



Jürgen Habermas and the Public Sphere

Critical Engagements

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abstract

The central theme of this thesis is the public sphere and its multifarious variations. Of specific interest is Jürgen Habermas' conception of the public sphere and its role in relation to other demarcated components of society. This thesis may be broken up into three main areas, each of which engages with Habermasian theory and applies it where possible to the Australian context. First, this thesis explores the way social movements have impacted upon the public sphere; second, the way new information technologies have altered human interaction in the public sphere, and also by virtue of this, changes in the nature of the public sphere itself and its democratic machinations. Last, I examine how the impact of different strategies of governmentality inform the construction and function of modern public space(s), and thus instruct social interaction and communication.

Traditional subsystem differentiation and public/private discourse has, in many ways, complicated the way we order our societies. This has resulted in a society largely demarcated by entrenched differences, both imagined and actual, like those originating from gender, class and race. Re-theorising traditionally separated subsystems is fraught with a number of specific complexities, which not only involves a renegotiation of public

and private spheres, but also a re-evaluation of gendered notions of public and private or in broad Habermasian terms, between the social and the systemic.

In one sense I argue that Habermas' theory not only of the public sphere, but also of his larger theory of society is good for emancipatory politics and for an understanding of society itself because of its increased separation of subsystems, or in other words, its recognition of social, political and economic complexity. On the other hand, I also conclude that Habermas' four-term model of public and private fails because despite its capacity for complexities in social relations, it remains entrenched in the modernist tradition and relies on universalist foundations. In other words, it remains a simplification of social structures.

I argue that further complexity arises as a result of what I refer to as 'the expansion of the social'. This development, I argue, has been the result of a combination of factors. Among other contributors, the augmentation of the social sphere is, in large part, a by-product of economic rationalism. The expansion of the social is the result of a marked decrease of government intervention in the market or economic sphere, and the subsequent increase of government in the private sphere of family relations. Such a process confounds traditional understandings of the role of an open public sphere and should be of particular concern for Habermasian social theory.

declarations

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award or any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Brigid Mahoney

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introduction

complexities of the public sphere

The acceptance of a separation between public and private spheres of life is a marked characteristic of liberal societies. It is also a predominant organising principle in many discourses grounded in modernity, including law. Inevitably feminist, post-modernist and post-colonialist scholars have destabilised the conventional line of demarcation. Nevertheless, because of the central ideological role played by the separation, a seemingly irrefragable lifeline continues to connect and vitalise the boundary between public and private, despite its instability.¹

The persistence of notions of a unified public sphere has long been central to the idea(l) of participatory democracy. In general terms, the public sphere has commonly been conceived of as that realm which invokes the notion of a concerned and informed citizenry who may freely voice concerns about the role of the market, the state and the formation of public and economic policy. It has its roots firmly embedded in the Western philosophic tradition and finds its origins in the conception of the Greek *agora*. Yet it is this very simplistic notion of a free and open public sphere that has been the subject of a number of ongoing theoretical disputes. In a modernist tradition the public sphere has most often been conceived of as existing in binary opposition to the private realm. Indeed, in this tradition a clear separation exists between the *polis* or public sphere, and the *oikos*,

¹ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.xiii.

the home or private sphere.² This traditional Aristotelian conception of the public and private divide, however, is increasingly at odds with liberal conceptions, which highlight the role of the individual and the market rather than the state and the family. Moreover, as many commentators have contended, it is difficult to conceptualise the public sphere of contemporary democracies in any universal, coherent manner or in terms of a simple binary separation between the categories of the family and the state.

Theorising about participatory democracy relies on promoting and reinforcing the idea of a public sphere, of an active civic public, of private citizens operating freely in their private affairs with the opportunity to debate on public affairs. However, popular notions of a unified public with generalisable interests and a collective popular opinion that serves as a guide and critic to the government are being shelved in favour of increasing social fragmentation and widespread public cynicism about the role of government. The proliferation of diverse interest groups and the globalisation of information through new information technologies has not only challenged conceptions of a unified public, but has resulted in the establishment and legitimation of multiple coexisting publics. Increasing popular dissatisfaction and uncertainty with the role of the public sphere, and the market, not only calls into question the legitimacy of the modern democratic state and its various institutions, but also raises some

² See: Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. and trans. T. A. Sinclair, revised by Trevor Saunders, Penguin Books, London, 1992. Also see: Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1992.

fundamental issues about the role and location of the individual within a modern pluralistic society.

Jürgen Habermas has amassed a substantial body of work on the structural transformation of the public sphere and provides an innovative approach to the varying roles and functions of a public sphere.³ For example, his early work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and 'The Public Sphere: an Encyclopaedia Article', detail the decline of the bourgeois public sphere in the Western European context. Both of these works are crucial to understanding Habermas' foundational notions of the role of the public sphere, and the machinations of procedural democracy which take place within such spheres. This is most evident in more recent works such as *Between Facts and Norms*, which addresses the role of a discourse⁴ theory of law and democracy in an evolving public sphere. Habermas' work has been variously concerned with the evolution of society and with ways in which the market, the individual, and institutions interact. This is necessarily coupled with an interest in communicative procedures that assist involvement in public sphere interaction, social movements, and a continuing fascination with his societal framework of

³ Works by Jürgen Habermas which deal quite directly with the public sphere include: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger in association with Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989; 'The public sphere: an encyclopaedia article', trans. Sara Lennox & Frank Lennox, in *New German Critique*, vol.3, fall 1974, pp.49-55; 'Further reflections on the public sphere', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, trans. Thomas Burger, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992. Other works such as Habermas' *The Past as Future*, Polity Press, Cambridge MA, 1994, address the notion of a public sphere in a less direct manner by discussing various difficulties with contemporary participatory democracies. Especially see: pp.5-15, 39-44, 87-93, 113-115, 135-137.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge MA, 1997. In particular, see: pp.287-328, 329-340, 359-387, 442-446.

'system' and 'lifeworld.' Habermas views the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere as the result of the confrontation between state and society, between public and private.⁵ Accordingly, his societal model of system and lifeworld provides a good starting point from which to show how the historical boundaries of the public (and private) sphere have undergone a number of significant structural and functional transformations.

In this respect, a Habermasian perspective is quite useful due not only to his work on the structure of the bourgeois public sphere, but also his continuing work on communicative and democratic themes. One of the major themes of this thesis is the adequacy with which Habermas can explain the changing nature of the public sphere and the way procedural democracy itself is practiced. Despite his continuing interest in the communicative nature of the public sphere there are various limitations of a Habermasian approach that will be explored. This approach remains interesting, though, in that it attempts to construct a theory which contends that mutual understanding is attainable in everyday social interaction. Indeed, Habermas' theory of communicative action is an argument for human cooperation and mutual understanding. Habermasian theory becomes more problematic in an increasingly fragmented era, especially when set against a backdrop of postmodernity and an abundance of theory hoping to expand upon and explain the nature of human interaction and social organisation. His insistence on the possibility of a universal experience is increasingly at odds with the increased visibility of

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', pp.430-1.

marginalised 'others' and the pervasion of social movements into the public realm.

Without a doubt, the practical and ideological functions of the public sphere have undergone considerable change since its theoretical inception and since Habermas first published his account in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in German in 1962. The change in function of the public sphere of civil society to that of the political public sphere accounts for a level of rationalisation and manipulation of public opinion and will formation that has only emerged in conjunction with the increasing complexity of the modern democratic state. It is my contention that three main factors are largely responsible for this transformation. First, the proliferation of social movements, in particular the rise of feminism; second, the emergence of new information and communication technologies; and third, theories of governmentality and the increasingly common tendency for democratic governments to favour the policies of economic rationalism. These three factors not only affect the nature of the public sphere, but also direct the positioning of the boundaries between public and private. Each of these factors has, in turn, altered our perception of the role and function of the public sphere in contemporary western societies. My core argument is that all three areas facilitate increasing fragmentation and social complexity of the public sphere and serve to highlight various inadequacies of Habermasian social theory. I will examine the theoretical background to the concept of the public sphere and discuss ways in which social movements, new information and

communication technology, and theories of governmentality engage with Habermasian critical social theory as well as his theory of communicative ethics.

Beginning with Habermas' early account of the 18th and 19th century bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe, and concluding with a look at contemporary Australia as an example of a modern industrial society, this thesis will trace various transformations of the democratic public sphere and also consider some fundamental changes in its perceived role and characteristics in contemporary society. In this way, this thesis deals with a number of different themes that are all interconnected on a number of levels. The main aim of the project however, is to show where Habermasian theory is useful and where it is not by applying it to modern conceptions of the public sphere and employing policy examples to illustrate my argument. I will examine Habermas' re-theorisation of the categories of public and private in order to deconstruct and analyse them, thus employing a strategy of 'double intention'. In this way I hope:

... to preserve as an instrument that whose truth value he criticises, conserving ... all those old concepts, while at the same time exposing ... their limits, treating them as tools which can still be of use In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. Thus it is that the language of the human sciences criticizes *itself*.⁶

⁶ G. Spivak, 'Translator's Preface', in *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p.xvii.

Despite a number of limitations with Habermasian theory, it encompasses some fundamentally useful dimensions through which to view the ever-changing nature of public sphere in modern democratic societies.

dimensions of the category 'public'

Part of the overall project is to show that while much of Habermas' theory is problematic, particularly when the gender variable is introduced, there are core aspects of Habermasian theory that are both redeemable and useful in understanding the structure and function of the public sphere, and the way individuals organise and govern themselves in modern capitalist societies. An explication of a Habermasian view of the role of the public sphere in its modern democratic form requires a brief look at a number of alternative models of the form and function of the public sphere and its relation to the state and the family. Thus, Chapter One, 'Representations of the Public Sphere' begins with an overview of the tripartite conceptions of society of G.W.F. Hegel⁷ and Hannah Arendt.⁸ These will also be compared with Michel Foucault's genealogical critique,⁹ and Niklas Luhmann's 'systems-theoretic critique'¹⁰ of the public sphere. I then consider Habermas' quadripartite model of family/bourgeois

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford UK, 1942.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1958/89.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Pantheon, New York, 1972; *Discipline and Punish*, Pantheon, New York, 1977; *The History of Sexuality Vol.I*, Pantheon, New York, 1978.

¹⁰ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

public/market/state focusing on his representation of the bourgeois public sphere as set out in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). My aim here is to explore ways in which conceptions of the public sphere by Hegel, Arendt, Foucault and Luhmann interact with Habermas' model.

The function of this chapter is not only to place Habermas within the literature and to provide a broader overview of ways in which the public sphere has been considered by key thinkers, but to also address some terminological differences such as the distinction between the 'public sphere' and 'civil society'. These varying perspectives are juxtaposed with the Habermasian view of the public sphere which, unlike many other conceptions of the public sphere, is able to accommodate many of the complexities of the ever-changing role of public and private spheres in modern democratic states.

This chapter will thus attempt to provide a solid overview of the main influences on Habermas' work in the area of the public sphere, including the influence of Adorno and Habermas' background in the Frankfurt school. The main aim of this discussion is to illustrate why it is useful to consider Habermas' construction of the quadripartite conception of society and what it is that is important about Habermas as a theorist that sets him apart from others like Hegel, Arendt or even Foucault. I am not arguing that a more complicated model manages to escape oversimplification, indeed 'refined schemata do not necessarily lead to a greater precision because of what Habermas refers to as "the blurred

blueprint"¹¹: the disintegration of the bourgeois public resulting from the mutual infiltration of public (polity) and private (market) spheres'.¹² Noteworthy is the shift in Habermas' emphasis of the public sphere as a historical sphere to a 'sphere where questions of the common good can be negotiated and decided ... anchored in abstract principles'.¹³ By grounding his conception of the public sphere in decentred terms, as he does in *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas is able to avoid a number of the historical problems which excluded individuals and groups from his societal model by class, gender and ethnicity, and which subsequently brought his work to the attention of many. Having said this, there arise some fundamental tensions between Habermas' modernist concerns about the relationship between social and cultural rationalisation¹⁴ and the product of this tension that gives rise to a more postmodern-looking society. Indeed, the divide between the categories of system and lifeworld are at the very core of Habermas' 'diagnosis of the pathologies and potentialities of modernity'.¹⁵

Concomitantly, this chapter will also provide a backdrop to the following chapter which looks at the relationship between the public sphere and Habermas' system/lifeworld framework and ways in which

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.175. This point will be developed further in Chapter Four in conjunction with a discussion on Habermas' colonisation thesis.

¹² Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private*, p.7.

¹³ Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'The Public Sphere: Models and Boundaries', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p.101.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by F. Lawrence, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1987, p.2.

¹⁵ Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.122.

that framework relates to traditional Aristotelian conceptions of a public/private binary. Habermas' treatment of the public sphere is most useful for my purposes because he recognises (if not from the very outset, as chapter two argues in some detail) the fluidity and multiplicity of publics which coexist. Habermas argues that 'The exclusion of the culturally and politically mobilized lower strata entails a pluralization of the public sphere in the very process of its emergence'.¹⁶ Thus, 'Next to, and interlocked with the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, a plebeian one assumes shape'.¹⁷ Needless to say, while Habermas idealises the function and importance of the public sphere(s), he concedes two very important points which, in addition to his later emphasis on what he presents as a more reflexive and communicative nature of public spheres, set him apart from a number of other commentators. First, his early treatment of a bourgeois public sphere as the hegemonic realm of public opinion neglected the development and operation of a plebeian public. Second, that 'women and other groups were denied equal and active participation in the formation of public opinion and will'.¹⁸

The emphasis of Habermas' earlier works in this thesis is significant to my interpretation of Habermas' thought on the public sphere. While my argument relies quite substantially on Habermas' earlier works, Habermas' later works are touched upon, but in less detail. This is largely because later works draw heavily on the major themes of earlier works and there

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.426.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.426.

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.428.

remain clear continuities between Habermas' earlier and more recent works. For example, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* deals with structural complexities of society as well as outlining the historical decline of the bourgeois public sphere as an arena for an idealised form of democratic participation. These three themes, that of the structure of the public sphere, communicative processes and democratic participation reoccur throughout Habermas' major works since the publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in German in 1962. Hence, these three main themes form the theoretical structure of the thesis. This has also informed the selection of Habermas' works that I have drawn from. Following this line of inquiry, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volumes 1 & 2 (1984/87), and *Between Facts and Norms* (1997) form the foundational works by Habermas that this thesis draws from.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere is pivotal to this thesis because it is preoccupied with all three themes outlined above. The two volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action* deal with processes of communication and understanding as a function of the public sphere. This prompted an investigation into new information and communication technologies and how Habermas's model of idealised communicative practices could be applied in light of new technologies. In a return again to old themes, *Between Facts and Norms* considers ways in which discourse theory and law contribute to the structures of democratic societies. In fact a major preoccupation of this work is the ways in which public spheres

operate to legitimise democratic systems. Thus, the third major theme addressed in this thesis involves an analysis of discourses of governance in contemporary Australia.

Chapter Two, 'Habermasian Transformations of Public and Private: subsystem integration and differentiation', traces Habermas' theoretical work on the nature of the public sphere, beginning with recent debates about historical and contemporary societal divisions of public and private. This leads to a discussion about Habermas' development and construction of the system and lifeworld categories and questions how they compare and correspond to the historical model of public and private. This chapter will then deal quite directly with the role of women as represented in Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and how his own system/lifeworld categorisation affects the role of women in such a demarcated social system. As Susan Moller Okin has argued:

We cannot hope to understand the 'public' spheres - the state or the world of work or the market - without taking account of their genderedness, of the fact that they have been constructed under the assumption of male superiority and dominance, and that they presuppose female responsibility for the domestic sphere.¹⁹

This involves an explication of ways in which Habermas has developed his argument in light of feminist criticism and also outlines some of Habermas' major theoretical influences. This will provide a

¹⁹ Susan Moller Okin, 'Gender, the Public and the Private', in *Political Theory Today*, ed. David Held, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991, pp.82-83.

backdrop to Habermas' own modernist societal model and its odd relationship to postmodernity. More specifically, this chapter includes a survey of feminist thought on the public/private distinction as well as Geoff Eley's argument about the multiplicity of public spheres.²⁰ In this way, I hope to examine whether the social framework of system and lifeworld that Habermas has laid out is more than just a reproduction of the public/private binary.²¹

new social movements: Habermasian reflections

The existence of social movements is fundamental in any modern democracy. Chapter Three, 'Social Movements and the Shaping of Public Spheres', looks closely at the emergence and development of social movements and their role in shaping modern public spheres. Habermas' colonisation thesis provides a useful theoretical framework to explain the trends in the social evolution of modern democratic societies. In particular, changes to the nature of the public sphere and the ideal(s) of democracy, which are firmly embedded in the tradition of public debate and the reification of social and political institutions, may be attributed to the persistence of social movements. I look at the historical impact of social

²⁰ Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992.

²¹ For example, Nancy Fraser argues that to the detriment of Habermas' argument, his system/lifeworld framework merely serves to reproduce and reinforce the traditional public/private binary and as such is oppressive for women. See, Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

movements in Australia and their role in shaping both public spheres and debate.

The role of social movements in the public sphere has been quite substantial in recent times and Chapter Four, 'Colonisation and Resistance: the femocrat phenomenon', continues this theme by focusing on what I refer to as the 'femocrat phenomenon' (in the simplest of terms, femocrats may be defined as feminist bureaucrats),²² arguing that the femocracy constitutes an atypical, but nonetheless effective social movement in Australia. It is here that Habermas' notion of 'the blurred blueprint' takes on greater importance. Habermas argues that the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere is a result of the simultaneous colonisation of both the state and the market, but he subsequently ignores the infiltration of the public sphere by the private realm of the household which adds to the continuing flux of any demarcated boundaries between his quadripartite schemata of family/bourgeois public/market/state. The case of femocrats is a pertinent example of how private sphere concerns infiltrate the public sphere, assisting the perpetuation of fluid boundaries between public and private.

I have chosen to explore the sometimes complex case of Australian femocrats as my prime example because of the specific difficulties the femocrat phenomenon highlights for Habermas' critical-social theory and for aspects of his theory of communicative action. This involves an

²² See: Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990; and, Suzanne Franzway, Dianne Court & R.W. Connell, *Staking a Claim: Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, pp.133-155.

examination of the history and development of the femocracy and what it is that sets the femocracy apart from other feminist and non-feminist social movements. Also included is an outline of differences and debates within feminism in regards to the femocrat position and strategy.²³ This chapter also details Habermas' colonisation thesis and works to develop a feminist critique. This is achieved by applying Habermas' argument about the increasing impact of lifeworld norms on the system to the femocrat resistance of this from within, through bureaucratic mechanisms. This develops the idea that the femocracy constitutes a social movement because it works to challenge and modify mainstream culture by articulating its own alternative vision. The intersection of femocrat feminism and Habermas' critical theory reveals some of the difficulties liberalism has in conceptualising the role of interest groups, in presenting the individual 'as a disembodied self unencumbered by the mere accident of his/her particular history and context'.²⁴

Thus, problematic as Habermas' categorisation of system and lifeworld may be, it is my contention that it is still very useful for an analysis of feminist progress in recent years. At the same time, the femocrat phenomenon is a useful tool for highlighting and clearly illustrating various problems with Habermasian social theory. The

²³ See: Marian Sawyer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1990, pp.229-252; and, Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, pp.133-155.

²⁴ Pauline Johnson, 'Feminism and Liberalism', in *Australian Feminist Studies*, no.14, summer, 1991, p.58. Also see: Pauline Johnson, *Feminism as Radical Humanism*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1994, esp. Chapter 4, 'Freedom and the Encumbered Self: Feminism's Changing Relations with Liberalism', pp.68-88.

femocrat example remains most useful because it indicates a specific area where Habermas' colonisation thesis and his development of the system/lifeworld category is found wanting.

In depth analysis of the femocrat phenomenon will illustrate how communicatively and strategically achieved action can be used together to produce rational consensus. The aim of this chapter is to provide a sound basis on which to show that Habermas' colonisation theory does not account for the way in which private sphere norms and values influence the structural evolution of the modern state, especially in modern pluralistic societies like Australia, where the femocrat strategy has been widely implemented.

This thesis will also challenge a core Habermasian assumption that systematically integrated action contexts and socially integrated action contexts both operate in categorically separate spheres. Femocrats provide a good example of the way these two categories may both be used in any one action context. While there are numerous feminist critiques of Habermasian theory, there are relatively few existing feminist critiques of this area of Habermasian social theory which specifically relate to the femocrat strategy in the Australian context.²⁵

²⁵ Some feminist writers who have critiqued aspects of Habermasian theory relevant to my argument include: Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*; Iris M. Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory' in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on The Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1987; and, Suzanne Franzway, *et al*, *Staking a Claim: Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State*.

new information technologies and the public sphere

The advent of new information technologies has dramatically altered the way we interact with each other and how we organise, structure and order both our public and private lives. It affects the nature of our social and political organisations and the way we perceive ourselves and our roles in the societies in which we live. Habermas' still growing work on the evolution of social interaction leads to a discussion in Chapter Five, 'Rescuing the Public Sphere: virtual communities and the expansion of public spheres', on the democratic potential of virtual communities as public spheres; of the capacity for new information technologies to increase the democratic potency of virtual public spheres. While Habermas sees increases in the development and application of technology as causing a growing separation of subsystems and the decreasing use of communicative processes as a crisis, the advances in the area of information technology are providing fast and firm links between the public and the private spheres. As a number of commentators have argued,²⁶ the Internet *qua* public sphere provides a sphere which, unlike the bourgeois public sphere of the 18th and 19th centuries, is open to all who wish to participate irrespective of their social status. This however, remains dependant upon the ability to gain access to a still fairly expensive (and therefore exclusive) medium for the exchange of communication.

²⁶ See: Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*, Minerva, Melbourne, 1994; and, Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space' [<http://www.fau.edu/divdept/commcatn/pubspace.html>] 1995.

My contention is that in an age when new information technologies play an increasingly crucial part in the formation of newly transformed public realms, the boundaries between the so-called private and public have become increasingly malleable, although not entirely obsolete. This development has resulted in modern societies where the former categories of public and private not only overlap more and more, but in which those categorical boundaries have become so fluid that it is increasingly difficult to map the existence of a unified public, or indeed private sphere, at all. Information technology and Internet access from the home has increased the popularity of home-based employment. (For example, home access to information technology has enabled many women to participate in the paid workforce from their own homes without the bother of locating adequate child care facilities). Habermas' grand narrative has its problems, but it is also useful to conceptualise different and changing roles of the individual in an ever evolving and increasingly fluid public sphere. Such evolution has seen the inclusion of groups that have been hitherto marginalised on the basis of class, ethnicity or gender. Government initiatives may also serve to reaffirm the boundaries which can keep such groups on the peripheries of the public sphere, if not out of it altogether. This introduces the idea of the 'peripheral citizen' as an individual inhabiting those groups which are more often classed as 'the marginalised other'. On the other hand, government initiatives also have the capacity to override the demarcated categories of public and private. This can result in an expanded public sphere. Examples of such government initiatives are discussed in the form of a case study which is primarily concerned

with the establishment and maintenance of public access to new information technologies, especially in lower socio-economic communities.

Due largely to numerous criticisms of Habermas' conception of the public sphere as historically specific, exclusive, and grounded in a dubious conception of universal rationality,²⁷ some argue that the 'notion of the public sphere has dropped out of Habermas' writings and has been replaced by the explicitly normative concept of the ideal speech situation'.²⁸ However, I would argue that while the explicit term may no longer be used, Habermas' more recent work remains centrally concerned with issues raised in his earlier writings on the public sphere. Indeed, the theme of the public sphere is often addressed by Habermas in more recent writings by reference to the limitations of democratic models of participation.²⁹ This has consequently enabled Habermas to be more specific about public sphere-like situations without returning to generalisations and historical universalisations. Chapter Six, 'Virtual(ly) Ideal Speech Situations: computer-mediated communication and Habermasian communicative ethics', addresses the debate between those who rally against the potentialities of the Internet as a site for attaining an Habermasian ideal

²⁷ See: Chapter Two in this thesis for a more detailed overview of some of the main criticisms of Habermas' conception of the public sphere as presented in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

²⁸ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres' in *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, Helen Wilson ed., Macmillan, Melbourne, 1989, p.16.

²⁹ For example, see Jürgen Habermas, 'Three normative models of democracy', in *Constellations*, vol.1, no.1, 1994, pp.1-10.

speech situation, and those who support it.³⁰ I argue that an ideal speech situation in fact is no harder to achieve via computer-mediated communication of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) rooms than in face-to-face communication, and further, that there are even many advantages of using computer-mediated communication (CMC). This chapter outlines the conditions of the ideal speech situation and the background to universal pragmatics, out of which the ideal speech situation sprang.

Specifically, I look at what Habermas refers to as 'validity claims', an idea which was largely influenced by Karl Otto Apel, followed by his formulation of the ideal speech situation. This raises issues concerning the associated problems of comprehensibility in CMC, prompting a discussion on the need for linguistic competence and highlighting the importance of unrestrained discussion for the ideal speech situation. This chapter also examines complaints from critics of CMC who argue that truth and identity are too easily altered in computer-mediated discussion. This requires an examination of the concept of identity in various areas of the Internet such as Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and e-mail, the use of nicknames in these arenas and the impact of identity creation on a 'true' conception of the external nature of reality. Issues of self-representation and intention are also introduced into the discussion which highlights the issue of 'flaming' and how it relates to the principle of truthful representation of the internal nature of reality as defined by

³⁰ In particular, see: Judith A. Perrolle, 'Conversations and Trust in Computer Interfaces', in *Computerization and Controversy*, eds Charles Dunlop & Rob Kling, Academic Press, New York, 1992, pp.61-79.

Habermas. This raises the question as to whether “flaming” is compatible with Habermas’ ideal speech situation.

For Habermas, consensus is formed by participants in a communicative process and rightness is determined by whatever consensus is reached by any group. Social norms and convention are formed by communities according to what they all deem to be ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ for them as a community. I examine the formation of social context cues and how they dictate behaviour and social convention within created Internet communities.

The concept of multiple publics grounded in abstract communicative reflexivity enables Habermas the theoretical flexibility necessary to describe increasingly complicated and fragmentary modern societies. Essentially, I am arguing that the development of Internet facilities such as IRC and various discussion groups and bulletin boards signals the emergence of a locatable link between once strictly differentiated sub-systems of public and private, system and lifeworld.

discourses of governance

Chapter Seven, ‘Legitimacy and Bureaucracy: state interactions with the public sphere’, explores ways of governing various processes of disintegrating and reinforcing boundaries between the traditionally demarcated categories of public and private. This will involve a brief examination of Foucault’s conception of ‘governmentality’ and an

investigation into the role of boundary maintenance between the so-called public and private spheres which ultimately serves to legitimate bureaucratic mechanisms. A comparison between Habermas' communicative rationality and the popular ideology of economic rationalism is drawn and both are examined in light of their relationship to the modern administrative state's interaction with the public sphere. Chapter Seven looks at how it is possible for bureaucratic government to obtain legitimation from such a fragmented civic public. The encouragement of self-governing behaviour is increasingly prominent in contemporary Australia where there may be observed a general move toward less interventionist policies, not only by the Liberal/National coalition, but also by the Australian Labor Party which has traditionally had a more interventionist agenda. In essence, we are left wondering how such a fragmented public sphere can legitimise bureaucratic rule and how this affects the role of such a fragmented public sphere or even the idea of a unified public sphere for a bureaucratic administration.

The increasing involvement of the state in controlling the division between public and private through concrete policies of economic rationalism signals a further transformation of the public sphere. Indeed, 'The separation between the public and the private spheres serves a significant ideological function which accords with liberal democratic theory so that inequities in the private sector are treated as though they were naturally beyond the purview of the state'.³¹ At this point, some

³¹ Margaret Thornton, *The Liberal Promise: Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p.102.

policy examples are introduced to illustrate the developing nature of the interaction between the largely bureaucratic state and Habermas' sphere of the social or lifeworld. Legislation is one of the most prominent ways in which the state exercises control over the private realm. While there are numerous instances where the state has enacted legislation that is directly intended for the private sphere of the family, that legislation cannot be expected to improve the social relations and inequality in the private sphere of the family.³² This highlights some fundamentally inherent difficulties of the nature of the public/private construct and its reinforcement of social inequalities.

The previous chapters will thus argue that what Habermas once considered a functioning public sphere with other co-existing publics, such as the plebeian, no longer exists even in a less idealistic representation. What we are left with is a fragmented and fluid idea of a public sphere which is coloured by a number of factors such as those already outlined in previous chapters (social movements, new information and communication technologies for example). The bureaucratisation of the state has had quite a significant impact upon the nature of public spheres in modern democratic societies, and societal structures can be seen to directly impact upon the way both individuals and groups or communities interact and communicate within it.

³² Margaret Thornton, *The Liberal Promise*, p.102.

Chapter Eight, 'Normalising Discourses: crises of modern publics', involves an exploration of discourses of self-government in Habermas' lifeworld. Systems theory has had an enormous influence on the way theorists have constructed notions of public and private. Indeed, systems theory has been useful not only for considerations of social and institutional interaction but also for forming more universal theories of society. In this section I offer a brief history of the systems theory approach, and examine some of the difficulties associated with negotiating the difficult interplay between modern bureaucratic states and increasingly fragmented modern publics.

research methodology

The method of inquiry of this thesis takes two main forms that involves a critical engagement with Habermasian theory, followed by its practical application within the Australian political context. In this way the research methodology is based on an incorporation of theory and policy examples. In more specific terms, the purpose of this approach is twofold. First, to critically engage with Habermasian theory, including both primary and secondary sources which includes a surprisingly broad range of feminist theory. Second, to incorporate contemporary Australian policy examples which provides a way of combining theory and practice and to also show the practical and sometimes impractical applications of specific theory. The use of the Australian femocrat example raises some important issues that are specific to this case and could not therefore be explored as effectively

without a thorough exploration of femocrat particulars as they apply in this context. To apply theory to examples from 'every-day life' often reveals a functional application of theory. It is hoped that this will also show a clearer application of the important function of theory and the role of the philosopher in the somewhat complex relations of modern social life, a theme which is pursued by Habermas in his more recent work.³³

The separation of public and private is a constant theme of this thesis. The traditional public/private dualism reveals a number of interesting complexities in the way Habermas envisions and theorises modern industrial society. The public/private debate also gives rise to questions about ways in which social order, whether imagined or actual, is still arranged along gendered lines. This involves not only examining ways in which resistance movements and new information technologies have opened up the public sphere, but also the extent to which discourses of governance have worked to entrench processes of publicising the traditional private realm. In this way, I demonstrate how the public/private divide is maintained discursively while simultaneously being eroded by increasingly 'normalised' legislation of the domestic arena.

³³ See for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Past as Future*, trans. and ed. Max Pensky, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1995.

conclusion

Emerging from the Frankfurt school, Habermas has covered an enormous amount of theoretical ground and has developed an expanding interest in the continuing evolution of society. Particularly important is his development of a theory of communicative ethics and his commentary on contemporary social phenomena such as social movements and their crucial role in the functioning of a democratic society. This thesis does not set out to argue that there no longer exists any division between the traditional categories of public and private. Rather, it argues that the categories themselves are more complicated than a simple binary construction. Indeed, my main contention is that while both social and institutional categories have become increasingly fluid, recent trends show an increasing expansion of the public sphere. One possible explanation for this may indeed be the emerging tension between a modernist and a postmodernist world-view.

Habermas' critical theory is an interesting (if not always useful) method for exploring the tensions between modernity and postmodernity. Habermas' theory of communicative ethics remains one of the most relevant theories, especially in an era where processes of communication are indispensable to the social reproduction of an information rich society. Habermas' theory of communicative action is still useful because it allows for a side-stepping of some of the dilemmas of modernity. Communicative reason is decentred and more fluid since it relies on argumentative procedures rather than on a subject-centred conception of rationality. The

increasing fluidity of social and institutional aspects of society has resulted in a society with increasingly less static barriers between what was once considered public and private life. Furthermore, such overlaps in societal roles and reproductive processes have resulted in the continuing development of multiple co-existing public spheres. In this respect, Habermas' colonisation thesis remains a useful way to trace the evolution of various components of society.

While this thesis will examine some of the difficulties with Habermas' depiction of the bourgeois public sphere, it will not dwell on this area too closely. It will, however, address Habermas' model of the public sphere as a prelude to his subsequent treatment of public communication in modern democratic societies. This approach will, in effect, provide a criticism of Habermas' modernist constructions of rationality, but will also highlight those areas in which Habermas' emphasis on social interaction provides a more fluid and thus more relevant social theory in an era of increasing complexity.

Social movements (originating in the private sphere) infiltrate the state (public sphere) bypassing the market, while new information technologies infiltrate both the state and the bourgeois public sphere by enabling hitherto restricted citizens access to the public realm of free and open debate. Governmentality, on the other hand, enables the state or the polity to infiltrate both the public sphere and the realm of the family through the market and through legislation. It seems clear that not only is the public sphere in danger of fragmentation through processes of

infiltration by the state and the market, as outlined in Habermas' 'blurred blueprint', but is itself an agent of infiltration and fragmentation. Habermas was correct to argue that increasing social complexity is responsible for the fragmentation of the public sphere, but he has not catered for the many other levels in which concomitant infiltration of demarcated spheres has made boundaries less stable, and yet stable in this fluidity.

PART I

**dimensions of the category
'public'**

chapter one

representations of the public sphere

Representations of public spheres which allow democratic processes to develop and function have been fundamental to the development and progress of modern industrialised states. The idea of a public sphere has undergone numerous definitional changes as political philosophers have interpreted and represented political involvement from Aristotle through to Hegel and beyond. The way public spheres are represented and understood has a deep impact on the way modern societies are seen to be ordered and is particularly important in light of classical notions of the function of public and private realms.

Contemporary conceptions of the diffuse notion of a public sphere can encompass any 'sphere within which any group begins to come to an understanding of what it is, what its unifying needs and aspirations are, and how it might best operate in the world in order to satisfy these needs and fulfil these aspirations'.¹ In this very broad sense, newspapers, journals and magazines, radio and television are all considered to be the

¹ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', in *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, ed. Helen Wilson, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1989, p.13.

media of the public sphere in contemporary societies.² Various representations of the notion of the public sphere have emerged from a number of different historical and ideological positions from within the tradition of political philosophy. Notions of a public sphere and the defining of such a realm have relied upon the division of society into two distinct and separate realms of public and private which has been a common practice of many socio-political thinkers. With technological advances and a rapidly growing population, the demarcation by which philosophers in recent times give order to our lives has markedly changed. Indeed, the application of a dichotomy between public and private no longer seems to be an adequate way of explaining or accounting for the increasing complexity of the interaction between individuals, communities and institutions, particularly in advanced industrialised societies.

Habermas' original conception of the bourgeois public sphere moves away from a basic dichotomy, instead looking toward a tripartite model of social and institutional demarcation. This chapter will look toward providing a background to Habermas' public sphere by looking at some of his major theoretical influences. The theoretical influences discussed here are those of G.W.F. Hegel, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Niklas Luhmann, all of whom have either influenced Habermas' work or have engaged with it in some detailed way.

² Jürgen Habermas, 'The public sphere: an encyclopedia article (1964)', in *New German Critique*, vol.1, no. 3, fall 1974, p.49.

Hegel's interpretation of civil society as a public sphere, or the intermediate realm in the tripartite model of the household, civil society, and state bears many similarities to Arendt's notion of 'society' which serves much the same function. Both Hegel's 'civil society' and Arendt's 'society' are forerunners of Habermas' own formulation of social system differentiation. On the other hand, Foucault's genealogical critique of the public sphere is more useful for discussions that deal directly with the relationship between state and society (and the positioning of the locus of power). While Habermas does not draw on Foucault's view of society as a model for his own work, both have engaged with the other's work in a critical manner.

