

*The Problematic Public:
Revisiting Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas*

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The promise of democracy is that citizens can make collective choices not only about short-term policies but also about the kind of institutions and future they want to share. This possibility turns not just on elections and other constitutional features of democratic government, but also on commitments to the public good—even the very idea that there is a public good—and participation in public communication to establish it and guide its pursuit. This is a claim against the authority or necessity of monarchs or dictators, but also for the possibility of choosing a way of life and organization of social solidarity, not simply inheriting it or putting up with what is engineered from above or emerges from other sources.

There have been many skeptics. In 1925, Walter Lippmann famously suggested that the public was a phantom, at most a reference point for establishing the collective interest but not a meaningful part of the process for ascertaining what policies would actually serve that interest. Solving problems, he said, required experts and effective administration but not large-scale public action or debate. Lippmann's argument served famously to occasion John Dewey's spirited defense of democracy and the centrality of public engagement to democracy.¹ In a sense, Lippmann can be seen as the foil to the entire ensuing development of the academic study and popular discussion of democratic publics: he said they don't matter much, that the real work of policy making and problem solving inevitably gets done by political insiders; most people are mere bystanders, not agents; and democracy itself is best limited to elections that check abuses of power or resolve crises.

We are not short of skeptics today. Some worry that the technical nature of policy challenges is beyond translation into the less precise terms of public discussion. Some worry that the public simply doesn't care. Secularization worries some, and the power of religion in the public sphere worries others. Trust in politicians and the media is low; political parties are weak and relatively ineffective in focusing reasoned debate on issues. The print media that have long sustained political public discussion are in decline, and broadcast television may not be far behind. New electronic media offer exciting possibilities such as interaction on a larger scale and over longer distances, but it is unclear whether these possibilities will outweigh the dominance of commercial and entertainment uses. The same new media have also chilled public life by their use to enable intensive state surveillance, massive corporate compilations of personal data on consumers, and new instances of involuntary publicity as data sets are hacked and documents leaked. In some countries such reasoned debate

is literally banned; in others thugs beat or kill those bold enough to raise questions about government policies. Not least of all there is doubt as to whether transnational publics can develop adequately to meet the scale of transnational social organizations, problems, and even governance. Reasons to doubt the project of a democratic public sphere seem as prominent as in 1925. And to top it off, at least in the United States there has been a decades-long campaign by the Mont Pelerin Society, followers who ascribe more extreme views to Hayek than he held, and in general neoliberals to discredit not just reliance on the public sector or the priority of the public good, but the very idea that democracy must rely on the public.

In this lecture, I want to explore some ideas of the three most important authors to take up the theme of what publics might accomplish in the decades after Lippmann's challenge: John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas. These can be brought together—with some themes they neglected—to help develop a stronger theoretical grasp of the problems and potential of democratic publics.

PUBLICS, PUBLICNESS, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

John Dewey answered Lippmann directly and almost immediately with an argument that publics were needed in order to address the problems that arose from the indirect consequences of social action in complex, large-scale societies. He thought the actual performance of publics could be greatly improved, not least by better information, but they were real, not phantom. At the center of his analysis was an asymmetry he wanted to reduce, between the capacity for a small number of people to make problem-causing decisions—including pursuing profits in ways that generate what we might now call negative externalities—and the large number of people affected by them. It was a Hegelian proposition, like Marx's vision of how class in itself could become class for itself. Dewey suggested that publics were objectively formed from all those affected by social actions but became subjectively effective when they were organized and self-aware. He showed a clear awareness that large-scale active publics depended on social foundations that were at best underdeveloped. "Modern state-unity depends on technology and far exceeds the limits of face-to-face community."²

Thirty-five years after Dewey, Jürgen Habermas responded to the situation he saw in postwar Germany. In a context of cynicism about democratic institutions, Habermas set out to show the unrealized potential of the public sphere as a category of bourgeois society.³ Formally democratic institutions had been introduced, but administrators had been carried over from the

previous Nazi regime, and public silence reigned on many important issues. The situation all too much resembled Lippmann's notion of the public as mere phantom. There were negotiations among business, labor, and political leaders but not an open debate about the character society should assume or still less the implications of the Nazi past. In contrast to such negotiations among interest groups, Habermas celebrated the emancipatory potential of a collective discourse about the nature of the public good and the directions of state action. This could be free insofar as it was rationally based on the success of argument and critique rather than the force of either status or coercion and could achieve unity by disregarding particular interests—like particular statuses—in favor of the general good. Habermas called for renewal of what he identified as an eighteenth-century ideal: the notion that ever-wider circles of private individuals could join in rational-critical debates, disregarding their differences of status, identifying the public good common to all of them and their whole society, and so informing the state and public policy. The best version of the public sphere was based on “a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.” It worked by a “mutual willingness to accept the given roles and simultaneously to suspend their reality.”⁴

The attractiveness of this idea is demonstrated by the remarkable spread of the term. It not only gained prominence in several academic disciplines but also became a staple of journalism and wider public discussions about the state of democracy and contemporary society. Debates over the public sphere are active in China, India, Brazil, Egypt, and South Africa. Public sphere joined civil society as a central theme in discussions of postcommunist transition, European unification, and explorations of a possibly cosmopolitan global future.

In fact, however, the public sphere came into currency with the English translation of Habermas's book as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Translation not only made this important work more widely available, but also established “public sphere” as a key term in discussion, though the German original, *öffentlichkeit*, could more literally have been rendered as “publicness.” This introduced a spatial metaphor to suggest a zone or dimension of social life outside of purely private, interpersonal transactions and market systems yet grounded in civil society and related to but not contained by the state.⁵

Where Dewey had seen publics as responses to specific issues, drawing in all those affected, Habermas identified a more or less stable zone of publicness—the public sphere—located between civil society and the

state, grounded in the former and addressing the latter. This was not simply an abstract ideal, Habermas argued; it was made realistic by the development of a new pattern of social organization and ideas since the late seventeenth century that created social bases adequate to sustain it: newspapers and a publishing industry, coffeehouses and other publicly accessible spaces, and indeed states increasingly attentive to public opinion. Habermas elaborated the social foundations of an effective public sphere in considerably more historical concreteness than Dewey.

The issue of foundations, the infrastructure of public life, is important. In the first place, the infrastructure turns the abstract normative potential of public communication into an immanent possibility. Second, the infrastructure gives publics their contours. It shapes both who is a participant and who is connected to whom. Public communication is organized not just by conscious choices of participants, but as a by-product of the organization of settings and media for communication. Habermas emphasized a late-eighteenth-century transition from aristocratic salons and early literary magazines to both more open and more political discussions on new foundations. Habermas stressed that newspapers grew as businesses, revealing that crucial supports for public communication can come on for-profit economic bases.⁶ As later critics noted, he might have made more of earlier waves of public communication with their distinctive social foundations: science with the Royal Society and “invisible colleges” of travel and correspondence and Reformation-era religion with churches and printed sermons.⁷ Changes in both technology and social organization have recurrently changed the underpinnings for public communication. It is not just that television happened, for example, but that it happened in different combinations of public management or subsidy, license fees or subscriptions, and commercial sponsorship.

Habermas left implicit one of the most important infrastructures for publicness: cities. Early modern public life was overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon. Market squares and certain street corners were important public spaces. Not just coffee shops but also public houses, gardens, parks, churches, and schools supported public gatherings. While some grew as small businesses, others were the objects of collective struggle as citizens tried to ensure that they would have the spaces required for public life, whether that meant Sunday-afternoon strolls or contentious meetings.⁸

Of course, small towns and villages also have spaces for gatherings. The issue is not just that cities have more. Rather, in cities those spaces more often bring strangers together. Publicness is necessarily shared. But

publicness is only one form of sharing: that which is open to strangers, to people who are not connected to each other in a tight web of personal relations.⁹ There is a slippery issue of scale here. It is perhaps tendentious to see a family as a “micro-public” because its members share goods with each other.¹⁰ But there is no specific scale at which people become strangers enough to each other that we should necessarily call their relations public rather than private. There is something at least “protopublic” to the relations among members of different clans or castes in a village, compared to relations inside the grouping structured by descent. There is something “protopublic” about clanship itself, when organized on a large scale, as distinct from narrower kinship groups.¹¹ But publicness is different from family or community crucially because it is a matter of connections among strangers.

Public life contrasts both to privacy and to community. If community referred to a social home, the public person idealized in this tradition was precisely at ease when not at home, even when surprised and challenged by the diversity typical of cities. In Richard Sennett’s phrase, “He is comfortable in situations which have no links or parallels to what is familiar to him.” A twentieth-century tradition, epitomized by urban analyst Jane Jacobs, praised the public character of nineteenth-century cities—their sidewalks, cafés, human scale, and mixed-use neighborhoods—and deplored its loss in twentieth-century transformations.¹²

As much anything else, publicness is about connection. The private is disconnected. It turns on a claim to be self-sufficient, to be understandable in and of itself. The private is closed to the public; it is, for example, what each of us owns and claims for our personal use rather than shares with all our fellows, what is concealed rather than made evident. The private need not be understood as the radically solipsistic; we speak of private relationships such as those of marriage and family or business contracts. There is ambiguity as to how shielded these are from public gaze, how protected from government interference. But with our modern ears attuned to the idea of privacy as something attractive, it may take an effort to recognize the shared root with privation, having something taken away, the sense of being left out of something larger. Private is the lowest military rank because the private soldier is an individual not in command of any other, not representing a platoon, company, or division. A private soldier, by historical usage, was hired or conscripted, brought as an individual into the military, not mobilized on the basis of public relationships.

