dominion (*dominium*) and public autonomy (*imperium*). There were lower and higher “sovereignties,” eminent and less eminent prerogatives; but there was no status that in terms of private law defined in some fashion the capacity in which private people could step forward into a public sphere. In Germany manorial authority, fully developed in the High Middle Ages, was transformed into private landed property only in the eighteenth century as part of the liberation of the peasants and the clearing of land holdings from feudal obligations. The domestic authority of the head of a household is not the same as private dominion, whether in the sense of classical law or in that of modern civil law. When the latter's categories were transferred to social conditions providing no basis for division between the public sphere and the private domain, difficulties arose:

If we think of the land as the public sphere, then the house and the authority exercised by its master must simply be considered a public

authority of the second order: it is certainly private in relation to that of the land to which it is subordinated, but surely in a sense very different from how the term is understood in modern private law. Thus it seems quite intelligible to me that "private" and "public" powers are so fused together into an indivisible unity that both are emanations from a single unified authority, that they are inseparable from the land and can be treated like legitimate private rights.⁶

It should be noted, however, that the tradition of ancient Germanic law, through the categories "*gemeinlich*" and "*sunderlich*," "common" and "particular," did generate a contrast that corresponded somewhat to the classical one between "*publicus*" and "*privatus*." That contrast referred to communal elements to the extent to which they survived under the feudal conditions of production. The commons was public, *publica*; for common use there was public access to the fountain and market square—*loci communes, loci publici*. The "particular" stood opposed to this "common," which etymologically is related to the common or public welfare (common wealth, public wealth). This specific meaning of "private" as "particular" reverberates in today's equation of special interests with private interests. Yet one should note that within the framework of feudalism the particular *also* included those who possessed special rights, that is, those with immunities and privileges. In this respect the particular (i.e., what stood apart), the exception through every sort of exemption, was the core of the feudal regime and hence of the realm that was "public." The original parallelism of Germanic and Roman legal categories was reversed as soon as they were absorbed by feudalism—the common man became the private man. A linguistic reminder of this relationship is the use of "private" in the sense of "common" soldier—the ordinary man without rank and without the particularity of a special power to command interpreted as "public." In medieval documents "lordly" and "*publicus*" were used synonymously; *publicare* meant to claim for the lord.⁷ The ambivalence in the meaning of "*gemein*" (common) as "communal," that is, (publicly) accessible to all and "ordinary," that is, without special right (namely, lordly prerogative) and without official rank in general still reflects the integration of elements of communal (*genossenschaftlich*) organization into a social structure based on manorial authority.⁸

Sociologically, that is to say by reference to institutional criteria, a public sphere in the sense of a separate realm distinguished from the private sphere cannot be shown to have existed in the feudal society of the High Middle Ages. Nevertheless it was no accident that the attributes of lordship, such as the ducal seal, were called "public"; not by accident did the English king enjoy "publicness"⁹—for lordship was something publicly represented. 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, if this term may be permitted. 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.¹⁰ The concept of representation in this sense has been preserved down to the most recent constitutional doctrine, according to which representation can "occur only in public . . . there is no representation that would be a 'private' matter."¹¹ For representation pretended to make something invisible visible through the public presence of the person of the lord: ". . . something that has no life, that is inferior, worthless, or mean, is not representable. It lacks the exalted sort of being suitable to be elevated into public status, that is, into existence. Words like excellence, highness, majesty, fame, dignity, and honor seek to characterize this peculiarity of a being that is capable of representation." Representation in the sense in which the members of a national assembly represent a nation or a lawyer represents his clients had nothing to do with this publicity of representation inseparable from the lord's concrete existence, that, as an "aura," surrounded and endowed his authority. When the territorial ruler convened about him ecclesiastical and worldly lords, knights, prelates, and cities (or as in the German Empire until 1806 when the Emperor invited the princes and bishops, Imperial counts, Imperial towns, and abbots to the Imperial Diet), this was not a matter of an assembly of delegates that was someone else's representative. As long as the prince and the estates of his realm "were" the country and not just its repre-

representatives, they could represent it in a specific sense. They represented their lordship not for but "before" the people.