Luhmann's system theory critique of the public sphere is crucial for a number of reasons. First, he is Habermas' most prominent rival in recent times; and second, in light of the later discussion of social movements, Luhmann's systems theory 'abandons the notion of individual and collective agency'.³ This is a particularly interesting comparison to draw since Habermas relies heavily on the idea of a discursive community, a notion largely rejected by Luhmann.

The very existence of civil society and the idea of a discursive community depends on a multi-party system of democracy and the very processes of open discussion about which Habermas has theorised. It has been widely argued that under one-party systems, civil society is

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Polity Press, Oxford & Cambridge UK, 1997, p.334.

continuously on 'the verge of extinction',⁴ and as such it is necessary here to only refer to the broader structures of Western industrial states.

While the various societal models do not always directly correspond neatly to the distinctions between public and private, often the discourses behind the notions of public and private are manifest in debates between individualism and collectivism. Those who are determined to rescue the notion of civil society for application in contemporary settings see civil society as 'the domain that can potentially mediate between the state and the private sector and offer people a sphere for activity that is simultaneously voluntary and public; a sphere that unites the virtue of the private sector - liberty - with the virtue of the public sector - concern for the general good'.⁵ A closer examination of varying conceptions of the public sphere, both historical and more recent, reveals that the function of such spheres are more complex than many of these theoretical manifestations allow for. Such a process of clarification will also clear up any conceptual confusion which the use of different terms may invariably produce.

the origins of civil society: Aristotle

In *The Politics*, Aristotle refers to a sphere which he calls *politike koinonia*.⁶

Translated, this has been interpreted as an association with, or participation

⁴ John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, Verso, London & New York, 1993, p.5.

⁵ Benjamin R. Barber, 'Searching for civil society', in *National Civic Review*, vol.84, no.2, spring 1995, pp.114.

⁶ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair, revised and re-presented by Trevor J. Saunders, Penguin Books, London, 1992, pp. 54, 105.

in a political community; that is, a society of citizens.⁷ Indeed, it has been argued that Aristotle's *politike koinonia* is the first version of the concept of civil society to appear, and has been defined as a 'public ethical-political community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined system of rule'.⁸ In this sense, this realm was considered to be quite distinct from both the state and the sphere of the household. Indeed, *politike koinonia* was regarded as a sphere of social interaction, of association and collectivity that presupposed the existence of an 'organized solidarity body of citizens capable of totally unified action'.⁹ The term civil society was also used to describe a type of political association which places its members under the jurisdiction of a system's laws, which thereby ensures peaceful order and good government.¹⁰ In this sense, to be a member of civil society, meant to be a citizen who acted under the laws of the state and who benefited from the states' paternalistic protection of individual rights. Cohen and Arato explain:

In theory at least *politike koinonia* was a unique collectivity, a unified organization with a single set of goals that were derivable from the common ethos. The participation of all citizens 'in ruling and being ruled' represented a relatively small problem in theory, given this assumption of a shared set of goals based on a single form of life.¹¹

⁷ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1995, p.97.

⁸ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.84.

⁹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, pp.84.

¹⁰ John Keane, 'Despotism and Democracy: The Origins of the Development of the Distinction Between Civil Society and the State 1750-1850', in *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed. John Keane, Verso, London & New York, 1993, p.35.

¹¹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, pp.84-5.

This set the precedent for a participatory model of democracy in which all citizens played a direct role in the administrative government of their society. Such a definition of the function of civil society underwent some modification with the emergence of classical liberalism. It was then that the Aristotelian concept of *politike koinonia* was modified and civil society became a sphere wherein 'there was a distinct line of demarcation between public life and civil society, an intermediate realm between the *polis* and the *oikos*'.¹² The distinction between public life and civil society became clearly separated. In this sense, civil society was redefined as a realm of economics as opposed to political interaction which was supposedly free of government or state intervention or regulation. For example:

Public life continued to encompass matters pertaining to government and service of the state, whereas civil society was understood as a realm where individuals were free from state regulation. Civil society conferred rights on male citizens to enter into contractual relations, to acquire property, to litigate, to associate and to travel. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, emergent market economies valued this realm of freedom as a facilitation of commerce.¹³

Thus, civil society was quite unproblematically a major component of the private sphere comprising of 'individuals engaged in private pursuits, together with private activities, interests and institutions themselves'.¹⁴ Thornton argues that the term 'private sphere' has had more

¹² Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1992, p.5.

¹³ Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, p.5.

¹⁴ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.4.

contemporary usage, in preference to the term 'civil society'. The difficulty arises because the family is also 'claimed as a distinct private sphere. Classical liberalism regarded the family as unproblematically private and as a barely visible appendage to civil society'.¹⁵

The conceptual confusion that exists today was established such that both the market sphere, and the sphere of the family, are considered 'private'. Nonetheless, both are set up in opposition to the 'public sphere' or 'civil society'. Consequently, from quite early on, the concept of civil society as a realm of public space evoked notions of clear public and private demarcations. The definitions of Aristotle's *politike koinonia* and classical liberalism's civil society were defined by their relation to the clearly separated spheres of the private household and the public state.¹⁶ It was later that theorists such as Hegel and then Arendt expanded on the function of civil society, further investing it with the attributes and functions of the previous notions of state and household to include the attributes of what was formerly known as 'public life'.

¹⁵ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private*, p.4.

¹⁶ Of course, definitions of demarcated social spheres also involved sex-role normalisation. For example, the polis was the realm of men and the household was the realm where women were employed: 'The polis, consisting of citizens deliberating about and executing public affairs, is the forum in which men can engage in the noblest activities of which humans are capable In a well-ordered city-state, women and slaves are not parts of the polis, but are conditions of it. Without their work, the polis could not exist, but they do not participate in the activities of the polis'. Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, The Women's Press, London, 1990, p.38; also see, Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, pp.52-55.

Hegel's 'civil society'

It has been argued that Hegel's conception of civil society is the first modern *theory* of civil society.¹⁷ Although Hegel does not speak of the concept of a public sphere *per se*, he does talk about the overlap between the public function of both civil society and the state. In this view, civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), is predominately characterized as a social sphere which is quite distinct from both the family and the state, in which agents more specifically, men¹⁸ pursue their separate and particular interests.¹⁹ Before Hegel, many philosophers, from Aristotle to Kant and Locke, used the term and its various cognates (*politike koinonia, societas civilis*) as interchangeable with 'political society'.²⁰ In Hegel's view however, the two terms were quite different. Indeed, in distinguishing between civil and political society, Hegel acknowledged the emergence of a separate social sphere within which individuals carried on their own business, for their own individual ends, without participating in political affairs.²¹ Or as Hegel asserts, civil society is the 'battlefield where everyone's individual private interest meets everyone else's'.²² This new sphere soon came to be

¹⁷ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.91.

¹⁸ 'This division of gender within the family reflects the broader division of gender in the modern social world. Hegel maintains that the private life of the family constitutes the social sphere of women and that the public life of civil society and the state constitutes the social sphere of men.' Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1994, p.184. For a further critique of Hegel's positioning of women in his political thought see: Seyla Benhabib, 'On Hegel, Women and Irony' in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, eds Mary Lyndon Shanley & Carole Pateman, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994, pp.129-145.

¹⁹ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.189, also see: Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1942, p.122, [para 182-183].

²⁰ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.190.

²¹ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.190.

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p.189, [para. 289].

known as the market economy, entrenching a terminological doubling up. While defined as a sphere clearly outside of the political state, Hegel's realm of civil society was also the sphere that Hegel conceived of as 'ethical life' in society, thus forming part of an 'ethical community'.²³

Ethical life itself is differentiated in a way (entirely unique to Hegel) that combines the two dualities of oikos/polis and state/society in the three-part framework of family, civil society and state. Civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is defined variously, but most revealingly as ethical life or substance in its bifurcation (*Entzweiung*) and appearance (*Erscheinung*).²⁴

While the state and civil society share institutions in common (the administration of justice and the public authority for example) they may still be distinguished from each other by virtue of what Hegel regards as their distinct determinations or particular aims.²⁵ That is to say, that the determination of civil society is to promote the development of 'the particular' or the private ends of individuals or groups.²⁶ Hardimon explains that 'the main reason why the administration of justice and the public authority count as integral components of civil society is that they are specifically concerned with the particularity of the members of civil society (their political rights and welfare) and as such share the

²³ Victor M. Perez-Diaz, *State, Bureaucracy and Civil Society: A Critical Discussion of the Political Theory of Karl Marx*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1978, p.10. Also see: Fred R. Dallmayr, *G. W. F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, London & New Dehli, 1993.

²⁴ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.93.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, pp.122-23, [para. 182-84].

²⁶ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.209.

determination of this sphere.²⁷ On the other hand, the 'determination of the modern state ... is to promote the common good of the community or what Hegel calls 'the universal'.²⁸

Hegel takes the fact that the modern political state has this universal end to be one of the features that distinguish it from civil society. Although the institutions of civil society aim at promoting the private ends of individuals and groups, they do not aim at promoting the good of the community as such.²⁹

Another feature of Hegel's civil society is its function as a 'process of mediation of particularity'.³⁰ In this regard, individuals come to a realisation that they are related to all other individuals in their common pursuit of private ends. Thus Hegel's 'particularity' is governed by the universal law of political economy.³¹ This is not to say that Hegel's conception of civil society indicated a sphere that was wholly devoted to market systems. Certainly, civil society for Hegel 'is not only the sphere within which people pursue their separate and particular interests but also the sphere within which people can form voluntary associations and enjoy the free life of civic association'.³² Hegel defines the association of civil society as:

²⁷ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.209. Also see: Hegel, *Philosophy of the State and of History*, ed. George S. Morris, Scott, Foresman & Co., Chicago, 1902, pp.55-65, pp.79-80.

²⁸ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.209.

²⁹ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.209.

³⁰ Bernard Cullen, *Hegel's Social and Political Thought: An Introduction*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1979, p.74.

³¹ Bernard Cullen, *Hegel's Social and Political Thought*, p.74. Also see: G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures of the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, Henry G. Bohn, Covent Gardens, London, 1861, pp.22-30; G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Roberts, Hartman, The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., Indianapolis US, 19 , pp;49-67.

³² Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p.190.

... an association of members as self-subsistent individuals in a universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs, by the legal system - the means to security of person and property - and by an external organization for attaining their particular and common interests.³³

This definition of civil society shows how individual and common interests begin to emerge in the same sphere. In this sense, civil associations that construct civil society are any association that are not directly linked with either the market or the government sectors. In this respect, the concept of civil society does indeed become a mediating domain between market and government sectors.³⁴

It is within this civil domain that such traditional institutions as foundations, schools, churches, public interest groups, and social movements belong. The media too, when they place their public responsibilities ahead of their commercial ambitions, are better understood as part of civil society rather than the private sector.³⁵

It is in this tradition that Hegel's notion of civil society shares some similarity with Arendt's notion of 'society' as a mediating realm.

Arendt's notion of 'society' as a realm of mediation

In *The Human Condition*, one of Hannah Arendt's main preoccupations is the maintenance of a definite division between public and private. She argues that the 'public and the private realms can only thrive in opposition to each

³³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p.110, [para. 157].

³⁴ Benjamin R. Barber, 'Searching for civil society', p.114.

³⁵ Benjamin R. Barber, 'Searching for civil society', p.114.

other'.³⁶ Importantly, this distinction between the public and private spheres is seen by Arendt as necessarily corresponding to the historical separation of the household and the political realm.³⁷ For example, Arendt argues that 'The private realm of the household was the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed.'³⁸

Correspondingly, she resolutely defends the model of classical political society, *politike koinonia*, along with its sharp separation from the *oikos* or private sphere, against modernity, particularly against the modern state (bureaucracy) and modern (mass) society. Her critique is a normative one based on what she takes to be the values of classical public life (political equality, public discourse, and honour) and private life (uniqueness, difference, individuality).³⁹

... mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well, deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life.⁴⁰

When the term 'private' is discussed, it is mostly in reference to either privacy or the private economy of the household. Indeed, for Arendt

³⁶ Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self: The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt*, Wilfrid Laurier Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1989, p.65.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1989, p.28.

³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.45.

³⁹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.177.

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.59.

it is possible to regard the separation between public and private spheres as one between collectivism and individualism.

Arendt's notion of 'public' has two different, although interconnected meanings. First it may be seen in the sense of publicity. Essentially, the public is whatever may be 'seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity'.⁴¹ 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'.⁴² So, this definition of the public sphere refers both to the sphere of appearance and the world we hold in common.⁴³ Arendt firmly places the public realm in opposition to that which is 'private, natural, and removed from the common'.⁴⁴

Further, it is a distinct feature of Arendt's public realm that, 'because it ultimately resides on action and speech, [it] never altogether loses its potential character'.⁴⁵ Thus, wherever people gather together, a public realm is potentially there, 'but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever'.⁴⁶

Only the existence of a public realm and the world's subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public

⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.50-2.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.50-2.

⁴³ Maurizio Passin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, Routledge, London & New York, 1994, p.140.

⁴⁴ Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self*, p.73.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.200.

⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.199.

space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men.⁴⁷

Arendt's notion of the public realm, then, refers simultaneously to a durable common world and yet also to something more fragile and transitory.⁴⁸ For example, Arendt argues:

For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can only offer the prolongation of multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives.⁴⁹

In other words, Arendt's public realm is comprised of meanings derived from continuously shifting perspectives. Within this view however, there are definite system boundaries. Arendt's main critique of the concept of modern civil society is 'concentrated specifically on the concept of "society" as an intermediate realm between family and political life'.⁵⁰ The emergence of a social realm however, which belongs neither to the public or the private, is for Arendt a 'relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation state.'⁵¹ Indeed, for Arendt, 'the rise of the social' ensures an institutional differentiation of modern societies

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.55.

⁴⁸ Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, p.143.

⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.57.

⁵⁰ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.177.

⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.28.

into the narrowly political realm on the one hand and the economic market on the other. As a result of these transformations, economic processes which had hitherto been confined to the 'shadowy realm of the household' emancipate themselves and become public matters.⁵²

The emergence of society - the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices - from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen.⁵³

Thus, from this perspective, Arendt's 'society' can be viewed as a 'realm of mediation where private interests, activities, and institutions assume public roles, while public institutions take on private "housekeeping" functions'.⁵⁴ However, even in early manifestations of public/private demarcation, the two categories overlapped and blended from time to time. Indeed, initially the function of a distinction between the two categories was to insulate one sphere of social life from certain kinds of scrutiny.⁵⁵ As a more general concept, civil society may be regarded as less of a matter of politics and generalisable interests, and more a matter of economic and particular interests.⁵⁶ In this regard, 'The family is doubly removed, both from politics and the economy. Indeed the family may be located outside of society altogether, as part of the natural

⁵² Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space', in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol.6, no.2, 19 , p.101.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.38.

⁵⁴ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.177

⁵⁵ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.10.

⁵⁶ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.10.

order of things.⁵⁷ Arendt's concern with the decline of the public sphere in modern times is manifest in the preoccupation of civil society with economic and individual interests instead of debate about political interests and the common good.

the Habermasian quadripartite model of society

Habermas' historical societal framework as presented in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is divided into two separate realms which divide state and society. These divisions are primarily based upon developments during the late 18th and early 19th century in France, Germany and Britain; the sphere of public authority and the private realm.⁵⁸ The sphere of public authority includes two subsystems, namely, the state, which is the realm of the police, and the court or the courtly noble society. Habermas' categorical sub-division within the private realm is more complex than that of either Hegel or Arendt. In structural terms, included in the private realm is civil society (the realm of commodity exchange and social labour) and the conjugal family's internal sphere.⁵⁹ Also in the private realm are another three sub-categories; the public sphere in the political realm; the public sphere in the world of letters (clubs and the

⁵⁷ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.10.

⁵⁸ Habermas says virtually nothing about the role of women in the private realm, and while he says very little about them in the public sphere, there are a few rather interesting (albeit brief) passages in which Habermas does mention women, and these will be looked at in more detail later in this section.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*; trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, pp.55-56.

press); and the 'town' or the markets of cultural products. By placing all these spheres in the private realm, Habermas emphasises and draws together the connections and commonalties between all the sub-groups of the private sphere.⁶⁰ Although considered as public spheres, the latter three categories are placed in the private realm because they are comprised of private persons coming together to form a public. Habermas explains:

Included in the private realm was the authentic 'public sphere', for it was a public sphere constituted by private people. Within that realm that was the preserve of private people, we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*intimsphäre*). The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society.⁶¹

Interestingly, here Habermas challenges the belief that the 'intimate sphere' of the family is independent of the market. He asserts rather, that 'in truth it [the sphere of the family] was profoundly caught up in the requirement of the market',⁶² and that families (or more specifically, the male heads of households) play an enormous part in shaping and regulating market activities.

The ambivalence of the private sphere was also a feature of the public sphere, depending on whether privatised individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate in the world of letters, about experiences of their subjectivity or whether private people in their capacity as

⁶⁰ For a helpful illustration of Habermas' categorisation of the bourgeois public sphere, see: 'The Basic Blueprint' in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.30.

⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.30.

⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.55.

owners of commodities communicated through rational political debate in the political realm, concerning the regulation of the private sphere.⁶³

What Habermas has done is re-theorised Hegel's tripartite societal division of family, civil society and state to include a fourth dimension, namely, the bourgeois public sphere.⁶⁴

For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere can be conceived of as a sphere wherein private citizens come together to form a public which engages in debate over general rules pertaining to the role of the government/state and official market economy, and which serves as an arena for public opinion formation. The broader category of public life in this sense 'constitutes the broader terrain of social existence: it is the domain of politics, economy and culture. In its modern form, public social life places individuals into relationships with unknown others; it is thus characterised by a certain externality, impersonality and self-interest'.⁶⁵ Private life on the other hand, 'is the realm of intimacy; it is more limited in scope, is concerned, above all, with human reproduction, and is characterised by closeness, emotion and concern for others'.⁶⁶

Since the publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas' conception of the public sphere has undergone some modifications. Up until the publication of *Between Facts and Norms*,

⁶³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp.55-56.

⁶⁴ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1988, p.5.

⁶⁵ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.9.

⁶⁶ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.9.

Habermas generally dealt with the 'public sphere as a communication structure rooted in the lifeworld through the associational network of a civil society'.⁶⁷ In his more recent work, *Between Facts and Norms*, the role of the public sphere is seen in a more communicative sense, that is as a 'sounding board' for societal problems that will eventually be dealt with by the political system. In this way, Habermas describes the public sphere as a 'warning system' for the sphere of legislation and government, or what he terms society's 'parliamentary complexes'.⁶⁸ Further, Habermas describes the public sphere as being outwardly characterised by:

... open, permeable, and shifting horizons. The public sphere can be best described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes)...⁶⁹

Habermas stresses that the notion of the public sphere does not refer to the contents or the functions of everyday communication, 'but to the *social space* generated in communicative action.'⁷⁰ 'The importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of societal interaction.'⁷¹ This theme is later taken up and generally referred to by Habermas as communicative action. In this view, processes of public discourse, state power and market economies are all possible modes of social coordination.⁷² But it is because 'money and power are non-discursive

⁶⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1997, p.359.

⁶⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.359.

⁶⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.360.

⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.360.

⁷¹ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p.6.

⁷² Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p.6.

modes of coordination, as Habermas's later theory stresses, they offer no intrinsic openings to the identification of reason and will, and they suffer from tendencies toward domination and reification.⁷³ Consequently, Habermas' more recent work views both the state and the economy as 'both crucial topics for and rivals of the democratic public sphere'.⁷⁴

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas differentiates between what he deems formal and informal public spheres. This distinction separates the 'general public sphere' of public opinion from the 'institutionalized public spheres of parliamentary bodies'.⁷⁵ The general or informal public sphere of public opinion is characteristically 'unconstrained in the sense that its channels of communication are not regulated by [formal] procedures'.⁷⁶ Because of this, it is 'better suited for the "struggle over needs" and their interpretation.'⁷⁷ In other words, the informal public sphere is concerned with discussion and debate about private needs and concerns prior to their recognition as political issues. This distinction clearly illustrates the progression of Habermas' conceptualising about the nature of the public sphere since he first discussed it in *Structural Transformation*. Such theoretical progression however does not detract from the relevance of Habermas' original conception of the public sphere as a realm of debate and needs interpretation which I draw on throughout this thesis. Nor does it counter my argument that despite more recent

⁷³ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p.6.

⁷⁴ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p.6.

⁷⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.307-308.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.314.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.314.

some fine-tuning, Habermas' public spheres are still constrained by those strict categorisations and firm boundaries that were evident in *Structural Transformation's* societal framework, and which reinforce a traditional gendered binary.

Habermas' 'rational' public and its critics

While Habermas' earlier construction of an ideal public sphere has been attacked by many commentators who regard it as too universalist, Marie Fleming argues that it is not universalist enough; that 'universalism has to include a vision of gender equality'. Indeed, Habermas has used this universalist model of the public sphere as the foundation for his rationally deliberative conception of modernity and democracy despite his acknowledgment of various commentators who attack his exclusionary public sphere.⁷⁸ The concept of a rational public sphere for Habermas is one that emerged out of modern bourgeois society. The only reality approximating the ideal of such a public sphere was the arena of 'rational' discourse that the emerging bourgeois class created for itself during the eighteenth century. It was within such a public sphere that early achievements of modern science were disseminated, new art and literature were produced and debated, discussions about the newly emergent commercial society were carried out, and where 'the power of reason was

⁷⁸ See: Marie Fleming, *Emancipation and Illusion: Rationality and Gender in Habermas' Theory of Modernity*, Penn State University Press, 1997.

mobilised against the forces of prejudice and reaction'.⁷⁹ Like Arendt's notion of 'society', Habermas' rational public sphere was 'the arena in which private interest took a discursive and therefore universal form'.⁸⁰

The institutions which comprised such a public sphere, making discursive sphere possible were coffee houses, salons, clubs, English magazines such as *The Spectator* and *The Tattler*, reading societies and lending libraries.⁸¹ In Habermas' view, this public debate or medium of political confrontation was unique and without historical precedent because it involved the use of public reason by private persons.⁸²

To be sure, before the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension charged field of state-society relations, the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public. Even before the control over the public sphere by public authority was contested and finally wrested away by the critical reasoning of private persons on political issues, there evolved under its cover of a public sphere in a political form - the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain. It provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself - a process of self clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness.⁸³

Habermas' main aim in *Structural Transformation* was to determine those social conditions which allowed for a rational critical debate about

⁷⁹ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.14. For a critical discussion of Habermas' notion of public reason in liberal democracies, also see: Pauline Johnson, 'Carl Schmitt, Jürgen Habermas, and the crisis of politics', in *The European Legacy*, vol.3, no.6, 1998, pp.15-32.

⁸⁰ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.14.

⁸¹ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.14.

⁸² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.27. For a quick reference to more of Habermas' writing on this topic see: William Outhwaite ed., *The Habermas Reader*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1996. In particular, see, part II: 'Rationality and the Public Sphere', pp.23-66.

⁸³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.29.

public issues conducted by private persons who were willing to let the better argument, rather than status, determine decisions.⁸⁴ Moreover, Habermas argued that rationality and rational debate would, under the right circumstances, produce truth:

At the same time, the results were that under these conditions issued from the public process of critical debate lay claim to being in accord with reason; intrinsic to the idea of a public opinion was the claim to that morally pretentious rationality that strove to discover what was at once just and right.⁸⁵

This early quote is a precursor to what would later evolve into Habermas' theory of communicative action.⁸⁶ In particular, it is a precursor to the idea that truth may be discovered through a process of free and open discourse, and, as such is an early exploration of what would later develop into Habermas' 'ideal speech situation'.⁸⁷ This early manifestation of an 'ideal speech situation' or of free and open discourse, promulgates the idealisation of the table societies, *salons*, and coffee houses of the late 18th century where Habermas argued social status and ethnicity (but not gender) were supposedly set aside as irrelevant in favour of the better argument:⁸⁸

The critical debate ignited by the world of literature and art were soon to include economic and political disputes The fact that only men were admitted to coffee-house society may

⁸⁴ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p.1.

⁸⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.54.

⁸⁶ For an excellent introduction to Habermas' theory of communicative action, see: William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994. In particular, see: Chapter 3: 'Communication and Discourse Ethics'.

⁸⁷ See: Martin Seel, 'The Two Meanings of "Communicative" Rationality: Remarks on Habermas's Critique of a Plural Concept of Reason', in *Communicative Action*, eds Honneth & Joas, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991.

⁸⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.36.

have had something to do with this, whereas the style of the *salon*, like that of the rococo in general, was essentially shaped by women. Accordingly, women of London society, abandoned every evening, waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution. The coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shop keepers.⁸⁹

Here Habermas tended to idealise what he saw as an open and free arena of discourse which at once excluded women and the uneducated, the latter being closely linked with class. Certainly the coffee house cultural discourse became 'the new form of bourgeois representation'⁹⁰ but did not, however, represent the concerns or thought of the entire public at large. Rather, it remained a rather small and relatively exclusive selection of mostly men, with mostly middle to upper class origins. Indeed, Habermas' bourgeois public sphere has been criticised not only because of its idealistic nature,⁹¹ but more importantly, because he also ignores alternative public spheres wherein non-bourgeois groups of citizens come together 'to put their reason to use'.⁹² As Eley has noted, 'the positive values of the liberal public sphere quickly acquired broader democratic resonance, with the resulting emergence of impressive popular movements, each with its own distinctive movement cultures'.⁹³

⁸⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.33.

⁹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.37.

⁹¹ Seyla Benhabib, 'Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory', in *Telos*, no.49, fall 1981, pp.39-59.

⁹² Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', pp.303-306.

⁹³ Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p.304.

During the period that *Structural Transformation* deals with, these alternative public spheres included the plebeian public sphere and women's groups which, by Habermas' own admission, were visibly and actively functioning at that time.⁹⁴ While the women of London society were actively involved in a struggle against the institution of the new liberal public sphere because they were excluded from it, they at once formed their own public sphere since they had organised themselves as bearers of public opinion, situated between state and society. In retrospect, Habermas reconfigures his original position on the single bourgeois public sphere:

It is wrong to speak of one single public even if we assume that a certain homogeneity of the bourgeois public enabled the conflicting parties to consider their class interest, which underneath all differentiation was nevertheless ultimately the same, as a basis for consensus, attainable at least in principle. Apart from introducing a greater internal differentiation of the bourgeois public, which by means of a more detail-oriented focus could also be accommodated within my model, a different picture emerges if *from the very beginning* one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere.⁹⁵

In more contemporary terms, alternative public spheres would also take the form of social movements. While Habermas does allow for the plurality of coexisting publics that permit the assignment of differing meanings to experiences and events, he still maintains that there can exist

⁹⁴ See: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.33, where he states that: 'Accordingly, women of London society abandoned every evening, waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution.'

⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', pp.424-425.

'universally shared concepts which reflect a fixed reality'.⁹⁶ In this vein, he argues:

As the paradigmatic discourse of modernity, law requires clear lines and certainty, even when seeking to accommodate novel concepts. Insistence upon the multiplicity, intersectionality, and fluidity of subject identities is deeply corrosive of the foundations of legal positivism.⁹⁷

In this view, the development of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere to include the notion of multiple publics undermines his modernist project. While Habermas acknowledges that women were not only visible during this period, but that they actively 'struggled in vain' against the development of the bourgeois public sphere, (and were at once excluded from it) he does not see the exclusion of women as a problem which prevented the rest of the population from full participation in public critical debate or full realisation of "so-called" universal citizenship. Further, Habermas does not see the exclusion of women as a barrier to the attainment of his idealistic theoretical framework for rational debate in practical terms. This distinction between public and private life is linked with dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Poole has argued that:

... those characteristics which are encouraged in public life are conceived to be masculine, even - or especially - when they are possessed by women; those characteristics associated with private life are conceived to be feminine even - or especially - when they are exercised by men. This is not just a matter of

⁹⁶ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1987, p.22.

⁹⁷ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.8.

who has, as a matter of fact, figured in the two spheres of social life, whether the reality of public and private life corresponds to the conception, or even of the extent to which there is a clear-cut distinction between the two spheres. It is rather that the elements of a conceptual or symbolic distinction between the public and the private have entered into a conception of what it is to be male and female.⁹⁸

As well as numerous criticisms of gender blindness⁹⁹, Habermas has also received a great deal of criticism for his idealisation of what he terms 'the liberal public sphere'. Habermas has recently conceded to various substantiated objections¹⁰⁰ that he over-stylises his depiction of the bourgeois public sphere thus leading to an unjustified idealisation that Habermas himself describes 'involving more than an overdrawn emphasis on the rational aspects of a public communication whose basis is reading and whose main vehicle is conversation'.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Habermas concedes in retrospect that, 'beside the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere

⁹⁸ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.9.

⁹⁹ Pointing out Habermas' gender-blindness is hardly a new criticism, but remains a point worth noting. For some of the most recent and also most useful criticisms of this area of Habermasian theory see, Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, University of Minnesota, 1989, esp. Chapter 6, 'What's so Critical About Critical Theory'; Jean Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas' in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995; Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, and Marie Fleming, 'Women and the "Public Use of Reason"' in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Many theorists have raised concerns with Habermas' idealisation of the liberal bourgeois sphere. For a comprehensive reading of those objections which are pertinent for this chapter, see; Nancy Fraser, 1990, Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992; Mary Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century America' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun; and Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*.

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p.424.

additional subculture or class-specific public spheres are constituted on the basis of their own and initially not easily recognisable premises'.¹⁰²

Moreover, the exclusion of the plebeian public sphere from Habermas' historical analysis marks a further difficulty, but it is one which he later attempts to come to terms with following a great deal of criticism from feminist theorists. He subsequently argued that:

The exclusion of the culturally and politically mobilised lower strata entails a pluralisation of the public sphere in the very process of its emergence. Next to and interlocked with, the hegemonic public sphere, a plebeian one assumes shape.¹⁰³

In other words, the exclusion evident in his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere merely manifests the existence of different and completing publics. In particular, the exclusion of women and the working from Habermas' idealised public sphere has significant repercussions for Habermas' universalist claims. The notion of a pluralisation of the public sphere attacks the very foundations of the modernist tradition upon which Habermas draws heavily. It lessens the inherent rationality of the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere and allows for the existence of multiple realities. Explicit in Habermas' early historical writings on the historical nature of the public sphere are discussions on the rationality of permanent norms and their importance for maintaining social order. For example, Habermas argues that:

¹⁰² Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.425.

¹⁰³ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.426.

In the 'law' the quintessence of general, abstract, and permanent norms, inheres a rationality in which what is right converges with what is just; the exercise of power is demoted to a mere executor of norms.¹⁰⁴

This is a clear manifestation of Habermas' universalistic leanings in a firm modernist tradition. However, the strategy employed by Habermas is one of setting up definitions and boundary parameters as an archetypal ideal in order to show how they can move, be manipulated and also interact with one another. Despite setting up a very modernist framework, Habermas is also at pains to show how boundaries and meanings can be contested. It is in this way that legitimacy may be secured at any given time. Calhoun explains:

The subject is the historically specific phenomenon of the bourgeois public sphere created out of the relations between capitalism and the state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Habermas sets out to establish what the category of the public meant in bourgeois society and how its meaning and material operation were transformed in the centuries after its constitution. The motivation for this lies largely in an attempt to revive the progressive potential in "formal" democracy and law and thus to counterbalance their neglect in the Marxist tradition.¹⁰⁵

Habermas argues that 'the bourgeois public's critical public debate took place in principle without regard to all pre-existing social and political rank and in accord with universal rules'.¹⁰⁶ Habermas' support of universal rules and the maintaining of the *status quo* once again points

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.53.

¹⁰⁵ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, London UK, p.5.

¹⁰⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.54.

directly to his modernist position which effectively supports and accepts the exclusion of women. In other words, Habermas' public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is set out as a critical ideal, but it is in fact not critical enough of prevailing historical norms which excluded women among other marginalised groups from participation. As Calhoun has argued, the 'importance of the public sphere lies in its mode of social integration'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the importance of inclusion of marginalised groups is paramount for any theorist seeking to work on modes of 'societal interaction'.

Habermas does indeed address the question of the treatment of women in *Structural Transformation*. He does so however, in a rather ambiguous manner:

The circles of persons who made up the two forms of public were not even completely congruent. Women and dependants were factually and legally excluded from the political and public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves.¹⁰⁸

In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas investigates how the relationship between public and private spheres changed in the course of the expansion of the democratic right of participation and the social-welfare state's compensation for class-specific disadvantages. Over thirty years after the first publication of this work, Habermas has recognised the

¹⁰⁷ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, London UK, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.56.

existence, or the validity of other socially disadvantaged groups such as women. In retrospect, Habermas acknowledges that 'both women and other groups were denied equal access to equal and active participation in the formation of political opinion and will'.¹⁰⁹ In other words, Habermas has toned down his somewhat over-enthusiastic praise of the public arena of 'free and open discourse' which he had previously maintained to be accessible to all. He has conceded that, 'this structural transformation of the political public sphere proceeded without affecting the patriarchal character of society as a whole'.¹¹⁰ He adds,

Equality of civil rights, finally attained in the twentieth century, has no doubt created for hitherto underprivileged women the opportunity to improve their social status. Yet women who, through equal political rights, also managed to come to enjoy increased social welfare benefits did not accomplish the modification of the underprivileged status tied to gender.¹¹¹

First, this is a recognition that the whole structure of the bourgeois public sphere rests on patriarchal foundations. Second, Habermas recognises that, although at some levels the official social position of women has been raised, there still remains 'an underprivileged status tied to gender'.

From this brief overview, it becomes apparent why Habermas' rational public has come under heavy attack from those who criticise its idealistic nature. The structure of Habermas' ideal public is essentially

¹⁰⁹ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.428.

¹¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.428.

¹¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p.428.

exclusionary in nature, and is firmly embedded in a strict modernist paradigm that relies on conceptions of rationality in the search for consensual, universal truths. It is however, necessary to emphasise the historical context of Habermas' notion of the public sphere and the extent to which this fact exaggerates the exclusionary nature of the public sphere that Habermas presents in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas has since distanced himself from his original portrayal of the ideal public sphere presented in *Structural Transformation*, taking on board many criticisms from feminist theorists in particular.¹¹²

Foucault's genealogical critique of the category 'public'

While Foucault does not actually use the term 'civil society', he does presuppose the differentiation between the categories of state and society.¹¹³ Indeed, part of what separates Foucault's work on the differentiated social systems of modern societies is that he does not see the state or intermediate realms such as Hegel's 'civil society' or Arendt's 'society' as the sole locus of power. Foucault argues that most of the loci in which the technologies of disciplinary power developed were not only in state institutions, but also in armies, schools, clinics and prisons.¹¹⁴ For example, in *Discipline and Punish*,

¹¹² For example see: Jurgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992. This volume of collected essays provides a number of very important criticism of Habermas' notion of the public sphere.

¹¹³ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.257.

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin Books, London & New York, 1991, p.215.

Foucault shows how disciplinary and surveillance procedures and/or methods of the penal system are also reproduced in other societal institutions:

... there was a whole series of mechanisms that did not adopt the 'compact' prison model, but used some of the carceral methods: charitable societies, moral improvement associations, organizations that handed out assistance and also practiced surveillance, workers' estates and lodging houses - the most primitive of which still bear the all too visible marks of the penitentiary system. And, lastly, this great carceral network reaches all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society ... the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body.¹¹⁵

For Foucault then, techniques of control used in prisons and the like were increasingly used and are indeed recognisable in other social institutions, thus pervading the 'entire social body'. In *Discipline and Punish*, the main characteristics of the so-called modern democratic civil society could be analysed as those of the disciplinary society. In this sense, 'The proliferation of power relations imply the proliferation of subjective resistances which themselves generate new power relations.'¹¹⁶ Certainly, for Foucault it is no longer possible to present a unified society because representation and normative categories of civil society have all become hopelessly romantic. 'It is not functional differentiation but the emergence of a new form of stratification and new power relations that renders the normative juridical model anachronistic'.¹¹⁷ Thus:

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.298.