The public is people in general, or the specific people of a place or group. To be in public is to be in their company—or exposed to their

gazes, and that is a connection, too. Of course, people may not be simply “at large” but connected through complex webs of social relations, norms, and institutions. In public, a person has responsibilities to others, whether merely the common civilities of everyday interaction, the more complex norms for participation in an argument, or the obligations of those with public offices to separate these from their private profit or comfort. These public relationships may be organized by government and law. But though much of the historical genesis of our thinking about publicness can be traced to ideas about government, notably in Roman law, these precedents do not exhaust the kinds of connections that make up publicness today. And though governments remain in many settings important agencies for pursuing the public interest, this doesn’t mean that the public interest is the government interest. On the contrary, the public interest is generally understood as the shared interests of the members of the public—as expressed in the notion of a commonwealth or republic. And it is crucial to recognize that these interests are constituted by shared engagement in markets and firms, urban life and travel, religion and voluntary associations. In short, people are knitted together in society, and in addition to their personal or private interests, they have interests in how their shared social lives fare. But as Lippmann would say, this doesn’t guarantee that they will successfully organize to debate or pursue those interests.¹³ But if they do, publicness works as a further form of social integration or solidarity.

We need the word “publicness,” however awkward, to indicate a specific mode of relationship among people. If “publics” suggests a variety of collectivities, and “public sphere” a determinate space of engagement with public issues and the public good, it is important to complement them with a sense of how publicness works as a form of social integration or solidarity, how it works alongside identities such as nation or the functional integration of markets or even subjection to a common state to help constitute that notion of “the whole people.” This is crucial partly because it reminds us that the mode of activity and relationship, publicness, is integral to the constitution of publics and the public sphere, not just something done in them after they exist.

Publicness thus is not simply community writ large. Not only are different infrastructures required, but the nature of the relationships is different as well. In the introduction to *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey quotes the passage from Woodrow Wilson’s *The New Freedom* that was taken as an epigraph by Graham Wallas in his book *The Great Society*: “Yesterday and ever since history began, men were related to one another

as individuals. . . . To-day, the every-day relationships of men are largely with great impersonal concerns, with organizations, not with other individuals.”¹⁴ Dewey notes that this is an overstatement, but insists it is largely true.¹⁵

“Public” refers to the good we potentially seek together, but also to the very notion or creation of the “we” that may do the seeking. This is sometimes obscured by use of nouns and definite articles such as “the public” or “the public sphere.” Dewey is alert to the issue. He observes that “the concept of the state, like most concepts which are introduced by ‘The,’ is both too rigid and too tied up with controversies to be of ready use.”¹⁶ The same, I fear, is true of “public” (and Dewey’s own use of the definite article in his title doesn’t reassure). The notion of “the public,” definite article and noun, immediately concentrates our attention on some presumed substantive referent such as the citizens of a state. The usage is probably inescapable, if only as a shorthand, but it calls our attention to a body of people rather than a mode of connection among them. We may call the latter “publicness” (however awkward the term). And we should keep in mind that publicness is variable. It can do more or less of the work of organizing any particular population of people, society, or state: creating connections among its participants, shaping shared culture and institutions.

As Hannah Arendt wrote, public speech creates a space among speakers and the possibility of institutional arrangements that endure beyond the lives and mere quotidian interests of those speakers.¹⁷ If Lebanon, say, is not merely a place where different religions and civilizations meet and sometimes conflict, but rather a space in which distinctively Lebanese relations are forged and Lebanese visions of the future enacted, then it depends on communication in public, as much as on distinctively Lebanese culture, or political institutions, or economy, or social networks.

Indeed, the necessity of sharing is crucial to what makes certain goods public in the standard economic definition: those that can be consumed by individuals only if they are also made more widely available (and are not used up in their consumption and therefore “nonrivalrous”).¹⁸ Sharing is also constitutive of the singular notion of *the* public good: that which is best for a whole people.

This doesn’t mean that publicness is all good. It is, after all, exposure to a collective gaze—crucial to the accountability of public officials and the transparency of contracts but also arguably threatening to intimate relations. Exposure may be involuntary and asymmetric, as when states or credit agencies mount surveillance operations and the information

gathered is either leaked or used strategically against individuals. Not everything that goes on in public is a performance we can control.

CULTURE, ACTION, AND REASONED CRITIQUE

Habermas does not offer the whole story or the last word on the public, but he is nonetheless very helpful for clarifying the “stakes” of the concept of public or public sphere. These lie in the possibility that the basic character of social life, including its political institutions and perhaps even economic relations, could be shaped by reasoned collective choice rather than only inherited from tradition, imposed by power, or dictated by allegedly necessary conditions of functional integration such as the logic of markets asserted by neoliberalism. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas did not propose a universal theory of public life, and still less claim to offer a description of public life everywhere (so he is hardly refuted by showing that public life in many places is not what he described). Rather, he argued that at least one constitutive category of bourgeois life had not yet exhausted its emancipatory potential—even though the conditions of actually capitalist democracy had thwarted it.

The basic question guiding Habermas’s exploration of the public sphere was: to what extent can opinions guiding political action be formed on the basis of rational-critical discourse? This is a salient issue primarily where economic and other differences give actors discordant identities and conflicting interests. For the most part, Habermas took it as a given that the crucial differences among actors were those of class and political-economic status; in any case, he treated them as rooted in private life and brought from there to the public. He focused on how the nature, organization, and opportunities for discourse on politically significant topics might be structured so that class and status inequalities were not an insuperable barrier to political participation. The first issue, of course, was access to the discourse. But given access, there was also the question of willingness to listen to another’s speech, and also distribution of the sorts of education that empowered speakers to present recognizably “good” arguments. Beyond this, there was the importance of an ideological commitment to setting aside status differences in the temporary egalitarianism of an intellectual argument. Habermas’s later accounts of communicative action—oriented to understanding rather than instrumental effects—pursued the same issues.

The public sphere joined civil society to the state by focusing on a notion of public good as distinct from private interest. It was, however, clearly rooted in civil society and indeed in the distinctive kind of privacy

it allowed and valued. “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.”¹⁹ This public use of reason depended not only on foundations in civil society but also on normative commitments to openness and rational political discourse.

Openness meant access to public information and participation in public debate. Habermas writes as though these expanded in a more or less evolutionary process, though we know long struggles were involved. No doubt the normative commitment implicit already in the eighteenth-century public sphere helped. But William Cobbett’s early-nineteenth-century effort simply to publish the proceedings of the English Parliament met with resistance from the Court and many parliamentary elites.²⁰ Indeed, the public sphere of Habermas’s golden age became the bourgeois public sphere only by expelling radical artisans and others and establishing limits both of class and of what counted as respectable opinion.²¹ Likewise, the rights of women to speak in public were often as much contested as their rights to vote.²² Exclusion from both information and voice was often as basic to the practice of public life as openness was to its normative foundation. But through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, public life in a wide range countries was opened increasingly to citizens beyond just property holders, to women, to workers, to racial and ethnic minorities.

This fulfilled part of the ideal of the public sphere that Habermas’s book embraced and articulated. Yet the book ended on a note of disappointment. Habermas traced a structural transformation that eroded the bases for effective rational-critical debate among independent members of civil society and allowed the public sphere to be overtaken by manipulative mass media, on the one hand, and negotiation among powerful interest groups such as employers and unions, on the other. Media lost their independence from states and especially markets and merged into an entertainment-driven culture industry that made them a “platform for advertising.”²³ Public relations specialists and the agents of firms, unions, and other instrumental market actors gained the capacity to manipulate public opinion. The rise of opinion polling was more an attempt to aggregate private opinions than deliberatively public. Give-and-take argument

between informed citizens gave way to projects of mass persuasion and negotiation behind closed doors.

Habermas had more than enough reasons for worry in simple observation of the weaknesses of the public sphere in Europe and America in the 1950s. Adenauer's Germany was a country repressing discussion of both its recent history and anything more than the narrowest version of its future. The United States endured one of the greatest of mass-mediated political panics in the McCarthy anticommunist witch hunts and as it recovered through itself into apolitical, even antipolitical, popular culture and mass consumption. Still, a crucial reason for the pessimistic second half of Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was his view of rational-critical debate itself, which was based overwhelmingly on face-to-face address and printed texts. His discussions of electronic media all focused on limits and problems.

Central to Habermas's story is the paradox that though openness was as basic to the public sphere as reasoned debate, the way in which it became truly large scale brought reduction in rational-critical quality. "Members Unlimited" had been a slogan of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s, but as it turned out, social foundations for effective participation didn't keep up. As Dewey had anticipated, the structures of face-to-face public communication could not be stretched to be effective on a very large scale. Bureaucratic and market powers reestablished capacity to "manage" public opinion or steer it from above. At the same time, rising corporate power and state penetration of civil society undermined the distinction of public and private, producing a "refeudalization" of society. Television allowed widespread access, but to centralized messages; in itself it didn't reproduce the give-and-take conversation of the eighteenth-century coffeehouses.²⁴

While Habermas's account of the continuing value of the category of public sphere evoked by the eighteenth-century ideal set him apart from Horkheimer and Adorno and their pessimistic turn in critical theory, he largely incorporated their critique of "mass society" as "administered society" into his survey of twentieth-century developments and with it many of the fears of nineteenth-century liberals.²⁵ As he summed up: "Kant still counted on the transparency of a surveyable public sphere shaped by literary means and open to arguments and which is sustained by a public composed of a relatively small stratum of educated citizens. He could not foresee the structural transformation of this bourgeois public

sphere into a semantically degenerated public sphere dominated by the electronic mass media and pervaded by images and virtual realities.”²⁶

Bemoaning mass society, Habermas sought ways to protect communicative action from colonization by systems of money and power. He saw relatively little in new electronic media or political styles to harness to the advantage of the public sphere. Where Dewey had seen the scale and impersonality of modern society as reasons publics were necessary, Habermas saw greater threats. So did the other great theorist of publics of the era, Hannah Arendt.