The staging of the publicity involved in representation was wedded to personal attributes such as insignia (badges and arms), dress (clothing and coiffure), demeanor (form of greeting and poise) and rhetoric (form of address and formal discourse in general)¹²—in a word, to a strict code of "noble" conduct. The latter crystallized during the High Middle Ages into the system of courtly virtues, a Christianized form of the Aristotelian cardinal virtues, which subdued the heroic to form the chivalrous and courteous. Characteristically, in none of these virtues did the physical aspect entirely lose its significance, for virtue must be embodied, it had to be capable of public representation.¹³ Especially in the joust, the replica of the cavalry battle, this representation came into its own. To be sure, the public sphere of the Greek *polis* was no stranger to a competitive display of *arete*; but the publicity of courtly-knightly representation which, appropriately enough, was fully displayed on feast days, the "high holy days," rather than on court days was completely unlike a sphere of political communication. Rather, as the aura of feudal authority, it indicated social status. This is why it had no particular "location": the knightly code of conduct was common as a norm to all nobles, from the king down to the lowliest knight standing just above the peasants. It provided orientation not merely on definite occasions at definite locales (say, "in" a public sphere) but constantly and everywhere, as representative of their lordly rights.

Only the ecclesiastical lords had, in addition to the occasions that were part of the affairs of the world, a specific locale for their representation: the church. In church ritual, liturgy, mass, and processions, the publicity that characterized representation has survived into our time. According to a well-known saying the British House of Lords, the Prussian General Staff, the French Academy, and the Vatican in Rome were the last pillars of representation; finally only the Church was left, "so utterly alone that those who see in it no more than an external form cannot suppress the epigrammatic joke that it no longer represents anything except representation itself."¹⁴ For all that, the relationship of the laity to the priesthood

illustrates how the "surroundings" were part and parcel of the publicity of representation (from which they were nevertheless excluded)—those surroundings were private in the sense in which the private soldier was excluded from representation and from military honor, even though he had to be "part." The complement of this exclusion was a secret at the inner core of publicity: the latter was based on an *arcanum*; mass and the Bible were read in Latin rather than in the language of the people.

The representation of courtly-knightly publicity attained its ultimate pure form at the French and Burgundian courts in the fifteenth century.¹⁵ The famous Spanish ceremonial was the petrified version of this late flowering and in this form survived for several centuries at the courts of the Hapsburg. A new form of the representative publicness, whose source was the culture of the nobility of early capitalist northern Italy, emerged first in Florence and then in Paris and London. It demonstrated its vigor, however, in its assimilation of bourgeois culture, whose early manifestation was humanism; the culture of humanism became a component of courtly life.¹⁶ However, following the activities of the first tutors to princes (i.e., as early as around 1400) humanism—which developed the art of philological criticism only in the course of the sixteenth century—became the vehicle for reshaping the style of courtly life itself. Under the influence of the *Cortegiano* the humanistically cultivated 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" centered in the court.¹⁷ The independent provincial nobility based in the feudal rights attached to the land lost its power to represent; publicity of representation was concentrated at the prince's court. The upshot of this was the baroque festivity in which all of its elements were united one more time, sensationally and magnificently.

In comparison to the secular festivities of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance the baroque festival had already lost its public character in the literal sense. Joust, dance, and theater retreated from the public places into the enclosures of

the park, from the streets into the rooms of the palace. The castle park made its first appearance in the middle of the seventeenth century but then spread rapidly over Europe along with the architecture of the French Century. Like the baroque palace itself, which was built around the grand hall in which the festivities were staged, the castle park permitted a courtly life sealed off from the outside world. However, the basic pattern of the representative publicness not only survived but became more prominent. Mademoiselle de Scudéry reported in her *Conversations* the stress of the grand festivities; these served not so much the pleasure of the participants as the demonstration of grandeur, that is, the grandeur of the host and guests. The common people, content to look on, had the most fun.¹⁸ Thus even here the people were not completely excluded; they were ever present in the streets. Representation was still dependent on the presence of people before whom it was displayed.¹⁹ Only the banquets of bourgeois notables became exclusive, taking place behind closed doors:

The bourgeois is distinguished from the courtly mentality by the fact that in the bourgeois home even the ballroom is still homey, whereas in the palace even the living quarters are still festive. And actually, beginning with Versailles, the royal bedroom develops into the palace's second center. If one finds here the bed set up like a stage, placed on a platform, a throne for lying down, separated by a barrier from the area for the spectator, this is so because in fact this room is the scene of the daily ceremonies of *lever* and *coucher*, where what is most intimate is raised to public importance.²⁰

In the etiquette of Louis XIV concentration of the publicity of representation at the court attained the high point of refinement.