¹¹⁶ Yves Sintomer, 'Power and civil society: Foucault vs. Habermas', p.358. Also see: Honi Fern Haber, *Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard, Rorty and Foucault*, New York, Routledge, 1994, pp.93-98.

¹¹⁷ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.256.

... since they are conceived as the product of modern technologies of power, none of the categories of civil society can provide a reference point for any project to challenge the structures of domination pervading our societies.¹¹⁸

Thus, as Arato and Cohen argue, the genealogy of the modern prison reveals a modality of power that is all-pervasive in modern civil society;¹¹⁹ that the genealogy of the modern prison system provides a metaphor for modern societies. In this sense, the categorical differentiation between state and society shows the shifting nature of power regimes in modern social systems. Indeed, such techniques of control to which Foucault refers are indicative of the variety of ways in which systems and subsystems are governed and self-governed.

Luhmann's systems-theoretic critique

According to Luhmann, the concept of *politike koinonia* or 'political society', was initially used as a concept to describe and expand on the emergence of 'an evolutionary stage of human development, namely, the construction of political rule that suppressed or greatly reduced the importance of archaic, kinship-based associations and the power of religion in the immediate relations of sub- and superordination'.¹²⁰ However, Luhmann sees a problem with this thematisation of a political society. He argues that societies that thematise themselves as political societies misunderstand

¹¹⁸ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.256.

¹¹⁹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.273.

¹²⁰ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.301.

their position, as they are really only a social system wherein a newly differentiated political subsystem has obtained functional primacy.¹²¹

In this view, it was an error to mistake the part for the whole. Processes of identifying a societal subsystem as emblematic of the whole of society did not convey the significance of the inter-relationship between subsystems. For Luhmann, it is only the notion of functional primacy that should be recognised.¹²² Systems theory regards society as a system, and institutions such as the political system or the economy as subsystems. Society then, 'is not just the sum of individual beliefs and decisions but a set of functionally interdependent elements whose co-ordinated operation maintains the whole system or subsystem'.¹²³

In broad terms, systems theory has a certain appeal because of its ability to conceptualize forms of complex social organization [eg. the market economy and bureaucratic organizations] that are effected more at an anonymous macro level than through the direct intentions of individual participants.¹²⁴

For Luhmann then, systems are 'autopoietic' in the sense that 'the states of the system are exclusively determined by its own operations. The environment can eventually destroy the system, but it contributes neither operations nor structures'.¹²⁵ The structures of the system 'condense and are confirmed as a result of the system's own operations, and the

¹²¹ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. Stephen Holmes & Charles Larmore, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p.19.

¹²² Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, pp.191, 222, 338.

¹²³ William Rehg, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1997, pp.xxi-xxii.

¹²⁴ William Rehg, 'Translator's Introduction', p.xxi.

¹²⁵ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, p.222.

operations in turn recursively reproduced by structural mediation.¹²⁶ The main strategy Luhmann employs against the concept of civil society and its numerous cognates, is to identify them with the traditional *societas civilis* to highlight the inadequacies of such a theoretical demarcation in relation to modern realities.¹²⁷ Luhmann views as obsolete not only the idea of political or civil society but also the concept of economic society, or the primacy of the economic subsystem that appears to have replaced it.¹²⁸

For Luhmann, the dichotomy between state and (civil) society is a false one because it assumes a level of stability and constancy in the definition of both state and society that just does not exist. In this view, the entire debate surrounding the 'separation of state and society has misunderstood [the] phenomenon of increasing differentiation and interdependence'.¹²⁹ In addition, Luhmann rejects the idea that the falsely demarcated state and society 'each consist of sets of concrete human individuals separated from one another in terms of their whole lives'.¹³⁰ Instead he argues in favour of a multiplicity of social roles that transcend supposedly separate subsystems. Such arguments are based on the diffuseness of Luhmann's own categorical definitions of state and society. The state in Luhmann's view means the broad 'political system', while society is used to describe the 'whole environment'.¹³¹

¹²⁶ William Rehg, 'Translator's Introduction', p.xxii.

¹²⁷ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.300.

¹²⁸ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, pp.341-342.

¹²⁹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.309.

¹³⁰ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.310.

¹³¹ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, p.236.

Critical of Luhmann's systems theory approach, Habermas has argued that it 'immediately abandons the notion of individual and collective agency'.¹³² And further, that 'In the face of immense complexities of increasing organizational density, it resolutely concludes that society should be conceived of as a network of autonomous subsystems, each of which is encapsulated in its own semantics and has all the other subsystems for its environment.'¹³³

conclusion

This brief look at the theoretical development of different ways of seeing public (and private) spheres shows a growing theoretical complexity in the consideration of the different functions of societal institutions in Western societies in recent history. However, early manifestations of the problematic division of public and private give way to, but also heavily inform, the Hegelian and Arendtian tripartite models of state, society and household. Habermas' quadripartite model, though clearly modernist in its structure and function, displays many of the complexities of modern industrial societies and the manner in which their institutions interact and merge with one another in role and often in function. The highly idealistic Habermasian model introduces the emergence of a reasoning public, but is limited by its inherently exclusionary nature that has been the cause of much of the criticism Habermas has received in recent years. While the

¹³² Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.334.

¹³³ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p.334.

Habermasian model caters for the coexistence of a multiplicity of public spheres, some publics are given definite primacy over others. For example, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), the bourgeois public is regarded as the main arena for public debate, while the salons (historically the traditional realm of women) and the plebeian publics are largely regarded to be of less importance.

The Foucauldian analysis shows modes of domination and power that operate at a number of levels throughout society making it difficult to locate a centralised democratic public like Habermas' model. Luhmann's systems theory critique most importantly highlights the inadequacy of existing theoretical categories such as 'the state' or 'civil society', preferring instead to focus upon the ongoing processes of subsystem differentiation and interaction in a way that the Habermasian model does not. Yet the earliest Habermasian depiction of the bourgeois public sphere remains important as a precursor to the later development of a 'system' and 'lifeworld' model of society, and a discursively constructed public sphere to which the next chapter will now turn. In this regard, it is important to explore Habermas' early interpretation of the bourgeois public sphere in order to illustrate ways in which Habermas has subsequently come to conceptualise the integration and differentiation of societal subsystems.

chapter two

Habermasian transformation(s) of public and private

subsystem integration & differentiation

A sphere for a privately autonomous pursuit of individual interests and life plans cannot be delimited once and for all from the public sphere oriented to the 'common weal', any more than the 'intimate sphere' can be delimited like a core inside the wider private sphere.¹

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, first published in German in 1962, contains some of Jürgen Habermas' earliest considerations of the structural divisions of public and private in Western European societies.² As the title suggests, Habermas' primary aim in this work was to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere from the historical context of British, French and German developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³ Since its first English publication in 1989, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been the target of a great

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1997, p.314.

² See: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989.

³ Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p.422.

deal of renewed criticism about Habermas' depiction of the public sphere. Many critics have argued that this historical account of the bourgeois public sphere contains various difficulties, many of which can be explained by pointing to Habermas' own idealistic and historical (mis)interpretations. My contention is that many of these misinterpretations of the nature of the public sphere either influence or have been transposed onto Habermas' later categorisation of 'system' and 'lifeworld.' Such limitations of the subsequent theory highlight difficulties not only specifically related to gender, but also those of class and ethnicity which stem, on the whole, from Habermas' often noted idealisation of the historic bourgeois public sphere. By looking at the theoretical background to the development of Habermas' system/lifeworld framework, both the usefulness and the limitations of the traditions which have influenced Habermas become evident. This is also a simple way to illustrate the diversity of theoretical traditions from which Habermas has borrowed and to which he continues to contribute.

Importantly, the re-publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* also prompted a new found engagement between feminist theory and critical theory. The feminist encounters with Habermas' critical theory which are of interest here are those which are specifically concerned with Habermas' system and lifeworld framework. The comparison between the 'system/lifeworld' framework and the traditional 'public/private' split is a particularly useful starting point to highlight both the intricacies of first, Habermas' societal categorisation; and second,

the variety of feminist opinion on the usefulness of Habermas' framework for still developing theories of emancipatory politics.

In comparing the system/lifeworld paradigm with the traditional public/private divide, I engage with feminist theorists who are critical of Habermas' framework and also with some who see something worthwhile and salvageable in Habermas' critical social theory. A limitation however, of the system/lifeworld model, as the feminist critiques show, is its insistence on the use of firm universalist categories symptomatic of the modernist project. For example, Nancy Fraser argues that Habermas' system and lifeworld model is little more than a reproduction of the patriarchally oppressive categorisation of public and private.⁴ On the other hand, Jean Cohen argues that despite its problems, which I endeavour to expand upon, Habermas' system and lifeworld societal framework still makes a valuable contribution to theories of emancipatory politics. Indeed, where Cohen is critical of specific aspects of Habermas' system/lifeworld framework, her larger approach has been to 'revise rather than jettison it'.⁵

While Habermas' early manifestation of an ideal public sphere was still very much influenced by the traditional public/private dichotomy, it is my contention that the system/lifeworld paradigm harbours a level of categorical complexity which goes some way to counter difficulties caused

⁴ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1989. In particular, see Chapters 7 & 8.

⁵ Jean Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate With Jürgen Habermas', in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995, p.57.

by this. Re-theorising the system/lifeworld model as a theory of civil society in the way Cohen has, enables us to see the two-way processes of interaction between societal subsystems (as Niklas Luhmann does),⁶ and reveals that Habermas has only catered for a one-way process. Indeed a reconfiguration of Habermas' categorical framework to one which accounts for concomitant differentiation and interdependence between subsystems leaves us with a model which more adequately caters for many of the structural complexities and processes of social change in modern liberal societies.

Habermas' 'system' and 'lifeworld'

Habermas' early research for *Structural Transformation* into the structure and development of bourgeois society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Western Europe was a substantial influence on his formulation of a new societal framework of system and lifeworld. This early research was particularly influential for Habermas' reconceptualisation of an ideal bourgeois public sphere. Part of this process was to follow the evolution of the public sphere as an arena in which private citizens came together to debate matters of the state, of art and of the market, to an arena largely based on consumption. Habermas' idealised version of the bourgeois public sphere signaled the beginning of

⁶ See: Niklas Luhmann, *A Sociological Theory of Law*, Routledge, London, 1972; and Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

what he saw as a free and open arena for public discourse, where public debate was aided by the introduction and development of newspapers, newsletters and journals. This arena of 'free and open discourse,' which Habermas interpreted as the public sphere in the private realm would later become part of what is known as the 'lifeworld'. Habermas' formulation of a lifeworld category did not develop until some years later and was greatly influenced by such sociological theorists as Aaron V. Cicourel, Harold Garfinkel and Alfred Schutz.⁷

Indeed, Habermas' methodological fascination with the work of Cicourel was grounded in Cicourel's concern with the location of appropriate foundations for measurement in sociology; the question of how to empirically collect data and interpret meanings in language and shared social experience in every social act.⁸ This interest was encouraged by Cicourel's use of E. Husserl's concept of a 'shared lifeworld', a concept which greatly interested Habermas, and one which he would later adopt and develop further, especially in his theory of communicative action. Indeed, Habermas credits Cicourel with making us aware of the epistemological significance of language, of shared social experience, and the necessity of developing a theory 'that explicates the structures of the everyday lifeworld articulated in ordinary language'.⁹ Habermas has since

⁷ Aaron V. Cicourel, *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1964, pp.iii-v. Cicourel was a student of Husserl's, while Garfinkel first introduced Cicourel to the work of Schutz.

⁸ For a more extensive discussion by Habermas on the work of Cicourel see, Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1988, pp.98-116.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.104.

elaborated on the significance of processes that theorize about and measure the 'lifeworld'. He insists that:

Without recourse to a preunderstanding of the social lifeworld we cannot know what we are grasping with measurement operations. Hence we have to begin by subjecting the transcendental framework of communicative experience, within which we relate measured data to theoretical concepts, to a process of reflection.¹⁰

Thus in Habermas' view, what Cicourel is concerned with are those things which are assumed or taken for granted, which are in any sociocultural world the 'indispensable basis of communicative experience that inconspicuously binds subject and object together'.¹¹ Further, he argues that there are 'invariant properties and constitutive rules for the primary lifeworld that are accepted without question as the conditions of possible communication'.¹² Thus, Habermas surmised that it was not the 'grammatical rules of language games in the social lifeworld that Cicourel was primarily concerned with, but the fundamental rules to which communicative action in everyday life conforms':¹³

These 'rules' and properties are invariant to the actual content and types of 'norms' which govern social action in particular situations. The study of these 'rules' and properties provide an experimental foundation for the measurement of meaning structure as basis to all sociological events.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.104.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.105.

¹² Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.105.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.105.

¹⁴ Aaron Cicourel, *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, p.171.

In this definition, Cicourel's view of the social lifeworld is similar to that of Alfred Schutz. Schutz began with the notion of the intersubjectivity of the world of everyday interaction. On this level of subjectivity we, as participants, are oriented to other people as subjects, but are not involved with them as natural objects. Rather we find ourselves speaking and acting with one another in a reciprocally interlocked perspective and reciprocal role within the same communication context.¹⁵ Habermas interprets Schutz's conception of the social lifeworld as biographically constructed. That being a process which draws on tradition, social interaction and interpretation to develop individual and collective identities. In this sense, the lifeworld is 'egocentrically structured, with multidimensional reference systems of the here and the there, the familiar and the strange, the remembered and the present, and the anticipated'.¹⁶ Habermas demonstrates this point:

I find myself in these coordinates of my life history, among contemporaries and in the midst of traditions that have been handed down by my ancestors and that we shall hand down to those who come after us. As children we grow into these traditions in order to win from them our individual life plan with its specific expectations, based on accumulated experience and on memories selected and stored from a certain perspective. The everyday knowledge with which tradition provides us equips us with interpretations of the people and events within the scope of our immediate or potential experience.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.108.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.107.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.107.

The everyday knowledge to which Habermas refers to here is of course what he means by the concept of the lifeworld. Habermas' early interpretation of such a notion also echoes Harold Garfinkel's conception of the lifeworld which focuses on:

... the structures of the lifeworld as the general rules of interpretation in accordance with which actors define everyday life situations and themselves. These rules are as stable or as transient as the world in which the socialized individual lives. They establish the individual reference points in terms of which the normality of events is measured.¹⁸

In essence, Garfinkel argues that the structure of a person's social lifeworld is dependent on what, for them, is 'perceivedly normal'.¹⁹ Likewise, Habermas has adopted the notion of what is to be considered 'perceivedly normal' to define the common or everyday experiences of the lifeworld. Indeed, in his later quest for rational consensus, Habermas perpetuates the use of the 'perceivedly normal' as a reference point to legitimate his use of universalising norms, experiences and truths.

In sum, Habermas views society as comprised of both 'system' and 'lifeworld'.²⁰ The lifeworld is 'the realm of culture, society and personality in which cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation take

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p.109.

¹⁹ For a more in depth look at Garfinkel's account of social action in the lifeworld, see, Aaron V. Cicourel, *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, pp.206-208.

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2, Lifeworld and System. A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, p.118.

place'.²¹ The two main institutions of the lifeworld are the private nuclear family and the public arena of political participation, debate and opinion formation. The former is the private arena, where exclusive membership to the private nuclear family is maintained; while the latter is an open, public forum for discussion, debate, and the pursuit of both individual and interest group aims.²²

On the other hand, the Habermasian category of system is governed by the 'steering media' of money and power which, because Habermas sees them as non-linguistic or speechless, do not feature the comprehension and agreement orientation of the communicative lifeworld. The two major institutions of the system are the private economy and the administrative state. Habermas sees the former as private since, in modern capitalist societies, a primary function of the economy is the pursuit of private welfare and profit. The administrative state is the public arena of the system because of its function as a general representative body whose aim is to act in the interest of the common or public good.²³

Thus, while the lifeworld draws on the use of universals (commonly held norms and values) and the process of rational argumentation to attain consensus which result in decisions and action coordination, the system draws on what Habermas calls 'the steering media' of money and power.²⁴

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.2, p.222.

²² Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique: Essays on The Politics of Gender in Late Capitalist Societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1987, p.7.

²³ Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique*, p.7.

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.2, p.154.

In the system, associations and organisations 'are formed on the basis of media that uncouple action from processes of reaching understanding and coordinate it via generalised instrumental values such as money and power. These steering media replace language as the mechanism for coordinating action'.²⁵ Thus, decision making processes in the system are dictated by economics, power and 'juridical means of sanction.'²⁶ This is especially the case as 'New Right' economic policies encourage the increasing domination of market forces in modern capitalist economies. Furthermore, such a process of economic rationalism is 'aimed at moving some of the coordination functions of nation-societies away from states and bureaucracies to economies and markets'.²⁷ Pusey has documented such a process of structural change in the Australian bureaucracies and administrative sectors. He argues that:

... with the shift to the new reformist discourse of economic rationalism, our political administrators take up a different orienting assumption that gives the steering functions of the economic system primacy over both the state and civil society.²⁸

It is in this sense that policy makers and reforming state apparatuses 'must now adapt civil society, culture, and identity to the functional requirements of the economy'.²⁹

²⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.1: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*: trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, p.342.

²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2*, p.165.

²⁷ Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes its Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1991. p.3.

²⁸ Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*, p.225.

²⁹ Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*, p.225.

	LIFEWORLD	SYSTEM
PUBLIC	public sphere	public authority (state)
PRIVATE	intimate sphere (family)	market/economy

Table 2:1 *Habermas' 'four-termed model of public and private'*.³⁰

What makes Habermas' social-theoretical framework of system and lifeworld so interesting is that despite his clearly modernist agenda, he moves away from the public/private binary and has instead created a 'four-term model of public/private relations'.³¹ The categorical divide between system and lifeworld, and their accompanying subsystems, then becomes more than a simple binary separation. Within the system and lifeworld are categories of public and private which are both separate and inter-connected exposing the complexity of the relationship and integration between them. This conception of social relations expands upon the earlier notion of what Habermas calls 'the basic blueprint'³² which maps the basic role of the bourgeois public sphere in society as presented in *The Structural*

³⁰ See: Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, pp.122-29 for a critical discussion of this model. Also see, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.30 for Habermas' categorisation of public and private in the context of his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere. For a more detailed account of his concepts of system and lifeworld refer to Jürgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action vol.2*, pp.118-160. For further reading see: Andrew Arato & Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1995, p.219.

³¹ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, p.138.

³² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.30.

Transformation of the Public Sphere. When the concepts of system and lifeworld are introduced in subsequent works, Habermas' societal blueprint reveals an in-depth understanding of the complexity of social and institutional relations, and provides a more useful model for understanding and accounting for processes and sites of social change.

the colonisation thesis

One of the central aspects of the categorical division between system and lifeworld is the Habermasian assertion that, in modern capitalist societies, the system is 'colonising' the lifeworld.³³ In Habermasian terms, the system is the realm of institutions, bureaucracies and economies where the steering media of money and power influence the outcomes of decision making processes. Habermas' thesis of colonisation of the lifeworld draws on Weber's theory of societal rationalisation as a point of departure and is based on a critique of functionalist reason.³⁴ Such an example of this process is the growing acceptance of economic rationalism in modern industrial societies. Conversely, in the lifeworld, consensus is reached through language and rational argumentation; rationality is achieved by force of the better argument:

³³ For a useful summary of this notion, see: William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994. In particular, see Chapter Six: 'The Colonisation of the Lifeworld'.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society' in *Modern German Sociology*, eds V. Meja, D. Misgeld & N. Stehr, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p.198.

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements.³⁵

The process of lifeworld colonisation by the system means that the systemic forces at work in society exert greater influence in the coordination of action and the attainment of rational consensus than language. In essence, Habermas' colonisation thesis asserts that in modern capitalist societies the market and the state are exerting increased control over the private realm or the lifeworld. As a result, members of any given culture are less likely to be in agreement about basic assumptions involving their every-day lives and culture, or in Habermasian terms, their accepted lifeworld norms and values.

As the system colonises the lifeworld, money and power exert an increasing control over society and impinge on the lifeworld norms and values. Thus, there is less need for achieving consensus by communicative means because disputes can be resolved and decisions made by recourse to formal regulations, laws and established structures of power.³⁶ For Habermas, the colonisation of the lifeworld is a direct consequence of what he calls the 'monetary-bureaucratic complex':³⁷

... we now observe, and feel, and suffer an 'overspill', an encroachment by the system on areas no longer at all related to

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.2, p.126.

³⁶ Sonya K. Foss, Karen A. Foss & Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives in Rhetoric*, 2nd ed., Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1991, p.264-5.

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, revised ed., Verso, London, 1992, p.116.

material reproduction. These areas of cultural tradition - social integration through values and norms, education, socialization of coming generations - are, however, ontologically speaking, held together by their very nature through the medium of communicative action. Once the steering media such as money and power penetrate these areas, for instance by redefining relations in terms of consumption, or by bureaucratizing the conditions of life, then it is more an attack on traditions. The foundations of a lifeworld that is already under assault.³⁸

Further, Habermas has discussed how conflicts arise along the 'seams' between the system and lifeworld. He argues that the 'interchange between the private and public spheres and the economic and administrative action system takes place via the media of money and power' which is 'institutionalized in the roles of employees, consumers, citizens, and clients of the state'.³⁹ Significantly, what Habermas does not consider however, is the impact or 'colonisation' of the lifeworld on the system. In addition, the encroachment of the system on the lifeworld and the subsequent appearance of fluidity this brings to the categorical division between system and lifeworld also has a fundamental impact upon traditional notions of public and private demarcation from which the system/lifeworld paradigm draws. This has aroused a stimulating engagement with feminist theorists, many of whom are concerned with the oppressive capacities of the traditional public/private division.

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, p.117.

³⁹ Jürgen Habermas, 'The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society', p.202.

system and lifeworld: some feminist considerations

A significant proportion of feminist debate and commentary about Habermas' dualistic categorisation of society revolves around whether it contains anything useful or salvageable for a feminist theory of emancipation. Some feminist debates focus on the public/private distinction which stem from the familiar catch-cry 'the personal is political' which, while it allows for the traditional roles and duties of women in the private realm to be publicly recognised, it also invites increasing regulation of that same realm by state institutions. Some arguments assert a 'gendered symbiosis of public and private', while other debates continue between feminists who argue for a complete dismantling of the barrier between public and private, and those who see the merit in retaining it.⁴⁰ Indeed one feminist argument is that when an activity is performed by men it is more highly valued than when performed by women; when men perform an activity it is designated to be 'public', while when women perform a task, it is deemed 'private'. For example, Imray and Middleton argue that, '[t]he opposition between private and public, then, is not seen as opposed activity, but rather in terms of power relationships which are thrown into sharp relief by rituals that mark these boundaries'.⁴¹ Much has been written about this particular debate which is defined and charged by the tension caused by the way the public sphere tends to define the private

⁴⁰ See: Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, p.16.

⁴¹ Linda Imray & Audrey Middleton, 'Public and Private: Marking the Boundaries', in *The Public and the Private*, eds Eva Gamarnikow, David H.J. Morgan, June Purvis & Daphne Taylorson, Heinemann, London, 1983, p.14.

by processes of exclusion. In essence, what is private is that which does not belong in the public realm. For example, Carole Pateman, among others, has surveyed different feminist critiques of the public/private dichotomy.⁴² However, what I am specifically interested in here are those feminist critiques of Habermas' reworking of the public/private model. Indeed, Habermas' categorisation of society into differentiated spheres (whether in the form of the quadripartite model of family, public sphere, economy and state, or of the system and lifeworld dichotomy) has been the focus of a great deal of feminist commentary and criticism in recent years.⁴³

While Nancy Fraser finds many other aspects of Habermas' work useful and positive for feminist theory,⁴⁴ and although it is difficult to ascertain whether or not she is in favour of dismantling the traditional public/private categorical divide altogether, she objects to the categorical opposition between system and lifeworld.⁴⁵ Fraser contends that

⁴² Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1989, esp. see Chapter 6, 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy', pp.118-140.

⁴³ For example, see: Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique*; Jean Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques'; Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989; Marie Fleming, 'Women and the "Public Use of Reason"', in *Feminists Read Habermas*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995; Nancy Fraser, 'What's So Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender', in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, and 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992; Joan B. Landes, 'Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: a feminist inquiry*', in *Praxis International*, vol.12, no.1, April 1992; and Mary P. Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century America' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992.

⁴⁴ See: Chapters 7 and 8 of *Unruly Practices* (1989) for a discussion of aspects of Habermasian theory that Nancy Fraser finds to be both positive and useful from a feminist perspective.

⁴⁵ Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p.115.

'Habermas' categorical divide between system and lifeworld institutions faithfully mirrors the institutional separation in male dominated, capitalist societies of family and official economy, household and paid workplace'.⁴⁶ Her point is that Habermas fails to recognise male dominance in both public and private realms. Fraser is not alone in making criticisms of this sort. In particular, Seyla Benhabib and Iris Young have also made substantial criticism of Habermas categorical divide which support Fraser's argument that the system and lifeworld binary reproduces male dominance in both realms.⁴⁷ In this sense, Habermas' system and lifeworld framework can be regarded merely as a more complicated reproduction and reinforcement of the public/private binary, which reproduces patriarchal oppression and the domination of women. In addition, Fraser argues that Habermas' distinction between material and symbolic reproduction is used to classify actual social behaviour, reinforcing

⁴⁶ Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p.119.

⁴⁷ See: Seyla Benhabib, 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg - Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory', in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1987; Seyla Benhabib, 'Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal tradition and Jürgen Habermas', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992; Iris Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public; Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory; in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, Cambridge UK, Polity Press, 1987; Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990; Iris Young, 'Recent Theories of Justice', in *Social Theory and Practice*, vol.18, spring, pp.63-79. Also of interest to this argument are: Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, Basic Books New York, 1989; and Tony Couture, 'Feminist Criticisms of Habermas's Ethics and Politics', in *Dialogue*, vol.34, no.2, spring, pp.259-279, 1995.

public/private gender roles.⁴⁸ In this view it may be contended that this separation of reproductive roles could be used to legitimise the institutional separation of childrearing from paid work - a separation which she considers a major contributor to the modern subordination of women.⁴⁹ As such, the drawing of boundaries between the public and private spheres helps to justify and/or normalise the entrenchment of traditional gender roles. Such an entrenchment of traditional gender roles becomes problematic from a liberal feminist perspective because it contributes to the institutional exclusion of women from the public realm, subsequently restricting equal access to the same rights as men.

More specifically, Nancy Fraser argues that childrearing activities (which Habermas sees as a function of the lifeworld), have taken on systemic characteristics as they become increasingly commodified. It is in this way that she argues that many lifeworld activities and functions are actually 'dual aspect' activities, and thus cross the boundaries of the system and lifeworld, problematising Habermas' colonisation thesis.

In my view, this is an important way of understanding the foundational structure of Habermas' social theory. But this is by no means the only feminist interpretation and criticism of Habermas' colonisation

⁴⁸ See: Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, p.115: 'Thus, according to Habermas, in capitalist societies, the activities and practices that make up the sphere of paid work count as material production activities since, in his view, they are 'social labor' and serve the function of material production. On the other hand, the child-rearing activities and practices that in our society are performed without pay by women in the domestic sphere - let us call them 'women's unpaid child rearing work'- count as symbolic reproduction activities since, in Habermas's view, they serve socialisation and the function of symbolic reproduction.'

⁴⁹ Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p.116.

thesis. In particular, Jean Cohen takes issue with Fraser's reading of Habermas' colonisation thesis and system/lifeworld paradigm. Her objection finds its foundation in the relationship between the family and the official market economy. Cohen does not see the family unit as an economic system in a strictly Habermasian sense, which she understands as 'a formally organized, media-steered set of social relations'.⁵⁰ She elucidates:

Although families do perform economic functions, although they can be and are functionalized by the imperatives of the economic or the administrative subsystem, and though there are strategic interactions within them as well as exchanges of services and labor for money or support, and although these are distributed along gender lines, families are not thereby economic systems. They are neither formally organized nor media-steered. By the same token, they cannot be described as administrative systems even though they are certainly imbued with power relations.⁵¹

This view however, disallows the possibility of a subsystem having the characteristics of both system and lifeworld. Further, Cohen is wrong to argue that the family itself is not formally organised nor media steered. As I argue later in Chapter Seven, families are indeed ideologically organised and some recent government policies actively encourage specific types of familial arrangements.⁵² That is, a nuclear heterosexual family with one primary breadwinner. Family units which meet such very

⁵⁰ Jean Cohen, *Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas*, in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995, p.65.

⁵¹ Jean Cohen, *Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas*, p.65.

⁵² See the section in chapter seven on access to childcare for a more detailed account of this line of argument.

specific governmental requirements are rewarded not only with social prestige, but also financially by qualifying for welfare assistance or tax benefits, or both.

Cohen's insistence that the family is not a valid Habermasian system ignores the ways in which its internal and external social relations are formally organised and media-steered by deliberate government policy. Cohen's position also assumes that the institutionalism of what she would regard as purely lifeworld activities like childrearing would have solely negative consequences. This however overlooks some of the advantages of institutionalisation which can provide the more formal representation of resistance movements or the advocacy of unions. Indeed, social movements are the organised form of lifeworld associations which assert the rights of members in the quest for social and economic justice.

In addition, the activity of childrearing is not just about caring and nurturing, but is also intrinsically about the maintenance of social structures and the production of socially responsible and economically productive citizens. In the case of child rearing activities, this is the implicit understanding behind such government initiatives as the 'parenting payment', an income supplement which is paid to the primary caregiver of one or more children in a nuclear family. While this initiative does cross the system/lifeworld divide by legislating for the private sphere, it also ascribes economic value to childrearing activities and establishes families as economic subsystems. In this way, such family units

themselves become both economic and social subsystems by virtue of the 'dual aspect' activities of childrearing they perform.

Habermas' framework aims to keep separations in place, while the feminist project is to ultimately dismantle the separations of public and private that also define gender relations and roles. Indeed, in this view, much of women's history over the last century in the Western world and elsewhere has been characterised by the struggle for acceptance within the public sphere on the same terms and conditions as men. As Margaret Thornton has argued:

The public sphere, mediated through law, has enabled benchmark men to construct normativity, like God in their own image The stigmata of affectivity continues to detract from the rationality and authority of women and others in public office. Conventionally, a 'public woman' was a prostitute, a figure of derision who acted in and for the universal good. This signification helps us to understand why benchmark men continue to dominate the most powerful institutions of the public sphere, including parliaments, courts, and universities.⁵³

Habermas' system/lifeworld framework works within similar parameters as the traditional public/private binary and subsequently may also be seen as a manifestation of the longevity of Habermas' early (mis)transformations of the public sphere. Habermas' original rendering of a hegemonic social structure with gendered roles in *Structural Transformation*, has been transposed onto his system and lifeworld framework where men are still regarded as the norm or the benchmark

⁵³ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, p.13.

citizen in the public realm, while the public woman remains the aberration or the deviant.

This particular line of debate raises some valid points, yet Habermas' system and lifeworld categorisation is characteristically more complex than the binary separation of public and private which Fraser argues is being reproduced here. Indeed, Habermas endeavours to draw out the different societal components of *both* the public and private realms, and in doing so has undertaken to rationalise a sphere which in traditional liberal and Enlightenment thought has hitherto been characterised as irrational and apolitical.⁵⁴ A common feature of the traditional divide between public and private is the presentation of the public sphere as somehow superior to the private sphere. As such, the public sphere has been represented as the embodiment of 'rationality, culture, and intellectual endeavour, whereas the domestic sphere has been represented as the sphere of nature, nurture and non-rationality'.⁵⁵

Conversely, in Habermas' societal re-theorisation, both the realm of the family or the household, and the public sphere are the fundamental components of the lifeworld, and as such are placed in direct opposition not to one another but to the system components of the economy and the state proper. Thus by focusing on the rationality of the lifeworld, Habermas promotes and politicises the personal. It is in this sense that

⁵⁴ Pauline Johnson, 'Feminism and the Enlightenment', in *Radical Philosophy*, no.63, spring 1993, pp.4, 11.

⁵⁵ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private*, pp.11-12.

Habermas' theory of communicative rationality differs from traditional liberal analyses of the public/private role division. It is only in the realm of the lifeworld, free from steering systemic media, that Habermas' theory of communicative action, the ideal form of rationality, may take place. Indeed, for Habermas, the 'concept of communicative rationality does not just apply to the processes of intentional consensus formation, but also to the structures of a state of pre-understanding already reached within an intersubjectively shared lifeworld'.⁵⁶

Poststructuralist feminism, like postmodern feminism, sees consciousness and language as fundamental human attributes; it is language that enables thought, to make sense of and give meaning to the external world.⁵⁷ This emphasis on language as the medium through which consciousness is constructed and meaning is given to events and ideas is reminiscent of Habermas' focus on language. In this way Habermas views language as the vehicle through which 'truths', or at least meaning may be inscribed, revealed or discovered through an idealised process of communicative interaction. In this sense, Habermasian theory of communicative action may be easily adapted to serve both feminist poststructuralist and postmodernist aims (depending on the choice of theoretical definitions).

⁵⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 'A Reply' in *Communicative Action*, eds A. Honneth and H. Joas, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991, p.223.

⁵⁷ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1987, p.32.

Yet another theoretical tension arose with Habermas' reworking of theory in the late 1980's and early 1990's after renewed criticism, largely from feminists, regarding his depiction of an ideal public which excludes women.⁵⁸ While Habermas has claimed that common experiences provide a common basis for understanding, he also allows for the coexistence of multifarious understandings, meanings and interpretations of both the public sphere and lifeworld. Moreover, although Habermas sees subjectivity as the product of society and culture of the lifeworld, he insists that shared lifeworlds will provide common, rather than different interpretation and meaning. There is some theoretical tension here. Habermas' re-evaluation of gender and his subsequent inclusion of it into his societal framework, has necessitated that he acknowledge that many shared understandings are historically and culturally constructed; yet this is at odds with his insistence that universals are a fundamental component of the shared lifeworld.

For those theorists working from a liberal feminist perspective, the Habermasian focus on communicative rationality and everyday norms in the private lifeworld is an important move toward promoting the private realm of the lifeworld (the household) as a positive and crucial structural component of society. This is a component of social life largely omitted by traditional liberal theory. Habermas' 'four-term model of public/private relations' shows that there is more to society than the standard either/or

⁵⁸ See: Jürgen Habermas, 'A Reply' for an extensive reply to specific points of criticism from various feminist perspectives.

binary of public and private. Moreover, it is clear that even the four main categories that Habermas has outlined cannot be fixed for any set period of time, but rather interact and as such cater for certain levels of fluidity and processes of societal modernisation and rationalisation. Theories about the categories of public and private are continually questioning the strict boundaries between the two in favour of seeing the categories of public and private as fluid, and as constantly changing. For example, Thornton argues that the public/private distinction is now defunct and has been replaced by 'a series of ways of thinking about public and private that are now constantly undergoing revision, reformation, and refinement'.⁵⁹ She views the boundaries of public and private as malleable especially in terms of law which, in many respects, shapes and regulates public and private roles and behaviours. It is for this reason that Thornton finds the Habermasian 'four-term model of public and private' more useful for feminist theory than a simple binary of public and private or even a trichotomy of family/economic-social/polity.⁶⁰ This is not to say however that a refined schemata necessarily leads to greater precision of boundary definition.

While critical of Habermas' categorical framework of system and lifeworld, other feminist theorists have tried to emphasise what practical application it has to offer the wider feminist movement. Jean Cohen for

⁵⁹ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, p.2.