Arendt joined in the critique of mass society and was generally unimpressed with the quality of political discourse in the 1950s and early 1960s.²⁷ But whereas Habermas’s response was to try to protect a space for deliberation and argument from intrusions, Arendt’s was to stress public action that could be creative and culture forming. The public realm, for her, was composed of that which human beings created and held in common: artifacts, relationships, culture—or, as she would say, stories. All these helped make up a way of life or a world, but only the artifacts could in a strict sense be *made*; the rest depended on action—which was not so fully subject to control.

In its most general sense, she suggested, “to act means to take an initiative.” Action allowed for startling, unexpected beginnings—but where it led and how much it mattered always depended on others. “Action,” she wrote, “is never possible in isolation.” Action takes place in a public space of appearance, before and with others. What people do creates both stories and effects not just visible to other people but visible in the response of other people. This was an extension of the ancient Greek approach to achieving honor and just recognition but also a challenge to the modern notion that the essence of individual life was interior. As political animals, human beings found their essential existence largely in communicating and forming life with others—and in the stories told afterward. Public action of this kind is basic to forming a common world. Our promises, for example, become the bases for institutions; repeated narratives establish standards of judgment. We make contracts to form business corporations, constitutions to organize countries. But the space of appearance, humans together in speech and action, is always prior to formal constitution and always “in the moment.” “Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.”²⁸ Action thus is never simply “making” because it is always unpredictable, always

a matter of enlisting others, and always a setting in motion rather than a stabilization. Power stabilizes.

Arendt shared much with Habermas's distinction of communicative from instrumental action. But her stress was not simply on rational-critical discourse aimed at understanding; it was on natality, the potential for novelty in the world—and the source of faith and hope for the future of the world. This world was created of promises, institutions, and indeed constitutions. Politics needed to manage this, but not control it so completely that it was lost. But it was also a way of literally making something new, not only disclosing but creating a shared world. This was the basis for Arendt's praise for the American revolutionary founding, an act of bringing a new public way of life into the world by means of speech and shared promises.²⁹

Both Arendt's and Habermas's books on the public sphere appeared just before, or just as momentum was gathering for, one of the greatest effusions of public engagement of recent history: that identified with the 1960s. Of course, the 1960s brought more to public life than just renewed political activism. Older critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno saw their fears confirmed by efforts to merge culture and intense personal experience, film, music, and sexual liberation with politics. Having analyzed the dangerous infusion of aesthetics into politics in Nazism, they were alert to the negatives in the 1960s. Habermas had similar worries, though a more open mind. He had described the public sphere as much more narrowly focused on rational-critical public debate bearing on state politics. The 1960s seemed to explode the boundaries. The events of that decade also made it clear that discussion of the public sphere demanded attention to social movements, not only debate.

Though Arendt was largely dismissive of the actual politics and public engagements of the 1960s, her work spoke to them in an important respect. She recognized the centrality of culture-forming activity and of creative initiative that could not be controlled. She argued the impossibility of reducing politics to mere contests over power, let alone over policy. At the same time, if only obliquely, Arendt freed the idea of publicness from the notion that it could be only about states. It is important to keep in mind the public life of cities, art, science, religion.

Though sympathetic to much in the 1960s movements, Habermas worried that they too were marked by a troubling "dedifferentiation," that politics and reason were not being kept clearly enough distinct from aesthetics, emotions, and experience. This points to two more basic theoretical issues in Habermas's account. First, he sees the work of the

public sphere overwhelmingly in terms of rational judgment of intellectual contents—not in terms of cultural production or change, not in terms of reimagining what is possible, not in terms of motivation or passion. The normative point is clear, but the practical implications are troubling.

Disembedding reason from culture, Habermas seems to elevate the norm that it should in principle be possible to offer a rational argument in favor of all positions taken in public discussions to a requirement that such discussions take place in the realm of reason alone. Few actual public discussions could meet this test. Most develop in more “culturally embedded” ways; most involve change in meaning and affect that is hard to distinguish from rational cognition. The primary target of Habermas’s treatment of differentiation and dedifferentiation in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is the deployment of money, power, and “technical” capacity to administer a public discussion, thus depriving it of the crucial capacity to decide questions by the quality of arguments. It is this capacity that makes the public sphere different from the mere imposition of power or negotiation among powers. Habermas is understandably keen to guard this, and the concern remains central as some of the terminology of his theory changes in ensuing years. Not only public debate but also communicative action and the lifeworld more generally need to be protected from colonization by systems of nonlinguistic steering media (money and power).³⁰ But although money and power are ubiquitous, they more clearly have an external relationship to reason than does culture, personal experience, or the embodiment of thought (which connects it not only to emotion but to habits forged in previous social life—whether of the salience of one’s gender or skin color or of the experience of solidarity). That there should be a strong norm privileging the place of reasoned critique and evidence in argument does not require privileging arguments made in contexts devoid of music, images, poetry, or impassioned speech. Habermas is consistent through his career in wanting to separate reason from culture, experience, and embodiment.³¹ It is an issue when he considers the place of religion in the public sphere, for example, leading him to approach religion as a matter of propositional content alone—without music, ritual, or the experience of prayer.³² He is hardly alone in this effort to separate reason from the rest of life, but it has a special significance in relation to the public sphere. It not only narrows the range of public engagement that counts as proper participation in the public sphere, but does so in potentially socially discriminating ways. Privileging performance in abstract argumentation commonly privileges elites; crowds and more emotion-laden performances may

be more important for subalterns seeking access to the public sphere; songs and films may carry important capacity to counterbalance hegemonic patterns of thought and carry them to a much wider range of people.

Habermas is deeply committed to the notion that modern society depends on its differentiation into distinct spheres, such as politics, economy, and civil society. This is a widespread view, classically articulated by Max Weber in the notion of different “value spheres” and given detailed theoretical formulation by Talcott Parsons. It would be a distraction to go very far into trying to elucidate this or related ideas.³³ The basic notion is that before the modern era, religion provided a comprehensively integrated set of values, but that modernity was constituted, in part, by the fragmentation of these values into a set of more or less incommensurable goods—even, in some phrasings, gods. These were not intrinsically ranked, and each could be treated as in some sense ultimate. Weber identified six value spheres (religion, economy, politics, aesthetics, the erotic, and the intellectual). Relatedly, Weber indicates that while there was a strong conceptual distinction in antiquity between public and private, this was lost in the Middle Ages, before being restored as part of the rise of Western modernity. Habermas questions some of Weber’s specifics—for example, he wonders whether the public-private distinction was even relevant to medieval social organization—but he accepts the overall account. Influenced by this conceptualization of social differentiation, he links the notion of the political public sphere to an idea of the properly political and its necessary separation from the economy or for that matter religion. This makes the differentiation of spheres and the distinction of public and private matters of principle not a complex relationship and an essentially contested question. We might compare Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of fields, also influenced by Weber.³⁴ Bourdieu sees an indefinite number of fields, each historically created, each with its own field-specific form of capital (similar to the distinctive value posited by Weber) and internal hierarchy. But Bourdieu suggests that capitals are convertible (if not perfectly commensurable) and that the various fields are no more than semiautonomous; all are influenced by state and market as well as each other.

The point of all this is that we might conceive of the relationships and boundaries among different fields or spheres as historically constructed and potentially reconfigured. Matters of economics or religion or sexual relations are not intrinsically external to the public sphere. The possibility of giving public attention to each and using public discourse to try to change the way each figures in social life more generally is always open.

This idea is not as foreign to Habermas as is sometimes implied. He stressed the development of a literary public sphere as an important precursor to the political public sphere of the late eighteenth century. Moreover, the role of the literary public sphere was not merely preparatory; somewhat curiously, it disappears from Habermas's account once the political public sphere is fully onstage, but of course literary (and religious and scientific) debate remains active and entwined with strictly political themes in public discourse. In later discussions Habermas accepts the multiplicity of publics, suggesting that pluralism advances democracy so long as none is hegemonic and all cooperate in a rational search for truth.³⁵

Habermas has also accepted the force of related criticism that his original account of the public sphere did not adequately recognize its exclusionary character. Despite its ostensible openness, it seems to exclude from participation many kinds of voices, arguments, and views. As Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argued soon after Habermas's book appeared, this includes many potential contributions that reflect the experience of workers and other subordinated groups.³⁶ The theme was later developed, most especially with regard to gender bias, but also race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, cultural style, and other dimensions. This encouraged reliance on the idea Negt and Kluge introduced of "counterpublics," which contested the hegemonic construction of dominant publics. Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner have been further prominent theorists of this concept.³⁷

I have urged caution against simply celebrating counterpublics, as though their existence in itself dealt with the issue of exclusion. It is important to recall that they have generally been contenders for more widespread influence. Commonly, their marginalization in or exclusion from a more authorized public sphere is a grievance. I think we should see something more like a multidimensional field of public communication in which different groups and indeed conversations contend for influence. Rather than implying that this is simply a competition of ideas, in which the best win regardless of status, we should recognize that multiple dimensions of social status and social connections shape the extent to which different groups are able to get their issues on the agenda. Contention for standing in public, therefore, is more than argument. Following Bourdieu, we can analyze how it reflects inequalities in various forms of capital. But taking up a theme Bourdieu did not make prominent, we can see also that it reflects social movements.

Take a current issue such as gay marriage. The issue moved into more "mainstream" discussion, and indeed attitudes changed for a host of

reasons, from the class position of gay Americans to the pattern of network links connecting straight to gay citizens and even the prominence of gay Republicans. It reflected movement mobilization not just on the issue but over recognition and rights more generally with results such as simply much greater awareness of the gay population in personal relations as well as public affairs. Of course, it also reflected a deradicalization of gay politics and perhaps sexual politics more generally and was thus a double-edged change from the point of view of the counterpublic—a claim to the right to be conventional more than a queering of convention. This was not only a “game” between advocates for gay marriage and upholders of so-called traditional definitions of marriage. It was activity in a field alongside a hundred other mobilizations and issues. There was competition for attention but also reinforcement as people active on one issue could turn networks and organizing skills to another.