The aristocratic "society" that emerged from that Renaissance society no longer had to represent its own lordliness (i.e., its manorial authority), or at least no longer primarily; it served as a vehicle for the representation of the monarch. Only after national and territorial power states had arisen on the basis of the early capitalist commercial economy and shattered the feudal foundations of power could this court nobility develop the framework of a sociability—highly individuated, in spite of its comprehensive etiquette—into that peculiarly free-floating

but clearly demarcated sphere of "good society" in the eighteenth century.²¹ The final form of the representative publicness, reduced to the monarch's court and at the same time receiving greater emphasis, was already an enclave within a society separating itself from the state. Now for the first time private and public spheres became separate in a specifically modern sense.

Thus the German word *privat*, which was borrowed from the Latin *privatus*, can be found only after the middle of the sixteenth century,²² having the same meaning as was assumed by the English "private" and the French *privé*. It meant as much as "not holding public office or official position,"²³ *ohne öffentliches Amt*,²⁴ or *sans emplois que l'engage dans les affaires publiques*.²⁵ "Private" designated the exclusion from the sphere of the state apparatus; for "public" referred to the state that in the meantime had developed, under absolutism, into an entity having an objective existence over against the person of the ruler. The public (*das Publikum, le public*), was the "public authority" (*öffentliche Gewalt*) in contrast to everything "private" (*Privatwesen*). The servants of the state were *öffentliche Personen*, public persons, or *personnes publiques*; they were incumbent in some official position, their official business was "public" (*öffentliches Amt, service public*), and government buildings and institutions were called "public." On the other hand, there were private individuals, private offices, private business, and private homes; Gottlieb speaks of the *Privatmann* (private person). The authorities were contrasted with the subjects excluded from them; the former served, so it was said, the public welfare, while the latter pursued their private interests.

The major tendencies that prevailed by the end of the eighteenth century are well-known. The feudal powers, the Church, the prince, and the nobility, who were the carriers of the representative publicness, disintegrated in a process of polarization; in the end they split into private elements, on the one hand, and public ones, on the other. The status of the Church changed as a result of the Reformation; the anchoring in divine authority that it represented—that is, religion—became a private matter. The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy; the

Church itself continued to exist as one corporate body among others under public law. The first visible mark of the analogous polarization of princely authority was the separation of the public budget from the territorial ruler's private holdings. The bureaucracy, the military (and to some extent also the administration of justice) became independent institutions of public authority separate from the progressively privatized sphere of the court. Out of the estates, finally, the elements of political prerogative developed into organs of public authority: partly into a parliament, and partly into judicial organs. Elements of occupational status group organization, to the degree that they were already involved in the urban corporations and in certain differentiations within the estates of the land, developed into the sphere of "civil society" that as the genuine domain of private autonomy stood opposed to the state.

Excursus: The Demise of the Representative Publicness
Illustrated by the Case of Wilhelm Meister

Forms of the representative publicness, to be sure, remained very much in force up to the beginning of the nineteenth century; this held true especially for economically and politically backward Germany, in which Goethe wrote the second version of his *Wilhelm Meister*. This novel contains a letter²⁶ in which Wilhelm renounces the world of bourgeois activity embodied by his brother-in-law Werner. Wilhelm explains why it is that the stage means all the world to him. Namely, it meant the world of the nobility, of good society—the public sphere as publicity of representation—as he states in the following passage:

A burgher may acquire merit; by excessive efforts he may even educate his mind; but his *personal qualities* are lost, or worse than lost, let him struggle as he will. Since the nobleman frequenting the society of the most polished, is compelled to give himself a polished manner; since this manner, neither door nor gate being shut against him, grows at last an unconstrained one; since, in court or camp, his *figure*, his *person*, are a part of his possessions, and it may be, the most necessary part,—he has reason enough to put some value on them, and to show that he puts some.

The nobleman was authority inasmuch as he made it present. He displayed it, embodied it in his cultivated personality; thus "He is a *public person*; and the more cultivated his movements, the more sonorous his voice, the more staid and measured his whole being is, the more perfect is he; . . . and whatever else there may be in him or about him, capacities, talents, wealth, all seem gifts of supererogation." Goethe one last time caught the reflection of the representative publicness whose light, of course, was refracted in the French rococo court and refracted yet again in its imitation by the petty German princes. The different hues emerged all the more preciously: the appearance of the "lord," who was "public" by virtue of representation, was stylized into the embodiment of gracefulness, and in this publicity he ceremoniously fashioned an aura around himself. Goethe again used "public person" in the traditional sense of public representation, although in the language of his age it had already taken on the more recent meaning of a servant of public authority or of a servant of the state. The "person," however, was immediately modified into the "cultured personality." Strictly speaking, the nobleman in the context of this letter served as something of a pretext for the thoroughly bourgeois idea of the freely self-actualizing personality that already showed the imprint of the neohumanism of the German classical period. In our context Goethe's observation that the bourgeoisie could no longer represent, that by its very nature it could no longer create for itself a representative publicness, is significant. The nobleman was what he represented; the bourgeois, what he produced: "If the nobleman, merely by his personal carriage, offers all that can be asked of him, the burgher by his personal carriage offers nothing, and can offer nothing. The former has a right to *seem*: the latter is compelled to *be*, and what he aims at seeming becomes ludicrous and tasteless." 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?" This is a statement which Nietzsche's later aristocratic pretensions adopted: a man proved himself not by what he could do, but by who he was.