⁶⁰ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, pp.6-7.

example, argues that 'a reconstruction of the system/lifeworld distinction along the lines of a theory of civil society corrects certain "blindspots."' ⁶¹

Habermas's tendency to view the subsystem as 'self-referentially closed' screens out from view the possibility of institutional reform in these domains as well. Its overly rigid separation of the domains of system and lifeworld blinds him to the offensive strategies of contemporary movements aimed at creating or democratizing receptors within the subsystems, for it makes success tautologically impossible. ⁶²

This is to say that while Habermas allows for a certain amount of fluidity of categorical differentiation, the movement between subsystems remains limited and is mostly seen by Habermas as the colonisation by the system's steering media of the lifeworld's domain of language social reproduction and interaction. This brings us back to the question of how Habermas sees the possibility of interaction/integration between subsystems. I argue that part of Habermas' inability to view subsystem interaction outside of the colonisation thesis has its origins in his very early considerations of the categories of public and private. However, it is necessary to concede that in order for the categories to be discussed and analysed, they must also be defined. This is not to say that Habermas' categories cannot adapt and change. Indeed, it is the 'ability to adapt and counter the constantly evolving influences of economy and state' which

⁶¹ Jean Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas', in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995, p.63.

⁶² Jean Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas', p.63.

requires a multidirectionality of boundary movement.⁶³ This is precisely what Nancy Fraser and other Feminists find valuable in Habermas' societal framework despite their criticism of Habermas treatment of gender issues..

irreconcilable separation of subsystems: early considerations

Social integration has been a theme of some longevity for Habermas' own research interests. He has argued that when the Frankfurt School theorists arrived in America in the 1930's, 'they realized that what needed explanation was not so much the phenomena of capitalist economic crisis as the mechanisms of capitalist cultural integration'.⁶⁴ Subsystem differentiation has since been a prominent theme for Habermas. He is largely concerned with subsystem interaction and functional differentiation. While this theme has inspired and entered many of his later works, Habermas began with the seemingly more simplistic division between literature and science as a manifestation of the public/private differentiation. In *Toward a Rational Society*, Habermas considers Aldous Huxley's view of the relationship between literature and science. It is here that Habermas makes an early distinction between the private and the public experience:

... literature makes statements about private experiences, the sciences about intersubjectively accessible experiences. The latter can be expressed in a formalised language, which can be made universally valid by means of general definitions. In

⁶³ Tony Couture, 'Feminist criticisms of Habermas's ethics and politics', pp.263-264.

⁶⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'Conservatism and capitalist crisis' in *New Left Review*, no.115, May/June 1979, pp.78-79.

contrast, the language of literature must verbalise what is in principle unrepeatable and must generate an intersubjectivity of mutual understanding in each concrete case.⁶⁵

Here, what Habermas refers to as the 'intersubjectivity of mutual understanding' sounds very similar to his later definition of the subsystem of the lifeworld which in later works would form the backdrop for the theory of communicative action. In sum, Habermas asserts that literary expression is derived from a constitution of private 'experience within the horizon of a life-historical environment'.⁶⁶ Literary expression thus has its roots firmly in the lifeworld which is 'culture-bound, ego-centred, and reinterpreted in the ordinary language of social groups and socialized individuals'.⁶⁷ In contrast, the sciences for Habermas are 'the sum of law-like hypotheses', and can be described in a 'spatio-temporal coordinate system'.⁶⁸ This approach demarcates a clear dichotomy between the societal Habermasian subsystems of system (objective) and lifeworld (subjective).

Habermas is critical of the way Huxley views the relationship between the two subsystems. While Huxley seeks to harmonise 'our own private and unshareable experiences with the scientific hypotheses',⁶⁹ Habermas takes the view that:

⁶⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, Heinemann, London, 1971, p.50.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.50.

⁶⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.51.

⁶⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.50.

⁶⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.52.

Information provided by the strictly empirical sciences can be incorporated in the social life-world only through its technical utilization, as technical knowledge, serving the expansion of our power of technical control. Thus such information is not on the same level as the action-orienting self-understanding of social groups. Hence, without mediation, the information content of the sciences cannot be relevant to that part of practical knowledge which gains expression in literature.⁷⁰

The problem then of mediation between the scientific and/or technical and the communicative processes of mutual understanding can be interpreted as a need to mediate the categorical divide which separates public and private. For Habermas, the sciences enter the social lifeworld only through the technical exploitations of their information.⁷¹ This leaves Habermas with the dilemma of how it may be possible to translate technically exploitable knowledge into the practical consciousness of the social lifeworld.⁷² The problems within Habermas' systems theory approach are beginning to emerge. This approach not only demands that subsystems be separated and analysed for their societal role, it also necessitates a site of mediation for this process to take place in. This process consequently, requires Habermas to account for the integration of the objective and the subjective; the integration of technical knowledge into the social-lifeworld. It is also possible to see in Habermas' dilemma evidence of the emerging themes of rationality, reflection and rational discussion, which of course takes place in the social lifeworld. Habermas asks: 'How can the relation between technical progress and the social life-

⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.52.

⁷¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, pp.51-52.

⁷² Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.52.

world ... be reflected upon and brought under the control of rational discussion?'⁷³ His categorisations follow a clear binary pattern of system/lifeworld, science/literature, technology/democracy, objective/subjective, and public/private. The problem thus becomes embodied in the relationship between Habermasian subsystems. In *Towards a Rational Society*, Habermas reflects on how society can 'possibly exercise sovereignty over the technical conditions of life and integrate them into the practice of the life-world?', and asks 'how can the force of technical control ... be made subject to the consensus of acting and transacting citizens?'⁷⁴

The introduction of self-reflexive rationality into this dilemma leads Habermas to question the impact of technology on notions of open deliberation. This is an obvious progression since, from very early on in his career, Habermas considered the role of the public sphere (which in *Structural Transformation* was still considered part of the private realm along with the social lifeworld) as that of a medium between private citizens and the state bureaucracies. Thus, Habermas redefines the original problem between science and literature as posed by Huxley, into a question of the relationship between technology and democracy⁷⁵ through a consideration of the scientific and the linguistic. The dilemma for Habermas remains one of merging the two cultures of the systemic and the

⁷³ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.53.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, pp.59-60.

⁷⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.57.

social to produce an open dialogue, which is grounded in rational reflection over technologically exploitable knowledge.

This rather idealistic vision of a rational discourse would later become a key aspect of Habermas' work and provide the foundation for his theory of communicative action. The solution to his subsystem integration dilemma lies in the ability to 'set into motion a politically effective discussion that rationally brings the social potential constituted by technical knowledge and ability into a defined and controlled relation to our practical knowledge and will'.⁷⁶ While Habermas has pin-pointed the problem and puts forward an ideal solution to the integrating of subsystems, he remains quietly pessimistic about the chances of actually reconciling technology and democracy. He contends that:

As little as we can accept the optimistic convergence of technology and democracy, the pessimistic assertion that technology excludes democracy is just as untenable.⁷⁷

This is important because while recognising the paradox that the two spheres may not converge, Habermas does not dismiss the possibility that they intersect in some way. Infact, he would argue that technology and democracy are fundamentally intertwined. This recognises that divisions between subsystems are not concrete, but rather, undergo certain levels of interaction and differentiation.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.61.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, p.60.

⁷⁸ See: Nicos Mouzelis, 'Social and system integration: Habermas' view', in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.43, no.2, June 1992, pp.267-288.

Niklas Luhmann's systems theory argues that the traditional categories of social structure, such as the division between state and civil society, are false and that such distinct categories have never existed.⁷⁹ Moreover, such categorical demarcation does not account for increasing differentiation and interdependence between subsystems.⁸⁰ Habermas has been criticised for his use of categories and indeed, his long-standing commitment to systems theory. More specifically, Habermas has come under attack for the 'normative inadequacy of system concepts for characterizing the institutions of a genuinely democratic society':⁸¹

If self-determination, political equality, and the participation of citizens in decision-making processes are the hallmarks of true democracy, then a democratic government could not be a political *system* in Habermas' sense - that is, a domain of action differentiated off from other parts of society and preserving its autonomy in relation to them, while regulating its interchanges with them via delinguistified steering media like money and power.⁸²

Thus, a political arena is not a completely differentiated arena of closed-off action, but rather a sphere wherein citizen participation is fundamental to its very operation. While simultaneous tension between interdependence and differentiation of subsystems is imperative, it is also important to be able to approximate boundaries of subsystems in order to examine their function. Despite interdependence with other subsystems,

⁷⁹ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.308.

⁸⁰ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.309.

⁸¹ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: or the Seductions of Systems Theory', in *Communicative Action: Essays on Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action*, eds A. Honneth & H. Joas, trans. J. Gaines & D. Jones, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991, p.132.

⁸² Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: or the Seductions of Systems Theory', p.132.

the aim of systems theory is to be able to determine the functions of the various distinctive components of society. While Habermas recognises certain levels of interdependence between system and lifeworld when it involves a colonisation of the lifeworld by the 'delinguistified steering media of money and power', he is less concerned with the encroachment of private sphere concerns into the system.

Taking this view of interdependence and concomitant differentiation between subsystems, it is possible to see how a Foucauldian perspective that involves the recognition of multiple loci of power becomes useful. The flow of power in society is headed not in one direction, but rather, in multiple directions, originating from many differentiated and interdependent societal institutions depending on what subsystem happens to be having 'functional primacy'⁸³ at the time. Indeed, Luhmann argues that:

Reciprocal dependencies and interdependence among subsystems increase simultaneously. In principle, this is because there is an increase of circumstances in which one can be dependent and interdependent.⁸⁴

This is not to say that an increasing 'intersocial complexity characterizing the functional primacy of the economic subsystem'⁸⁵ has occurred and that Habermas' colonisation thesis is defunct. It does however, suggest a need to pay attention to the ways in which other

⁸³ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.302.

⁸⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *A Sociological Theory of Law*, p.149.

⁸⁵ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.309.

subsystems take functional primacy as processes of societal interaction become increasingly complex. This will be the focus of the next chapter when I look at the role of social movements in regard to the changing nature of the public sphere. This is useful inasmuch as feminist and systems theorists have also argued that the construction of the traditional public/private divide is a false dichotomy, or at least a less than distinct separation. What makes Luhmann useful for an emancipatory politics such as that which social movements push for, is that in some respects his systems theory approach provides a way of looking at society that does not ignore the simultaneous multi-directional interaction between subsystems. This is especially so in the case of hitherto marginalised subsystems of social reproduction such as the household or the private sphere.

conclusion

In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas transformed the simple dichotomy of public/private into a more complex framework that he labeled, somewhat ironically, 'the basic blueprint'. In subsequent works, Habermas has drawn on much of his original analysis of 'the basic blueprint' to perform a second transformation resulting in a shift from a debating public sphere to a market driven technology-based public sphere. This transformation in the function of Habermas' public sphere was a precursor to his later system/ lifeworld framework and the subsequent colonisation thesis. In sum, I have argued that a great deal of Habermas' gender-blindness in his reconceptualisation of the public and private categories is

the result of early historical definition of what constitutes a citizen in *Structural Transformation*. This is clearly manifest in Habermas' discussions of a public arena of (supposedly) free and open discourse, which in reality often restricted participation according to class, gender and at times, ethnicity.

While Habermas' societal framework can certainly be reduced in the way that Nancy Fraser has argued, it may also be commended for the attention it gives to the private sphere of the lifeworld (an area largely ignored by mainstream liberal democratic analysis). Indeed, aspects of the system and lifeworld framework remain useful for reconceptualising societal categories. This is not to say that the categorical flexibility of Habermas' system and lifeworld theory will necessarily filter down into everyday life, in turn serving to break down gendered public/private roles. I am suggesting however, that it is a useful way for feminist politics from a variety of differing perspectives, and a variety of other social change interest groups, to conceptualise different and ever shifting components of society. When combined with Niklas Luhmann's understanding of systems theory, the fluidity of Habermas' most recent categorical framework of system and lifeworld provides the tools with which to better understand various ways in which different societal components interact with one another.

While many of the criticisms aimed at Habermas' categorisation of the system and lifeworld institutions continue to stand, the

system/lifeworld framework is an advance on the standard binary separation of spheres. Indeed, Habermas' conception of a public sphere which mediates between the state and the private lifeworld(s) of citizens is a useful way of bringing private sphere concerns into a public arena where it may form part of public opinion. A truly accessible public sphere is an effective vehicle for publicising, legitimising and normalising the private concerns of those groups which have hitherto been marginalised by more dominant sectors of society. It is a helpful way to assign value to the private sphere which has often been omitted from mainstream political analysis.

Habermas' model of a public sphere, which rests on processes of communicative action, introduces a newfound appreciation for the contribution of the private sphere of the family/household to matters which concern the larger community. What a more complex social model provides, that a simplified binary of public and private does not, is easier access for hitherto marginalised private sphere concerns to public sphere debate. This not only provides recognition, but also a capacity to prompt key policy changes in liberal democratic systems. The crux of the argument is that constant interaction between theoretically demarcated categories results in a level of boundary fluidity that caters for varying, different and previously excluded or marginalised identities to emerge and to actively participate in the public sphere in a recognised and legitimate way. Such participation, as the next chapter will endeavour to show, is important not only for a more inclusive public sphere, but also for the

continual renegotiation of spheres within which the struggle for social change may take place.

PART II

new social movements: Habermasian reflections

chapter three

social movements & the shaping of public spheres

Many contemporary activists accept the existence of the formally democratic state and the market economy. Of course their struggles involve a project of reorganizing the relations between economy, state, and society, and of redrawing of the boundaries between public and private.¹

Theorising about social movements in recent times has uncovered a number of interesting developments in the negotiation between the hitherto separate categories of state, economy and society. This introduces questions not only about the function of new public spheres which serve as intermediates between traditional public and private realms, but also about the maintenance of a legitimate authoritative state. The move from the study of Marxist-based 'old' social movements to the more culturally grounded 'new social movements' has marked a further broadening of popular conceptions of the public sphere and its democratic possibilities in advanced industrial societies. Continual renegotiation of the traditional boundary between public and private by social movements has resulted in increasing obfuscation of the categories themselves. This is by no means a

¹ Jean L. Cohen, 'Strategy or identity: new theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements', *Social Research*, vol.52, no.4, winter 1985, p.673.

new phenomena. Indeed, in 1985 Claus Offe wrote about the role of the so-called 'new' social movements as the 'fusion of political and nonpolitical spheres of social life'.² While this position ignores the already long-established movements such as the women's movement who insisted that the personal was indeed political, what Offe referred to were those processes by which social movements remove and/or alter the distinct and separate divisions between public and private, and in broader Habermasian terms, between system and lifeworld. Consequently, traditional demarcations between family, civil society and the state become difficult to maintain and define. 'These new social movements have given birth to social knowledges that contest the Enlightenment framework of the social scientific disciplines.'³ In such a view, the abstractly firm boundaries between the Habermasian system and lifeworld are in need of a drastic reconsideration as a deeper mystification of boundaries occurs.

Habermas, among others⁴ considers the function of social movements generally as one of resistance; as protector of the lifeworld against the pressures of the delinguistified, steering media of system institutions. The women's movement however, is not confined to a purely resistant function, but rather performs a far more active role in its engagement with the system than is considered by Habermas' colonisation thesis. Indeed, the contribution of the women's movement to the system

² Claus Offe, 'New social movements: challenging the boundaries of institutional politics', *Social Research*, vol.52, no.4, 1985, p.817.

³ Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, Blackwell, Oxford UK & Cambridge MA, 1994, p.235.

⁴ See for example: Dieter Rucht, 'Themes, logics and arenas of social movements: a structural approach', in *International Social Movement Research*, vol.1, 1988, pp.305-328.

involves the introduction of many lifeworld issues into the system. This in itself places stress on the traditional boundaries between public and private, and creates largely elastic barriers that are under constant renegotiation. In Habermasian terms, this alters the sites of material and symbolic reproduction. Concurrently, this has repercussions for what Habermas calls 'systematically and socially integrated action contexts', which he argues, occur in categorically separate spheres. My contention is that as the women's movement, as quite a visible example of a social movement, renegotiates the divide between system and lifeworld, systematically and socially integrated action contexts are no longer relegated to either one site or another. Rather, they may occur in either system or lifeworld, or even both simultaneously as cultural conditions undergo constant shifts, renegotiations, and changes in meaning.

Using the broader Australian women's movement as a case study, this chapter will illustrate various ways in which such Habermasian categorisations of system and lifeworld, and indeed of the public sphere itself, are perpetually challenged. Changing public sphere discourses about the role of social movements also signal a broad shift in its usefulness in a functioning democracy, and results in a more clearly differentiated civic public than imagined by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. I am not arguing that early class-based social movements did not participate in such process of subsystem boundary and function renegotiation. Rather, the so-called 'new' social movements such as the women's movement have made this process

decidedly more prominent; that 'the social knowledge generated by the new social movements challenge[s] the Enlightenment ... tradition'.⁵

social movements: some complexities of definition

Much of the theorising that surrounds the concept of the social movement is accompanied by a great deal of ambiguity. Indeed, as Mario Diani has argued, one might very well speak of concepts such as 'collective action',⁶ 'social change' and 'social conflict' rather than actually employ the term 'social movement'.⁷ Such is the range of phenomena that are included under the broad term 'social movement' that it has been variously taken to mean any number of 'social and political phenomena as heterogeneous as revolutions, religious sects, political organisations [and] single issue campaigns'.⁸ While social movements are comprised of individuals, they rely upon collective action; a 'social movement may be heterogeneous in its range and type of actions, while also being unified as the one movement'.⁹ Social movements may also be considered as 'networks of interaction between different actors which may either include formal organisations or not, depending on shifting circumstances'.¹⁰

⁵ Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, p.273.

⁶ See: Joseph R. Gusfield, 'Social movements and social change: perspectives of linearity and fluidity', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, vol.4, 1981, p.318; and Lars Uden, *The Limits of Public Choice: A Sociological Critique of the Economic Theory of Politics*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996, esp. Chapter 6 'The Sociology of Collective Action', pp.278-328.

⁷ Mario Diani, 'The concept of social movement', in *The Sociological Review*, 1992, p.2.

⁸ Mario Diani, 'The concept of social movement', p.2.

⁹ Tim Jordan, 'The unity of social movements', in *The Sociological Review*, 1995, p.675.

¹⁰ Mario Diani, 'The concept of social movement', p.14.

This raises questions about the relationship between the formation and function of social movements and an active public sphere. In quite basic terms, it is in the discursive part of the public sphere where 'a social movement ... gains an understanding of what it is about and what it can do'.¹¹ Or as Jean Cohen puts it, 'collective action involves forms of association specific to the context of a modern pluralistic civil society'.¹² In this sense, the structure and organisation of such public spheres which provide environments for the fostering of social movements are fundamentally important for a functioning democratic system. Not only that, but the role of the social movement becomes the 'defence and democratization of the public social realm'.¹³ It is the task of social movements 'to build on the achievements of past democratic movements, namely, civil society and a formally democratic state, while creating new solidarities, public spheres, and additional democratic forms.'¹⁴ Public spheres then, are often a composite of a number of differing social movement organisations, incorporating both individual and collective action. These conceptions of public spheres are unlike early conceptions of civil society or even a Habermasian conception of the public sphere. They are not restricted to purely 'public' concerns such as politics or the economy, but are just as likely to be interested in matters historically considered to be the concern of the 'private realm of the family', and as

¹¹ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', in *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, ed. Helen Wilson, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1989, pp.21-22.

¹² Jean L. Cohen, 'Strategy or identity', p.673.

¹³ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol.28, 1983, p.106.

¹⁴ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.106.

such are outside of the realm of the bourgeois public sphere conceived of by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

The visibility of social movements is very often aided by the help of sources outside the movement itself such as the mass media.¹⁵ Indeed, most

... movements will want access to a wider public, both to extend their constituency and make their case to a wider audience. This introduces a second notion of the public sphere which is essentially singular: that part in which matters which are - or are thought to be - of concern to a relatively large number of people are debated, and where this debate is a significant input into both prevailing views and political decisions.¹⁶

While most social movements today use the media to broaden their public sphere, and while the media plays a crucial role in the widening of public spheres, it is not the media alone that constitutes a public sphere. Contemporary social movements 'struggle in the name of autonomy, plurality, and difference, without, however, renouncing the formal egalitarian principles of modern civil society or the universalistic principles of the formally democratic state'.¹⁷ Social movements have also been defined in more abstract terms as 'recurrent patterns of collective activities that are partly institutionalised, value oriented and antisystemic

¹⁵ Ron Eyerman & Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1991, p.94. Also see: Richard B. Kielbowicz & Clifford Scherer, 'The role of the press in the dynamics of social movements', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol.9, 1986, pp.71-96; and Joseph R. Gusfield, 'Social movements and social change: perspectives of linearity and fluidity', pp.317-339.

¹⁶ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.22.

¹⁷ Jean L. Cohen, 'Strategy or identity', p.669.

in their form and symbolism'.¹⁸ Three basic components of social movements include 'networks of relations between a plurality of actors', which involve 'collective identity' and which address 'conflictual issues'.¹⁹ On the whole, to use Alaine Touraine's definition, 'the concept 'social movements' only refer[s] to conflicts around the social control of the main cultural patterns' of a society.²⁰ In 'new' social movements,²¹ Seidman sees 'an effort to reconsider knowledge, society and politics in a way that underscores a moral vision of human studies'.²²

Social movements then, provide a functional vehicle for individuals to engage in an exchange of ideas and opinions with the often seemingly formidable administrative state. In this sense the public sphere serves as a realm of mediation between the public bureaucratic state and the private realm of the family or the Habermasian lifeworld. Claus Offe has highlighted a number of difficulties associated with such a trend.²³ Among these is the neoconservative concern that through social movements citizens would attempt to 'win a more immediate and more comprehensive control over political elites by means that are seen frequently to be

¹⁸ Jan Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991, p.xiv.

¹⁹ Mario Diani, 'The concept of social movement', p.17.

²⁰ Alaine Touraine, 'An introduction to the study of social movements', in *Social Research*, vol.52, no.4, 1985, p.760.

²¹ For some additional perspectives, see: Charles Tilly, 'Social movements, old and new', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol.10, 1988, pp.1-18; and Anthony Oberschall, 'The decline of the 1960's social movements', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol.1, 1978, pp.257-289.

²² Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, Blackwell, Oxford UK & Cambridge MA, 1994, p.235.

²³ See: Claus Offe, 'New social movements: challenging the boundaries of institutional politics', in *Social Research*, vol.52, no.4, winter 1985.

incompatible with the maintenance of the institutional order of the polity'.²⁴

Offe explains:

As the *functions* and responsibilities of the state expand, its *authority* (i.e., its capacity to make binding decisions) is debased; for political authority can be stable only so long as it is limited, and thus complimented by self-sustaining nonpolitical spheres of action which serve to both exonerate political authority and to provide it with sources of legitimacy.²⁵

The surprising thing here is that almost a decade and a half later, the so-called 'new' social movements are still functioning and yet the legitimacy of the state remains largely intact. Thus, not only can social movements serve to reinforce the legitimacy of the state, but they also underline notions of an active and interested civic public, thereby working some way towards refuting popular notions of a passive citizenry who are happy to allow groups of elites to govern representatively. The longevity of social movements not only reinforces the legitimacy of participatory democratic systems, but also helps to preserve the separate categories of economy, state, and society through processes of constant renegotiation between them.

The main division of approaches to the study of social movements is marked by those who 'see movements as a response to structural strain, and those which interpret them as part of the normal processes of change'.²⁶ If we consider certain sections of the women's movement, we can see an example of an active social movement which reaffirms the legitimacy of the

²⁴ Claus Offe, 'New social movements', p.816.

²⁵ Claus Offe, 'New social movements', pp.818-819.

²⁶ Jan Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, p.30.

state often through processes of open negotiation with, and participation within, the state's bureaucracies.

In part, it is through social movement interaction, that the shape and function of public spheres have expanded and the categories of public and private have not entirely faded, but rather, remain in a state of perpetual flux. What is remarkable, despite notions of a growing public sphere, is the resilience of traditional conceptions of the categories of public and private and also of a functioning authoritative state. This says something quite significant about how deeply ingrained the cultural discourse of concrete categories of public and private are despite their more fluid reality and their ongoing contestation. In other words, 'Culture can no longer be practically addressed in terms of a proper sphere, whether aesthetic or reactionary, that is distinct from other social spheres.'²⁷ Cultural meanings undergo a constant process of change with concomitant reference to tradition.

the role of social movements in the public sphere: Jürgen Habermas

While in his later works, Habermas has evidently lost confidence in the ability of the working class to resist debased forms of rationality because he sees their solidarity as broken down (especially by the welfare state), he

²⁷ David Lloyd & Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State*, Routledge, New York & London, 1988, p.161.

finds hope in social movements.²⁸ Habermas positions new social movements at the 'seams between system and lifeworld'.²⁹ 'Indeed, many of the actors interpret their actions as attempts to renew a democratic political culture and to reintroduce the normative dimension of social action into political life.'³⁰ This often involves the transposing of lifeworld concerns into systemic institutions. In Habermasian terms, this is a clear process of resistance against encroaching systemic forces that attack the communicatively rational lifeworld.

Habermas maintains that the role of social movements, or resistance movements as he sometimes calls them, is to resist tendencies of systemic mechanisms to colonise the lifeworld.³¹ For Habermas this explains the role and development of social movements such as the environmental movement or the peace movement. These social movements are important because if the colonisation thesis is to be believed, they cannot be pacified by the systemic steering media of money and/or power. Habermas argues that this is because resistance movements are concerned with problems which arise out of questions about the quality of life and 'do not respond to the media of money and power' and thus are not susceptible to the overtures of systemic forces such as those propelled by economic rationalism.³² Habermas explains:

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2, Lifeworld and System, A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1987, pp.392-393.

²⁹ Steven M. Beuchler, 'New social movement theories', in *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol.36, no.3, 1995, p.445.

³⁰ Jean L. Cohen, 'Strategy or Identity', p.670.

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, 'New social movements', in *Telos*, no.49, fall 1981, p.35.

³² Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2*, p.392.

In the past decade or two, conflicts have developed in advanced Western societies that deviate in various ways from the welfare-state pattern of institutionalized conflict over distribution. They no longer flare up in domains of material reproduction; they are no longer channeled through parties and associations; and they can no longer be allayed through compensations. Rather, these new domains of conflict arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization; they are carried out in sub-institutional - or at least extraparliamentary - forms of protest; and the underlying deficits reflect a reification of communicatively structured domains of action that will not respond to the media of money and power.³³

For Habermas, this represents a shift in the problems which arise in regard to questions of what he terms 'old politics' (economic and social security, internal and military security), to a 'new politics' which encompasses problems concerned with the quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realisation, participation, and human rights.³⁴

As a result of his colonisation thesis, Habermas argues that members of a culture are less likely to be in agreement about basic assumptions of the lifeworld (namely, accepted or traditional norms and values). As the system colonises the lifeworld, money and power exert an increasing control over society and impinge on the lifeworld norms and values. Thus, there is less need for achieving consensus by communicative means because disputes can be resolved and decisions made by recourse to formal regulations, laws and established structures of power.³⁵ In essence, this means that, in modern industrial societies, the market and the state are

³³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2*, p.392.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2*, p.392.

³⁵ Sonya K. Foss, Karen A. Foss & Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, 2nd ed., Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1991. pp.264-5.

exerting increasing control over the private realm of society. Habermas distinguishes between social movements with emancipatory potential and those with the potential for retreat and resistance:

The struggle against patriarchal oppression and for the realization of a promise that is deeply rooted in the acknowledged universalist foundations of morality and legality lends feminism the impetus of an offensive movement, whereas all other movements are more defensive in character. The movements of resistance and retreat seek to stem or block the formal, organized spheres of action in favor of communicative structures; they do not seek to conquer new territory.³⁶

Indeed, Habermas singles out feminism, or the women's movement as a prominent example of a social movement whose functional strategy is specifically offensive rather than resistant, whose aim is to 'seek to conquer new territory'. He argues that the feminist struggle against patriarchal oppression gives 'feminism the impetus of an offensive movement, whereas the other movements have a more defensive character'.³⁷ This is an important distinction between the larger women's movement and other social movements because as we will see later in Chapter Four, this provides scope for sections of the women's movement to highlight specific difficulties with Habermas' colonisation thesis.

In attempting to create a synthesis between the European and American schools of social movement research, Munck confronts the dilemma of political strategy. Munck notes that 'while a social movement

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 'New Social Movements', p.34.

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, 'The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society', in *Modern German Sociology*, eds Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld & Nico Stehr, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p.200.

must move onto the political stage if it is to fulfil its orientation toward change, the difficulties in making the transition from a defensive to an offensive strategy threaten to undermine this orientation toward change'.³⁸ The introduction of the women's movement onto the 'political stage' has required a necessarily offensive strategy, but one which has maintained its ability to instigate significant levels of cultural change. Indeed, considered in this way, the so-called 'new' social movements lack a fixed centre and a sense of certainty which 'permits new possibilities for knowledge and social practice'.³⁹ Jean Cohen surmises that it becomes clear from Habermas' 'analysis of legitimation problems that Habermas sees social movements as the key dynamic process that could revive and expand the public realm if they lead to the institutionalisation of discourse addressing practical, political concerns'.⁴⁰ As in many other countries, the women's movement in Australia has had a unique impact on the public sphere. In its various forms, it has played a significant role in the expansion of the public realm to include more issues concerned with what Habermas would refer to as 'new politics' and has indeed assisted in opening up new 'possibilities for knowledge and social practice'.

³⁸ Geraldo L. Munck, 'Actor formation, social co-ordination, and political strategy: some conceptual problems in the study of social movements', in *Sociology*, vol.29, no.4, 1995, p.682.

³⁹ Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, p.278.

⁴⁰ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.110.

case study: a brief history of women's movements in Australia⁴¹

As Claus Mueller has argued, 'The intervention of the state into economy, education, and social services, which affect most of an individual's life as well as direct regulations such as taxation or civil rights legislation (extending or infringing on them as the case may be) lead to the politicization of everyday life.'⁴² It is this very idea of the politicisation of everyday life that leads to an interest in the role of the women's movement in Australian society. The case of the Australian women's movement is especially interesting not only because what it encompasses is so diverse and large, but also because it continues to have such a pronounced impact upon the development of conceptions of the public sphere in Australian society, this in turn has led to a significant politicisation of 'everyday life'.⁴³

The diversity of what the term 'women's movement' encompasses is important to note because it highlights not only the very broad range of issues represented by such groups, but also the heterogeneity of perceptions which such organisations and affiliations engender.

For some, the women's movement is synonymous with all initiatives that involve women, or focus on specific women-

⁴¹ For some earlier perspectives from studies of the women's movement in the United States' see: Maren Lockwood Carden, 'The proliferation of a social movement: ideology and individual incentives in the contemporary feminist movement', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol.1, 1978, pp.179-196; and Rachel A. Rosenfeld & Kathryn B. Ward, 'Evolution of the contemporary U.S. women's movement', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol.19, 1996, pp.51-73.

⁴² Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization and Legitimation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p.161.

⁴³ In this vein, also see: Janet Saltzman Chafetz, 'Chicken or Egg? A Theory of the Relationship between Feminist Movements and Family Change', in *Gender and Family Change in Industrialized Countries*, eds Karen Oppenheim Mason & An-Magritt Jensen, Clarendon Press, Oxford UK, 1995, pp.63-81.

related issues, like childcare, abortion and domestic violence. This includes both radical feminist groups, women's rights lobbies and such conservative groups such as Women Who Want to be Women, Women's Action Alliance and the Country Women's association.⁴⁴

In this view, the 'women's movement' may be viewed as 'sets of heterogeneous collective actions, which may include but are not subsumed by formal organisations'.⁴⁵ Without a doubt, it is important from the outset to note the diverse positions within what can be referred to as the broader women's movement in Australia, and their relationship to formal organisations and institutions, including the state. Such a diverse range of positions includes various combinations and variations of liberal, radical and socialist feminisms to name a few. Each has its own way of defining feminist ideology and their ideal level of interaction with the state and its bureaucracies.

New social movements such as the women's movement have what Arato and Cohen describe as a 'double political task' which involves 'the acquisition of influence by publics, associations, and organisations on political society, and the institutionalisation of their gains ... within the lifeworld'.⁴⁶ Indeed, this describes the relationship between social movements or collective action and civil society.⁴⁷ For women's organisations, this also introduces the notion of a feminist public sphere:

⁴⁴ Jan Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, Longman Cheshire, Sydney, 1991, p.195

⁴⁵ Tim Jordan, 'The unity of social movements', p.675.

⁴⁶ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1995, p.555.

⁴⁷ Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p.493.

The concept of a feminist public sphere provides a model for the analysis of diverse forms of recent artistic and cultural activity by women in relation to the historical emergence of an influential oppositional ideology which seeks to challenge the existing reality of gender subordination.⁴⁸

Yet, not all women's groups can be said to conform to the concept of a feminist public sphere. As outlined above, women's groups range from formal women's rights groups often with conservative leanings, to decentralised women's liberation initiatives, with more radical feminist roots. Indeed, the broad spectrum of formal, informal, radical and conservative women's groups also includes anti-feminist groups such as Women Who Want to be Women.⁴⁹

In Australia, from the mid to late 1880s to the present day, a variety of women's groups have been formed, established and evolved. Such groups have represented a diversity of attitudes and positions towards the role of women in society. I will outline a selection of such groups to illustrate the assortment of positions represented by the term 'women's movement', and to also show the longevity of such organisations in their various manifestations which aim at shaping conceptions of gender and gender roles in contemporary society.

⁴⁸ Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Cultural Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, p.164.

⁴⁹ See: Jan Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, especially, Chapter 7, 'Particularistic Anti-bureaucratic Movements: Feminism and Minority Rights Campaigns'.

Early Women's Organisations

In Australia, early feminist lobby groups sprang up during the mid to late 1880s. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the South Australian Suffrage League were both formed in Australia during the mid 1880s.⁵⁰ The WCTU was 'essentially a middle class [movement] which was supported in parliament by male conservatives who saw the female vote as a conservative vote'.⁵¹ Interestingly, for this strategic reason, this meant that the right for women to vote in Australia at least was never fiercely contested as it was in other countries.

The Australian Women's National League (AWNL) was formed by the Victorian Employer's Federation in 1904.⁵² Such groups worked in varying degrees to politicise and legitimise feminist concerns. Indeed, establishing themselves in a liberal feminist tradition, the main preoccupation of these groups was the attainment of political rights and representation.⁵³ Nearly all of these early feminist groups sought to influence the state by lobbying for legislative changes which would benefit the legal status of women. For example, the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) was also very active in obtaining 'testimonials' from leading statesmen to counter the argument that enfranchisement of women would mean 'social and political disaster'.⁵⁴ Many of these movements had strong ties with each other, since their members often

⁵⁰ Marian Sawer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1993, p.5.

⁵¹ Paul R. Wilson ed., *Australian Social Issues of the 70s*, Butterworths, Sydney, 1972, p.133.

⁵² Marian Sawer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place*, p.10.

⁵³ Marian Sawer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place*, see Chapter 1, pp.1-29.