Looking at the modern era more broadly, we see an expansion of publicness driven by both mobilization around specific issues and a range of more general factors: development of new communications media, rising literacy and educational levels, growth of the state, and expansion of popular political participation. In this process, the distinction of public and private took on new importance and complexity. First, the realm of public interaction expanded; cities were the primary setting for this, especially cosmopolitan trading and capital cities. Public spaces appeared literally with coffeehouses, parks, theaters, and other places where people who were not bound by private relations gathered and communicated. They also grew metaphorically with printed sermons, pamphlets, newspapers, books in vernacular languages, journals that reviewed them, and other media of public communication on through the Internet and social media today. Second, the state also expanded and with it the range of *res publica*, public things that included property held in common and matters of concern to the whole polity. Publicness took on a dual sense referring both to openness of access and interaction and to collective affairs as managed by the state. “The public” referred both to the collective subject of democracy (the people organized as a discursive and decision-making public) and to its object (the public good).

UNKNOWABLE SOCIETY

In Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, discussion of the public realm follows immediately on denunciation of “the rise of the social.” This latter phenomenon Arendt equates with “the rise of housekeeping,” that is, the

various activities, problems, and organizational devices that constitute ordinary, mundane life—rather than life with the possibility of action and excellence. Arendt speaks of “life processes.” She means eating and sleeping and even sex (though others might think that sex does offer opportunities for excellence and in any case is related to her celebration elsewhere of natality). She means economic activity and also political efforts to alter economic conditions. She means the ways in which people are absorbed into social relations that are not of their conscious creation. She means mass normalization—from eating dinner in front of the television to using credit cards, driving cars, and tolerating the surveillance implied by the gathering of statistics about one’s viewing, driving, purchases, and payments.

If Dewey recognized that the complexity and scale of modern society were significant and Habermas worried that it tended to bring organization in autopoietic systems rather than self-aware human action, Arendt was outright hostile to the rise of society—and not just because of scale and impersonality but because it was organized to serve mere needs of human existence, not the possibilities of human creativity. Arendt’s disdain for society and ordinary human welfare is troubling, but at the same time her account enables us to recognize something in modernity that threatens both private and public. For Dewey, this distinction was of minor theoretical interest; his focus was more on the contrast between the few and the many. For Habermas, it was basic, with formation of individuals in private life a condition of both competent and independent voice in public life. At the same time, Habermas insisted that the issues of private life could rightly be excluded from the public sphere, indeed that it was important that they should be excluded in order to allow the public to focus only on what people shared in common. This was in one sense a peculiar notion: that people somehow did not share the institutions that produced and reproduced inequality, that marginalized women or workers. But Arendt turns our attention to a different and important point: that the organization of life together in terms of the imperatives of states and capitalist economies is a threat not just to vibrant public life but to private happiness.

The public had been opposed to the private, Arendt argues, but now in important ways both are opposed to the social. She acknowledges the everyday meaning of publicity—exposure to the gaze of the multitude. But what she is really concerned with is the way publicness connects. “To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit

around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.” The difference of the public from the mass is precisely that it has the power to distinguish and relate. This power to give form and establish connections offers the capacity to order human relations in ways that transcend mere intimate subjectivity and mere responses to necessity. “Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible.” Here Arendt comes close to Dewey: “Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.”³⁸

This realm of housekeeping may seem to be the realm of privacy, but in three senses it is not. It is a realm of consumption, not deprivation—and dependent on connections to producers. It is exposed to external scrutiny. And it is devoid of true personal character. In other words, it involves contents that might superficially have been private but have been transformed into the stuff of the social by commensuration and aggregation. This, I think, is a considerable part of what Arendt meant by blaming equality for the rise of the social. She appeals to Aristotle for the opposition between freedom and necessity, but is tendentious in holding that he saw privacy as mere necessity and an isolation somehow falling below the common standard. As Swanson has argued, “In Aristotle’s view human beings should conceive privacy not as a sphere that should (at best) accommodate common opinion but as activities that cultivate virtue and discount common opinion.”³⁹ It is not that everyone or everything actually became equal in some material sense. Arendt was quite aware of differences of wealth or in the quality of goods. But this is just the point. Differences of wealth are expressions of the underlying equivalences that make for units of measurement—money, notably. And a focus on differences of wealth implies otherwise equal people—as distinct from an aristocratic differentiation of persons by status that presumes no such common denominator. Differences in the quality of goods are literally qualitative, except insofar as they are measurable by differences in cost or price and thus render all sorts of goods mere commodities.

Indeed, Arendt suggests, the rise of the social disrupts the old opposition between public and private. “The decisive historical fact is that modern privacy in its most relevant function, to shelter the intimate, was

discovered as the opposite not of the political sphere but of the social, to which it is therefore more closely and authentically related.” The transformation of privacy, she suggests, is in large part a matter of efforts to claim and protect a realm of the personal from the reduction to common denominators and impersonal connections in this new phenomenon of the social. Intimacy is rethought as a quintessential expression of the personal and of direct interpersonal but not public relations. To claim the intimacy of the heart, deep subjectivity, or one’s very moods and emotions as private was to rebel against their potential reduction to currencies of the social. Rousseau and the romantics discovered intimacy as resistance against conformity, though, of course, the social would colonize the intimate. Arendt describes the modern enchantment with “small things” from pets to gardening as in some sense similar, “a purely humane corner” in a world of industrial objects. There is an intimation here of the new valuation of ordinary happiness that Charles Taylor identifies as a link between religious and secular culture in the early modern era. Not least, Arendt suggests that bodily pain, nearly noncommunicable, is a borderline experience between life among men and death because it is so radically subjective that it cannot assume an appearance, a form meaningful for others in any approximation of how it is meaningful for oneself.⁴⁰

Appearances are central to the public realm. In public action we face outward, not inward. It is appearances that connect acting and speaking men. Participants’ agency is disclosed in speech and action. The metaphorical table around which we sit (to hark back to the earlier quote from Arendt) is the product of speech and action. Craftsmen create objects that embody their creativity and endure, but the words and actions that make up *vita activa* have no such material continuity; they live on as they are remembered and as they shape history. At the extreme, they may be words and acts may come together in moments of constitution, of the radical performativity that can bring a new institutional order into being, which Arendt celebrates in *On Revolution*’s story of the American founding. This depends on the space of appearance in which power is actualized, “where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.” Public actors seek the immortality of being remembered for their speech and actions, not some notion of their inner essence. They do not simply find the self; they cultivate it. Arendt’s student Richard Sennett has offered eighteenth-century

exemplars to elaborate on her insight.⁴¹ He contrasts the posture of naturalness adopted by Rousseau to the artful presentation of self championed by Diderot, complete with powdered wig and artificial beauty mark. It is precisely this effort at self-presentation that enables life in public, that enables us to hold public things in relationship to each of us.⁴² Publicness is action that connects us around Arendt's table of matters of shared concern and the promise of creating a better world with each other.

Arendt emphasizes the capacity of action in public to create the world that citizens share in common. The term "public," she writes, "signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena: It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. . . . Second, the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it."⁴³ Public action, moreover, is the crucial terrain of the humanly created as distinct from the natural world, of appearance and memory, and of talk and recognition. Such action both requires and helps to constitute public spaces—spaces held in common among people within which they may present themselves in speech and recognize others. Public action is thus a realm of freedom from the necessity—notably of material reproduction—that dominates private life.

Public action can create institutions, as in the founding of the American Republic, but as action it is unpredictable. Its publicness comes from its performance in a space between people, a space of appearances, but it is in the nature of public action to be always forming and re-forming that space and arguably the people themselves. This conceptualization offers clear advantages for thinking about the place of plurality in the public sphere. As Arendt says of America, "Since the country is too big for all of us to come together and determine our fate, we need a number of public spaces within it."⁴⁴

Arendt sees this plurality threatened not just by mass conformity but by the reduction of public concerns to material matters. A focus on sex as much as on the economy threatens the public-private distinction. It not only intrudes on intimacy and private life but also impoverishes public discourse. Arendt sees this problem as basic to totalitarianism, which could allow citizens neither privacy nor free public discourse.⁴⁵ Totalitarianism is distinguished from mere tyranny by the fact that it works directly on private life as well as limiting public life. This is not just a matter of contrasting intentions, but one of distinctively modern capacity. Modern sociological conditions offer rulers the possibility to reach deeply into the

family in particular and personal life in general to engineer human life in ways never before imagined.

This potential for collapsing the public and private realms is linked to Arendt's unusually negative view of civil society. "Society," she writes, is "that curious and somewhat hybrid realm which the modern age interjected between the older and more genuine realms of the public or political on one side and the private on the other." Civil society is first and foremost a realm of freedom *from* politics. But public freedom is freedom *in* politics. This calls for action that creates new forms of life, rather than merely attempting to advance interests or accommodate to existing conditions. This distinguishes Arendt's view, and republicanism generally, from much liberal thought: "Thus it has become almost axiomatic even in political theory to understand by political freedom not a political phenomenon, but on the contrary, the more or less free range of non-political activities which a given body politic will permit and guarantee to those who constitute it."⁴⁶

Arendt's account of the rise of society has been one of the more controversial—indeed, literally as well as figuratively unpopular—of her arguments. Hannah Pitkin describes it as "the attack of the blob."⁴⁷ The title evokes at once a cheesy science fiction movie of the 1950s and the widespread treatment of crowds as undifferentiated masses. Both are indeed relevant. The contemporary disaster-movie genre reveals at once anxieties about potential calamities, commonly displaced onto aliens, and desires for greater human capacity to act in concert to meet challenges. And in our current era of financial and climate catastrophes, we are not without similar anxieties and desires nor their expression in disaster movies.