Wilhelm confesses to his brother-in-law the need "to become a public person and to please and influence in a larger circle." Yet since he is no nobleman and as a bourgeois also does not want to make the vain effort merely to appear to be one, he seeks out the stage as a substitute, so to speak, for publicity. Here lies the secret of his theatrical mission: "On the boards a polished man appears in his splendor with personal accomplishments, just as he does so in the upper classes of society." It may well be that it was the secret equivocation of the "cultured personality" ("the necessity I feel to cultivate my mental faculties and tastes"), the bourgeois intention in the figure projected as a nobleman, that permitted the equation of theatrical performance with public representation. But in turn the perception of the disintegration of the representative publicness in bourgeois society was so much on the mark and the inclination to belong to it nevertheless so strong that there must be more to the matter than a simple equivocation. Wilhelm came before his public as Hamlet, successfully at first. The public, however, was already the carrier of a different public sphere, one that no longer had anything in common with that of representation. In this sense Wilhelm Meister's theatrical mission had to fail. It was out of step, as it were, with the bourgeois public sphere whose platform the theatre had meanwhile become. Beaumarchais's Figaro had already entered the stage and along with him, according to Napoleon's famous words, the revolution.

3 On the Genesis of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

With the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, the elements of a new social order were taking shape. From the thirteenth century on they spread from the northern Italian city-states to western and northern Europe and caused the rise first of Dutch centers for staple goods (Bruges, Lüttich, Brussels, Ghent, etc.) and then of the great trade fairs at the crossroads of long-distance trade. Initially, to be sure, they were integrated without much trouble by the old power structure. That initial assimilation of bourgeois humanism to a noble courtly culture, as we observe it paradigmatically during the

rise of Florentine Renaissance society, must also be seen against this background. Early capitalism was conservative not only as regards the economic mentality so vividly described by Sombart (a characteristic way of doing business typified by "honorable" gain²⁷) but also as regards politics. As long as it lived from the fruits of the old mode of production (the feudal organization of agricultural production involving an enserfed peasantry and the petty commodity production of the corporatively organized urban craftsmen) without transforming it,²⁸ it retained ambivalent characteristics. On the one hand this capitalism stabilized the power structure of a society organized in estates, and on the other hand it unleashed the very elements within which this power structure would one day dissolve. We are speaking of the elements of the new commercial relationships: the *traffic in commodities and news* created by early capitalist long-distance trade.

The towns, of course, had local markets from the beginning. In the hands of the guilds and the corporations, however, these remained strictly regulated, serving more as instruments for the domination of the surrounding areas than for free commodity exchange between town and country.²⁹ With the rise of long-distance trade, for which—according to Pirenne's observations—the town was only a base of operations, markets of a different sort arose. They became consolidated into periodic trade fairs and, with the development of techniques of capitalist financing (it is known that letters of credit and promissory notes were in use at the trade fairs of the Champagne as early as the thirteenth century), were established as stock exchanges. In 1531 Antwerp became a "permanent trade fair."³⁰ This commercial exchange developed according to rules which certainly were manipulated by political power; yet a far-reaching network of horizontal economic dependencies emerged that in principle could no longer be accommodated by the vertical relationships of dependence characterizing the organization of domination in an estate system based upon a self-contained household economy. Of course, the political order remained unthreatened by the new processes which, as such, had no place in the existing framework, as long as the members of the old ruling stratum participated in them only as consumers.

When they earmarked an increasing portion of what was produced on their lands for the acquisition of luxury goods made available through long-distance trade, this by itself did not bring traditional production—and hence the basis of their rule—into dependence on the new capital.