⁵⁴ Marian Sawer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place*, p.10-11.

came from predominantly religious and conservative backgrounds. While both the WCTU and the SA Suffrage League fought for improving the status of women and children, and more specifically, for women's suffrage, they remained fairly conservative in respect to the traditional social roles of women as the moral guardians of society. For example, the WCTU 'were concerned with equal rights for women, but they did not want to fundamentally change what they saw as women's role' in society.⁵⁵ Because of this 'Women's gains occurred largely in the roles of wife and mother, and they brought what was in historical context, an augmentation of women's domestic or private status'.⁵⁶ Dixon argues that much of the early women's movement efforts were aimed at what she terms 'domestic feminism':

Major domestic feminist demands concerned married women's property rights, divorce law, custody of children, drink, social purity - and the vote seen in large part as a means to secure such ends. In embracing programmes of domestic feminism, the women's movement chose the only path then available for women to enter the political arena.⁵⁷

This was seen as a significant move because it transgressed the boundary between the domestic and the public/political arena dominated at the time by men. The WCTU also worked closely in conjunction with other groups, such as the Australian Federation of Women Voters and its

⁵⁵ Jenny Barber, *Women's Movement: South Australia*, Experimental Art Foundation, St. Peters SA, 1980, p.4.

⁵⁶ Miriam Dixon, 'Gender, Class, and the Women's Movements in Australia 1890, in *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, eds Norma Grieve & Ailsa Burns, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987, p.17.

⁵⁷ Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', in *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, ed. Kate Pritchard Hughes, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, p.18.

state affiliates such as the League of Women Voters in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania (formally the 'Women's Non-Party Political Association', formed in 1909), the United Association of Women (NSW), the Non-party Association of Queensland, and the Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia.⁵⁸ Additionally, the National Council of Women and the Status of Women Committee were also established the aim of helping women to stand for parliament.

From the League of Women Voters, several other, more specialised groups were formed, including the Local Governments Women's Association (LGWA), the Electoral Reform Society and the Council to Stop Offensive Advertising.⁵⁹ Other early women's groups of note include the National Council of Women (NCW), the Country Women's Association (CWA), and the Australian Women's Charter (AWC) formed in 1943.⁶⁰ The League of Women Voters (disbanded in 1979) worked closely with and bore many similarities with the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL).

The Union of Australian Women (UAW) was formed in 1950 'with the aim of uniting women regardless of race, nationality, religion and political opinion so that they might work together to defend their rights as mothers, citizens and workers and to ensure the rights of children to education, health and happiness in a peaceful world'.⁶¹ The UAW saw themselves as a predominantly working class organisation, working

⁵⁸ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, Fontana/Collins, Sydney, 1983, p.20.

⁵⁹ Jenny Barber, *Women's Movement*, p.13.

⁶⁰ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, see chapter 1, pp.16-36.

⁶¹ Jenny Barber, *Women's Movement*, p.14.

closely with the trade unions; in effect acting as a link between trade unions and the women's movements.⁶²

'Second Wave' Women's Groups

More recent women's movement organisations which sought to apply feminist principles in everyday life with the explicit aim of instigating social change and attitudinal shifts sprung up with varying enthusiasm during the late 1960s and early 1970s in Australia.

The social movements of the period 1960-1990 have been termed 'new' because they cannot be subsumed under the political class struggle between the organisation of private capital and the labour movement, especially if reference is made to the women's movement and to the post-colonial movements for race justice...⁶³

In Australia during the 1970's the two major groups in the women's movement were the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL).⁶⁴ These groups were largely concerned, at least in the earlier stages, with alleviating the oppression of the universal female subject. However, it was soon to become apparent, that many differences existed between members.

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was started by a group of mainly left-oriented women in Sydney during 1969. By mid-1970, numbers of the organisation had increased profoundly and many branches

⁶² Jenny Barber, *Women's Movement*, p.17.

⁶³ Anna Yeatman, 'Women and the State', in *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, ed. Kate Pritchard Hughes, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, p.178.

⁶⁴ Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', p.198.

or groups were established at various sites around Sydney with other states to follow.⁶⁵ Many of the WLM members were previously active in other political organisations but were largely disgruntled by the 'patronising attitudes'⁶⁶ of their male counterparts. Largely as a response 'to the hierarchical nature of the male-dominated left groups, the women's liberation groups theoretically eschewed structure, elected positions and leaders and *theoretically* embraced an egalitarian, round-table approach to decision making'.⁶⁷

One important group that was later to merge with the Melbourne University WLG was The Women's Action Committee (WAC). This particular group, formed in March 1970 and drew up a policy with the specific aim to 'enlighten women with their demands'.⁶⁸ The policy called for economic equality, social equality, equal education and abortion law reform. The WAC had no official political affiliations although several of its founding members had extensive experience within the communist party and the trade union movement. WAC's main role was quite general: to act as a pressure group working for the equality of women.⁶⁹ In this respect, the feminist movements of the 1970s were 'not connected with those which took place at the beginning of the century, but is more closely

⁶⁵ For a detailed account of the Sydney women's liberation movement see: Sue Wills, 'The Women's Liberation Movement', in *The Pieces of Politics*, ed. Richard Lucy, 3rd ed., Macmillan, Melbourne, 1987, pp.311-327.

⁶⁶ Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', p.202.

⁶⁷ Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', p.202.

⁶⁸ Zelda D'Aprano, *Zelda*, Spinifex, Melbourne, 1995, p.193.

⁶⁹ Zelda D'Aprano, *Zelda*, p.194.

related to changing economic, social and educational forces which underlie the growing importance of women in the workforce'.⁷⁰

A significant point of consideration about the organisational nature of the WAC was its structural lack of hierarchy. Founding member Zelda D'Aprano equated hierarchy with 'male' oppression and was therefore opposed to the implementation of any hierarchical structure for the WAC. This was a result of her disillusionment with the hierarchies of the Communist Party and of the various trade unions with which she had been heavily involved. In her experience, power, whether wielded by men or women, obtained through a male hierarchical structure led to imminent corruption and abuse of position and power; sexism was also inherent to this.⁷¹ Other feminists have concurred with this position:

Feminist analyses of bureaucracy point out that such hierarchical power structures simultaneously legitimise and conceal domination Far from being a neutral system that mechanically achieves explicitly stated objectives, bureaucracy depoliticises resistance to existing power relations, silences resistance and functions to reproduce prevailing power relations.⁷²

The WAC's cynicism about hierarchy prevented their involvement in the political system itself. Since it was a WAC belief that hierarchical power was essentially male, sexist and corrupt, they would not take any part in its official channels or bureaucratic machinations, choosing instead

⁷⁰ Paul R. Wilson ed., *Australian Social Issues of the 70s*, p.134.

⁷¹ Zelda D'Aprano, *Zelda*, p.191.

⁷² Dorothy Broom, *Damned if We Do: Contradictions in Women's Health Care*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991, p.64.

to resist from the outside. Moreover, Clarke and White explain the structure of the WLM after the merger with the WAC:

So from 1971 when WAC provided central leadership to 1978 when general meetings were abandoned, we can speak of the Women's Liberation Movement in Melbourne, after that it seems more appropriate to speak of women's liberation groups. Sydney Women's Liberation evolved in a similar way ... with general meetings providing the basis for a centralised organisation until the late 1970's. In both states the movement became too large and diverse for the general meeting type of participatory democracy and no alternative structure was found. However, in the smaller states participatory democracy worked better and so centralized [sic] women's liberation groups survived.⁷³ There was never any attempt at a national women's liberation organization.⁷⁴

While the WAC changed its size and form, it remains a good example of a resistance movement. In Habermasian terms, the WAC may be viewed as a resistance social movement that uses the lifeworld as the site of resistance against the steering media of the system. In this sense, the WAC conforms to the Habermasian model which insists on lifeworld resistance against systemic colonisation.

The emergence of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) in February 1972 saw Australian feminism take a markedly different approach toward the state than that of the WAC or the broader WLM. While the WEL is directly concerned with the hierarchical mechanisms of the political sphere and has concentrated its efforts in this arena, it is a 'non-party-political,

⁷³ For example, see: Sylvia Kinder, *Herstory of Adelaide Women's Liberation 1969-74*, Salisbury Education Centre, Adelaide, 1980.

⁷⁴ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p.162.

non-sectarian, national organisation'.⁷⁵ As their name suggests, they serve as a lobby group designed to influence both voters and candidates alike.⁷⁶ The WEL is 'committed to the feminist goal of achieving social, economic, educational, political and sexual equality for women'.⁷⁷ The roles and functions of WEL expanded upon that of the WLM primarily through their explicit interaction with the state through the existing political and bureaucratic processes. Reade argues that a major motivation for the establishment of the WEL was 'frustration with the women's liberationist anti-structure, anti-hierarchy, anti-men and anti-state attitude and style'.⁷⁸ Such WLM rhetoric was thought to serve a very limited purpose and achieve restricted results. While the WEL itself continues to remain unhierarchical in its own structure, it does support the inclusion of women candidates in the political party system and in the very hierarchical machinery of state bureaucracy. Indeed,

WEL has ... provided a number of significant women bureaucrats or 'femocrats', women who ... are employed within state bureaucratic positions to work on advancing the position of women in the wider society through the development of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination strategies of change.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) Australia, 'More About WEL', [<http://www.wel.org.au/about/aboutwel.htm>] July 1999.

⁷⁶ Initially they surveyed attitudes of as many candidates as they could just before election time to see how sympathetic they were to various so-called women's issues and the feminist cause. See Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1996, p.16.

⁷⁷ Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) Australia, 'More About WEL', [<http://www.wel.org.au/about/aboutwel.htm>] July 1999.

⁷⁸ Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', p.206.

⁷⁹ Marian Sawer & Marion Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, p.245.

WEL endorses increased representation of women in parliament and the right for women to participate equally in both political and public life. They support the bureaucratic strategy of 'reform-rather-than-revolution'⁸⁰ that femocrats employ. WEL's main aim is that of lobbying those in power within the state bureaucracy with a view to reform current legislation which affects the roles and rights of women in contemporary Australian society. 'WEL's policies have been based on the assumption of a women's right to choose and to control her own destiny; WEL's approach has been to demand that right be entrenched in legislation, and embedded in political, economic and social structures.'⁸¹ The WEL supports women in their quest for employment in state bureaucracies because they maintain that doing so improves the chances of success for their own reformist aims. Broadly, their position is based on the assumption that the more women in power, the more likely future legislation and amendments to existing legislation will further feminism's causes.

The different strategies between the WLM and the WEL opened up an ideological chasm within the larger women's movement. As such both the WLM and the WEL were positioned largely in direct opposition to one another. Despite the differences between them, the WLM and the WEL share a number of commonalties, goals and practices, but had to deal with

⁸⁰ This phrase is borrowed from Marian Sawer, *Women's Political History: A Guide to Sources*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1992, p.14.

⁸¹ Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), 'Women's Electoral Lobby History', [<http://www.vcepolitics.com/pg/wel.htm>] July 1999.

the 'difficulty of juggling significant similarities with monumental differences between women'.⁸²

It is already possible to see how the differences in women's movement strategies are used to define such groups separately; the WLM as a more oppositional, aggressive resistance movement, and the WEL as an aggressive group whose main aim was the reform of existing structures. 'The creation of the Women's Electoral Lobby ... emphasised the distinction between revolutionary (WLM) and reformist (WEL) feminism, between those women who wanted to work against and those who wanted to work in 'the system'.⁸³ Indeed, Lyndall Ryan argues that the WEL

... saw itself as the pragmatic wing of women's liberation Instead of eschewing the state and promoting revolutionary change, WEL demanded the right to participate in the decision-making processes of the state, and its share of the national cake.⁸⁴

Another example of a feminist movement with clear and direct links with the state is the Australian Local Government Women's Association (NSW. Branch) Inc. was established in Canberra in 1951. It was attended by sixteen women from positions of local government from all states of Australia who were in Canberra initially to attend the Jubilee Women's Convention in the jubilee year of the commonwealth of Australia (1901-1951). Unlike the WAC, the association has a president, a national board and state branches which operate autonomously within their own

⁸² Katy Reade, 'Struggling to be Heard: Tensions Between Different Voices in the Australian Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970's and 1980's', p.209.

⁸³ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p.163.

⁸⁴ Lyndall Ryan, 'Feminism and the Federal Bureaucracy 1972-1983', in *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, ed. Sophie Watson, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p.72.

constitutions. The general aims and interests of the ALGWA are to 'assist in furthering women's knowledge of the function of local government'; 'to protect and enhance the interests and rights of women in local government'; 'to take action in relation to any subject of activity of particular interest to women affecting local governing bodies and/or local government legislation'; 'to act in an advisory capacity to intending women candidates for local government elections'; and finally, 'to encourage women into professional careers in local government'.⁸⁵

The Women's Action Alliance (WAA) was formed in 1974 in Melbourne largely as a reaction to the perceived pursuits of the larger women's liberation movement. It viewed itself as an 'organ of moderate feminism'.⁸⁶ As Sawer argues, the WAA was 'in favour of increased opportunities for women, but [is] also in favour of the protection of the family (from the depredations of more radical feminists) and increased social and economic recognition for the full-time 'home-maker''.⁸⁷ The inaugural president of WAA claimed that:

... married women should work by choice, not obligation ... women were being forced into the workplace by economic necessity or by media portrayal of the housewife as a 'drab homebody, a vegetable and by sniggering references to female ghettos in the suburbs'.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Australian Local Government Women's Association, [<http://www.ruralnet.net.au/brokenhill/algwa1.html>] July 1999.

⁸⁶ Marian Sawer, 'Women and Women's Issues in the 1980 Federal Elections', in *Australian Women and the Political System*, ed. Marian Simms, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1984, p.102.

⁸⁷ Marian Sawer, 'Women and Women's Issues in the 1980 Federal Elections', p.102.

⁸⁸ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p.172.

The WAA also attracted attention because a number of its position policies concerning family allowances were accepted 'to varying degrees' by the Fraser Liberal Government.⁸⁹ WAA tactics involved letter writing and petition campaigns to lobby for the increasing indexing of family allowances among other issues.

Women Who Want to be Women (WWWW) 'split off from WAA in March 1979, but was to retain some overlapping membership. This split was caused by WWWW's demands that the anti-abortion issue be given priority'.⁹⁰ 'WWWW was founded to seek the abolition of the Fraser Government's National Women's Advisory Council and to promote the interests of full-time homemakers. It described itself as a Christian, pro-life, pro-family organisation.'⁹¹ WAA differed from WWWW, 'in refusing to be drawn on some ethical or moral issues'.⁹² For example, while WWWW was opposed to artificial contraception and abortion, the WAA maintained that issues of family planning were a private matter and as such organisations had no right to intrude in such domains. WWWW is a good example of a women's group which is not always feminist in its objectives.

⁸⁹ Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p.175.

⁹⁰ Marian Sawer, 'Women and Women's Issues in the 1980 Federal Elections', p.103.

⁹¹ Marian Sawer, *Women's Political History: A Guide to Sources*, p.22.

⁹² Jocelyn Clarke & Kate White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p.174.

More Recent Women's Organisations

While some of the earlier feminist groups no longer exist, many others have sprung up in their place. More contemporary groups such as Women for Local Government (WLG) have been formed in recent years. WLG was established in 1994 with its base in Melbourne. Like WEL, which is still in operation, it is primarily concerned with getting more women involved in local council politics. It supports and encourages nominations, and lobbies already elected councilors and the media on political decisions in local government that specifically effect women.⁹³

The plethora of women's groups which have been formed in recent times is immense. This is especially the case with online women's organisations and chat groups. One of the most well known is Ausfem-Polnet, or The Australian Feminist Policy Network, which is 'an electronic network for activists, practitioners and scholars who are actively involved with policies which aim to improve the status of women'.⁹⁴ Other women's coalitions include The National Women's Justice Coalition, Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, Australian Women Lawyers, National Women's Media Centre and many more.⁹⁵

⁹³ Women for Local Government, *Media Release*, West Footscray, Melbourne, 1985, p.3.

⁹⁴ Ausfem-Polnet, 'The Australian Feminist Policy Network', [http://www.utas.edu.au/docs/humsoc/cpmp/ES6.html].

⁹⁵ See: The National Women's Justice Coalition Inc., 'NWJC Homepage', [http://www.nwjc.org.au/]; The National Women's Justice Coalition Inc., 'About the National Women's Justice Coalition Inc.', [http://www.nwjc.org.au/board.html]; Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), 'Links 3: Mostly Australian', [http://www.wel.org.au/links/womlink3.htm] 1999.

While both formal and informal support increases for women who want to enter a public and/or political life, there still remains a great deal of debate among sections of the women's movement as to whether or not entering the bureaucracy of the state is an effective way to change it for the general betterment of all women. Cohen has argued that it is only through the moderation of the anti-institutional basis of social movements that the way may be paved for 'a mutually fruitful interaction between reform and collective contestation'.⁹⁶ She maintains that 'It is only such interaction that could strengthen the pluralist, democratizing and tolerant dimensions of movements against fundamentalist tendencies, and re-vitalize or re-create tolerant and democratic dimensions of the political and economic system'.⁹⁷ This reinforces the importance of the role of social movements in contemporary liberal societies. They play a fundamental role in strengthening democratic processes against fundamentalist and intolerant tendencies. Social movements also make obvious the tensions between market driven decision making processes of the economic system and the open processes of communicative action in the liberal public sphere.

It is to such tensions between the political, the economic and the social that I will now turn by applying a Habermasian analysis. This will highlight the role of social movements in negotiating the public/private divide.

⁹⁶ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.111.

⁹⁷ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.111.

social movements and the public/private divide: Habermasian applications

Material & Symbolic Reproduction

Material and symbolic reproduction are those categories that Habermas uses to distinguish between social reproductive functions.⁹⁸ For example paid work (social labour) is considered to be material reproduction, while socialisation would be regarded as symbolic production, since it reinforces existing social mores and traditional value systems. Nancy Fraser regards Habermas' separation of material and social reproduction as problematic. To illustrate her concerns, she draws attention to the case of child rearing activities, which Habermas would view as social reproduction, but which she argues involves both material and social reproduction simultaneously. She explains:

I claim that it is not the case that child rearing practices serve symbolic as opposed to material reproduction. Granted, they comprise language teaching and initiation into social mores - but also feeding, bathing, and protection from physical harm. Granted, they regulate children's interactions with other people - but also their interactions with physical nature (in the form, for example, of milk, germs, dirt, excrement, weather and animals). In short, not just the construction of children's social identities but also their biological survival is at stake - and, therefore, so is the biological survival of the societies they belong to. Thus child rearing is not per se symbolic reproduction activity; it is equally and at the same time a material reproduction activity. It is what we might call a 'dual aspect' activity.⁹⁹

This criticism remains significant because it highlights the difficulties of Habermas' either/or binary schema. The 'dual aspect

⁹⁸ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1989, p.115.

⁹⁹ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, pp.115-116.

activity' of child-rearing occurs not only in the Habermasian lifeworld, but also in the realm of the public sphere. This has largely been a result of increasing numbers of women in the paid workforce, a phenomena which has precipitated structural change not only in familial spheres, but in the larger public sphere. Put simply, the problem is that Habermas' categorisation of system and lifeworld, along with their respective discursive and reproductive norms and values, is becoming less demarcated when considered in a contemporary context of highly volatile social change. What is left of the distinctions can often overlap, be used simultaneously or in conjunction with their assumed or supposed opposite.

In this sense, what remains important is that in its various manifestations, the women's movement transgresses the traditional separation between public and private. Indeed, a main aim of such a movement is to contest the traditional categorisations themselves. In Habermasian terms, the women's movement recrafts social conventions (symbolic reproduction) while at the same instant works to reaffirm sites of material production. The women's movement in this sense has been responsible for arguing that the traditional patriarchal ways of categorising symbolic and material reproduction no longer apply and indeed never did apply outside of ideological abstractions. A more accurate way to categorise most activities is to call them 'dual aspect' activities as Fraser suggests. Indeed, the simultaneous reproduction of the social and the material as represented by the 'dual aspect'¹⁰⁰ of the women's movement, is

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, p.116.

evidence that the discursively separate categories of public and private are becoming less stable, and increasingly opaque as social movements renegotiate traditional sites of reproduction. Similar difficulties become apparent upon closer examination of Habermas' notions of systematically and socially integrated action contexts.

Systematically and Socially Integrated Action Contexts

When Habermas talks about systematically and socially integrated action contexts, he also locates each in separate and distinct categories of system and lifeworld. Habermas maintains that each action context operates in categorically separate spheres.¹⁰¹ Fraser summarises this view-point:

Socially integrated action contexts are those in which different agents coordinate their actions with one another by reference to some form of explicit or implicit inter-subjective consensus about norms, values, and ends, consensus predicated on linguistic speech and interpretation.¹⁰²

Clearly, Fraser is describing the communicative action which takes place in the lifeworld. From a feminist perspective, Fraser views the separate and opposite integrated action contexts to be a reinforcement of the categories of public and private, thus serving to maintain female subordination in the confines of the private sphere. On the other hand,

¹⁰¹ While Habermas makes the point that social labour (material reproduction) essentially amounts to a combination of communicative and instrumental action (see Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.1, Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, p.268). Incidentally, this view is not taken any further and applied to symbolic reproduction, nor is this view evident in other writings where the categories are fleshed out in more detail.

¹⁰² Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, pp.116-117.

systematically integrated action contexts are those which are deemed to take place in the system, and wherein participants coordinate action by the steering media of power and money.¹⁰³ According to Habermas, systematically integrated action contexts are,

... formed on the basis of media that uncouple action from processes of reaching understanding and coordinate it via generalized instrumental values such as money and power. These steering media replace language as the mechanism for coordinating action.¹⁰⁴

Habermas argues that actions are coordinated in separated spheres; that instrumental action takes place in the system, while communicative action takes place in the lifeworld. Furthermore, Habermas argues that there is a tension between action contexts which leads to a competition between the 'principles of societal integration.' He argues:

Thus, there is a competition *not between the types of action* oriented to understanding and to success, *but between principles of societal integration* - between the mechanisms of linguistic communication that is oriented to validity claims ... and those de-linguistified steering media through which systems of success-oriented action are differentiated out.¹⁰⁵

and further:

The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrative effect on the lifeworld.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, p.342.

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, p.342.

¹⁰⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, p.342.

¹⁰⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, p.343.

While there may be competition or tension, it is not a necessary outcome that only one of the principles of societal integration will triumph over the other. Indeed, it is possible, even likely that both may function effectively in conjunction with the other. I am arguing that this process of competition, does not lead to a 'disintegration of the lifeworld', but rather, leads to processes of continual renegotiation of the formal barriers between Habermas' system and lifeworld.

Communicative action occurs in the lifeworld and the public sphere, but not in the Habermasian system where action is primarily steered by forces such as money, power and bureaucratic mechanisms. In the lifeworld (public and private), background assumptions, commonly shared norms and values are formed and reproduced (through the socialisation process). The Habermasian public sphere is where free and open discourse takes place and where actions are determined by the force of the better argument, by the public use of reason. However, there is not only an increasing overlap of separated spheres, but an overlap of the communicative processes which operate in each theoretically demarcated sphere.

The simultaneous use of both action contexts by the women's movement in their various negotiations with the state and the official economy is evidence of a simultaneous use of system and lifeworld norms and values. This signals a renegotiation of the traditional parameters of public and private rather than, as Fraser insists, marks the reinforcement of the patriarchally oppressive binary categories of system/lifeworld and

public/private. The end result of such processes is the expansion of the public sphere to encompass more of what in a Habermasian framework we can regard as the private realm of the family and the public realm of both state and economy.

The social movement responds to the ideological divisions of space in civil society that are themselves increasingly inadequate to a capitalism that unfolds through every dimension of the social structure.¹⁰⁷

Thus, social movements cannot be said to only address singular issues like race, gender or the environment. Rather, each issue is inextricably linked to the many accompanying processes of capitalism and democracy. Thus, social movements must also address matters of representation, social and material reproduction, economic oppression and so on. What results is an 'insistence on a fluid and resistant phenomenology of historically constituted intersections of the effects of power and exploitation'.¹⁰⁸

It is at this juncture, that I wish to draw attention to Gusfield's concept of the fluid social movement. This is a social movement, such as the women's movement, which instigates social transformation that is 'seen as a change in the meaning of objects and events rather than the occurrence of associations'¹⁰⁹ or collective behaviour. This view concentrates on 'the pervasive impact of changing cognitive structures on social and cultural

¹⁰⁷ David Lloyd & Paul Thomas, *Culture and State*, p.161.

¹⁰⁸ David Lloyd & Paul Thomas, *Culture and State*, p.162.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph R. Gusfield, 'Social movements and social change: perspectives of linearity and fluidity', p.322.

transformations',¹¹⁰ and on the reflexivity of those groups. In this way, social movements exist at the level of the private and the situated, and also in the more linear sense of organised, public activities. Thus, social movements cross the conceptual boundaries between public and private and 'blur the line between trend and movement', shifting 'attention away from the association and its member-participants to the longer-run and less public areas in which meanings are undergoing transformation'.¹¹¹ It is in this way that the so-called 'new' social movements employ a framework which views both material and symbolic reproduction in many cultural practices, and assumes the possibility of systematically and socially integrated action contexts occurring simultaneously.

conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of social movements not only in terms of their relationship with the state, but also as an intermediary between the private sphere and the state. In such terms, social movements largely constitute a newly defined and expanded public realm. Social movements involved in 'new politics',

... raise the hope once again of a ... democratic civil society organized not around market and property or around the state, but in free associations and public spheres penetrating and institutionalizing both economy and polity. I would argue that the presence of social movements is the sign of a healthy society, but also that the institutionalization of discourse and

¹¹⁰ Joseph R. Gusfield, 'Social movements and social change: perspectives of linearity and fluidity', p.322.

¹¹¹ Joseph R. Gusfield, 'Social movements and social change: perspectives of linearity and fluidity', p.323.

the expansion of the public realm is the product of a healthy movement.¹¹²

The activism of the women's movement has primarily been responsible for the introduction of many women's issues, interests, norms and values that have been traditionally relegated to the private sphere of the family, into the arena of political participation, debate and public opinion formation. Indeed, this tends to suggest that the so-called 'new' social movements 'are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural. The distance between civil society and the State is increasing while the separation between private and public life is fading away'.¹¹³ In other words, new social movements are more concerned with quality of life issues rather than the class-based issues of earlier social movements. In this way, so-called 'women's issues' become increasingly prominent in new social movement agendas.

What is significant about the impact of social movements in recent times is the number of important functions they serve. First, they have highlighted the inadequacy of Habermas' strict separation between the family and the public sphere on the one hand, and the state and the economy on the other. Second, they have drawn attention to the longevity of the demarcated spheres of public and private and ways in which they reinforce a certain brand of patriarchal social order. As the public sphere expands, the distance between the family and the state widens, and yet it is at once subsumed as notions of separation between public and private

¹¹² Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.112.

¹¹³ Alaine Touraine, 'An introduction to the study of social movements', p.780.

disappear. Third, as Cohen argues, the most important function for social movements is their capacity to create:

... new public spaces, of additional democratic reforms, and the restructuring or revitalization of old ones. Even if social movements are to be self-limiting, that is, non-revolutionary, then they can nevertheless take on an offensive role and confront the economic and political systems by raising the issue of institutional reform.¹¹⁴

But the role of social movements involves more than this. Social movements may also be considered as the source of pressure that emerge out of critical communities to create cultural change by processes of the diffusion of new ideas and newly adopted, altered languages.¹¹⁵

Recent developments have changed both the nature and function of public spheres. Considered in a Habermasian sense, the public sphere inhabits a much wider expanse of our social structure or private sphere of the family, while the function of the hitherto limited public sphere has also widened. What is continually surprising is that despite the apparent breaking-down and/or renegotiation of concrete boundaries between the state, the economy, the family and the public sphere, notions of a public and private distinction still underwrite the projects of social movements.

The categorical division between public and private realms continues to flourish despite efforts by various feminist groups (among other social movements). This reveals how deeply rooted the very notion of a public/private division is to our historical and cultural development

¹¹⁴ Jean L. Cohen, 'Rethinking social movements', p.111.

¹¹⁵ Thomas R. Rochon, *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1998, p.22.

and practice. Habermas' colonisation thesis itself makes the success of social movements rather difficult, even theoretically impossible on his terms, which define social movements as generally defensive in function. In more recent times, Habermas has emphasised however, that the relationship between system and lifeworld need not be a purely one-way exchange. By doing so, Habermas has distanced himself from the colonisation thesis that sparked criticism by some feminists for reproducing the gendered symbiosis of Liberalisms public and private spheres.¹¹⁶ Habermas has raised the extreme case of civil disobedience - 'in the sense of a non-violent transgression of rules intended as a symbolic appeal to a majority which is of a different opinion' as a way to consider the 'interplay between non-institutionalised public communication and the institutionalised decision-making processes within democratic bodies.'¹¹⁷ In fact, this process embodies the very ideal of Habermas' theory of communicative action which involves. In this way, 'the liberal meaning of parliamentary will formation [ensures that] truth orientated opinion formation is brought into play as a kind of filter before majority decisions in such a way that the latter may claim the presumption of more or less reasonable outcomes.'¹¹⁸ This view encapsulates the Enlightenment's trust in reason and rational deliberation.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter Two for a more detailed account of two important feminist considerations of Habermas' colonisation thesis.

¹¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas & Torben Hviid Nielsen, 'Jürgen Habermas: Morality, society and ethics - an interview with Torben Hviid Nielsen', in *Acta Sociologica*, no.33, 1990, p.108.

¹¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas & Torben Hviid Nielsen, 'Jürgen Habermas: Morality, society and ethics', p.108.

On the other hand, a post-Enlightenment culture 'urges that we approach discourses, including its own, as permanently contestable, as containing values, social interests, and a will to shape human history'.¹¹⁹ The following chapter will concentrate on a case study of 'femocrats' or feminist bureaucrats in Australia, and will examine their specifically offensive strategy as they work within the state's bureaucracies to create and legislate social and institutional change.

¹¹⁹ Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*, pp.277-78.

chapter four

colonisation & resistance

the femocrat phenomenon

Public access held many promises for women the new feminists were not simply demanding admission to the public: they also placed a multitude of specific issues, often drawn from their 'private' experience, on the political agenda.¹

The introduction of femocrats into the state bureaucracies represents a significant shift not only in the structure of societal subsystems as demarcated by Habermasian theory, but also in the nature of broader social policy agendas. The application of Habermas' colonisation thesis to the Australian context draws out a number of complexities and limitations not only for Habermasian social theory and social movement theory, but also for feminist theory and practice. Indeed, the femocrat phenomenon draws out a number of implications for Habermas' categorical split between system and lifeworld, and also for the division between public and private, to which a surprising amount of feminist analysis is still devoted.

¹ Mary Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p.260.

In the strictest sense of the term, the femocracy itself is not a social movement, but rather, as the previous chapter endeavored to show in some detail, it may be viewed as a direct outcome of the wider women's movement agenda. Considered in such terms, the femocracy poses some difficulty for Habermas' colonisation thesis. This is because Habermasian theory caters for social movement agendas, but assumes they will try to influence the system by resistance from the site of the lifeworld, not through participation from inside the parameters of the system. In other words, Habermasian theory does not cater for the emergence of social movements whose strategy entails working within the system, and who have a tendency to blur boundaries and merge categories, thus bringing traditional private realm concerns into the public sphere. While Habermas sees the role of social movements as generally defensive, he does highlight feminism as a specific exception which has a deliberate offensive strategy.²

Having arisen out of the broader feminist movement in Australia, the femocracy not only pursues an offensive strategy, but is particularly useful for an exploration of Habermasian theory since it works within the Habermasian system to effect change, rather than resisting the system from outside, as is the agenda of many other social movements, whether they be considered 'old' or 'new'. Accordingly, the evolution of this phenomena has implications for the ways in which Habermasian theory depicts the role of social movements, and for the application of their broader agendas in contemporary contexts.

² Jürgen Habermas, 'New social movements', in *Telos*, no.49, fall 1981, p.34.

Although there are many other feminist and women's organisations which influence the state in other ways, I am confining my focus to a close study of femocrats because the strategy they employ sets them apart from the wider feminist movement, and also because their progress and relative success is not catered for by Habermasian theory. The femocrat strategy is unique in that it aims at changing and/or reshaping the Habermasian system, not by resistance to the system, but through systemic mechanisms. It is this strategy that has enabled femocrats in Australia to have made considerable legislative headway in the struggle for gender equality in ways that women's groups in other countries have not. In this manner, femocrats have been largely responsible for the transformation of women's issues from political debate into official state public policy and legislation. 'The fact that so many feminist objections appear to hinge on legal and policy reforms ... has, for many feminists, warranted a focus on "the state".'³ As such, while feminist groups and organisations that are encompassed by the broad umbrella of the women's movement *assert* the legitimacy of private sphere concerns, femocrats are working to *entrench* the legitimacy of private sphere, or traditional women's concerns through liberal democratic and legislative processes.

Since the early 1970s, coinciding with the movement of women into the state bureaucratic apparatuses there was a significant directional change in the development of Australian social policy. The policy-related

³ Judith Allen, 'Does Feminism Need a Theory of 'the State'?', in *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, ed. Sophie Watson, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p.21.

example of child care will be used in this chapter as a vehicle by which to explore the potential and the limitations of femocrat achievements in merging traditionally separate action contexts and processes of societal reproduction. Only one policy example will be used since it would be too massive a task to provide a detailed account of all areas of social policy where femocrats have endeavored to change policy, especially when these details have already been outlined in great length elsewhere.⁴ Nor would lengthy detail strengthen the main argument of this chapter which is primarily concerned with specific ways in which the femocracy attempts to simultaneously colonise and resist what it sees as the patriarchal state.

Thus my intention here is to explore in some detail, difficulties encountered by femocrats in using what has been regarded as traditional private sphere norms and values to shape and influence the state system; to examine the impact of the 'private' experience of women as it is placed on

⁴ For further reading on other social policy issues in the Australian context such as health care, women in the paid workforce, sex discrimination and housing to name a few, see: Dorothy Broom, *Damned if We Do: Contradictions in Women's Health Care*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991; Equal Employment Opportunity Bureau, *A Handbook on Legal Rights for Sex Discrimination*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987; Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), *Occupational Segregation: Women's Work, Women's Pay*, AGPS, Canberra, 1990; Kate Tully, *Opening Doors with CEDAW*, AGPS, Canberra, 1993; Chris Ronalds, *Affirmative Action and Sex Discrimination: A Handbook on Legal Rights for Women*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1987; Janet Baker, *Take Shelter: Housing in Australia*, CIS Publishers, Carlton, Vic., 1993; Terry Burke, Linda Hancock & Peter Newton, *A Roof Over Their Heads: Housing Issues and Families in Australia*, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 1984; Bill Randolph, *A Review of Community Housing in Australia*, Urban Research Program, Working Paper No.40, Australian National University, 1993; Alastair Greig, *The Stuff Dreams are Made of: Housing Provision in Australia 1945-1960*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1995; R. A. Carter, 'Housing Policy in the 1970s', in *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia: Volume II, The First Fraser Years, 1976-78*, eds R. B. Scotton & Helen Ferber, Longman/Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980, pp.77-143; Sophie Watson, 'Reclaiming Social Policy', in *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, eds Barbara Caine & Rosemary Pringle, St. Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin, 1995.

the political agenda by femocrats and the implications of this process for Habermas' colonisation thesis.

who are femocrats? femocrats and femocrat strategy

'Femocrat' is a term invented in Australia to describe feminists who take up women's policy positions in government bureaucracies,⁵ 'and subsequently, also feminists who moved onto 'mainstream' positions in government'.⁶ Appointed as the first women's adviser to the Whitlam Labor government⁷ on 8 April 1973, Elizabeth Reid is regarded by many political commentators to be Australia's first femocrat.⁸ The appointment was met with mixed reactions from the women's movement who saw compromise as inevitable upon entry into the state bureaucracy.⁹ Many of the seventeen women who also applied for the women's adviser position entered the bureaucracy in the decade after the initial appointment of Elizabeth Reid. This group of

⁵ Marian Sawer, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990 p.22.

⁶ Marian Sawer & Abigail Groves, *Working From the Inside: Twenty Years of the Office of the Status of Women*, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, p.8.