Pitkin argues that the concept of the social was confused and in tension with many of Arendt's most profound insights and arguments. In particular, in most of her work Arendt argues that problematic social arrangements are the results of human action—or more often the failure of human beings to rise to the need for action—and therefore that humans have the capacity to liberate themselves from the problems by virtue of their own freedom to take action, to engage in politics (a position close to Dewey). By contrast, Pitkin suggests, Arendt presents the social as somehow alien, an external force constraining human beings and blocking action. Arendt describes the social in a flood of mostly negative metaphors; it rises up intrusively, devours human individuality, lets loose meaningless growth, and perverts politics. Pitkin argues that by presenting the social (hypostatized into a noun) so much as an external force, Arendt undercuts her

own more general and more important argument that we have the capacity to engage in critical thought, grasp what is going on, and take action to change it.

The critique of mass society in which Arendt participated was widespread in the 1950s and '60s and had both academic and popular versions. Along with others Arendt simultaneously analyzed the social system that turned humans into mere cogs in its machinery and denigrated the potential for large-scale collective action to change this situation. This is the account echoed by Habermas in the last chapters of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, though he describes a degeneration caused more by a collapse of the differentiation between public and private. Almost immediately, Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge responded with *The Public Sphere and Experience*, introducing the idea of counterpublic, arguing for the actuality and potential of a proletarian public sphere, and suggesting that critical public engagement was grounded in experience, not simply abstract thought. Engaging Habermas specifically, this was also a challenge to mass-society views in general. This in fact echoed a theme from John Dewey, who argued for common experience, including of production, as a source enabling popular democracy to escape reliance on experts. By contrast, the mass-society critique was often elitist and evidenced contempt not just for crowds but for the concerns of ordinary people that commonly drove collective action. The masses of modern society, Arendt suggests, are "worldless." Or, in the metaphor introduced earlier, they have no table to sit around. They haven't created a world of promises, public meanings, and constitutional order to establish differentiation and relationships. They behave rather than act.

Indeed, a widespread approach to popular protest and struggles for social change used precisely this description. Rather than speaking of social movements or collective action, it described "collective behavior." With roots back to Gustav LeBon's notion of a debased-crowd psychology and Sigmund Freud's notion that group psychology worked at the lowest common denominator of individual psychologies, this perspective flourished as part of the broader critique of mass society in the 1950s. It reached a sort of apogee with Neil Smelser's 1962 book *Collective Behavior* that described efforts to bring about social change by means of protest and challenges to authority as the result of "short-circuiting" in the thinking of participants and in the social system itself.⁴⁸ This critique has been countered by a range of studies showing the extent to which collective action is not mindless. This involves showing the strategy and organizational labor behind

even relatively ephemeral crowds, such as demonstrations or even food riots, revealing them not always to be simply “eruptions” or “explosions” expressing emotions but not real, thoughtful actions. Even more, the old collective-behavior view has been countered by attention to the more concerted collective action of social movements. Whether focused on workers or women or peace, social movements are better seen as forms of action, politics in Arendt’s positive sense, than mere behavior in response to needs. They are also central ways of communicating in and shaping the agenda of the public sphere, though curiously neglected by Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas.

It is telling that Arendt considered the founding of the United States creative activity by the heroic individuals who drafted documents such as the Constitution, but not a social movement. For Arendt (and Pitkin), the hope for escaping the tyranny of the social-as-blob lies in retrieving a strong sense of individual action. But movements are not merely worryingly collective for Arendt. They are literally focused on the social, which Arendt sees as a realm of mere response to needs. This is central to Arendt’s critique of the social. She contrasts matters of necessity to freedom, the capacity to act and to create precisely in ways not governed by need or necessity. This is unfair to social movements, which can be important to precisely the sort of world-making activity that Arendt praises. Nonetheless, without agreeing entirely with Arendt’s account, like Pitkin I think she is on to something important. But we need more clarity about this “social” and why it is so refractory to public scrutiny and competition from public ways of ordering social relations.

Arendt’s account of the rise of the social includes industrialization, a statistically mediated world of markets and bureaucracies, and a superficial equality that offered broad but weak rights. As a shorthand we may say that she focuses on capitalism and bureaucracy. She writes of the former much like Marx and the latter much like Weber, though she avoids identifying her arguments with either. Both are also concerned with ways in which the products of human action become external pressures on humans, constraints on freedom. Of course, there is a bit more to it than this, for Arendt (like both Marx and Weber) is also concerned with a way of thinking—she speaks of ideological thinking—that inhibits recognition of what is going on.

Arendt looks back to the upheavals created by the Great Depression, but beyond this to a longer process of organizing human affairs on a large scale by impersonal, instrumental means. This created a mass neediness for

belonging that paved the way for fascism. This was reinforced by the opacity of the new world of large-scale and abstract systems in which national institutions and local communities failed adequately to bring order and distant forces could create huge upheaval. Organic nationalist ideologies flourished partly because they promised a way to understand what was going on, albeit in an arguably paranoid fashion.

Unlike Arendt, we have not just lived through global depression, the rise of fascism and Stalinism, and cataclysmic world war. Nonetheless, we live in an era hardly free from worry about such things. Without actual depression, we have had a dramatic example of the way financial capitalism can wreak havoc on both large-scale capitalism and ordinary lives. Following from this we see upheaval in the politics that until recently seemed to be bringing integration to Europe. We see states hamstrung by fiscal crises and politicians who find it hard to act. We see large-scale unemployment and antipolitical movements from Greece's near-Nazi Golden Dawn to Italy's populist Five Star. And in the United States as well we see rather severe failures of both politics and markets. Not least of all, we live under the shadow of potential climatic or ecological catastrophe yet are seemingly unable to stem its causes, whether we identify them with rapacious unethical consumption or the growth machine of global capitalism.

We may look at all these actual and potential threats in various ways. Their relevance here is only that each is produced partly by the growth of large-scale systems of human activity, often aided by technology, that appear to operate outside voluntary human control. These systems are basic to our contemporary ways of life. Markets and bureaucracies—economic exchange and hierarchical authority relations—are major modalities governing these systems. But we should also recognize the range of things managed by sociotechnical systems, from transportation and energy to taxation and credit, capitalist production to warfare. In each case there are interactions among information systems, material infrastructures, and human agents. In each case, transparency is a challenge. The systems are increasingly automated, and they create such complex interdependency that it is hard for any actor to see the workings of the whole. At the heart of each is some form of connectivity. We see a dramatic expansion in connectivity among people forged in what I will call indirect relations. By these I mean simply social relationships that do not depend on—and possibly do not allow—direct interpersonal communication. This means more than simply the use of phones or e-mail instead of face-to-face communication (though that mediation is also significant). The relationship between

authors and readers of books is a bit more indirect, that between writers and compilers of software and end users generally still more so. Indirect relationships include those between the makers and purchasers of goods in markets where there can be any number of intermediary steps, each an additional transaction that obscures but does not eliminate the relationship. They include those established in bureaucratic organizations between employees at high levels and those at low and even more through such organizations between those who establish regulations and those subject to them. And indirect relationships are forged by surveillance and the use of data about our daily lives created in innumerable transactions and monitored to assess our creditworthiness—or to calculate just what political message a candidate should offer us.

Much of this appears in the form of systems that operate largely beyond the reach of political action, and a key question is whether these systems are in principle autonomous, like Weber's value spheres, or potentially subject to effective regulation (even if not direct management), or indeed like Bourdieu's fields only semiautonomous, engaged in boundary struggles with each other. Put another way, to what extent may public communication be able at least to change the conditions and constraints under which these operate? At the same time, though, these systems intrude ever more into what might have been considered private life. They thus challenge at once the public project of actively choosing the modes of our relationships to each other (and to nature) and the possibility of private life sheltered from external gaze.

Take the sociotechnical systems that contributed to the financial crisis of 2009. These involved computerized trading, newly engineered financial instruments, a culture of gambling, and a failure of regulation. A key feature was the dramatic expansion of the sheer amount of capital tied up in financial instruments: 75 percent of all capital by 2008, where it had been only 25 percent in the 1970s. A concomitant of this proliferation of credit and debt was a proliferation of connections among all the various parties who held these instruments. Industrial capital also creates connections, but it is less fluid, mobile, and promiscuous than finance. We have only to think of the interlinking involved in credit default swaps with their all but unknowable counterparty risks or the role played by mortgage-backed securities, sliced into thousands of shares and dispersed into markets, yet used as collateral by banks seeking ever-greater leverage.⁴⁹

Arendt's account of society is frustrating in the extent to which it presents an external force all but preventing public action. The blob involves

forms of knowledge, such as statistical representation of populations; Arendt is a forerunner of Michel Foucault in his accounts of power and knowledge. But for Arendt society is also in a crucial sense unknowable—and I have tried to suggest that this problem has become more severe where connections are forged in partially automated, highly engineered processes made opaque by both secrecy and complexity. Society, in this sense, moves of itself, threatening privacy and publicness alike and making it hard, though perhaps not quite impossible, to bring about a different order of human relationship by public action.