The traffic in news that developed alongside the traffic in commodities showed a similar pattern. With the expansion of trade, merchants' market-oriented calculations required more frequent and more exact information about distant events. From the fourteenth century on, the traditional letter carrying by merchants was for this reason organized into a kind of guild-based system of correspondence for their purposes. The merchants organized the first mail routes, the so-called ordinary mail, departing on assigned days. The great trade cities became at the same time centers for the traffic in news;³¹ the organization of this traffic on a *continuous* basis became imperative to the degree to which the exchange of commodities and of securities became continuous. Almost simultaneously with the origin of stock markets, postal services and the press institutionalized regular contacts and regular communication. To be sure, the merchants were satisfied with a system that limited information to insiders; the urban and court chanceries preferred one that served only the needs of administration. Neither had a stake in information that was public. What corresponded to their interests, rather, were "news letters," the private correspondences commercially organized by newsdealers.³² The new sector of communications, with its institutions for a traffic in news, fitted in with the existing forms of communication without difficulty as long as the decisive element—publicness—was lacking. Just as, according to Sombart's definition, one could speak of "mail" only when the regular opportunity for letter dispatch became accessible to the general public,³³ so there existed a press in the strict sense only once the regular supply of news became public, that is, again, accessible to the general public. But this occurred only at the end of the seventeenth century.³⁴ Until then the traditional domain of communication in which publicity of representation held sway was not fundamentally threatened by the new domain of a public sphere whose decisive mark was the published word.

There was as yet no publication of commercially distributed news; the irregularly published reports of recent events were not comparable to the routine production of news.³⁵

These elements of early capitalist commercial relations, that is, the traffic in commodities and news, manifested their revolutionary power only in the mercantilist phase in which, simultaneously with the modern state, the national and territorial economies assumed their shapes.³⁶ When in 1597 the German Hanse was definitively expelled from London, and when a few years later the Company of Merchant Adventurers established itself in Hamburg, this signified not merely the economic and political ascendancy of Great Britain but an altogether new stage of capitalism. From the sixteenth century on merchant companies were organized on an expanded capital basis; unlike the old traders in staple goods, they were no longer satisfied with limited markets. By means of grand expeditions they opened up new markets for their products.³⁷ In order to meet the rising need for capital and to distribute the growing risks, these companies soon assumed the form of stock companies. Beyond this, however, they needed strong political guarantees. The markets for foreign trade were now justly considered "institutional products"; they resulted from political efforts and military force. The old home towns were thus replaced as bases of operations by the state territory. The process that Heckscher describes as the nationalization of the town-based economy began.³⁸ Of course, within this process was constituted what has since been called the "nation"—the modern state with its bureaucracies and its increasing financial needs. This development in turn triggered a feedback that accelerated mercantilist policy. Neither private loans made to the prince by financiers nor public borrowing were sufficient to cover these needs; only an efficient system of taxation met the demand for capital. The modern state was basically a state based on taxation, the bureaucracy of the treasury the true core of its administration. The separation precipitated thereby between the prince's personal holdings and what belonged to the state³⁹ was paradigmatic of the objectification of personal relations of domination. Local administrations were brought under the control of the state, in Great Britain through the

institution of the Justice of the Peace, on the continent, after the French model, with the help of superintendents.

The reduction in the kind of publicity involved in representation that went hand in hand with the elimination of the estate-based authorities by those of the territorial ruler created room for another sphere known as the public sphere in the modern sense of the term: the sphere of public authority. The latter assumed objective existence in a *permanent* administration and a *standing* army. Now continuous state activity corresponded to the continuity of contact among those trafficking in commodities and news (stock market, press). Public authority was consolidated into a palpable object confronting those who were merely subject to it and who at first were only negatively defined by it. For they were the private people who, because they held no office, were excluded from any share in public authority. "Public" in this narrower sense was synonymous with "state-related"; the attribute no longer referred to the representative "court" of a person endowed with authority but instead to the functioning of an apparatus with regulated spheres of jurisdiction and endowed with a monopoly over the legitimate use of coercion. The manorial lord's feudal authority was transformed into the authority to "police"; the private people under it, as the addressees of public authority, formed the public.