⁷ For a more thorough discussion of the Whitlam Labor Government and the beginning stages of the federal Femocracy, see: Carol Johnson, 'The Fragility of Democratic Reform: Challenges to Australian Women's Citizenship', in *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratization*, ed. Shirin Rae, Macmillan, Houndmills, 1999.

⁸ Others who share this opinion include: Marian Sawer, *Sisters in Suits*, p.22; Anne Summers, 'Mandarins or Missionaries: Women in the Federal Bureaucracy', in *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, eds Norma Grieve & Ailsa Burns, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p.61; Anna Yeatman *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p.69; Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p.138.

⁹ Marian Sawer, *Sisters in Suits*, p.21; Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, p.140.

women became known as the first femocrats.¹⁰ Ryan argues that the entry of feminists into the Australian federal bureaucracy from 1973 onwards was dependent upon a number of factors including:

... the resurgence of the women's movement in 1970 in response to the massive changes for women in the 1960's; the emergence of a liberal feminist political organization, Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), which developed goals and strategies in relation to the state; and a political climate which fostered the view of a neutral state, whose services should be extended to the disadvantaged.¹¹

Some quite comprehensive definitions of the archetypal femocrat have been developed. For example, Anna Yeatman's definition has four defining characteristics. Her four defining characteristics of femocrat positions in the occupational structure are as follows: first, performance in these positions demands a commitment to feminism; second, these positions are located in full-time, primary labour markets; third, they are predicated on a relative freedom from domestic labour; and fourth, they confer on their woman occupants the privilege of establishing their own position in the class structure.¹² For Yeatman then, femocrats are defined as 'official or state feminists, namely women who are employed within state bureaucratic positions to work on advancing the position of women in the

¹⁰ Marian Sawyer, *Sisters in Suits*, p.22. While the majority of femocrat commentators regard it largely as an Australian phenomenon, others however, contend the femocrat phenomenon is unique to Australia and New Zealand. See, Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, p.133; and Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.64. While I agree that the femocrat phenomenon is just as prevalent in New Zealand, for the purposes of this study, I have confined my discussion to femocrats in the Australian context only.

¹¹ Lyndall Ryan, 'Feminism and the Federal Bureaucracy 1972-1983', in *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, ed. Sophie Watson, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.71.

¹² Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.67.

wider society through the development of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination strategies of change'.¹³

This definition of what constitutes the archetypal femocrat is very broad, and includes not only those women who staff the women's adviser and equal opportunity units in public bureaucracies, but also women who staff women's community centres and feminist women academics, especially those in women's studies departments. Hester Eisenstein, is also very broad in her definition of 'femocrat', viewing them quite simply, as 'a cohort of feminist women who became bureaucrats in a quest for social change',¹⁴ in effect, feminists who attempt to use the machinery of the state as a means to transform the situation of women.¹⁵

It is important to note that while originally used as "a term of abuse or ironic self-deprecation, the term femocrat is now perhaps an icon of the Australian experiment with feminist interventions in the state."¹⁶ For the current purposes, the femocrat position will be considered in somewhat more narrow terms. For example, female academics and staff of community and voluntary organisations have less influential and fewer direct links to the state and its adjoining bureaucracies than bureaucrats

¹³ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.65.

¹⁴ Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1996, p.xi.

¹⁵ Hester Eisenstein, 'The Gender of Bureaucracy: Reflections on Feminism and the State', in *Women, Social Science and Public Policy*, eds Jacqueline Goodnow & Carole Pateman, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p.104. Also see: Marian Sawyer, 'Femocrats and Ecorats: Women's Policy Machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand', Occasional Paper, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, March 1996.

¹⁶ Marian Sawyer, 'Femocrats in Glass Towers?': The Office of the Status of Women in Australia', in *Comparative State Feminism*, eds Dorothy McBride Stetson & Amy G. Mazur, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA, 1995, p.22.

themselves. While they might still rely on state funding, their obligations to the taxpayer are less direct, and are under less public or media scrutiny. Thus, for the purposes of this study, I will consider femocrats to be those feminist women who staff the public service bureaucracies. Higher level women politicians who have a clear feminist agenda are not strictly femocrats once they assume an elected position. So, while many high profile women politicians may have once been femocrats, once elected they become public representatives (of the bureaucracy) rather than actual bureaucrats. What remains important in early definitions of the femocrat position is their direct link with the organised women's movement. Indeed, as Eisenstein has noted, in the early days 'femocrats were senior public servants who owed their positions to pressure from the organized women's movement'.¹⁷ However, many women who today hold what could technically be seen as femocrat positions often have either very tenuous links with the women's movement, or none at all.

Women working within the state is no longer a controversial or revolutionary idea. Feminists working within the state with a clear agenda to effect social change is, however, a fairly recent and peculiar strategy. While the term 'femocrat' is unique to Australia (and arguably New Zealand), the phenomenon is not.¹⁸ Affirmative action programs emanating from the reform strand of feminism in both the United States and Canada have seen many women appointed to what would term

¹⁷ Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators*, p.xii

¹⁸ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.64; Suzanne Franzway et al, *Staking a Claim*, p.133.

'femocrat positions'. In Britain where the most visible feminist encounter with the state has been with local progressive councils, the femocrat strategy is broadly viewed as a betrayal of feminist ideals.¹⁹ What sets Australia's femocrat phenomenon apart from the United States and Canadian experience is the consistent growth of women in femocrat positions and the amount of headway femocrats have made in the quest for advancing the influence of women in the legislative process.

While many Australian femocrats may have a support base in the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), their unique strategy of working within the system separates them from WEL and other feminist groups whose main function is restricted to the lobbying of official or state power brokers. Many femocrats themselves see the internal femocrat strategy as relying on the maintenance of links with the feminist principles of the women's movement as well as the maintaining of access to cabinet submissions.²⁰ They view such an internal strategy of developing a network, as moving away from the traditional hierarchical structures of the state bureaucracy. In such a model, the Women's Affairs Branch served as the central 'hub' or the mediator between the two extreme organisational polarities of the women's movement and the state bureaucracy.

This innovative approach to the development of the women's affairs machinery was seen ... as structurally appropriate to

¹⁹ Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, p.133.

²⁰ Marian Sawer & Abigail Groves, *Working From the Inside: Twenty Years of the Office of the Status of Women*, p.26.

feminist philosophy - a centre-periphery model rather than vertical integration, or a network rather than a hierarchy.²¹

Whether or not this theoretical model is reflected is debatable. What is certain however, is that the femocracy has always had a conscious feminist strategy, and 'believed they could make changes for women'.²²

The femocracy differs somewhat from other smaller, feminist and non-feminist social movements and the broader women's movement in that it is not completely oppositional to the state. Rather, its tendency toward a bureaucratic strategy serves to reinforce state mechanisms. However, the femocracy may still be considered part of a larger social movement because it continues to challenge the dominant patriarchal political culture. If anything, the role of femocrats is to prevent the depoliticisation of feminist concerns before they can be legitimised and remedied. A look at the debates between femocrats and other feminist groups and organisations in Australia, past and present, will be a useful way to situate the femocracy in relation to other feminist resistance groups and to further outline contentions between the femocracy and its feminist foundations.

femocrats as feminists: the debate(s)

Much of the debate within feminist circles surrounding the insurgence of femocrats into the Australian (and New Zealand) federal bureaucracies can

²¹ Marian Sawer & Abigail Groves, *Working From the Inside*, p.26.

²² Marian Sawer & Abigail Groves, *Working From the Inside*, p.8.

be traced back to internal schisms between different feminist ideologies. The existing ideological distinctions between the different feminisms - Liberal, Socialist, Radical and so on - are played out in the argument about the role of women in politics. For example, liberal feminists would generally argue that the only sure way to successfully fight institutionalised male oppression is to use the male bureaucracy to instigate and legislate for change. This course of action is advocated by WEL and indeed the femocracy has been equated with liberal feminism by various feminist academics.²³ It is through this association that the femocrat position has come under attack by radical feminists for necessitating, through its close relationship with the state, too great a compromise of feminist principles and goals. In other words, it is claimed that feminists who choose to participate in the hierarchy of the state will inevitably lose focus on their initial feminist pursuits, in favour of more self-serving aims.²⁴ In this view, resistance against the state should occur from outside the male bureaucratic hierarchies by way of such protest tactics employed by women's groups such as the WAC. This however, neglects the reality that many femocrats were also socialist feminists and as such, their interactions with the state did not pose a significant ideological conflict for them. This is particularly the case for feminists 'whose background and political base were in the

²³ For example, see Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, pp.14-32.

²⁴ For more on specific tensions between femocrats and the wider women's movement, see: Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1996, esp. Chapter 5, 'Using the State', pp.67-85; Hester Eisenstein, *Gender Shock: Practising Feminism on Two Continents*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, esp. Chapter 3, 'Feminism and Femocrats', pp.19-26; Hester Eisenstein, 'Femocrats, Official Feminism and the Uses of Power', in *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, ed. Sophie Watson, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, pp.87-103.

labour movement' where 'historically, the the Australian labour movement has regarded the state as relatively benign, or at least neutral, and has looked to government to achieve reform'.²⁵

The WEL and WLG have both promoted an environment which fosters the increase of femocrat numbers. Both groups which support the femocrat strategy differ from earlier women's liberation groups which strongly opposed involvement with such an inherently male hierarchy such as the state. The WAC in particular held very strong reservations about women's involvement with male hierarchies. Indeed, the WAC argued that:

... all power structures have been created by men, and when women, by the grace of men, occasionally obtain a position of power they feel they need to prove themselves capable of carrying out this authority which often makes them more ruthless than men.²⁶

In this view, men remained the benchmark against which women in public bureaucracies were to be assessed. A common difficulty then, for women in the political bureaucracy, and a major source of conflict between them and sections of the women's movement, has been their struggle to retain links with both their feminist and non-feminist constituents while being taken seriously by their male colleagues.²⁷ This amounts to an

²⁵ Deborah Brennan, revised ed, p.75.

²⁶ Zelda D'Aprano, *Zelda, Spinflix*, Melbourne, 1995, p.121.

²⁷ For a more detailed account of the relationship between the women's movement and femocrats and the state, see: Verity Burgman, *Power and Protest: Movements for change in Australian Society*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1993, pp.77-131. [esp., pp.1215-119]. Also see: Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, esp. Chapter 6, 'Mandarins or Missionaries? Accountability to the Women's Movement', pp.86-100.

ongoing struggle between their own feminist ethics and their loyalty to their occupational position and employer. One femocrat expressed this tension in the following way:

I am a bureaucrat. The community regards me as a bureaucrat and so I'm distrusted, and rightly so. I'd feel the same way. I have loyalties, obligations, and duties to the department. I take them lightly, but I can't take them too lightly. I also have an obligation to the taxpayer and to the community that I work effectively and responsibly. We're caught in the middle.²⁸

Whereas Habermas would regard this situation as a struggle between one set of norms or the other, I am arguing for the possibility of both sets of norms working together simultaneously. Indeed, it is the struggle to find an equilibrium between system and lifeworld norms which defines the femocrat position. This is not an easy task when the femocrat position appears to receive criticism from both sides of an unclearly defined system and lifeworld dichotomy. Femocrats are viewed as owing their positions to movement pressure, but as giving their ultimate loyalties to the employing government body.²⁹ In Habermasian terms, this is a conflict between obligations to both system and lifeworld norms.

Femocrats, however, are not the only group to have found themselves in a double bind, forced to compromise ideologically to ensure their very survival. Sections of the larger women's movement too has had its share of criticism for consorting with the state:

The women's movement, especially in South Australia, has received a lot of money to become institutionalised. It is very

²⁸ Jesvier Singh, 'Targeting the Top', in *Broadsheet*, nos., 152 & 153, 1987, p.14.

²⁹ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.65.

difficult to have non-hierarchical structure such as collectivism and still receive government funds because you have to name a management committee. That has been a major factor in determining our divergence from our stated ideology.³⁰

The problem of funding has certainly been a factor in the determination of community-based organisations. The opposition femocrats face from both inside and outside the Habermasian system is accounted for by Marian Sawyer as stemming from problems of perception about the role of femocrats in government. She has argued that:

... problems of perception exacerbated the relationship between femocrats and their supposed constituency in the women's movement and weakened the femocrats political base. Those inside felt aggrieved by the lack of understanding and support from the outside, particularly as they themselves were constantly under suspicion from the rest of the bureaucracy because of their supposed closeness to the women's movement.³¹

The women's movements' oppositional stand toward the state's hierarchical structure and historically patriarchal agenda aroused a deep suspicion of feminist causes in bureaucratic circles. In contrast to other public servants femocrats are highly visible and therefore under intense scrutiny both from feminists and non-feminists alike.³² In addition, by the late 1980s, the majority of femocrats found themselves marginalised and located outside the political mainstream in the women's units³³. Dowse has

³⁰ Jenny Barber, *Women's Movement, South Australia*, Experimental Art Foundation, St. Peters SA, 1980, p.25.

³¹ Marian Sawyer, *Sisters in Suits*, p.24.

³² Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, p.139.

³³ See: Meredith Edwards, *Social Policy, Public Policy: From Problems to Practice*, with Cosmo Howard & Robin Miller, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2001; for a very thorough outline of the processes involved in policy formation and the role played by women bureaucrats and community members.

argued that while this has improved somewhat with growing moves toward centralisation, feminists in government still suffer from isolation simply because the Australian public service is an overwhelmingly male bureaucracy.³⁴ Wendy Brown has also considered state centred feminist reforms, and is wary about conducting feminist struggles 'in or near the domain of the state'.³⁵ She argues that:

... like male dominance itself, masculinist state power, consequent to its multiple and unsystemic composition, is something feminists can both exploit and subvert, but only by deeply comprehending in order to strategically out manoeuvre its contemporary masculinist uses.³⁶

Further, the complex relationship with the women's movement variously affects femocrats and the larger femocrat project; there are difficulties in providing such a mainstream representation of such a large and diverse 'interest group'.³⁷

While Franzway *et al*, among others, equate femocracy with liberal feminism, Yeatman analyses femocracy from the perspective of class analysis. Her interest lies in the capacity of femocrats to 'establish themselves as economically independent through their own labour market activity',³⁸ thus creating a new femocrat class.

This commitment among feminists to establishing their own class positions, independent of the men to whom they relate,

³⁴ Sara Dowse, 'The Women's Movement's Fandango With the State: The Movement's Role in Public Policy Since 1972', in *Women, Social Welfare, and the State in Australia*, Sydney, eds Bettina Cass & Cora V. Baldock, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p.215.

³⁵ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1995, p.196.

³⁶ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, p.196.

³⁷ Suzanne Franzway *et al*, *Staking a Claim*, p.138-140.

³⁸ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.62.

does indeed distinguish them from most women in the labour market even as it links them to their not yet successful or less successful sisters committed to the same ideal, and willing to practice it even if it means relative poverty.³⁹

Yeatman stresses that the femocrat strategy will only progress if feminists maintain a clear commitment to the feminist ideology which originally urged them to seek out their bureaucratic position. Once again though, femocrats are viewed as owing their positions to women's movement pressure, but as giving their ultimate loyalties to the employing government body.⁴⁰ Sawyer argues that the 'extent to which those entering the bureaucracy are able to maintain links with the social movement from which they came, as well as with other members of the bureaucracy, may be a crucial element in resisting pressure to conform to prevailing values'.⁴¹ In Habermasian terms, this is a conflict between obligations to both system and lifeworld norms. The difficulty lies in locating and maintaining a middle ground and minimising a feminist compromise.

the femocrat argument: who is colonising whom?

Born out of a broader social movement agenda, the Australian femocracy aims to instigate social change through direct co-option of state bureaucratic mechanisms. In this process of policy formation and reform, femocrats draw on both system and lifeworld norms and values. In so

³⁹ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, pp.74-75.

⁴⁰ Anna Yeatman, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, p.65.

⁴¹ Marian Sawyer, *Sisters in Suits*, p.25.

doing, they incorporate both systematically and socially integrated action contexts into their policy making, and thus fundamentally affecting not only processes of societal reproduction, but also of cultural production. Once again this draws attention to Habermas' binary use of symbolic and material reproduction. In much the same way that he separates action contexts, Habermas places the processes of material and symbolic reproduction in categorical opposition to one another. In order to explore the inadequacies of this approach, I will explore an area of social policy where femocrats have assisted in the merging of those categories that Habermas has separated and placed in categorical opposition.

As outlined in the previous chapter, tensions between femocrats and the wider feminist movement stem largely from different strategic approaches. With their roots firmly embedded in the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), femocrats have been the target of a great deal of criticism from other feminists. Such contentions about femocrat strategy show a correlation between the differing ideological positions of different strands of feminism.⁴² The main difficulties arise around two main issues: feminist interaction with the state; and 'the problem' of hierarchy. For example, can be argued that the general influx of femocrats into politics in recent years can be viewed as an indication of a gradual humanisation of the system, economically, politically and legislatively. On the other hand however,

⁴² See: Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural feminism versus poststructuralism: the identity crisis in feminist theory' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.13, no.3, 1988, pp.405-436; Gregor McLennan, 'Feminism, epistemology and postmodernism: reflections on current ambivalence' in *Sociology*, vol.29, no.2, May 1995, pp.391-409; and Elizabeth Frazer & Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto & Buffalo, 1993.

there are also those who argue that to work within the system is to compromise what should be a fundamental feminist objection to hierarchy. Such differences of interpretation add to the tension between femocrats and the wider women's movement. This internal debate also reveals both the limitations and potential of femocrat strategy in broadening the public sphere to include 'a multitude of specific issues, often drawn from their "private experience"'⁴³.

Whether the influx of femocrats into the system and the bureaucratic state signals a humanisation of politics, or is merely an indication of the gradual bureaucratisation of feminism, feminist norms and values, is debatable. What can be surmised however, is that there has been a definite shift in popular perceptions of the traditionally demarcated realms of public and private, as more traditionally private sphere concerns are introduced into the public realm to undergo public debate.

In the past, there has been a good deal of criticism pitched at the overreaching arm of the state in to the private affairs of the family.⁴⁴ In Habermasian terms, such a trend of interventionist statism would be described as a 'colonisation of the lifeworld'. However, I am arguing that the emergence of the femocrat phenomenon is evidence that no one group is 'colonising' the other. To varying degrees, the system and lifeworld are both influenced by the other. Since the early 1970s in Australia, policy-

⁴³ Mary Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access', p.260.

⁴⁴ For example, Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York, 1979; and Michele Barrett & Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-social Family*, NLB, London, 1982, are both works which deal with this issue.

making has encompassed a much broader range of issues, which has included traditionally private sphere concerns, like child care, domestic violence and women's health, to name a few. Attention to such areas signals a structural social shift of sorts; it has now become clearly acceptable to discuss and formulate policy which is overtly oriented to lifeworld concerns. In this view, femocrats have not only opened up the public sphere, but have also blurred any clear distinctions between traditional separations of public and private, particularly those which have been advanced along gender lines. Through an analysis of such progress, it becomes clear that Habermas' social-theoretical framework is unable to cater for the emergence of the femocrat phenomenon, which has instigated important social shifts in the arena of traditional gender roles and which, significantly, merge and redefine his separate system and lifeworld categories.

directional changes in Australian social policy

For an extended period in Australian politics, as elsewhere, it was considered unnecessary and inappropriate for governments to overtly address or publicly discuss those (traditionally) lifeworld issues which a great deal of feminist politics encompasses. The activism of the women's movement has primarily been responsible for the introduction of many of the women's issues, interests, norms and values that have been traditionally relegated to the private sphere of the family, into the public arena of political participation, debate and opinion formation. This is to

say that when femocrats enter what Habermas would call the system, they both influence and are influenced by systematically integrated action contexts. In the first instance, upon entering the system, femocrats bring with them some degree of lifeworld norms and values (which often take the form of various feminist ethics, but not always). This causes a tension between obligations to system and lifeworld. For example, in their occupation as femocrats, they bring women's private-sphere concerns to the fore, but they also have bureaucratic obligations and budgets to work within which can sometimes limit feminist effectiveness.

Many feminists would maintain that to a large extent, such 'private sphere' issues are still considered taboo by the majority of politicians and decision makers. At some point however, many so-called 'women's issues' like domestic violence, child care, the place of women in paid employment and women's health found themselves at the top of many political agendas and as the subject of a surprisingly *public* debate. This development is significant because it highlights the transitory nature of the traditionally strict boundaries between public and private, and the role of material and symbolic reproduction in Habermas' system and lifeworld matrix.

My contention here is that growing attention to such areas signals a structural social shift of sorts; it has now not only become clearly acceptable but necessary to discuss and formulate policy which is, in Habermasian terms, overtly oriented toward lifeworld concerns. My point then, is that the emergence of the femocrat phenomenon is evidence that no

one group is 'colonising' the other. To varying degrees, the system and lifeworld are both simultaneously influenced by the other.

The process(es) of what some view as the normalisation of 'women's issues' in the Australian bureaucratic sphere via the femocracy is still not yet complete. Portfolios concerned with social policy are known as secondary or 'soft' portfolios, and are thereby considered inferior to those concerned with economic policy such as trade, finance or industrial relations.⁴⁵ Regardless of the mainstream attitude toward women's issues, many argue they have certainly become part of the political furniture. Sawyer and Simms argue that 'if institutionalisation is defined as becoming part of the machinery of government then women's issues have been institutionalised'.⁴⁶ Whether this institutionalisation of women's (private sphere) concerns is a result of a genuine social shift, indicating a change in attitudes, or is merely the realisation that there exists a powerful female vote to be won,⁴⁷ there remains no doubt that lifeworld norms and values have an increasing impact on the systemic state bureaucracies.

⁴⁵ Sara Dowse, 'The Women's Movement's Fandango with the State', pp.205-206.

⁴⁶ Marian Sawyer & Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place. Women and Politics in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p.224.

⁴⁷ In the past women have generally been considered to be more conservative voters than their male counterparts. This has been explained in various ways, but a major factor has been the tendency of women to vote the same way as their husbands or fathers. In recent years (particularly in Australia) this trend has practically reversed as women have become more politically informed and involved. Current trends indicate that in Australia, women are more 'left' or radical in their voting. For further reading see; D. DeVaus & Ian McAllister, 'The changing politics of women: gender and political alignment in eleven nations', in *European Journal of Political Research*, vol.17, 1989, pp.241-262; and Murray Goot & Elizabeth Reid, 'Women: if Not Apolitical Then Conservative' in *Women and the Public Sphere: A Critique of Sociology and Politics*, eds Janet Siltanen & Michelle Stanworth, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1984.

By focusing on the example of child care as a case study I will attempt to present a brief history of the institutionalisation of feminist (lifeworld) norms and values in the Australian public sphere. In Habermasian terms, I am asserting that the processes of communicative action encroach upon the various sites of material production through the work of femocrats. In this way, femocrats have and continue to play a major role in the introduction of many private sphere discourses into the realm of public policy debate, and in doing so, assert a new feminist citizenship. Indeed, 'Government policy and practice is of itself an important indicator of the extent to which women are recognised as full participants in society enjoying a complete range of life options and opportunities.'⁴⁸

Child Care

The work of femocrats in the area of child care is a particularly useful example of the development of social policy, which while in the past has been widely thought of as an exclusively 'feminine' concern or 'women's issue', is now increasingly regarded as also being an economic concern.⁴⁹ Studies of child care have uncovered a fundamental link between women's access to employment and the transition from the private or domestic

⁴⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (HRSCCLA), *Half Way to Equal. Report of the Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1992, p.12.

⁴⁹ HRSCCLA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.149.

sphere to the public domain.⁵⁰ As such, affordable child care is a basic necessity which enables women the opportunity to make choices as to their life options.⁵¹ For example, the 1992 inquiry into equal opportunity and equal status for women in Australia found:

Evidence suggests that access to child care affects a woman's decision to re-enter the work force, the number and range of hours she is available to work, and the likelihood of her being able to make longer term commitments to the work through seeking promotion opportunities. It also affects the amount of time women can devote to meetings, work commitments and extra activities outside of official work hours.⁵²

In this way, the unavailability of adequate child care facilities limits the life-choice options for women, reinforces traditional sex-role stereotyping, and further entrenches a specific divide between social and economic, public and private, system and lifeworld. Given the importance and the impact of child care policy for women in regard to access to choice, adequate child care policy can be a formidable measure of a society's commitment to equality and equity of all citizens.

The fact that inadequate child care impacts so greatly on women rather than men in terms of workforce opportunities is a stark reminder of how society and largely parents see mothers as the prime carers of children. Given this, there is a temptation to portray child care as a 'women's issue'. The evidence to the committee strongly rejects this proposition and argues that child care is an economic and productivity issue as well as a basic test of the community's commitment to equity.⁵³

⁵⁰ Eva Cox, 'Pater-Patria: child-rearing and the state', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Cora Baldock & Bettina Cass, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1988, pp.190-204.

⁵¹ HRSCCLA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.69.

⁵² HRSCCLA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.69.

⁵³ HRSCCLA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.69.

Not only this, but government aid to child care, couched in terms of assistance for women raises some questions about the ideological foundations of the assumption that women should be primarily responsible for childrearing.⁵⁴

Before 1972, few direct measures had been taken by the government to provide child care facilities in Australia. Even toward the late 1970s, 'Federal government programs affecting families with pre-school children were limited to income support provisions, such as child endowment, maternity allowances and tax deductions for dependants.'⁵⁵

In 1966, the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labour and National Service produced a review of studies concerning the children of working mothers. This was followed in 1969 by 'the first national survey of the extent of provision in Australia for the care of children under school age in licensed child care centres'.⁵⁶ Subsequently, social policy in Australia has undergone a marked change since the entry of the first femocrats into the federal bureaucracies under the Whitlam Labor government. Issues such as child care were not largely discussed in public debate since they were widely considered a private realm concern. Feminist demands of the early 1970s coincided with the emergence of both femocrats and hitherto

⁵⁴ Carol Johnson, 'Whose consensus?: Women and the ALP', in *Arena*, no.93, 1990, p.93. Also see: Anne Showstack Sassoon, 'Women's New Social Role: Contradictions of the Welfare State', in *Women and the State: The Shifting Boundaries Between Public and Private*, ed. Anne Showstack Sassoon, Routledge, London & New York, 1987, pp.158-188.

⁵⁵ R.B Scotton & Helen Ferber, *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia. Volume 1: The Whitlam Years, 1972-75*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1978, p.65.

⁵⁶ R.B Scotton & Helen Ferber, *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia*, p.65.

private sphere concerns in the public sphere of political debate. However, even with the influx of femocrats into government apparatuses, attitudes toward social policy remained consistently quite conservative. For example, earlier debates about child care were commonly couched in terms of 'the problem of the working mother', rather than the availability or adequacy of child care provision,⁵⁷ or indeed any notion of shared responsibility by both men and women.

Demand for child care was high during the second world war while women participated in the paid workforce in high numbers, the years following the end of the war saw a resurgence of traditional conservative attitudes toward working women and the need for child care facilities. For example, Cheeseright argues that part of the reason for inadequate child care facilities was the 'reluctance of the community and their elected representatives to accept that women with young children do work outside their homes and that, if they do, the community has any responsibility to provide care for their children'.⁵⁸ This assumes the sole responsibility for child care rests on the mother, and while this view did not begin to change for some time, the need for government assistance in the area of child care became increasingly apparent and was subsequently dealt with.

The August 1972 Federal Budget pledged \$5 million toward child care schemes.⁵⁹ Parliamentary debate in the week following centred

⁵⁷ M. Cheeseright, 'Day Care: The Problem of the Working Mother', in *Australian Social Issues of the 1970s*, Paul Wilson ed., Butterworths, Sydney, 1972, pp.153-156.

⁵⁸ M. Cheeseright, 'Day Care: The Problem of the Working Mother', p.153.

⁵⁹ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Budget Speech (second reading)*, vol. HR79, p.47. Mr Snedden (Bruce).

around the establishment of child care centres made possible by the State Grants (Pre-School Teachers Colleges) Bill 1972.⁶⁰ This bill dealt with the provision of more pre-school education for lower income families, but also grew to encompass their role as child-minding centres for women who needed to work out of economic necessity. Indeed, this became a reoccurring theme: the problem of the mother who was forced into the paid workforce out of economic need. The idea of choice for women did not emerge in policy until much later. For example, one parliamentarian at the time argued that:

Not every mother in Australia wants her child to go off to pre-school, yet clearly there are other mothers, and some fathers, who have no choice, for economic reasons, than to go to employment and leave young children in the care of others or alone.⁶¹

and;

Not every women in the workforce wishes to go into the work force and to leave her children behind. But there are a number who, for economic reasons, must do so, whilst on the other hand there are those who feel that their life will not be fulfilled until they manifest their talents in areas outside the kitchen or outside the household.⁶²

While economic necessity was cited as the main cause for the growing need for child care facilities and funding, the focus remained on the mother as the parent solely responsible for child care. In this view,

⁶⁰ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, vol. HR79, pp.419-428. Mr Beazley (Fremantle).

⁶¹ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, vol. HR79, p.424. Mr Les Johnson (Hughes).

⁶² Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, vol. HR79, p.424. Mr Les Johnson (Hughes).

child care legislation became a matter of the state helping women who could not fulfil their child care obligations on their own, for whatever reason. In this way, child care policy became entrenched as a 'feminine concern'. Subsequently, the issue of child care also became not just a matter of coping with economic hardship, but also one of social control and crime prevention. Parliamentary debate warned of the apparent decline in social order caused largely by children with absent mothers:

I turn to child care. This is one area which has required considerable attention in previous years. In this Budget \$5m is appropriated to provide accommodation and training for specialised staff to deal with the children of low income and special need families as well as the children of working parents who must leave their children, sometimes in the care of friends of relations or sometimes without care at all. Very often these children get into real trouble. I have seen and heard of them moving around in gangs. My attention was directed to one gang of these children aged between 7 and 11 years old, roaming around on their own, robbed an old man who was lying on the grass of more than \$100. On another occasion, at the other end of my electorate, a similar gang of children used a shanghai to kill a prize cat in some one's back yard. On another occasion, another gang of children speared a fowl through a fence. These children were roaming around with nothing to do and had no-one to take care of them. In growing up, they will find their way into an early life of crime. The Budget provides \$5m to set up and equip these centres and to train qualified staff. We must face the fact that quite a number of staff will be needed. This has been an increasing social problem and I look to this scheme to be of great assistance in the bringing up of these children.⁶³

While child care facilities were thus viewed as a way to prevent urban social decline without which children would be drawn into 'an early

⁶³ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, vol. HR79, p.731. Mr Calder (Northern Territory).

life of crime', the preferred option remained one where mothers remained at home with their children. A common argument at the time is as follows:

What I am saying is that despite the great works that we may find in pre-schools, a great deal of what is offered, socially and educationally, could well be found in a good home environment between mother and child.⁶⁴

Despite the different motivations for the provision of child care, it was stressed that such provisions were made out of necessity, not as was to later become the case, to further choices for women. For example, it was argued that:

The budget provides \$5m for child care centres which mainly is to be allocated to centre catering for one parent families. This amount is a mere drop in the bucket compared to the problem of providing centres properly staffed by competent people for those wives who are forced to work, not because they want to, but because they have to.⁶⁵

and;

The Child Care Scheme is not intended to encourage mothers to enter paid employment, nor to discourage them from doing so. Rather it is aimed at meeting an existing problem, that is to help the children of working and other parents insofar as they are deprived of proper child care either because good quality facilities are not available or because the cost is presently too high.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, vol. HR79, p.427. Dr Solomon (Denison).

⁶⁵ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Budget Speech (second reading)*, vol. HR79, pp.714-15. Mr Armitage (Chifley).

⁶⁶ Australia, House of Representatives 1972, *Debates*, Vol. HR81, p.3398. (Answers to questions), Mr Lynch (Flinders).

The introduction of the child care act in 1972 provided the first legislative move toward Federal funding of child care in Australia.⁶⁷

The Commonwealth has recognised that providing child care services is critical for the economic development of the country and has embraced the view that child care is a community issue and should therefore be addressed by business, unions, all levels of government as well as the community.⁶⁸

There is a surprising correlation between a definite change in the direction of Australian social policy and the arrival of women's lobby groups. In particular, the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), was formed in 1972 as a political lobby group to ensure that women's issues were not overlooked in the 1972 federal election campaign. In the federal budget speech of 15 August 1973, the new Whitlam Labor government announced its 'intention to legislate for the establishment and running of child care centres on a non-profit basis'.⁶⁹ It was estimated that \$5 million would be spent on the implementation of this scheme in the first year. By Budget time the following year, the same government announced that a further \$8 million would be spent in this area.⁷⁰ During the Whitlam era, Elizabeth Reid, 'together with feminists in the bureaucracy, saw family day care as a way of providing desperately needed care for the children of working mothers.'⁷¹

⁶⁷ Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future. The New National Agenda for Women 1993-2000*, AGPS, Canberra, 1993, p.52.

⁶⁸ Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.52.

⁶⁹ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes', in *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia: Volume 1 The Whitlam Years, 1972-75*, eds R. B. Scotton & Helen Ferber, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1978, p.216.

⁷⁰ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes', p.216.

⁷¹ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed, p.134.

On the 11th of June 1975, an act for the establishment of a Children's Commission was assented to.⁷² However, 'The government believed that it was more appropriate to establish an Office of Child Care as part of the Department of Social Security, with Mrs. Marie Coleman, Chairman of the Social Welfare Commission, as its first director.'⁷³ Brennan notes that the 'most important achievements of child care groups during the Fraser period were defensive ones. The sustained resistance of these groups to changes mooted by the government'.⁷⁴

The small but steady budget increases in the allocation of resources to child care programs continued until 1976 when the Fraser Liberal government announced a substantial funding increase. The 1976 Federal budget allocated 73.3 million for Children's Services for the year.⁷⁵ However, this was to provide for a variety of education programs, not just for child care alone:

The services included centre-based day care services; small group day care schemes; pre-school education services; before and after school care; school vacation care programs; support to central play group organisations; training courses; some special programs for disadvantaged; and isolated children and families; research and evaluation, and pilot projects on alternatives to residential care.⁷⁶

⁷² Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes', p.322.

⁷³ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes, 1975 to 1978', in *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia: Volume 2, The Fraser Years, 1975-78*, eds R. B. Scotton & Helen Ferber, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1978, p.322.

⁷⁴ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed, p.117.

⁷⁵ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes, 1975 to 1978', p.322.

⁷⁶ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes, 1975 to 1978', pp.322-23.

In the August 1977 federal budget, it was announced that a further \$73.3 million would be allocated to the children's services program, \$34.3 million of which 'would be spent meeting progress payments toward completion costs of previously approved capital projects and recurrent costs of existing child care projects and others expected to become operational during the year'.⁷⁷

The 1979 budget speech announced '\$69.2 million for assistance for pre-school and child-care projects in the States and the Northern Territory, an increase of \$5.2 million'.⁷⁸ By the early 1980's the government undertook 'a thorough review of the children's services program. As a result, total expenditure under the program was increased by 28 per cent to \$103 million in 1982-83'.⁷⁹ Subsequently, a number of innovations were taken which included:

- an increase in the operational support grants to family day care schemes from \$7 to \$10 a week per child in full-time care;
- the development of an income test to determine eligibility for a free rebate for pre-school day care for families in need; and
- the three year pilot Youth Services Scheme has been extended for one year to 30 June 1983 to enable final evaluation of the scheme. Additional funds will be made available to increase assistance to existing projects for this period.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Helen Ferber, 'Diary of Legislative and Administrative Changes, 1975 to 1978', p.323.

⁷⁸ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-4, 1979-80, John Howard p.10. According to the budget statement the following year, the government only actually spent \$63.8 million during the 1978-79 financial year. See: Statements attached to the budget speech 1979-80, p.107.