INDIRECT RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

John Dewey was also struck by the enormous complexity of social organization (and he was writing in the 1920s and Arendt in the 1950s; I won't belabor the point that complexity has grown). Dewey's book is part of a large early-twentieth-century engagement with the rise of large industrial enterprises, new transport and energy infrastructures, and the growth of both government and a range of new associations such as trade unions. Dewey sees these not as problems in themselves, but simply the basic character of modern life. They knit large populations together, make possible economies of unprecedented productive capacity and trading reach, and facilitate the organization of states both more intensive and extensive. But they also allow for some actions of specific human beings to have enormously far-reaching impacts. Where Habermas in his later work would emphasize the systemic imperatives of economy and politics, Dewey maintained an insistence on seeing actual human actors behind large-scale effects.⁵⁰

Dewey's perspective, which he says is simply empirical, takes its "point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others." Some consequences are concentrated among the direct parties to the original action, but others affect a much wider range of people, often indirectly. Dewey says that "the lasting, extensive, and serious consequences of associated activity bring into existence a public." But this leaves out a key mechanism; it is the perception of such indirect consequences that Dewey believes gives rise to publics; their efforts to organize action in response create states. "The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences

systematically cared for.” But by whom is the care deemed necessary? This could well be a small minority of the potential public, though Dewey implies an expectation of growth. He offers little clarity, though, as to how the passive public of the affected turns into the active public that cares and does something about the consequences. Communication, publicness, is itself the answer: “There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it.” Departing from empirical description, Dewey asserts that “the essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussions, and persuasion.”⁵¹

There is a puzzle here, for Dewey mostly evinces high hopes for the contributions of behavioral science to better politics. “It may be urged that the present confusion and apathy are due to the fact that the real energy of society is now directed in all nonpolitical matters by trained specialists who manage things, while politics are carried on with a machinery and ideas formed in the past to deal with quite another sort of situation.” More than eighty-five years later, we might wonder whether the course of development of expertise in politics had taken an unexpected turn. There is, in fact, a great deal of expertise. From polling to selecting targets for political advertising to focus groups and selecting messages to even experiments in using ideas from neuroscience to manipulate responses, there is a brave new world of political technologies. It owes much to advertising, marketing, and public relations but also more than a little to advances in behavioral science. Indeed, in some tension with his general enthusiasm for behavioral science, Dewey anticipated this—in terms similar to those Habermas would use thirty-five years later. “We seem to be approaching a state of government by hired promoters of opinion called publicity agents.” And of course this portended inequality. “A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters is not knowledge at all.”⁵² But this leaves the question: why didn’t the public do something?

For Dewey, states do not just demarcate the populations that may be organized as publics; they are organized efforts to carry out the business of publics. “The obvious external mark of the organization of a public or a state is thus the existence of officials.” Dewey’s book is a challenge to all theories that approach the state as a radically distinctive phenomenon, searching for its causes and taking it as the organizing principle for understanding the modern world. For him, the state has no special status. “There is no more an inherent sanctity in a church, trade-union, business

corporation, or family institution than there is in the state. Their value is also to be measured by their consequences.”⁵³ In a certain sense, the meaning of Dewey’s title is that publics are brought into being by the distinctive set of problems with which they deal. But of course Dewey also thinks the US public of his day suffers problems of underdevelopment, though they are remediable.

The major weakness of the US public that Dewey notes is a mismatch between the scale at which we are habituated to organize and think and that of the consequences that affect us. “We have inherited . . . local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental national state.” Dewey’s project in the book is, at least in part, to call forth an American public capable of dealing with the very large-scale and complex webs of consequences that he sees emanating from some actions—presumably those backed by concentrated wealth and power. This is an international issue as well. “Extensive, enduring, intricate and serious indirect consequences of the conjoint activity of a comparatively few persons traverse the globe.”⁵⁴ If scale challenges national publics, of course, it challenges transnational and global publics even more.

Dewey is impressively alert to the impact of an improved transportation infrastructure. “Railways, travel and transportation, commerce, the mails, telegraph and telephone, newspapers, create enough similarity of ideas and sentiments to keep the thing going as a whole, for they create interaction and interdependence.” Writing in a new 1946 introduction to *The Public and Its Problems*, he is worried by what World War II revealed, but expects movement toward more effective global governance. Whereas Arendt thought a world state impossible, Dewey is more hopeful. But in a discussion of the importance of habit, he suggests some of the reasons this may be a slow development, if it is coming at all. People work within the channels they know best. I would add, people have very unequal resources, and for many working in their countries, cities, or localities may be the most promising option. Dewey asks, a bit plaintively, “How can a public be organized, we may ask, when literally it does not stay in place?”⁵⁵ Perhaps we should take this less as a rhetorical expression of doubt about the possibility of place-transcending publics than a genuine question about how they can be organized. The means cannot be the same as local community. Not only do publics link strangers, often impersonally, and at a distance. They are not organized in terms of dense webs of internal relationships. Scale itself limits density, but if this is in one sense an organizational loss, in another it is a key dimension of openness.

I suspect the answers include both movements and media ecologies. When Dewey emphasizes habit—working the channels they know best—we might see also a connection to culture as well as embodied memory. At both the personal and the collective level, public life is sustained by familiarity. This applies not simply to contents, but also to more material and social practices—such as building barricades on the same Paris street corners for centuries.⁵⁶ Publicness is organized not only by norms but also by habituated practices: singing certain songs at protests, opening meetings with invocations of God or previous public leaders, insisting that speakers take turns. These make capacity for public participation in part a skill, dependent on experience—as one practiced in public speaking at church or in the union hall may do it better at a demonstration. By the same token, of course, reliance on shared culture and practices may make publics less open even while it empowers them, may make it harder for those who don't know the local traditions to join in. And of course there are traditions and practices in space-transcending publics as well, from bits of argot, jargon, and abbreviation in messages to knowledge of where to look. Think of the way public messages may have multiple meanings, as evangelical Christians could decode references to Last Days eschatology in speeches of President George W. Bush that secular or non-Christian listeners might completely miss.

Local community also impresses Dewey as crucial. “Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself.”⁵⁷ Dewey is not saying that the public can exist simply in local community (or at least he shouldn't be). Rather, I think, he is suggesting that space-transcending public life needs to be complemented by local community. He has in mind a national public, but the point applies more broadly. It is hard for a public to be sustained only in “virtual” or electronically mediated connections (though this is perhaps instructive as a limit case). The more local is partly a matter of intermediate associations; integration into the larger whole is more effective if it is through smaller-scale, even face-to-face groupings as well as a matter of direct access. It is partly a matter of social support. It is very likely a matter of carrying habits and practices learned locally into larger arenas.

At the same time, local communities may not simply mediate participation in larger publics; they may represent them. However inaccurate the notion that one's local community is a microcosm of the country, it is nonetheless powerful. People think of whole countries as made up

of numerous local communities at least somewhat like their own (and, indeed, the same goes for imagining the country—or world—as involving people who also live in families, have jobs, and so on).⁵⁸ It is not entirely clear what Dewey means by the public needing to “find itself” (like an adolescent searching for autonomous identity). But the basic idea seems to be that the public can be fully effective only when it is self-aware as well as aware of the indirect consequences and relationships that both give it problems to address and make possible its large-scale internal connections. Dewey seems to be searching for a way to describe how the large-scale public becomes tangible, surveyable, and meaningful for ordinary individuals. Just what the dialectic between local and large scale can or should be remains a question for exploration. To what extent can public communication or action thrive by large-scale electronic means alone? What would be missing without webs of more directly interpersonal relations?

Dewey draws on the sociology of Charles Horton Cooley to make the contrast of the face-to-face (a term Cooley coined) to large-scale and impersonal relations.⁵⁹ He notes that face-to-face relations are “local and contiguous and consequently visible.” Implicitly—but without ever really making it a focus of attention—he raises the question of whether all the effects of impersonal and large-scale action are equally visible and therefore whether they become thematized for the attention of the relevant public that is nonetheless affected by them. Of course, they are not, but the matter is more complicated.

Think of the issue of representing the public. Participating in a crowd event—for example, a political protest—can give a powerful sense of the public as a whole. When hundreds of thousands of people gather in, say, Tiananmen or Tahrir Square, it is easy to feel that the people as a whole are present, that the public has risen up. This is dramatic to see, but for participants it is even more powerful as an embodied experience of the immediate presence of other members of the public. When the physical space for the crowd is also symbolically loaded and prominent in the design and flow of a city, the resonance is multiplied. Such events are powerful modes of voice and also powerful collective representations of the people and the public. But they can also be misrepresentations, since large as they are, they mobilize minorities. They can encourage participants to think there is more national unity than there really is. And of course protesting crowds are blunt if powerful instruments. They are out in public, they represent the public, but as such they are not discursive publics—though within a crowd there may be innumerable conversations. Indeed, inside the occupation

of a square, there may be public debates exemplifying the rational-critical exchanges of Habermas's theory. And efforts to make visible the internal organization of a crowd, with different component groups wearing different colors or carrying flags, marching in orderly ranks are all ways of communicating to observers that this is a public, not simply a mass.