The relation between authorities and subjects took on a peculiar character as a result of mercantilist policies, policies formally oriented to the maintenance of an active balance of trade. It is a familiar story how the opening up and expansion of markets for foreign trade, in which the privileged companies managed to attain monopolistic control through political pressure—in a word, the new colonialism—step by step began to serve the development of a commercial economy at home. In parallel fashion the interests of capitalists engaged in manufacture prevailed over those engaged in trade. In this way one element of the early capitalist commercial system, the trade in commodities, brought about a revolution, this time in the structure of production as well. The exchange of imported raw materials for finished and semi-finished domestic goods must be viewed as a function of the process in which the old mode

of production was transformed into a capitalist one. Dobb remarks on how this shift was reflected in the mercantilist literature of the seventeenth century. Foreign trade no longer counted per se as the source of wealth, but only insofar as it aided the employment of the country's population—employment created by trade.⁴⁰ Administrative action was increasingly oriented to this goal of the capitalist mode of production. The privileges granted to occupation-based corporations characterizing the estate regime were replaced by royal grants of personal privileges and were aimed at transforming extant manufacture into capitalist production or at creating new manufacturing enterprises altogether. Hand in hand with this went the regulation of the process of production itself, down to the last detail.⁴¹

Civil society came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority. Activities and dependencies hitherto relegated to the framework of the household economy emerged from this confinement into the public sphere. Schumpeter's observation "that the old forms that harnessed the whole person into systems of supraindividual purpose had died and that each family's individual economy had become the center of its existence, that therewith a private sphere was born as a distinguishable entity in contrast to the public"⁴² only captures one side of the process—the privatization of the process of economic reproduction. It glances over the latter's new "public" relevance. The economic activity that had become private had to be oriented toward a commodity market that had expanded under public direction and supervision; the economic conditions under which this activity now took place lay outside the confines of the single household; for the first time they were of general interest. Hannah Arendt refers to this *private sphere of society that has become publicly relevant* when she characterizes the modern (in contrast to the ancient) relationship of the public sphere to the private in terms of the rise of the "social": "Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance, and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public."⁴³

The changed conditions of the times were reflected in the

transformation of the economics handed down from antiquity into political economy. Indeed the term "economic" itself, which until the seventeenth century was limited to the sphere of tasks proper to the *oikodespotes*, the *pater familias*, the head of the household, now, in the context of a practice of running a business in accord with principles of profitability, took on its modern meaning. The duties of the household head were narrowed and "economizing" became more closely associated with thriftiness.⁴⁴ Modern economics was no longer oriented to the *oikos*; the market had replaced the household, and it became "commercial economics" (*Kommerzienwirtschaft*). Significantly, in eighteenth-century cameralism (whose name derives from *camera*, the territorial ruler's treasure chamber) this forerunner of political economy was part of "police-science," that is, of administrative science proper, together with the science of finance on the one hand and with agricultural technology on the other (which was becoming differentiated from traditional economics). This shows how closely connected the private sphere of civil society was to the organs of the public authority.

Within this political and social order transformed during the mercantilist phase of capitalism (and whose new structure found its expression precisely in the differentiation of its political and social aspects) the second element of the early capitalist commercial system, the press, in turn developed a unique explosive power. The first journals in the strict sense, ironically called "political journals", appeared weekly at first, and daily as early as the middle of the seventeenth century. In those days private correspondence contained detailed and current news about Imperial Diets, wars, harvests, taxes, transports of precious metals, and, of course, reports on foreign trade.⁴⁵ Only a trickle of this stream of reports passed through the filter of these "news letters" into printed journals. The recipients of private correspondence had no interest in their contents becoming public. On the one hand, therefore, the political journals responded to a need on the part of the merchants; on the other hand, the merchants themselves were indispensable to the journals. They were called *custodes novellarum* among their contemporaries precisely because of this dependence of public

reporting upon their private exchange of news.⁴⁶ It was essentially news from abroad, of the court, and of the less important commercial events that passed through the sieve of the merchants' unofficial information control and the state administrations' official censorship. Certain categories of traditional "news" items from the repertoire of the broadsheets were also perpetuated—the miracle cures and thunderstorms, the murders, pestilences, and burnings.⁴⁷ Thus, the information that became public was constituted of residual elements of what was actually available; nevertheless, it requires explanation why at this particular time they were distributed and made generally accessible, made public at all. It is questionable whether the interests of those who made a living by writing news pamphlets would have provided a sufficiently strong impetus; still, they *did* have an interest in publication. For the traffic in news developed not only in connection with the needs of commerce; the news itself became a commodity. Commercial news reporting was therefore subject to the laws of the same market to whose rise it owed its existence in the first place. It is no accident that the printed journals often developed out of the same bureaus of correspondence that already handled handwritten newsletters. Each item of information contained in a letter had its price; it was therefore natural to increase the profits by selling to more people. This in itself was already sufficient reason periodically to print a portion of the available news material and to sell it anonymously, thus giving it publicity.