⁷⁹ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-4, 1982-83, John Howard, p.9.

⁸⁰ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-4, 1982-83, John Howard, p.9.

Although positive developments in child care policy slowed during the period the Fraser Government were in office, the input of feminist into preventing any unravelling of already established policy was crucial. As Brennan has documented, 'the unsung work of Liberal Party women, the delicate manoeuvring of feminist bureaucrats and the rallies and other public activities of child care groups all played a role in this'.⁸¹

By the time the Labor Government returned to office in 1983, it had developed more extensively detailed child care policy than it had in 1972.⁸² The new revised policy had been drafted by Eva Cox during 1981-1982 while she was working for the shadow Minister for Community Services Don Grimes.⁸³ In association with the ALP Left and Right, Cox was able to get this policy written into the party platform in what Sawer has noted was 'a startling display of sisterhood at a conference characterised by extreme Left/Right confrontation.'⁸⁴ This is clear example of femocrat policy being incorporated into official party platform, of feminist agenda being channeled through bureaucratic mechanisms.

Once in office, the Hawke Labor Government continued the funding increases for child care during the mid-1980s:

In 1985-86 \$4.9 million is being provided to create 1,000 new child care places. In the following two years further new places will be provided to meet the government's election commitment for 20,000 additional places over three years.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed, p.117.

⁸² Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed, p.174.

⁸³ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed, p.174.

⁸⁴ Marian Sawer, 1990, p.80.

⁸⁵ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-2, 1985-86, P. J. Keating, p.15.

The Hawke Government subsequently pledged that 'The government [would] ensure that lower income families are not disadvantaged by the implementation of the child care savings announced in the May budget.'⁸⁶ By the late 1980s, in the social justice budget statement for 1988-89, the Hawke Labor Government, under the heading of 'Assistance to Women', pledged its continuing support for 'the provision of adequate and affordable child care'.⁸⁷ The aim was an expansion of child care places by 200%.

By the early 1990s, the discourse around child care had shifted from one of economic necessity as a matter of social control to one which addressed the impact of child care responsibilities on women. For example, the then treasurer, Paul Keating argued:

In the past, opportunities were closed to women for many reasons, not the least of which was the lack of decent and affordable child care places. Following the pledge we made in the election campaign, we will double spending on child care over the next three years with a first installment of \$75 million this year.⁸⁸

In addition, Keating considered the issue of child care to be directly related to economic developments. Indeed the impact of child care during this period was directly linked to the ability of women to contribute to the

⁸⁶ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-2, 1985-86, P. J. Keating, p.15.

⁸⁷ Circulated by the Honourable R. J. Hawke, *Towards a Fairer Australia: Social Justice Budget Statement, 1988-89*, AGPS, Canberra, 1988, p.19.

⁸⁸ Australia, *Treasury Budget Paper*, no.1-2, 1990-91, p.8, P. J. Keating.

economy.⁸⁹ In this view, renewed policy attention to child care was seen as a strategy to invest in the economic progress of the nation.⁹⁰

In 1990, the Federal government introduced child care fee relief for low and middle income families. By 1991, fee relief was extended to eligible families using private and employer sponsored child care services.⁹¹ Between 1983 and 1992, the supply of child care places in Australia rose from 40 000 to 230 000.⁹² By September 1995 it had reached 278 850 places.⁹³

Since numerous studies have confirmed that access to quality child care is one of the most important factors influencing the continued entrance of women into the full-time paid workforce,⁹⁴ the steady increases in funding by Federal governments since 1972 can generally be viewed quite favourably; as a sign of increasing state commitment to goals of equity and equality in life choices for all citizens. What is significant however, is the gradual shift in government discourse around child care provision and

⁸⁹ Carol Johnson, *Governing Change*, p.72.

⁹⁰ Investing in the Nation, Statement by the Prime Minister the Honourable P J Keating, MP, 1993, pp.77-82.

⁹¹ Office of the Status Women, *Women: Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.51.

⁹² Deborah Brennan, 'The Role of Government in the Supply of Childcare', in *Child Care: A Challenging Decade*, Australian Government Public Service, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, p.92.

⁹³ Liberal/National Coalition Party, 'Liberal/National Childcare Policy', 1996, Appendix B.

⁹⁴ The Childcare Connection, 'The Childcare Choices and Preferences of Employees in Five Victorian Companies', AGPS, Canberra, 1998, p.1; Anna Yeatman, 'A Review of Multicultural Policies and Programs in Children's Services: With Particular Emphasis on Childcare', Office of Multicultural Affairs, Barton, ACT, 1988, p.21; Joan Corbett, 'Childcare as a Factor in Understanding Women's Labour Market Participation', in *Childcare: A Challenging Decade*, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, p.71; Joan Corbett, 'Childcare Provision and Women's Labour Market Participation in Australia', Discussion Paper No.32, February, ANU Public Policy Program, Canberra, 1993, p.20; Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Childcare: From Philanthropy to Feminism*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.92.

processes of argumentation that eventually rest on choice for women rather than the prevention of social decline as a result of children roaming unsupervised and uneducated. Despite this, child care largely remained a 'women's issue'.

By the late 1990s, discussion of child care in the federal budget statements revolved around assistance to families and working parents, rather than issues of working or absent mothers. Discourse around the responsibility of the mother in regards to child care seem to have disappeared, being replaced by the introduction of carefully non-gendered subsidy schemes to encourage parents to stay at home. Thus, despite the careful use of non-gendered language, such schemes are generally aimed at perpetuating the ideology that at least one parent should be responsible for the provision of child care, and this role is still largely filled by women. Such subsidy schemes include the 'Family Allowance Payment' and the 'Parenting Payment', 'which is available to sole and partnered parents caring for children under 16 years of age'.⁹⁵

The election of a Liberal-National Party Coalition Government in March 1996, saw the implementation of an even more market driven attitude toward social policy than that of the Keating Labor Government in the early 1990s. Such changes 'reflect views held by senior administrators ... about the importance of reducing public expenditure, encouraging private sector provision and extending the user-pays principle'.⁹⁶ Indeed,

⁹⁵ Budget Strategy and Outlook, 1998-99, Budget Paper no.1, pp.4:59-4:60.

⁹⁶ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, revised ed., p.205.

Brennan argues that such initiatives in the area of child care reflect trends in the Howard Government's approach to social policy in general:

The broad thrust of such changes has been to move away from supply-side subsidies (such as capital and operational assistance to service providers) and towards encouraging competition between commercial and non-profit providers by subsidising consumer demand.⁹⁷

A combination of market ideology and social conservatism of the Howard Government has seen a decline in general government commitment to the provision of child care in Australia.⁹⁸ In some respects this has seen a further demarcation between spheres of public and private and marks a reinstitutionalisation of gendered divisions in society. However, at another level, what is significant is that the Howard Coalition Government remains determined to order the boundary construction between public and private spheres. Indeed, it retains a commitment to legislative intervention in processes of lifeworld construction, thus making the lifeworld a priority of state discourse while simultaneously reinforcing the issue of child care largely as a private sphere concern of women.

⁹⁷ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, p.213.

⁹⁸ For more on the increases to childcare cost under the Howard Government see: Carol Johnson, *Governing Change: Keating to Howard*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia Queensland, 2000, p79. Also see: Gillian Beer, 'Is it Worth Working? The Financial Impact of Increased Hours of Work by Married Mothers With Young Children', National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling, Faculty of Management, University of Canberra, paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference of Economists, University of Tasmania, 28 September - 1 October 1997, p.30. For a more general background on the Howard Government's commitment to market ideology and social conservatism see: Scott Prasser & Graeme Starr eds., *Policy and Change: The Howard Mandate*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1997; Gerard Henderson, *A Howard Government?: Inside the Coalition*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1995, in particular see Chapter 6: 'John Howard and the End of Ideology'; and John Howard MP, 'The Australia I Believe In: The Values, Directions and Policy Priorities of a Coalition Government Outlined in 1995'.

This brief historical overview of child care policy in Australia has been a useful way to highlight some of the limitations of Habermas' categorical split of system and lifeworld. For Habermas, the lifeworld is the site where societal reproduction occurs, where traditions, norms and values, and community expectations are developed and reproduced; it is where younger generations are socialised. In contrast, the system is the site of economic, bureaucratic and political reproduction. In modern industrial societies such as Australia, it is the processes of systemic reproduction that are valued highest and which earn economic rewards for those most concerned with their maintenance (predominantly men).

While the system and lifeworld split is technically different from the traditional public/private split (as outlined in some detail in Chapter One), in the case of the gendering of symbolic and material reproduction, the categories correspond fairly neatly. The lifeworld is the site wherein women (mostly) perform the officially unpaid task of child care, child rearing and socialisation (symbolic reproduction). The child rearing role of women in the unofficial economy of the lifeworld, prevents women from gaining easy access to paid positions in the domain of material reproduction (public life). Or as one commentator has argued, 'The consequence of gender roles are arguable the most powerful determinants of women's access to social and economic power.'⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Eva Cox, 'Pater-patria: Child-rearing and the State', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Bettina Cass & Cora V. Baldock, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p.191.

Habermas caters for the emergence of resistance movements such as the women's movement, who resist the system from the site of the lifeworld.¹⁰⁰ However, he makes no room for the possibility of a femocrat strategy which, armed with its feminist claims and hierarchical strategy, fights the system from within to instigate social change. In this sense, the system itself becomes the site of resistance against systemic media. I am arguing that the femocracy is largely part of the greater feminist movement, while employing a strategy which Habermasian theory does not cater for, or cannot account for. As outlined above, it is precisely this strategy that isolates the femocracy from many feminists, and yet it is their commitment to feminism that inspires and underwrites their strategy.

The Australian women's movement's approach to child care has developed within a culture that places great reliance on the state. The goal of persuading governments to adopt and implement particular kinds of child care policies has been central to feminists' endeavours in this area.¹⁰¹

The case of Australian child care policies is an especially interesting example because "it is the particular model of child care that has been developed and the extent to which this model has been shaped by women, many of them feminists, that demands attention."¹⁰²

A new pressure for the development of children's services began with the resurgence of an active women's movement in Australia in the late 1960s. Women's Electoral Lobby was formed in early 1972 and, with more radical elements of the Women's Liberation movement, it began to press the view that

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, p.394.

¹⁰¹ Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Childcare*, revised ed., p.4.

¹⁰² Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Childcare*, revised ed., p.5.

childcare was not just an educational service or a workplace facility. Rather it was a fundamental social requirement which was necessary if any serious challenge was to be made to the current unequal sexual division of labour and income.¹⁰³

When cuts were made by the Federal government to the childcare program in July 1974 from \$130 million to \$34 million, some intense lobbying was provoked by the WEL. The months following this "childcare funds were 'deflated and re-flated like the proverbial balloon.'" ¹⁰⁴

The femocrats' dubious position, striking a balance between the activism of the women's movement and the bureaucracy of the state, necessitates a mainstream strategy which is largely employed by social movements. Such a strategy involves 'the need for activists to present arguments, policies and material in a symbolic form which is acceptable, comprehensible and not frightening to mainstream Australian audiences'.¹⁰⁵ In this capacity, the femocracy acts as a social movement since they are in a position wherein they may act as a strong social force 'which also articulate[s] their own alternative visions and socio-cultural agendas'.¹⁰⁶ It is this process of making their feminist argument 'acceptable, comprehensible and not frightening to mainstream Australian

¹⁰³ Deborah Brennan & Carol O'Donell, *Caring for Australia's Children: Political and Industrial Issues in Childcare*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p.23.

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Brennan & Carol O'Donell, *Caring for Australia's Children*, p.33; also see: the Age, September 7, 1974 quoted in Peter Spearritt, 'Playing Politics with the Under-Fives', in I.K.F. Birch & D. Smart (eds), *The Commonwealth Government and Education 1964-76: Political Initiatives and Developments*, Richmond Victoria, Primary Education Publishing, 1977, p.207.

¹⁰⁵ Boris Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture*, Arena Publishing, Melbourne, 1992, p.205.

¹⁰⁶ Boris Frankel, *From the Deserts Prophets Come*, p.205.

audiences' which brings the femocracy under attack from the larger women's movements for compromising their feminist principles. However, since the state is the most powerful and legitimate agent of the redistribution of power in society,¹⁰⁷ it is reasonable for femocrats to take such a strategic approach toward to the cultural production of social change. The process of material reproduction in the Habermasian system, such as the bureaucratic forces of government, need to also take into account traditional lifeworld symbolic reproduction, such as child care for example. Child care problematises such categorical separation as it is an example that directly affects both the material and the symbolic reproduction in modern societies.

The influx of femocrats into the political bureaucratic sphere has changed the method by which bureaucratic power brokers approach material production; indeed it has attacked the very traditional processes of material reproduction. By arguing that the colonisation process is a two way transaction, it appears that the once separate subsystems of system and lifeworld are merging beyond Habermas' original separate categorisations. Such merging occurs as traditional norms and values which once firmly separated the two subsystems are used instead of, or in conjunction with each other.

In terms of Habermasian theory, what the case study on child care has illustrated is that if it is indeed possible to achieve a colonisation of any

¹⁰⁷ Anna Yeatman, 'Women and the State', in *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, ed. Kate Pritchard Hughes, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, p.178.

sphere it is, at the very least, a somewhat slow and precarious process. My argument goes further than this however. It is not one sphere, system or lifeworld, public or private, that is colonising the other, but rather, separated spheres are becoming less and less definable as both lifeworld and system norms and values pervade *all* aspects of society; system *and* lifeworld. The colonisation thesis becomes less applicable as social spheres or systemic subsystems become increasingly difficult to locate and categorise within definite parameters.

While colonisation may be a two-way process wherein the system and the lifeworld draw on and are influenced by the other, the exchange is by no means equal. This process does however, serve to blur the boundaries and divisions between the two Habermasian categories of system and lifeworld. A growth of discourse surrounding domestic (lifeworld) issues both in recent political policy and in popular culture shows that lifeworld norms and values are influencing the system in increasingly meaningful ways in areas of social and cultural reproduction, and are ratified in femocrat instigated legislation.

conclusion

While Habermas sees the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system as a process which attacks the very foundations of symbolic reproduction, the femocrat phenomenon shows that lifeworld colonisation of the system (however limited) can also be an attack on patriarchal traditions which seek to maintain an ideological separation between public and the private

spheres. This causes a crisis in the way material reproduction is approached, with an increasing emphasis in public debate and state legislation on the symbolic reproductive methods of the lifeworld.

The increase of femocrats in the Australian public bureaucracies does not signal the colonisation of the (masculine) system by the (feminine) lifeworld, rather, it signals a deep crisis for notions of separate and distinct divisions between the categories of public and private which, as many critics have argued, perpetuate gendered divisions of labour. In this sense, the femocracy has challenged the modernist foundations of Habermas' system and lifeworld demarcation and has broadened notions of what the public sphere can and should encompass. The femocrat phenomenon also shows that Habermas' socio-critical framework does not cater for the emergence of social movement agendas which work within the system. Nor does it take into account those movements which have a tendency to blur boundaries and categories, and bring traditional private realm concerns into the public sphere, resulting in social change.

This section has used a case study on child care policy in recent Australian political history to show how the boundaries between public and private have been manipulated by femocrats as an extension of a larger women's movement agenda. In doing so, the femocrat case study also shows how the so called 'new' social movements, are not just resistance movements as Habermas has suggested.

The following section will examine the prospects for a more open and inclusive public sphere using new information and communications

technologies. By exploring ways in which the Internet, and more specifically, virtual communities operate, I hope to show how more formal demarcations between public and private spheres are transgressed to create new and more open public spheres than that which Habermas considered in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

The broadening of the public sphere and the increasing diversity of interest groups inevitably produces an environment where social movements set about achieving their broader aims by compliance with or use of, existing bureaucratic structures and mechanisms as the femocrats have done. The difficulty however, is that as the public sphere expands, the possibilities for inclusive discursive interaction between all collective action groups and legislators becomes increasingly difficult. Furthermore, Habermas' notion of a rational consensus brought about by processes of rational deliberation and debate in such public spheres, becomes a remote utopian vision.

The following section will look at the potential of enlarged public spheres to produce the ideal Habermasian public sphere. This will involve a detailed consideration of the ability of new information technologies to facilitate expanded and multiple public spheres. Chapter Five critically engages with the capacity of internet technology to broaden the possibilities of a fully operational Habermasian public sphere. In this sense, advances in information technologies have rescued dwindling notions of an inclusive sphere for both individual and collective processes for rational deliberation of public concerns. Chapter Six grapples further

with communicative theory. It questions the possibility of attaining Habermas' theory of an ideal speech situation through computer-mediated communication technologies, and considers whether the internet's public spheres provide the ideal conditions for putting into practice Habermasian notions of free and open rational argumentation.

PART III

new information technologies & the public sphere

chapter five

rescuing the public sphere

virtual communities and the expansion of public spheres

The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost - intellectual leverage, social leverage, commercial leverage, and most important, political leverage.¹

The emergence of an increasing body of literature that hails virtual communities as new public spheres signals a new era in the perception of the role of technology in contemporary society.² Indeed specific comparisons have been drawn between the Internet's virtual communities and Jürgen Habermas' representation of the 18th and 19th century salons and coffeehouses, as public spheres.³ Both engage with variations of the discourse surrounding the limitations of normative models of democracy. This comparison is of particular interest here because it draws attention to the impact of information technologies on social theory, and the evolving

¹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Harper Collins, New York, 1996, p.4.

² Howard Rheingold's, *The Virtual Community* is a central work in this area. Some other key works which will be considered in this chapter include Mark Poster's 'The Net as a Public Sphere', [<http://www.wired.com/wired/3.11/departments/poster.if.html>] 1996; and Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', [<http://www.fau.edu/divdept/commcatn/pubspace.html>] 1995.

³ Notably by Mark Poster: 'CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere', [<http://www.hnet.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html>] 1995.

relationship between the two. First developed in the early 1960s, Habermas' conception of the public sphere has enjoyed a recent renaissance of interest with the republication and translation into English of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.⁴ This republication has also coincided with the development of new information and communication technologies, which many commentators have seized upon, highlighting new possibilities for the realisation of the Habermasian model of the public sphere. While Habermas no longer engages directly with this early concept of the public sphere, his conception of an ideal public sphere remains critical for the study of his later work.⁵ Indeed, much of Habermas' theory of modernity and subsequent ideas about the function of democratic societies rests on his earlier notions of the public sphere.⁶

Many commentators argue that the Internet's virtual communities do not have the capacity to constitute a public sphere in a clear liberal tradition; that they do not bear any similarities to the Habermasian ideal of the bourgeois public sphere. However, a case has been made in its various forms, which argues in favour of the democratic potential of virtual communities as new technologically inspired public spheres. While I

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*; trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1989.

⁵ Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World: Conceptions of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge MA, 1999; especially see Chapter Three on Habermas' theory of discourse and democracy and how it sits with his theory of modernity.

⁶ For example, see: Jürgen Habermas, 'Three normative models of democracy', in *Constellations*, vol.1, no.1, April, pp.1-10, 1994; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1997; and Jürgen Habermas, 'On Reconstructive Legal and Political Theory', in *Habermas, Modernity and Law*, (Philosophy and Social Criticism Series), ed. Matthieu Deflem, Sage Publications, London, 1996.

consider the advantages and limitations of both positions, I argue that the value of virtual communities lies in the ability to blur the formal boundaries (established by Habermas' stringent use of systems theory) between the Habermasian categories of system and lifeworld. Thus, the intent here is to explore the more inclusive potential of cyberspace and its democratic possibilities as a new public arena. Despite its limitations, the Internet's virtual communities have the potential to provide a sphere which, unlike the bourgeois public sphere of the 18th and 19th centuries, is reasonably accessible to all those who wish to participate, irrespective of their social or economic position.

If the Internet's virtual communities provide for new public spheres with an added inclusive potential, it should be noted that such public spheres are enlarged in such a way that they encompass many lifeworld (or traditional private sphere) concerns. In this way, information and communication technologies play a significant role in the continuing relocation of the parameters between the Habermasian categories of system and lifeworld. Habermas' systems theory approach, on the other hand, works to redefine and maintain the categorical separation. Thus, Habermas' early theoretical concerns about the extension of 'the technical conditions of life' in processes of will formation and communicative action are problematic when viewed in terms of information and communication technologies and the creation of virtual communities. This is largely because Habermas' rigid definition of each subsystem limits the ability of his critical theory to adapt to both social and technical change.

Many of the limitations of the bourgeois public sphere stem largely from its exclusive nature. What cyberspace's virtual communities add to more traditional notions of the public sphere it represents greater accessibility to a larger number and variety of participants. Still, there are many that are unable to afford the set up and running costs of logging on. In Australia as elsewhere, various government initiatives have worked towards making the Internet accessible to all, thus increasing the potential for virtual communities to be more open and democratic public forums than those in Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Thus, it will be necessary to explore recent government initiatives that aim at making the Internet more accessible, and which directly influence the nature of the public sphere they intend to provide for.

By implementing initiatives which provide Internet access to a broader range of people, governments can encourage and nurture public debate and the development of more operational public spheres, which have traditionally been the primary source of both government legitimation and public discontent with government action. It is therefore important to explore government initiatives which are aimed at universalising Internet provision in Australia because of the way such actions affect both the real and the imagined conceptual boundaries between public and private spheres. Such government initiatives also work to expand practical arenas of public sphere.

technology, ideology, and subsystem differentiation

The existence of a clear distinction between public and private spheres is evident in Habermas' earlier writings on social theory. Indeed, it is Habermas' early concerns about the extension of power by technical specialists⁷ that reinforces the notion that technological advances inevitably promote the separation of subsystems. Habermas argues that the specialisation of expert cultures, to which he refers in the theory of communicative action, carries with it two opposing risks; the inhibition of the flow of cultural knowledge which 'leads to the drying out of economic practices ... and the domineering influence by experts over decisions that should be taken democratically'.⁸ These are the dangers of the 'expertocracy'. That is, as the technical conditions of life become increasingly important in decision-making processes and will-formation, they begin to replace the need for any rational communicative aspects of the consensus formation process. This establishes a clear demarcation between system and lifeworld where the technical conditions of life, which according to Habermas originate in the system, colonise the decision-making and will formation communicative practices of the lifeworld. The result is an extension of the colonisation thesis in practice.

Some research suggests that there exists a firm connection between technology and the oppression of various classes and gender based groups. Further, some theorists warn of the effects of 'the privatised consumption

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971, p.61.

⁸ Mikael Carleheden & Rene Gabriels, 'An interview with Jürgen Habermas', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol.13, no.3, August 1996, p.5.

of cultural products pushed by current forms of commerce which dissuades the critique of contemporary formation of the state and capital'.⁹ In such a view, 'the scope of politics [is] reduced to questions of stable and extended economic growth, to matters of technical decision making'.¹⁰ It is from such a tradition that Habermas emerges to question the compatibility of technology and democracy, and to view technology with suspicion.

Cynthia Cockburn has argued that 'Technology is far from neutral. This should not be a difficult concept for Marxists, who are, after all, used to understanding that our technology is capitalist technology and bears the marks and serves the purposes of the class that owns it'.¹¹ Cockburn, however is not speaking of class conflict alone and highlights the impact of technology on the labour force with specific reference to gender. Cockburn asserts that traditionally, technological advances have maintained (and more often than not, widened) the chasm between the work that men do and that which women do; between work which takes place in public and that which takes place in the private realm. That is to say, 'that the social relations of technology are gendered relations, that technology enters into gender identity, and (more difficult for many to accept) that technology itself cannot be fully understood without reference to gender.'¹² The

⁹ Tim Plaisted, 'Internet, Democracy and the Public Sphere in Australia', trans. Justina Lago, [<http://www.geocities.com/SOHO/1989mc.html>] November 1996, p.1.

¹⁰ James Annis, 'Why Governments Cannot Command Deep Loyalty', [<http://sdss.fnal.gov:8000/~annis/digrati/draining.html>] 1996.

¹¹ Cynthia Cockburn, 'Caught in the Wheels: the High Cost of Being a Female Cog in the Male Machinery of Engineering', in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, eds D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman, Open University Press, Milton Keynes UK, 1985, p.56.

¹² Cynthia Cockburn, 'The Circuit of Technology: Gender, Identity and Power', in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, eds R. Silverstone & E. Hirsch, Routledge, London & New York, 1994, p.32.

problem then for Habermas is not that this creates gender-specific boundaries and categories, but that will formation and communicative interaction will be influenced by factors other than reason; in this case, by technology. As Cockburn argues at some length, technology and power are inextricably intertwined and men have consistently guarded their near exclusive access to that technology (and hence, power). For example, Cockburn states that:

A difference between the sexes in relation to 'technology' was a lived reality throughout the industrializing years of the nineteenth century in Britain Men were the technologists and technicians or in the industrial revolution, women were the factory hands that operated the new machines In the twentieth century the struggle of women to join the engineering union was not won until 1942, despite two world wars in which women were used to fill the engineering jobs of men drafted to the military.¹³

Thus, Cockburn sees technology as a social construction, which therefore, is inextricably linked to the relationship between power and gender. Uses of technology are shaped not only by specific ideology, but also reflect accepted notions of public sphere institutions and who can legitimately occupy the sphere within them. In this sense, virtual communities are distinct from other forms of public spheres because they are potentially more inclusive of difference. Yet, many commentators present a strong case when they argue that virtual communities are often framed by exclusivity and often harbour sexist and racist and elitist

¹³ Cynthia Cockburn, 'The Circuit of Technology: Gender, Identity and Power', pp.34-35.

ideologies.¹⁴ In this way, information and communication technologies are far from neutral.

Using the 'social shaping approach' advocated by MacKenzie and Wajcman in the mid-1980s, Cockburn regards technology as a social construction; that is, a construction which is dependent upon economic interest and which may 'differ in different social contexts'.¹⁵ Following such an approach, technology may be seen not only as an artifact or as a piece of hardware, 'but also as a kind of work and as a kind of knowledge'.¹⁶ 'The way a society is organized, and its overall circumstances, affect its typical pattern of costs, and thus the nature of technological change within it.'¹⁷

Technology too, as we have seen it, is increasingly understood as relational. As deployed in production, in everyday life, in the household, technological artifacts *entail* relations. They embody some (those that went into their making). They prefigure others (those implied in their use, abuse or neglect). But they also enter into and may change relations they encounter.¹⁸

That technologies instrumentally order human action and interaction, and are responsible for the bypassing of communicatively achieved agreement, is for Habermas, a major foundation of inequality and

¹⁴ For example, see: Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Pheonix, London, 1997; Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, Duke University Press, Durham, Nth Carolina USA, 1996; and, Mark Dery, *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Duke University Press, Durham, Nth Carolina USA, 1994.

¹⁵ David MacKenzie & Judy Wajcman eds, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes UK, 1985 p.17.

¹⁶ David MacKenzie & Judy Wajcman eds, *The Social Shaping of Technology*. Also see, Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1991.

¹⁷ David MacKenzie & Judy Wajcman eds, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, p.17.

¹⁸ Cynthia Cockburn, 'The Circuit of Technology: Gender, Identity and Power', p.40.

is also a factor in the entrenchment of the separation of subsystems within society. Indeed, 'technologies mediate human actions and perceptions' and are social processes of cultural performance.¹⁹ Thus, technologies are not neutral, but are instruments of ordering and reproducing cultural hierarchies. From a different perspective, Langdon Winner expresses a similar idea. He argues that:

The things we call 'technologies' are ways of building order in our world. Many technical devices and systems important in everyday life contain possibilities for many different ways of ordering human activity. Consciously or not, deliberately or inadvertently, societies choose structures for technologies that influence how people are going to work, communicate, travel, consume, and so forth over a very long time. In the processes by which structuring decisions are made, different people are differently situated and possess unequal degrees of power as well as unequal levels of awareness.²⁰

This outlines the importance of technology to the ordering of social structures. Additionally, the fundamental division between the categorical functions of industrial and domestic technologies are also reproduced in modern industrial societies. Both types of technologies correspond neatly to the separation of public and private spheres and indeed, both perpetuate the notion that these categories, or 'ways of building order in our world', cannot be altered or transgressed.²¹ Silverstone *et al* maintain that information and communication technologies are doubly articulated into

¹⁹ Zoë Sofia, 'Of Spanners and Cyborgs: 'Dehomogenising' Feminist Thinking on Technology', in *Transitions: New Australian Feminism*, eds Barbara Caine & Rosemary Pringle, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1995, p.147.

²⁰ Langdon Winner, 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?' in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, eds D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1985, p.30.

²¹ See: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, 'The Industrial Revolution in the Home', in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, eds D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1985.

both public and private cultures.²² Domestic technologies have long affected the ways in which relationships are constructed within families, and between families and the social world.²³ The television and the telephone are early examples of such technologies. However, communication and information technology (IT) is particularly interesting because of its contribution to the ordering of *both* public and private worlds. In many ways new communication and information technologies have opened up public spheres and dismantled many of the gender, class and race restrictions traditionally attached to them. 'The requirements for a status free environment are ... well served by the Internet. In direct communication, gender, race and class are irrelevant in a text based environment.'²⁴ Similarly, Tracie Strelzter argues that newer information technologies that make computer mediated communication (CMC) possible have 'the ability to dissolve the barriers of race, age, religion, gender, status and nationality by virtue of serving a mutual interest and creating a sense of community'.²⁵ Thus, the Internet is an example of how technical control has shifted to become more decentred.²⁶ However, this is

²² Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch & David Morley, 'Information and Communication Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, eds R. Silverstone & E. Hirsch, Routledge, London & New York, 1994, p.15.

²³ Sonia Livingstone, 'The Meaning of Domestic Technologies: A Personal Construct Analysis of Familial Gender Relations', in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, eds R. Silverstone & E. Hirsch, Routledge, London & New York, 1994, p.113.

²⁴ Tim Plaisted, 'Internet, Democracy and the Public Sphere in Australia', p.1.

²⁵ Tracie L. Strelzter, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', Presented at the 65th Annual Southern States Communication Association Convention, [<http://www.fau.edu/divdept/commcatn/pubspace.html>] 1995, p.8.

²⁶ TyAnna Herrington Lambert, 'Jürgen Habermas: Luddite Dragon or Defender of the Weak? Effects of Intertextuality on Meaning in Jürgen Habermas' *Toward a Rational Society*', [<http://www.daedalus.com/didak/cccc95/tyanna.html>] 1995.

not to ignore other factors which contribute to the production of new technologies and determine the way they are applied:

Theories regarding communication technology are in actuality theories of social change: political, economic and social. Thus communication technology does not develop in a vacuum; political, economic and social factors all shape the development of these technologies and create the demand for more technology.²⁷

Many remain justifiably skeptical about the potential of communication and information technologies to alter social order in such significant ways. For example, Cockburn maintains that advances in the area of information technology have failed to noticeably alter many of those political, economic or social structures that inform gendered divisions of labour and cultural behaviours and performance. She argues that the 'advent of microchip technology does not, as some believed it might, break the technical sexual division of labour and give women the knowledge and know-how to design, produce and control, as well as supply parts or press buttons on, electronic equipment'.²⁸

The above discussion on the relationship between technology and labour highlights two main points. First, that while technology has often maintained class divisions, it has also been responsible for reproducing gendered divisions of labour. Second, that information technology does

²⁷ Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.7.

²⁸ Cynthia Cockburn, 'The Circuit of Technology: Gender, Identity and Power', p.35.

indeed have egalitarian and democratic potential.²⁹ It is this potential which depends not only on the political, economic and cultural factors that contributed to its production, but also influences ways in which it is put to use in various processes of cultural reproduction and consumption.

Information and communication technologies provide hope where industrial and domestic technology has often failed. Indeed, in its various manifestations, the Internet offers a way to bridge the clear theoretical divide between the Habermasian subsystems of system and lifeworld and subsequently, between conceptual notions of public and private. In this case, technology becomes the vehicle for communicative action, and the distinction, which maintains any categorical divide between the systemic and the social, becomes more flexible. It thus becomes clear that the complexity of modern industrial societies can no longer be measured only in terms of boundaries and function. The multiplicity and expansion of publics, their roles, goals and functions, is evidence of this. In some respects, the changing shape and function of the public sphere begins to account for one of Habermas' early theoretical dilemmas. He asks '... how can society possibly exercise sovereignty over the technical conditions of life and integrate them into the practice of the life-world? how can the force of technical control ... be made subject to the consensus of acting and

²⁹ I do not mean to suggest that information and communications technologies are necessarily responsible for social change since such an argument would involve accepting the tenets of technological determinism. This chapter is not intended to address the debate between the 'technological determinists' and those who advocate 'social shaping' arguments. The point I want to make is that information and communications technology have the ability to increase the democratic potential of the public sphere simply because they blur the boundaries between the communicatively oriented and the goal-oriented.

transacting citizens?³⁰ The advances of communication and information technologies work to expand upon Habermas' earlier notions of the public sphere not only by creating greater access to public debate and the power that comes with that, but also by bridging the hitherto separate categories of system and lifeworld, public and private.

virtual communities as alternative public spheres

Of continuing significance throughout much of Habermas' work is the theme of the public sphere. It is the public sphere that provides the forum for rational debate, and the site where the potentialities of his theory of communicative action can be sought through processes of public opinion formation. For Habermas, the role of the public sphere is to act as the realm of social life in which ordinary citizens can gather to form a public dialogue in which something approaching 'rational' public opinion can be formed. In such a realm, access is guaranteed to all citizens. Indeed, for Habermas, the spirit of the ideal public sphere is invoked in every conversation wherein private individuals are assembled to form a public body.³¹

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas stated that 'the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension field of state-society relations ... through the vehicle of public opinion it put

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, pp.59-60.

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, 'The public sphere: an encyclopaedia article', in *New German Critique*, vol.3, fall 1964/74, p.1.

the state in touch with the needs of society.³² In this view, the role of the public sphere is to serve as a mediator between the formal state and society; to act as a vehicle for free and open critical debate on any aspect of human affairs, or what Habermas refers to as 'matters of general interest'.³³ The Habermasian public sphere then, is a forum in which 'ordinary citizens' can meet and debate with the aim of forming a normative consensus based on the shared experience and mutual understanding drawn from a common lifeworld. Such a forum would necessarily be open to all who wished to participate.³⁴

While many of the difficulties associated with accessibility to the Habermasian ideal public sphere have already been explored in Chapter Two, many commentators argue that new information technologies bring to the public sphere debate an increased capacity to attain the highly

³² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*; trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1962/89, pp.29-30.

³³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.49.

³⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the limitations of Habermas' 'open' and 'inclusive' public sphere as presented in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1964/89), see Chapter Two.

³⁵ For example, see: Charles Ess ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996; Charles Ess, 'The Political Computer Democracy, CMC and Habermas', in *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*, Charles Ess ed., SUNY Press, Albany, 1996; Emma Rooksby, 'Computer-Mediated Democracy?', conference paper presented at *Women on the Verge of New Technology Conference*, 20-30 November & 1-14 December 1997, Fremantle, WA [<http://www.imago.com.au/wov/papers.htm>]; Denis Gaynor, 'Democracy in the Age of Information: A Reconceptation of the Public Sphere', [<http://www.georgetown.edu/bassr/gaynor/intro.htm>], spring 1996; S. Sneider, 'Creating a democratic public sphere through political discussion', in *Social Science Computer Review*, vol.14, no.4, 1996, pp.373-393; I. Ward, 'How democratic can we get?: The Internet, the public sphere, and public discourse', in *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol.17, no.3, 1997, pp.365-379; Scott London, 'Teledemocracy vs deliberative democracy: a comparative look at two models of public talk', in *Journal of Interpersonal Computing and Technology*, vol.3, no.2, April 1995, pp.33-55; Adam T. Perzynski, 'Habermas and the Internet', [<http://socwww.cwru.edu/~atp5/habermas.html>] 1999.

idealistic Habermasian model of the public sphere.³⁵ Such arguments assert that the Internet provides for new public spheres in the form of virtual communities, which bring with it increased democratic opportunities and political advantage than that which Habermas idealises in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.³⁶

For example, Howard Rheingold, one of the most prolific writers on the 'virtual community' phenomenon, defines virtual communities as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'.³⁷ Rheingold is very much concerned with the actual mechanics of virtual communities; with the process of forming social bonds with other people solely through CMC technology, and ways in which this generates community.