A protesting crowd or the occupation of a public space is intensely face-to-face, but not a local community. There is variation even among face-to-face relations, as indeed Cooley recognized in distinguishing primary relations such as family and close friends from more ephemeral or less close secondary ones such as bank tellers and the policeman on the corner. Beyond these are a range of mediated relationships. Some involve people we know by name but don't usually see face-to-face, such as politicians and movie stars but also distant cousins. Some are more strictly impersonal, including people to whom we are connected only by markets, or complex organizations, or indeed voting in the same elections. And some are not just impersonal but hidden, as government security agencies may observe us, even act to influence us, without our awareness and perhaps without our awareness even of their existence.⁶⁰

Dewey points out that publics are only minimally able to grasp the actual large-scale integration of social life (let alone act effectively on that scale). Moreover, large-scale publics have a hard time recognizing and understanding themselves. "In spite of attained integration, or rather perhaps because of its nature, the Public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered."⁶¹

Borrowing Graham Wallas's term for the society of large-scale complex organizations, Dewey worries, "The machine age in developing the Great Society has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community."⁶² Society, for Dewey, means much the same as for Arendt except that it is nowhere near so threatening. But he never defines the Great Community clearly. It would seem to be something like what Talcott Parsons called "societal community"—that is, some large-scale production of solidarity and a sense of belonging.⁶³ This could be produced largely by means of mediated communication, but in Dewey's case with the proviso that it brings understanding of just what is going on.⁶⁴ "We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thought and aspirations congruous with them are not communicated, and hence are not common. Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless, seeking spasmodically for itself, but seizing and holding its shadow rather than its

substance. Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues, but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.”⁶⁵

Dewey gives voice here to a hope that has run through the entire modern era. Won't technology combine with enlightenment to produce a new combination of solidarity and accurate self-understanding, banishing the mystifications of tradition? Moderns have expected national solidarity to be replaced by some more modern form for more than two hundred years. Immanuel Kant thought that “the effects which an upheaval in any state produces upon all the others in our continent, where all are so closely linked by trade, are so perceptible that these other states are forced by their own insecurity to offer themselves as arbiters, albeit without legal authority, so that they indirectly prepare the way for a great political body of the future, without precedent in the past.” He expected a “universal cosmopolitan existence . . . a perfect civil union of mankind.” Similar thoughts have animated liberals into the present day, cosmopolitan hopes for global order combined with knowledge. Two basic questions are whether extending reach requires thinning of solidarity and identity, and if so, how much that matters. What cosmopolitanism offers, Martha Nussbaum suggests, is “only reason and the love of humanity, which may seem at times less colorful than other sources of belonging.”⁶⁶ Habermas is similarly committed to thinness and proceduralism, suspicious of calls for “belonging” and thick identities.⁶⁷

Here Dewey seems torn. He thinks that “in its deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse.” Or again, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborhood community.” Here we see some tension with his own earlier chapters, which were much more optimistic about the potential for expansion of the public in large-scale, technologically mediated democracy. But in the later part of *The Public and Its Problems*, he worries more about the disruption of family life and especially local community, going so far as to assert that “the local is the ultimate universal.”⁶⁸

Since clearly face-to-face intercourse won't be enough to deal with the challenges of modern complexity, Dewey is left using the word “community” to refer to two completely different sociological concepts: the densely knit local community and the widely diffused, metaspatial Great Community. It is clearer how participants might be able to survey, understand, and adopt a common sense of value and purpose in the local community

(though far from obvious that this is in fact the state of affairs in most local communities). He acknowledges the tension. "The Great Community, in the sense of free and full inter-communication, is conceivable. But it can never possess all the qualities which mark a local community." Dewey continues to hope, because "fraternity, liberty, and equality isolated from communal life are hopeless abstractions."⁶⁹ He doesn't want to see them sacrificed to scale and complexity. His position has a special pathos, since he insists on the emotional and sociological importance of local community. Habermas, of course, shares the hope for a large-scale cosmopolitan unity, even as he cedes much of social organization to systems beyond the reach of communicative action. But he vests his hopes in achieving solidarity more completely on the basis of reason; informed by different experiences as well as theory, he finds calls for thicker social relations troubling.⁷⁰

One of Dewey's central concerns is that the public should be self-aware. "The fact of association does not of itself make a society. This demands, as we have also seen, perception of the consequences of a joint activity and of the distinctive share of each element in producing it." Durkheim expressed the same concern in his argument that organic solidarity required an advance in knowledge so that people could understand their complex interdependence. In Dewey's words, "An inchoate public is capable of organization only when indirect consequences are perceived, and when it is possible to project agencies which order their occurrence." Dewey repeats several times that the public needs to "find itself." But this is made vastly harder by the challenge of understanding the growing web of indirect consequences. "The local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so vast, so remote in initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so completely indirect in operation, that they are, from the standpoint of the members of local social units, unknown." In order to cope with this, there will have to be enormous advances in knowledge—which Dewey expects to follow partly from science and partly from the experience of practical experiment. "The prime condition of a democratically organized public is a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist."⁷¹ How to integrate such knowledge with widespread participation in public life is, of course, a basic challenge.

CONCLUSION

Insights from Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas can potentially be integrated into a stronger theory of public life and its potential as a support for democracy. I don't claim to have done this, but hope I have pushed the

project forward. Each contributed something underestimated by the others: Dewey the centrality of indirect consequences, Habermas the notions of social foundations and structural transformation, and Arendt a richer concept of action and cultural embeddedness. I have also tried to connect their work to some important themes they neglected. Perhaps the most glaring issue is the extent to which actual public life has been marked by exclusion even when its protagonists claimed openness as one of its virtues. This has been noted over and over again in the literature, and in practical affairs there has been a long struggle for inclusion of a range of different marginalized or subaltern populations.

The issue of inclusion and exclusion raises other questions besides simply who may be left out. One is the issue that troubled Habermas: did expansion in the scale of the public sphere contribute to loss of its rational-critical capacity? Another is whether the problem lies in imagining a single integrated public sphere in the first place; is it better to speak of multiple publics with different participants conducting their internal debates and contending with each other? But then, in what communicative space do they contend if not a larger, potentially integrative public sphere? It's easy to say "Look! There's a religious public, a women's public, a sports public, a teen public, a public sphere of pacifists, a public sphere of film fanatics." All true perhaps, but somewhat begging the question of why we cared in the first place.

The idea of counterpublic has helpfully identified the extent to which some arenas of public engagement are organized directly in tension with a dominant public. Negt and Kluge saw a proletarian public sphere acting as a counterpublic to the bourgeois public sphere of European capitalist states. Fraser extended the idea influentially to include a range of subaltern counterpublics. Warner not only elaborated the general argument but also reminded us that counterpublics need not be subaltern, pointing to the public sphere forged by evangelical Christians and more generally the religious Right in the United States. Sometimes withdrawal from the dominant public sphere may be a choice made by counterpublics, hoping to benefit from a more autonomous setting for internal discussions, perhaps building a common identity by reducing plurality. Sometimes counterpublics form more reluctantly, among those excluded or marginalized by the dominant public sphere, whether because of some identity or because of their opinions. And their ambition may be precisely to gain full inclusion in a larger public. Being a counterpublic is not something automatically to celebrate.

In all cases, the notion of counterpublics, or even simply multiple publics differentiated by identity, taste, or opinions, reveals a challenge to the very idea of publicness as openness. It suggests that participation in the dominant public may block the development of some discussions that will flourish more in partially closed spheres. Are these still public spheres? Or is the point that in a large and complex society, public discussion will necessarily be highly segmented—something minimally considered by Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas?

The idea of counterpublics also raises another question, that of the relationship of social movements to the public sphere. The boundary between a counterpublic and a social movement is fuzzy. Very often there is an overlap between a larger public discourse on a theme—say, the rights of women—and a more specific set of campaigns to effect social change. There is also a meaningful difference. Social movements are often seen primarily as instrumental projects. This notion may be helpfully enlarged by recognizing the extent to which movements develop—and stay alive—only with a continual discussion of their nature and purpose and the issues that animate them. This discussion, moreover, may not be entirely strategic, or even rational-critical. It very likely is part of a developing movement culture in which identities and understandings are recast.

Not only may movements be accompanied by associated publics, but movements very often shape debates in larger public spheres. This is a theme surprisingly underdeveloped in the accounts of Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas (though each of them touched on movements more in other work). For example, Habermas's story of the structural transformations of the public sphere in Europe and America is told as a story of the rise of large bureaucratic organizations, new forms of administration of public opinion, and replacement of public engagement by negotiations among interest groups. But this leaves out the continuous counterpoint of movements that challenged the seeming administered consensus, put new issues on the agenda, and revitalized public engagement. The story of US history, for example, is as much the story of successive movements—religious, populist, labor, antislavery, prosuffrage, temperance, civil rights, peace, environmental, and so forth—as it is the story of the rise of corporations and the state and their various forms of collusion.

Both multiple publics and social movements focus our attention on the internal differentiation of the public sphere and the limits of a model that imagines the whole as organized in discourse among individuals. This is centrally a matter of scale, but it goes also to basic conceptualization and

questions about the nature of public communication itself. The model of interpersonal speech cannot encompass modern democratic public life. In the first place, only a small part of the communication of such a public can be directly interpersonal communication. This means we need to complement a model of interaction with dimensions. Language use in public is necessarily a matter of the circulation of tropes, images, and information as well as anything conceptualized readily as messages and arguments. Public spheres are necessarily embedded in and productive of culture; some of the work they do is cultural change. In addition, partly through culture and partly in other ways, public engagement is partly a source of social integration. It knits together the members of the public.

This in turn raises questions about the idea that members of the public are fully formed in advance of their actual participation. As Dewey suggested, participation in public can both educate the participants and improve the quality of collective knowledge and understanding. Identities and ways of thinking as well as opinions are changed by active public participation. This calls into question the widespread claim made by elites—even subordinated elites—that many of “the people” are not ready to be part of “the public.” Chinese students protesting for democracy told me in 1989 that peasants just weren’t ready.⁷² They weren’t educated; they didn’t know how to participate in public discourse. Liberals in Russia think the same thing today: the masses are erratic; they vote either for reactionary chauvinists or for communists. Some advocate a literacy test for voter registration. And, of course, these ideas are not foreign to Western liberals who worry that the people are simply too, well, populist. But if we need to be suspicious of entry qualifications, this does not mean we can easily insist on identity preparation or capacity.

Capacity for public engagement must be understood as variable. It varies for whole countries or other large populations based on their histories, cultures, and institutional supports. It varies among individuals as an embodied competence. If one can learn and change through public participation, one can get better (or worse) at it. This competence is, I would suggest further though this isn’t the place to develop the point, a practical matter not fully subject to conscious control. It is a matter of habitus. This does not mean that there is no distinctive role for rational-critical argument; this can indeed have a regulative function in relation to public understanding. But it cannot be taken as definitive or exhaustive of communication in the public sphere, even ideally.