The interest of the new (state) authorities (which before long began to use the press for the purposes of the state administration), however, was of far greater import. Inasmuch as they made use of this instrument to promulgate instructions and ordinances, the addressees of the authorities' announcements genuinely became "the public" in the proper sense. From the very beginning, the political journals had reported on the journeys and returns of the princes, on the arrival of foreign dignitaries, on balls, "special events" (*Solennitäten*) at court, appointments, etc.; in the context of this news from the Court, which can be thought of as a kind of transposition of the publicity of representation into the new form of public sphere,

there also appeared "sovereign ordinances in the subjects' best interest." Very soon the press was systematically made to serve the interests of the state administration. As late as March 1769 a press ordinance of the Vienna government witnessed the style of this practice: "In order that the writer of the journal might know what sort of domestic decrees, arrangements, and other matters are suitable for the public, such are to be compiled weekly by the authorities and are to be forwarded to the editor of the journal."⁴⁸ As we know from the letters of Hugo Grotius, then Swedish emissary in Paris, Richelieu already possessed a lively sense of the usefulness of the new instrument.⁴⁹ He was a patron of the *Gazette* established in 1631 by Renaudot, which served as the model for the *Gazette of London* that appeared from 1665 on under Charles II. Two years earlier the officially authorized *Intelligencer* had appeared in London, itself preceded by the *Daily Intelligencer of Court, City, and County* that sporadically appeared as early as 1643.⁵⁰ Everywhere these advertisers, which first arose in France as aids to address agencies or intelligence agencies, became the preferred instruments of governments.⁵¹ Many times the intelligence agencies were taken over by governments, and the advertisers changed into official gazettes. According to an order of 1727 by the Prussian cabinet, this institution was intended "to be useful for the public" and to "facilitate communication." Besides the decrees and proclamations "in police, commerce, and manufacture" there appeared the quotations of the produce markets, of the taxes on food items, and generally of the most important prices of domestic and imported products; in addition, stock market quotations and trade reports and reports on water levels were published. Accordingly, the Palatine-Bavarian government could announce to the "commercial public" an advertiser "in the service of trade and the common man, so that he can inform himself both about the decrees that from time to time are issued by the King and about the prices of various commodities so that he can sell his merchandise at a better price."⁵²

The authorities addressed their promulgations to "the" public, that is, in principle to all subjects. Usually they did not reach the "common man" in this way, but at best the "educated classes." Along with the apparatus of the modern state, a new

stratum of "bourgeois" people arose which occupied a central position within the "public." The officials of the rulers' administrations were its core—mostly jurists (at least on the continent, where the technique of the received Roman law was adopted as an instrument for the rationalization of social organization). Added to them were doctors, pastors, officers, professors, and "scholars," who were at the top of a hierarchy reaching down through schoolteachers and scribes to the "people."⁵³

For in the meantime the genuine "burghers," the old occupational orders of craftsmen and shopkeepers, suffered downward social mobility; they lost their importance along with the very towns upon whose citizens' rights their status was based. At the same time, the great merchants outgrew the confining framework of the towns and in the form of companies linked themselves directly with the state. Thus, the "capitalists," the merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs, and manufacturers (at least where, unlike in Hamburg, the towns could not maintain their independence from the territorial rulers) belonged to that group of the "bourgeois" who, like the new category of scholars, were not really "burghers" in the traditional sense.⁵⁴ This stratum of "bourgeois" was the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public. Unlike the great urban merchants and officials who, in former days, could be assimilated by the cultivated nobility of the Italian Renaissance courts, they could no longer be integrated *in toto* into the noble culture at the close of the Baroque period. Their commanding status in the new sphere of civil society led instead to a tension between "town" and "court," whose typical form in different nations will concern us later.⁵⁵

In this stratum, which more than any other was affected and called upon by mercantilist policies, the state authorities evoked a resonance leading the *publicum*, the abstract counterpart of public authority, into an awareness of itself as the latter's opponent, that is, as the public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*. For the latter developed to the extent to which the public concern regarding the private sphere of civil society was no longer confined to the authorities but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs. Besides the carriers of commercial and finance capitalism, a growing group

of entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and factory owners became dependent upon measures taken by the state administration whose intent certainly was not merely that of controlling commercial-entrepreneurial activity but also of encouraging initiative through regulation. Mercantilism did not at all, as widespread prejudice would have it, favor state enterprise; rather, its commercial policy, albeit in a bureaucratic fashion, promoted the establishment and dissolution of private businesses run in a capitalist manner.⁵⁶ The relationship between the authorities and the subjects thereby assumed the peculiar ambivalence of public regulation and private initiative. In this way the zone in which public authority, by way of continuous administrative acts, maintained contact with private people, was rendered problematic. This in fact involved a wider circle of persons than those participating directly in capitalist production. To the degree to which the latter became pervasive, the number of self-sufficient economic units shrank and the dependence of local markets upon regional and national ones grew. Accordingly, broad strata of the population, especially in the towns, were affected in their daily existence as consumers by the regulations of mercantilist policy. Not the notorious dress codes but taxes and duties and, generally, official interventions into the privatized household finally came to constitute the target of a developing critical sphere. When there was a scarcity of wheat, bread consumption on Friday evenings was prohibited by official decree.⁵⁷ Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became "critical" also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason. The public could take on this challenge all the better as it required merely a change in the function of the instrument with whose help the state administration had already turned society into a public affair in a specific sense—the press.

As early as in the last third of the seventeenth century journals were complemented by periodicals containing not primar-

ily information but pedagogical instructions and even criticism and reviews. At first there were scholarly periodicals speaking to the circle of educated laymen: Denys de Sallo's *Journal des Savants* of 1665, Otto Mencken's *Acta Eruditorum* of 1682, and finally the famous *Monatsgespräche* of 1688 by Thomasius; these forged the model for an entire genre of periodicals. In the course of the first half of the eighteenth century, in the guise of the so-called learned article, critical reasoning made its way into the daily press. When, from 1729 on, the *Hallenser Intelligenzblatt*, besides the usual material contained in advertisers also published learned articles, book reviews, and occasionally "a historical report sketched by a professor and relevant to current events," the Prussian King was moved to take the development into his own hands. Even the use of one's own reason as such was subjected to regulation. All chaired professors of the faculties of law, medicine, and philosophy were to take turns in "submitting to the editor of the gazette, expeditiously and no later than Thursday, a special note, composed in a pure and clear style of writing."⁵⁸ In general "the scholars were to inform the public of useful truths." In this instance the bourgeois writers still made use of their reason at the behest of the territorial ruler; soon they were to think their own thoughts, directed against the authorities. In a rescript of Frederick II from 1784 one reads: "A private person has no right to pass *public* and perhaps even disapproving judgment on the actions, procedures, laws, regulations, and ordinances of sovereigns and courts, their officials, assemblies, and courts of law, or to promulgate or publish in print pertinent reports that he manages to obtain. For a private person is not at all capable of making such judgment, because he lacks complete knowledge of circumstances and motives."⁵⁹ A few years before the French Revolution, the conditions in Prussia looked like a static model of a situation that in France and especially in Great Britain had become fluid at the beginning of the century. The inhibited judgments were called "public" in view of a public sphere that without question had counted as a sphere of public authority, but was now casting itself loose as a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opin-

ion. The *publicum* developed into the public, the *subjectum* into the [reasoning] subject, the receiver of regulations from above into the ruling authorities' adversary.

The history of words preserved traces of this momentous shift. In Great Britain, from the middle of the seventeenth century on, there was talk of "public," whereas until then "world" or "mankind" was usual. Similarly, in France *le public* began to denote what in the eighteenth century, according to Grimm's *Wörterbuch*, also gained currency throughout Germany as *Publikum* (its use spreading from Berlin). Until then one spoke of the "world of readers" (*Lesewelt*), or simply of the "world" (*Welt*) in the sense still used today: all the world, *tout le monde*. Adelung draws a distinction between the public that gathered as a crowd around a speaker or actor in a public place, and the *Lesewelt* (world of readers).⁶⁰ Both, however, were instances of a "critical (*richtend*) public." Whatever was submitted to the judgment of the public gained *Publizität* (publicity). At the end of the seventeenth century the English "publicity" was borrowed from the French *publicité*; in Germany the word surfaced in the eighteenth century. Criticism itself was presented in the form of *öffentliche Meinung*, a word formed in the second half of the eighteenth century in analogy to *opinion publique*. In Great Britain "public opinion" arose at about the same time; the expression "general opinion," however, had been in use long before.

II

Social Structures of the Public Sphere

4 The Basic Blueprint

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*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.¹ Hitherto the estates had negotiated agreements with the princes in which from case to case the conflicting power claims involved in the demarcation of estate liberties from the prince's overlordship or sovereignty were brought into balance.² Since the thirteenth century this practice first resulted in a dualism of the ruling estates and of the prince; soon the territorial estates alone represented the land, over against which stood the territorial ruler.³ It is well known that where the prince's power was relatively reduced by a parliament, as in Great Britain, this development took a different course than it did on the continent, where the monarchs mediatized the estates. The third estate broke with this mode of balancing power since