All of this suggests the need to resist three longings that color many accounts of the public sphere. It is not subject to complete rational control, as Arendt suggests by stressing the importance of action as initiatives with unpredictable results. It is not possible to make public life an extension of community; it is a different form of social connections or integration, not least because it is specifically about strangers and often large scale. And publicness cannot be neatly bounded by the limits of a public sphere, because publicness always has the capacity to transform the public itself.

NOTES

1. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925); John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Theory* (1927; reprint, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).
2. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 1952–63.
3. Some of Habermas's Marxist contemporaries dismissed "mere democracy" in calling for more radical social transformation. His Frankfurt School forebears feared that "premature" democracy would be dangerous, bringing into public engagement people vulnerable to demagogues, easily swayed by manipulative media, and unprepared for political responsibility. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno judged Habermas's book too much of an invitation to public activism, and Habermas had to present it for a habilitation under Wolfgang Abendroth at Marburg instead of in Frankfurt.
4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), translating *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), 131.
5. In French Habermas's book is *L'Espace publique*, the public space (a term also used by Arendt).
6. Writing about national consciousness rather than publicness as such, Benedict Anderson later coined the term "print capitalism" to describe how business interests came to support spreading communication. See *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).
7. Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus: Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); David Zaret, *The Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). There are, of course, a range of national variants in the organizational structures that support public communication.
8. E. P. Thompson describes the early-nineteenth-century struggle to keep Greenham Common open to public access—and how this still mattered in the 1980s when it became a symbolic focus of antinuclear protest. See *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1993), 126.
9. In *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2002), Michael Warner rightly stresses the centrality of strangers to publicness, but in the idea of "stranger sociability" puts the emphasis on interaction rather than, for example, the sharing of public goods.
10. John Keane, "Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere" and "A Reply to Nicholas Garnham," *Communication Review* 1, no. 1 (1995): 1–22, 27–31;

- Nicholas Garnham, "Comments on John Keane's 'Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere,'" *Communication Review* 1, no. 1 (1995): 23–25.
11. And indeed, in China clan organizations have been seen as bases for a public sphere, even if the case is ambiguous. See discussion in Craig Calhoun, "Civil Society and Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (1993): 267–80.
 12. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 234; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961).
 13. The public as a group of people—say, citizens of a state—may have various interests, and government, or markets, or other mechanisms, may serve to help meet those interests. But some sorts of goods are public in a stricter sense: they must be shared. Individuals can consume them only if they are also made more widely available, like, say, clean air or reduction in global warming. Public action—say, government expenditure—is commonly needed to secure such public goods because private markets do not give discrete individuals enough separate interest (or capacity) to pay. Also important, the shared goods must be "nonrivalrous": that is, consumption by one must not use up the good and prevent consumption by another. Paul A. Samuelson, "The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36, no. 4 (1954): 387–89.
 14. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 1771.
 15. "Impersonality" is an important theme in regard to public life, and potentially much more complicated than this passage suggests. First, there is the question of whether a complex organization—a corporation, say—is entirely separate from the concrete people who bring it into being, run it, or own it. As with the notion of system, there is a real question of theoretical perspective. The distinction of collective from emergent properties is one philosophical effort to analyze this issue, which obviously comes up in questions such as assigning legal responsibility. See May Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualisms: Definition and Reduction," in *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, edited by Brodbeck, 280–303 (New York: Macmillan, 1958). Second, there is a question about the social meaning of anonymity, not least when it is chosen as a way to make public discourse more impersonal and therefore in line with Habermas to keep the focus on arguments, not the persons arguing or their statuses. See Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Third, there is the distinction between experiencing a direct relationship as lacking in personal character or content—relating impersonally to a traffic cop, for example—and actually being unable to identify one's counterpart in an indirect and potentially very asymmetrical relationship. See Craig Calhoun, "The Infrastructure of Modernity: Indirect Relationships, Information Technology, and Social Integration," in *Social Change and Modernity*, edited by H. Haferkamp and N. J. Smelser, 205–36 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Fourth, though related, is the impersonality of membership in a large collectivity as an equivalent token of a type, as individuals are members of nations. See Craig Calhoun, "Indirect Relationships and Imagined Communities: Large Scale Social Integration and the Transformation of Everyday Life," in *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, edited by P. Bourdieu and J. S. Coleman, 95–120 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), and *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
 16. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 862.
 17. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

18. Paul A. Samuelson, "The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36, no. 4 (1954): 387–89.
19. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27.
20. I have explored this struggle in *Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early 19th Century Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). See the chapter "Members Unlimited" in E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) for an account of the radical public sphere of the late eighteenth century, the value it placed on openness, and the resistance it encountered from those who considered themselves the more proper public voices of Britain.
21. Calhoun, *Roots of Radicalism*.
22. Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 109–42 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Mary Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in 19th Century America," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Calhoun, 259–88.
23. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 185.
24. Of course, this sort of view was challenged by a wave of studies of media reception that suggested that audiences did not merely receive televised messages, but interpreted and debated them and in appropriating them often changed them. For a summary, considering also some of the challenges in making sense of empirical research on audience reception, see Sonya Livingstone, "Relationships between Media and Audiences: Prospects for Audience Reception Studies," in *Media, Ritual and Identity: Essays in Honor of Elibu Katz*, edited by T. Liebes and J. Curran, 237–55 (London: Routledge, 1998).
25. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1944).
26. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 176.
27. Arendt discussed her view of public space and the *vita activa* in most detail in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
28. *Ibid.*, 177, 188, 199.
29. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1990).
30. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (1984; reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1988).
31. See, for example, his sharp repudiation of Charles Taylor's suggestion of the importance of "thick" identities to democratic politics in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
32. See Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), and compare Habermas to Judith Butler, Charles Taylor, and Cornell West in Mendieta and Van Antwerpen, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). See also my discussion of each in the same volume.
33. In Habermas's work the Weberian idea of value spheres dovetails with Niklas Luhmann's contention (on rather different grounds) that social systems require at least operational closure if not complete autonomy; it is a condition of their systematicity that they are reproduced by means of internal feedback loops managing relationships to an external environment. See Luhmann, *The Social System*.

34. There is no perfect source for exploring Pierre Bourdieu's notion of fields, which is discussed in slightly different terms at many places in his work. See in particular *Distinction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), *Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), and *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
35. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2:458. See also Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*. Others have tried out the notion of separate arenas linked in a larger mass-mediated public sphere. See S. Hilgartner and C. L. Bosk, "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): 53–78; and M. M. Ferree et al., *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
36. Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience* (1972; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
37. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere"; Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.
38. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 52, 55; Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 2311.
39. Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 7.
40. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 38, 52, 51. See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
41. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 200; Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*. See also *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), in which he differs from Arendt in bringing craft and material poesis more fully into the creation of the public realm.
42. Having mentioned presentation of self, it is worth recognizing Erving Goffman's performative, dramaturgical sociology. Goffman shares much with Arendt, but is also decisively different in his focus on everyday life rather than the search for heroic action. See *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).
43. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50, 52.
44. Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 232.
45. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; reprint, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1973).
46. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 122, 30.
47. Hannah Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
48. Gustav LeBon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1909; reprint, New York: Viking, 1960); Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922; reprint, London: Hogarth, 1966); Neil Smelser, *Collective Behavior* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1962).
49. See Craig Calhoun, "From the Current Crisis to Possible Futures," in *Business as Usual: Sources of the Global Financial Meltdown*, edited by C. Calhoun and G. Derluquian (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
50. See Craig Calhoun, "Populist Politics, Communications Media, and Large Scale Social Integration," *Sociological Theory* 6, no. 2 (1988): 219–41, for an argument that Habermas's turn to explanation in systemic terms came with some loss not just of critical purchase but of capacity to show the role of human action.
51. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 898, 1462, 939, 2505, 2932.
52. *Ibid.*, 2046, 2525, 2922.
53. *Ibid.*, 1032, 1535.
54. *Ibid.*, 1942–52, 2097.

55. Ibid., 1952, 2231.
56. Mark Traugott, *The Insurgent Barricade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
57. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 3015.
58. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, makes this point well in regard to the way nations are imagined: not just in grand festivals and monuments to the whole, but in a serial imagination as each person who reads his newspaper in the morning may imagine all his (proper) countrymen doing the same.
59. Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Scribner's, 1909).
60. For more on the extension of Cooley's account of primary and secondary relationships into mediated relationships, see Calhoun, "Infrastructure of Modernity."
61. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 1983.
62. Ibid., 2252.
63. Talcott Parsons developed the term "societal community" in the 1960s, to designate a diffuse, enduring solidarity, produced largely by a common normative structure. See his posthumously published *American Society: Toward a Theory of Societal Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).
64. The proviso is more complicated than Dewey suggests. First, even in local communities it is not at all clear that people who recognize the community's existence and their membership and share a common culture really understand all the causal relationships that organize their lives. Second, it is entirely possible to produce common culture on a large scale, influencing basic patterns in social life, without people being aware clearly that this is going on. The rise of national cultures, for example, was accomplished partly by shared media of communications, and it produced effects such as homogenization of national fertility patterns. See Susan Cott Watkins, *From Provinces into Nations: The Demographic Integration of Western Europe, 1870–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). Dewey inadequately distinguishes community as a structure of relations from common culture and common culture from collective understanding.
65. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 2252.
66. Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent," in *Kant's Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 51; Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 15.
67. See, for example, the appendix "Citizenship and National Identity," in *Between Facts and Norms*, by Habermas.
68. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 2963, 2984, 3005.
69. Ibid., 2963, 2321.
70. See Habermas's surprisingly sharp response in *Between Facts and Norms*, 498–99, to Charles Taylor's appeal for greater recognition of culture and belonging in "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutman, 107–45, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
71. Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*, loc. 2725, 2128, 2495. See also Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1893).
72. Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