Other critics have concerns that are more theoretical. For example, Tracie Streltzer is concerned with the changing definitions and decline of the public sphere, with the role of CMC, and how it differs from other forms of electronic media in terms of a decentralising, democratising influence on electronic public spheres.³⁸ Streltzer examines the role of virtual communities by first deciphering the terminology which clearly sets 'virtual' in a binary opposition to 'actual'. This use of language, in some ways, suggests that far from constituting an additional, alternative

³⁶ For example, see: Tim Plaisted, 'Internet, Democracy and the Public Sphere in Australia', in which he argues that the Internet is able to build on a number of the shortcomings of Habermas' public sphere.

³⁷ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.5.

³⁸ Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.2.

public sphere, virtual communities are nothing more than 'artificial' communities. Steltzer thus clarifies the terminology and the corresponding meaning:

The definition of 'virtual' differs from 'artificial' in the following way: an artificial object or environment is an imitation of reality and is a symbol for an object that exists in reality. When an object or environment is described as virtual, although there is a symbolic element to its representation, the symbol takes the place of the object(s) in reality.³⁹

Thus, virtual communities should not be considered as mere symbols or representations of a 'real' public sphere or 'flesh' space, since they have all the characteristics of it and take its place in another form. 'Whereas an artificial community would be composed of descriptions or objects representing people and places, a virtual community is composed of real people engaging in real interaction in real electronic social places.'⁴⁰ Rheingold illustrates this point with his account of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, or what is referred to as the 'WELL', with which he has been deeply involved. The WELL 'is a computer conferencing system that enables people around the world to carry on public conversations and exchange via private electronic mail (e-mail)'.⁴¹ This involves Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where people may hold discussions and carry on conversations in 'real time'. While these public discussions are written, not spoken, the responses are as immediate as the typing abilities of the discussants.

³⁹ Tracie L. Steltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.5.

⁴⁰ Tracie L. Steltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.5.

⁴¹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.1.

In many respects, Rheingold's virtual community on the WELL resembles Habermas' traditional model of a public sphere. It is an open forum for public debate of a variety of topics. The immense range of public conference topics available on the WELL illustrates how diverse and popular a communicative medium this facility has already become. A small selection of public conference topics available include: Arts and Letters; Entertainment, Education and Planning; Body - Mind - Health; Computers and Communications; Business and Livelihood; Cultures; Place; Conferences and Interactions; Parenting; Media and Communications; and Social Responsibility and Politics.⁴² Rheingold is at pains to point out that 'each conference can have as many as several hundred topics going on inside it, and each topic can have several hundred responses'.⁴³ Rheingold is thus convinced that public spheres such as this have enormous democratic potential.⁴⁴

Likewise, Streltzer examines the development of communication technologies in their capacity as initiators of social change.⁴⁵ She is also optimistic about the democratising potential of the information and

⁴² Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, pp.44-47.

⁴³ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.44.

⁴⁴ There are too numerous accounts of various online communities and efforts at electronic democracy to include in this discussion. However, for further reading on specific examples, see: G. Scott Aikens, 'A History of Minnesota Electronic Democracy', in *Firstmonday*, [<http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5/aikens/>] 1996; Cyberdewd, 'IRC on AustNet - an example of a Virtual Community', [<http://members.nol.com/Cybersoc/is2cyberdude.html>] 1988; John Monberg, *New Community Networks: Wired for Change*, Addison-Wesley, New York, 1996; Leonie Daws, 'Creating Communities through Electronic Communication: Rural Women Online', [<http://teloz.media.latrobe.edu.au/circuit/daws.HTML>] 1998; Australian Rural Telecentres Association, 'Submission of Australian Rural Telecentre Association Updates', [<http://www.arta.org.au/>] 1999.

⁴⁵ Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.2.

communication technologies as manifest in developments such as virtual communities. One of the major limitations of Habermas' traditional model of the public sphere is the problem of size. Once the number of participants reaches a certain level, it becomes extremely difficult to facilitate rational debate in which all participants have an equal opportunity to participate. Virtual communities on the other hand, without the limitations of physicality, have the capacity to deal with an enlarged public forum.

While aspects of what Rheingold is describing in his account of the WELL's 'virtual community' do indeed resemble a Habermasian public sphere, much of what he describes has a great deal in common with Habermas' blueprint of the social lifeworld. It is in that sense that virtual communities blur boundaries between public and private, thus expanding the reach of what may be understood as 'public'. Not only does the Internet provide a closer estimation of the ideal public sphere that Habermas espoused in *Structural Transformation*, but it also provides an improved version which also encompasses traditionally lifeworld concerns. Virtual communities serve as another medium in which norms and values emerge that provide shared meaning for shared experience. In some respects, the virtual community to which Howard Rheingold refers has, in fact, more in common with the lifeworld than with the Habermasian model of the public sphere.

The public sphere emerges on the Internet only when critical debate actually takes place. This excludes great sections of the Internet, which are devoted primarily to establishing personal links and relationships between sets of people who share similar interests. However, it is that which constitutes the formation of community. Nancy Baym explores 'ways in which participants form group-specific forms of expression, identities, relationships, and normative convention'.⁴⁶ She argues that distinct cultures and cultural behaviours that emerge through CMC are grounded in communicative practices. 'Community is generated through the interplay between pre-existing structures and the participants' strategic appropriation and exploitation of their resources and rules those structures offer in ongoing interaction.'⁴⁷

What Rheingold describes at some length in *The Virtual Community* are the cyberrelationships of a tightly knit social group who spend the vast proportion of their time online discussing personal problems. Participants draw on the common experience of a shared lifeworld to discuss personal problems or concerns in an open manner. This is a public forum, but differs from a *bona fide* public sphere in that it concerns individual as well as community concerns or issues. The ramifications of any problem discussed will reach only individuals or families, not whole communities. It is purely those members of the community who agree to specific rules

⁴⁶ Nancy Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', in *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, ed. Steven G. Jones, Sage Publications, London, 1995, p.139.

⁴⁷ Nancy Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.139.

governing their interaction that define these socially interactive places.⁴⁸

The emergence of this type of public sphere alters the way we define notions of the public sphere:

The legal definition of a public forum has become obsolete. The blending of computers and telecommunications (the most ubiquitous of communications networks) has created the virtual public forum, whereby physical location is no longer a prime consideration of public space.⁴⁹

That new information and communication technologies are able to create a public forum where 'physical location is no longer a prime consideration', highlights a very important limitation of Habermas' use of social theory. While Habermas insists that society is both socially and systematically integrated, it is the project of systems theory to maintain the boundaries between societies' subsystems. The categorical separation of subsystems, however, on which systems theory is grounded, has insufficient flexibility to allow for the merging of categorically differentiated subsystems. Within the set Habermasian framework, it is difficult to conceive of a merging between the scientific world and the normative world of literature; thus, the spheres of public and private remain separated.

democratic potential of virtual communities

For Rheingold, the most important aspect of cyberspace is its link to personal liberties and 'the ways virtual communities are likely to change

⁴⁸ Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.5.

⁴⁹ Tracie L. Streltzer, 'The Virtualization of Electronic Public Space', p.7.

our experience of the real world, as individuals and communities'.⁵⁰ In other words, such a utopian vision of the democratising potential of computer mediated communication technologies may be interpreted as the hope that classical democracy will emerge stronger than the representative or elitist systems currently prevalent in most modern democracies. Such an idealistic vision of a representative democracy can also be interpreted as a reaction against the emergence of a handful of media moguls who control very large segments of the communications industry. As Rheingold argues, 'The political significance of CMC lies in its capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps revitalize citizen-based democracy'.⁵¹

Arguably however, the most important task of virtual communities and other such networks available on the Internet is that they serve to disseminate large quantities of information to vast numbers of individuals. It is in that sense that new communication technologies are said to be able to protect democracy from erosion and/or corruption.⁵² This free access to information is, for Habermas, a paramount function of the liberal model of the public sphere.⁵³ The enormous potential of the Internet as a medium for the dissemination of information is critical. It fulfils the function not

⁵⁰ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.4.

⁵¹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.14.

⁵² See: F. Christopher Arterton, 'Teledemocracy Reconsidered' in *Computers in the Human Context: Information Technology, Productivity and People*, ed. Tom Forester, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1989; Alinta Thornton, 'Will Internet Revitalise Democracy in the Public Sphere?', unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 1996; and, Julianne Schultz, 'Universal Suffrage? Technology and Democracy', in *Framing Technology: Society, Choice and Change*, eds Celia Green & Roger Guinery, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1994.

⁵³ Jürgen Habermas, 'The public sphere: an encyclopaedia article', p.54.

only of news reporting, but also of forming and reforming public opinion, cultural production and consumption. In this sense, similarities may be drawn between the Internet, with its various virtual communities, and the early trading journals and newspapers in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe with which Habermas has been largely concerned.⁵⁴ What sets the Internet apart, however, is that it has a much larger readership. This makes it far easier for potential contributors to join or instigate a debate, side-stepping choosy or agenda driven editors who, in the print and telecommunications media, often play a role in setting the parameters of public debate. Indeed, the great majority of published material on the Internet is stored through a non-hierarchical system of search engines where no judgement about the author's status is possible.⁵⁵ In other words, 'since the Internet de-emphasizes the body as a characteristic for social evaluation, users are able to interact on an equal level'.⁵⁶ In the most optimistic of views, information and communication technologies 'vanquish barriers of space and time, obliterate cultural boundaries, and generate new forms of social life.'⁵⁷ This should only serve to work in the favour of the Internet as a medium for a more inclusive public debate.

However, it must be emphasised that the Habermasian version of the public sphere remains an ideal. Communication and information technologies only provide an added *potential* to attain that ideal. Like the

⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'The public sphere: an encyclopaedia article', p.53.

⁵⁵ Tim Plaisted, 'Internet, Democracy and the Public Sphere in Australia', p.1.

⁵⁶ Tim Plaisted, 'Internet, Democracy and the Public Sphere in Australia', p.1.

⁵⁷ John Monberg, 'Information Technology Systems as Publics', in *CMC Magazine*, [http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1996/apr/monberg.html] February 1996.

development of domestic and industrial technologies, information and communications technologies remain malleable, and may be used for any number of purposes, including action oriented communication as well as consensus oriented discourse. As such, 'Virtual communities could help citizens revitalize democracy, or they could be luring us into an attractively packaged substitute for democratic discourse'.⁵⁸

In an age which is increasingly dominated by communication and information technologies, many critics object to the notion that virtual communities form new public spheres, or even that they form an extension of the conventional public spheres. Some argue that online communities are unable to replace traditional forms of face-to-face communities.⁵⁹ For example, Mark Poster argues the Internet does not fill the requirements of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense because rationality does not prevail, 'and achieving consensus is widely seen as impossible'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Poster argues that those who moot virtual communities as providing new public spheres are misguided and 'overlook the profound differences between Internet 'cafes' and the agoras of the past'.⁶¹ This view however, tends to idealise Habermas' historical representation of the

⁵⁸ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.267. Also see: David MacKenzie & Judy Wajcman eds, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, (2nd ed.), Open University Press, Milton Keynes UK, 1999. In particular, see part 2: The technology of Production: section on writers, texts and writing acts.

⁵⁹ 'A New Sense of Place: Communication and Community in Virtual Worlds', [<http://www.people.enternet.com.au/~woofer/newcom.htm>] September 1999. Also see: Shawn W. Yerxa & Marita Moll, 'Commodification, communication and culture: democracy's dead end on the Infobahn', in *Government Information in Canada*, vol.1, no.32, 1995.

⁶⁰ Mark Poster, 'The Net as a Public Sphere' [<http://www.wired.com/wired/3.11/departments/poster.if.html>] 1996, p.1.

⁶¹ Mark Poster, 'The Net as a Public Sphere', p.1.

bourgeois public sphere. Poster echoes Habermas' original position without an acknowledgement of the inherent exclusivity of the bourgeois public to which Habermas refers. For example, Poster argues that:

In Western civilisation, the public sphere was a place people could talk as equals. Status differences did not exclude frank discussion. Rational argument prevailed, and the goal was consensus. It was a place where anyone could argue with anyone else, and the collected assembly acted a judge of the wisest direction for society to take.⁶²

Poster is signaling a number of things in this passage. In the midst of his intense idealisation of the past, he makes the claim of equality between all participants. This claim however, does not bear scrutiny. Occupational differences (for example, farmers or factory workers who work long hours or shift work) restricted potential participants from participation in rational argument at all. Educational differences (often a result of class or economic disparities) also limited the ability of many to participate in ways in which they could adequately represent their views. Finally, gender differences were paramount as women were excluded from Habermas' bourgeois public sphere altogether.

In sum, while CMC does have its limitations, it also has the potential to eliminate a number of the barriers to equal participation such as gender, class and ethnicity which prevailed in the representations of the 18th and 19th century bourgeois public sphere(s). Objections to the capacity of virtual communities and CMC to form 'rational' public discourse most often arises when there is a transgression or fluidity between traditional

⁶² Mark Poster, 'The Net as a Public Sphere', p.1.

categories of public and private. This stems from difficulties with the very concept of 'public' itself, for example Poster maintains:

If 'public' discourse exists as pixels on screens generated at remote locations by individuals one has never and probably will never meet, as it is in the case of the Internet with its 'virtual communities', 'electronic cafes', bulletin boards, e-mail, computer conferencing and even video conferencing, then how is it to be distinguished from 'private' letters, print face and so forth.⁶³

Of course, when private letters are published or released into the public domain, they become 'public'. Just as in Habermasian theory, a public sphere is created whenever private citizens gather to put their reason to public use. Early journals also performed this function. CMC technology enables the participation of many more people who might otherwise be excluded if the public sphere was restricted to a face-to-face communicative situation. The communication facilities available through the Internet are vehicles by which information and communication may be transformed into a public domain. What makes this type of media so popular is its accessibility, its bypassing of publishing houses whose criteria are based largely on market demand, not on the 'force of the better argument'.

This raises the question of physicality. For Poster, 'the media, especially television but also other forms of electronic communication isolate citizens from one another and substitute themselves for the older

⁶³ Mark Poster, 'CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere', [<http://www.hnet.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html>] 1995, p.6.

spaces of politics'.⁶⁴ Conversely, the interaction that takes place within virtual communities promotes communication; the only isolation is physical not communicative. The Internet provides a sphere wherein those who can access the technology, and who possess the level of education necessary to use that technology, may participate in any discussion provided they adhere to 'netiquette' or the rules of the discussion. This at the very least provides a more open and free discursive sphere than that which Poster, like Habermas, nostalgically describes as free, equal, rational and consensus forming.

Other critics argue that new information and communication technologies have significant limitations. Manuel Castells argues that electronic information systems are giving rise to the creation of what he terms 'megacities'.⁶⁵ He argues however, that this will ultimately result in the erosion of social communication, which will subsequently bring about the end of urban civilisation.⁶⁶ A significantly less dramatic view is presented by Steven G. Jones who argues that while CMC appears to allow everyone to 'tap into' a global village or community, there remain some inherent problems. He maintains that 'connection does not inherently make for a community, nor does it lend to any necessary exchange of information, meaning, and sense making at all'.⁶⁷ However, what I am

⁶⁴ Mark Poster, 'CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere', p.4.

⁶⁵ Manuel Castells, 'Megacities and the end of civilisation', in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol.13, no.3, summer 1996, pp.12-15.

⁶⁶ Manuel Castells, 'Megacities and the end of urban civilisation', pp.12-15.

⁶⁷ Steven G. Jones, 'Understanding Community in the Information Age' in *CyberSociety: Computer Mediated Communication and Community*, ed. Steven G. Jones, Sage Publications, London, 1985, p.12.

asserting is significance of the *potential* of CMC technology to create communities that are more accessible than Habermas' bourgeois representation in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. This is not to argue that CMC technology is incorruptible. Indeed, 'The great weakness of the idea of electronic democracy is that it can be more easily commodified than explained'.⁶⁸ Ultimately, it depends on how CMC technology is utilised by the people who come together to form the virtual communities or discussion groups.

The most important aspect of communication technologies remains the ability of CMC to confuse the conventional boundaries of public and private that gives it emancipatory potential. The dismantling of formal barriers effectively removes much of the gender, class and race oppression that has relied on the maintenance of such barriers. Despite the apparent potentials of the computer mediated communication and virtual communities for a more democratic society, this argument remains dependent on the availability of widespread access to a relatively expensive (and therefore exclusive) medium for the exchange of communication.

information technology & public spheres: a public policy comparison

What is most interesting when regarding public policy in an Habermasian sense is that it involves coming to terms with some contradictions. In

⁶⁸ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.289.

principle, public policy is formed in the interest of the public, and is a culmination of research, public submissions and the findings of numerous sub-committees. It would appear that public policy formation processes aim to replicate Habermas' ideal of an open forum where equal citizens may contribute their own point of view and final decisions (consensus) are made for the 'public good'. Yet, while the processes involved in making public policy resemble Habermasian communicative action, Habermas places the political sphere firmly in the *system*, where he argues, decisions and 'steering media' guide actions. McCarthy has expressed this contradiction rather succinctly:

If self-determination, political equality, and the participation of citizens in decision-making processes are the hallmarks of true democracy, then a democratic government could not be a political *system* in Habermas' sense - that is a domain of action differentiated off from other parts of society and preserving its autonomy in relation to them, while regulating its interchanges with them via delinguistified steering media like money and power.⁶⁹

Perhaps Habermas' reasoning for including the political realm as a subsystem of the system, is a reflection of his own cynicism not only in regards to the motives of individual political actors, but also in more general terms toward the democratic political processes in modern democracies. For Habermas, 'democracy no longer has the goal of rationalising authority through the participation of citizens in discursive

⁶⁹ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: or the Seductions of Systems Theory', in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*; eds A. Honneth & H. Joas, trans. J. Gaines & D. Jones, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991, p.132.

processes of will formation'.⁷⁰ Certainly, the popular trend toward economic rationalism is evidence to support Habermas' view of a modern democratic society as one that derives consensus and policy from non-linguistic steering media. McCarthy suggests that Habermas' placement of the political sphere in the system may well be a matter of practicality; a matter of 'recognising the limitations of participatory democracy in a pluralistic society with a highly differentiated modern culture'.⁷¹ Whatever Habermas' motivation, it is not difficult to see how the political process itself is 'steered' by money, power and party or factional ideologies (themselves often the culmination of the quest for control over steering media).

Recent government policies in the area of information and communication technologies have often had the effect of broadening public spheres. On the one hand, this works to give the state an expanded legitimation base now that market forces largely decide economic policy. By actively expanding public spheres to include lifeworld concerns, the state not only alters the theoretical boundaries between public and private, but also expands the extent to which it can govern over and/or influence the private concerns of its citizens. On the other hand, such initiatives also work to ensure business and industry are linked to the Internet to keep them up to date with changes and challenges brought about by processes of globalisation. The ultimate outcome of such a strategy is to protect

⁷⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1975, pp.123-124.

⁷¹ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: or the Seductions of Systems Theory', p.132.

profits. The former is a result of steering media whittling away at the foundations of government legitimation, while the steering media of profit drives the latter. In this sense, the information and communication policies of both the Federal governments I consider below have been steered by such motivations.

These concerns may be examined more fully with a close look at a related policy area; that of access to information technology in Australia.⁷² First I will consider policy produced by the Keating Labor Government and then compare that with more recent policy developments since the 1996 Federal election, when the Howard Coalition (Liberal/National) Government was voted into power. In each example I hope to highlight the role of steering media and how the political process is, as Habermas has suggested, dominated by 'instrumental reason and is, on the whole, goal oriented. More importantly, I hope to emphasise ways in which government policies shape both the function and the perimeters of public spheres which effect notions of the separation between public and private spheres.

⁷² For an interesting examination of information and communication technologies as a democratising force, their role in processes of cultural production and consumption, and the effects of privatisation on online communities as public spheres, see: Dan Hill, 'The Privatisation of Public (Cyber) Space', presented at Shouts from the Street Conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, [http://darion.mmu.ac.uk.h&ss/privat.htm] September 1995.

the Keating labor government and public access to information technology

During the last term of the Keating Government, statements praising the potentials of new information technologies, and their importance for Australia, peppered public policy in that area. Questions of access, competitiveness, and efficiency dominated much of the literature of information and communications technology policy drafts. Government press releases argued that: 'As information increasingly becomes a social and economic necessity, we must ensure that Australians have access to an information "safety net" so that no one is left behind.'⁷³ The Keating Labor Government seemed determined to provide a system wherein the use of information and communications technology would be of benefit not only to the business sector and to its own administration, but also to the voting public.

In its cultural policy statement, *Creative Nation*, the Labor Government undertook to work with States and Territories to link all of Australia's public libraries through a new communications network.⁷⁴ *Creative Nation* claimed that 'Access to information for all Australians is an important element of Commonwealth cultural policy'.⁷⁵ This was an early (and some might argue, relatively small) step in the daunting task of linking a very large and diverse public.

⁷³ Peter Baldwin, 'All Australian[s] to Have Access to Information Technology', [<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/pres/baldwin0495.html>] 1995, p.1.

⁷⁴ Department of Communications and the Arts, *Creative Nation*, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, p.89. Also see: Response to the Report of the Australian Science and Technology Council, *The Networked Nation*, (ASTECC) [http://www.erin.gov.au/astec/net_nation/response.html] 1996.

⁷⁵ Department of Communications and the Arts, *Creative Nation*, p.89.

Another significant publication of the Keating Labor Government was *The Networked Nation*. This provided a blueprint for government strategy toward information networks and while it dealt with benefits for the wider community, much of the focus was placed on the benefits of developing information networks for business and industry.⁷⁶ Steps were already being taken to shift policy direction away from the cultural and toward the economic.

At that time, much of the Labor Government discourse surrounding new information and communications technology emphasised access to government information and services. This is especially true of the *Creative Nation* publication, which was very much concerned with the ability of the Government to offer an information service. Indeed, in the exposure draft 'Framework and Strategies for Information Technology in the Commonwealth of Australia (1996)', the Labor Governments' Office of Government and Information Technology (OGIT) claimed that 'The Commonwealth will be a world leader in government administration and in the cost-effective provision of affordable, equitable and accessible government information and services'.⁷⁷ While recognising the trend toward the scaling back of government subsidies, there remained evidence

⁷⁶ The Australian Science and Technology Council, *The Networked Nation*, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, [http://astec.gov.au/astec/net_nation/contents.html] January 1996.

⁷⁷ Office of Government and Information Technology (OGIT), 'Framework and Strategies for Information Technology in the Commonwealth of Australia - Exposure Draft', p[<http://www.nla.gov.au/ogit/blueprint/bp3b1ch1.html>] 1996, Box 2:1.

of a level of commitment to both direct and indirect public funding, particularly for new information systems for rural industry producers.⁷⁸

Likewise, the discourse around information technology accentuated the importance of access as an equity concern and was to later form a significant part of the social justice and economic policy:

The information society as a new and complex concept is based on the convergence of telecommunications, computer and television technologies, and is now a major theme of the government's social justice and economic policy. It is a policy by which we do not allow a situation to develop in which we have information rich and information poor ...⁷⁹

Prime Minister Paul Keating declared that his government would 'develop the use of networks to improve delivery of social and employment services to Australians, and as communication tools for communities'.⁸⁰ This type of political rhetoric was commonly used in much of the Government literature of the time which included policy drafts, recommendations, and actual legislation, all of which made similar claims to equality, equity and opportunity for all Australians to access information. I will concentrate however, on only two specific examples from the Keating Labour Government before moving on to an analysis of the Howard Coalition Government.

⁷⁸ Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), 'Rural Australia Online - Electronic Information Systems for Building Enterprises and Communities Beyond the Cities', [<http://www.dpie.gov.au/rirdc/pub/out/raonline.html>] May 1996.

⁷⁹ Simon Crean, 'Australian School[s] and the Information Super Highway', [<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/press/crean907.html>] 1995, p.1.

⁸⁰ Paul J. Keating, 'A National Strategy for Information and Communications Services and Technologies', [<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/press/pm0495.html>] April 1995.

On the 6th of December 1995, a new Labor government initiative called *Accessing Australia* was announced. Education Network Australia (EdNA) and the already existing Community Information Network (CIN) both formed components of the larger *Accessing Australia* initiative. Broadly, their aim was to 'provide widespread access to a diverse range on information, on education and social resources respectively, through schools, libraries, other public institutions, and community-based facilities'.⁸¹ Initially, EdNA was established to meet the needs of primary and secondary schools and offered access to educational resources, emphasising that users provide as much feed back as possible. 'EdNA represents a commitment to collective action on the part of the education sector to maximise the benefits of information technology within the education community and to avoid duplication and overlap.'⁸² The most significant aspect of the *Accessing Australia* initiative was the establishment of the CIN. The CIN is of particular interest because of its specific emphasis on providing Internet access to people on low incomes, thus allowing them access to the public spheres of virtual communities. The official purpose of the CIN was to 'examine the potential of new and innovative community based services to enhance the living standards of

⁸¹ Office of Government and Information Technology (OGIT), 'Framework and Strategies for Information Technology in the Commonwealth of Australia - Exposure Draft', p.3.

⁸² Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), 'Update on the Establishment of Education Network Australia (EdNA), [<http://www.deet.gov.au/edna/ednaup1.html>] 1996.

people on low incomes'.⁸³ The research project was conducted on the premise that:

... people on low incomes will have an improved opportunity and capacity to act in a resource and information rich environment. It is also hypothesised that such an environment could be developed by providing people on low incomes with: the opportunity to develop and access a broader range of products and services; and major advances in the provision of, and capacity to access information.⁸⁴

The CIN charter aimed 'To use information and communications technology to improve the living standards of people on low incomes and to serve the community sector'.⁸⁵ The main function of the CIN was to provide 'a range of electronic information services to predominantly low income people and to trial innovative approaches to community initiatives in areas such as information exchange for low cost housing and bartering'.⁸⁶ More specifically, the CIN aimed:

... to provide information on assistance, services and resources available locally and nationally to assist people on low incomes to enhance their living standards; provide a forum for people on low incomes to communicate and collaborate with each other and to share information and ideas; encourage the creation and publication of content on the CIN that is targeted to assist people on low incomes and the individuals, groups and organisations that service them; give people more options in the way they interact with DSS and other Government agencies; and encourage the use of CIN as a forum for the community sector to link to information and communicate with

⁸³ Jane Maher, & Barry Smith, 'Future Social Provision: The Department of Social Security Community Research Project', [http://www.cin.gov.au/rooms/cin_room/backpub1.html] 1996, p.1.

⁸⁴ Jane Maher, & Barry Smith, 'Future Social Provision: The Department of Social Security Community Research Project', pp.1-2.

⁸⁵ Community Information Network (CIN) Library Room, 'Library and Resource area - On-line catalogue', [http://www.gov.au/rooms/cin_room/library.htm#Practical_tab] 1996, p.2.

⁸⁶ Media Release (Michael Lee's Office), 'All Australians to get access to Information Superhighway', p.1.

each other to share information and ideas to enhance the quality of service provided to people on low incomes.⁸⁷

In a practical sense, the CIN could be used to

... find information about and connect to organisations and support groups; to help people become more involved with their community and other social activities; to provide information about DSS entitlements and rates; to find information about courses and assessment details, eligibility requirements and financial support to assist study. The CIN could also be used to improve language and computer skills; to find out about jobs and employment or business opportunities.⁸⁸

In sum, the CIN was intended as a tool for low-income earners to aid their participation in a more inclusive electronic public sphere.

As part of the Community Research Project, the Department of Social Security (DSS) set up places for people who did not own their own personal computer to access the CIN. These sites, some of which include public libraries, are located across southern and eastern Australia: in Gympie, Nundah and Chermside in Queensland; Modbury, Salisbury and Elizabeth in South Australia; and numerous locations throughout Tasmania and the ACT.⁸⁹ Further, the DSS provided regular CIN training sessions that demonstrated 'how to use computers to 'talk' to others; find out about social events and activities; and to access Government and other

⁸⁷ Community Information Network (CIN) Library Room, 'Library and Resource area - On-line catalogue', p.2.

⁸⁸ Community Information Network (CIN) Library Room, 'Library and Resource area - On-line catalogue', p.3.

⁸⁹ Community Information Network (CIN) Library Room, 'Library and Resource area - On-line catalogue', p.2. Also see: Department of Communication and the Arts, 'Public Libraries and Accessing Australia', [http://www.alia.org.au/~actbran/proact154/doc3.html] 1996; Peter Bladwin, Minister for Social Security, 'All Australians to Have Access to Information Technology', [http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/press/balwin0495.html] April 1995.

useful information'.⁹⁰ Such policy initiatives focused on the provision of access to information and communication technologies as a way of strengthening community and promoting open dialogue among its participants. However, the early signs of a paradigm shift from a cultural emphasis of such policies to a more market driven approach were already becoming evident.

the Howard coalition government and national strategies for the information economy

Following the change of government in 1996, the CIN project was discontinued and replaced by a similar initiative called *Online Australia*. *Online Australia* is designed to help 'Australia's online communities; to involve Australians in determining and participating in the nation's online future'.⁹¹ This approach varied from that of the previous governments in that it considered participants not as a community, but as players in 'an economy-wide process of expanding Australia's productive, confident and vibrant online presence'.⁹² In this respect people were already being considered not so much as a part of a cultural community, but as economic participants in the process of nation building.

On a federal bureaucratic level, The Information Policy Advisory Council (IPAC) was set up by the Minister for Communications and the

⁹⁰ Community Information Network (CIN), Computer Help', [http://www.cin.gov.au/rooms/cin_room/arp/5160.html] 1996, p.1.

⁹¹ Online Australia, 'About Online Australia', [<http://www.onlineAustralia.net.au/about.cfm>] 1996 p.1.

⁹² Online Australia, 'About Online Australia', p.1.

Arts in August 1996: 'Its role is to investigate and provide advice and recommendations to the Commonwealth Government on the full range of social, technological and regulatory issues emerging from the rapid development of online services, particularly the Internet, and their increasing use by governments, businesses and other sectors of the community.'⁹³

The EdNA project continued under the Howard Government and still enabled educators, trainers and students to engage with one another. Indeed, concrete steps were being made to ensure the continued development of EdNA Online as a community.⁹⁴ Because the overall focus of EdNA Online is for education sectors, the same emphasis on business links that are evident in subsequent initiatives such as Australia Online, are not apparent. However, EdNA's official strategic directions remained directly determined by the 'current and anticipated needs of users and strategic placement in the market place'.⁹⁵ In this sense, the educational network may be viewed as a client based consumerist demographic whose demand would determine both policy and the supply of online services.

YarraNet is Melbourne's Eastern Region Business and Community Network. Originally designed as the test-run for the EdNA initiative, *YarraNet* is a joint project by the Swinburne University of Technology and

⁹³ Information Policy Advisory Council, 'All About IPAC', [http://www.ipac.gov.au/about/info.htm] November 1996, p.1.

⁹⁴ See: Education Network Australia, 'The EdNA Community', [http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA/Showpage.html?file=%2FaboutEdNA%2Fcommunity.htm] November 1996.

⁹⁵ Education Network Australia, 'Where is EdNA Going?', [http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA/Showpage.html?file=%2Faboutedna%2Fgoing.htm] November 1996.

the Centre for Economic Development. *YarraNet* provides twelve local access points housed in community venues located around the city of Melbourne.⁹⁶ At a federal level, *YarraNet* reports to the National Open Learning Policy Unit - a division of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). This was largely to summarise the findings of the *YarraNet* pilot phase. What is significant about *YarraNet* is that while its focus remains on providing access to information technology to the community, under the Federal Coalition Government, it also has a clear focus on establishing links with private industry. For example, the 'Portfolio of Applications Trial' was commissioned as a part of the State Government report that deals with *YarraNet* as well as three other projects of the Department of Business and Employment and the Office of Communications and Multimedia. The purpose of the report was 'to inform the Government on the development of multi-media and communications policy'.⁹⁷ *YarraNet*, as an extension of the EdNA initiative, is no longer dealt with as a fundamental part of social policy as under the Keating Labor Government, but is now directly answerable to the Department of Business in conjunction with the Office of Communications and Multimedia. The change in government departments responsible for the *YarraNet* project is indicative of a larger ideological shift that began with the Keating Government and which views information and communication technologies in terms of economic rather than cultural practice.

⁹⁶ YarraNet, About YarraNet, [<http://www.yarraNet.net.au/yarranet/about.html>] 1997 p.1.

⁹⁷ YarraNet, 'About YarraNet', p.1.

Toward an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy' is a preliminary statement of the Commonwealth Government's policy approach to the information economy. The National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE) is coordinating the consultation process between business, the community and the Government. The 'coming of the information economy' is viewed as part of global change or as an unavoidable component of globalisation, and virtual communities are viewed in terms of economic or commerce communities which provides market place enlargement and flexibility. Information technology and economic growth are seen to converge in the Internet, and the increased opportunity for Australia's competitive advantage in the information economy and the private sector is seen to play an instructive role in this process:

The private sector is driving - and will continue to drive - the advent of the information economy. It is the role of governments to provide an environment conducive to investment in new technology, to the formation and growth of new enterprises, and to the acquisition of information technology skills and knowledge.⁹⁸

and;

For electronic commerce to flourish, the private sector must continue to take the lead. The government encourages industry self-regulation, and supports the efforts of private sector organisations to guide the successful expansion of electronic commerce and to build confidence in its use.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', <http://www.noie.gov.au/docs/strategy/strategy.html>] 1999, part: 1.2.

⁹⁹ National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', part: 1.3.

Benefits from the information economy are largely seen by the Howard Government during this period in terms of competitive edge, efficiency, growth, and as contributing to the national wealth. 'The Commonwealth sees its role as reinforcing the benefits of the traditional economy as well as guiding Australia's seamless transition to the information economy, in order to open up to Australians the additional possibilities it brings to enhance everyday life, and contribute to national wealth.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the Governments' mission statement for its approach to the information economy aimed: 'To ensure that the lives and work of Australians are enriched, jobs are created, and the national wealth is enhanced, through the participation of all Australians in the growing information economy'.¹⁰¹ As such, the state's main concerns in the area of information technology is the building of infrastructure which will enable business and industry to become globally competitive, and to produce profits which will 'enhance the national wealth'. The Government also hoped to implement a 'world class model for delivery of all appropriate government services online'.¹⁰² This involved the establishment of a customer focused structure of service delivery. In such a model, the citizen is reinscribed as a customer or a client of the state. The state's main function then, is to act in partnership with business as a service provider, specifically requiring them to act in terms of assistance for industry,

¹⁰⁰ National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', part: 1.2.

¹⁰¹ National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', part: 1.3.

¹⁰² National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', part: 2.7.

commerce and the strengthening of economy, as opposed to community-building or the provision of non-profit making social services.

While both governments have displayed a clear policy commitment to the development of information technologies, the emphasis placed on IT by each government embodies its own particular characteristics while also representing a similar ideological standpoint. While the Keating Government was also interested in the application of IT for industry, its primary aims in policy terms were, at least rhetorically, focused on community access to new technologies. The Howard Government on the other hand has been primarily concerned with building links with private industry, boosting employment, and in fostering potential gains in new markets.¹⁰³ Indeed the move in policy rhetoric between both governments signifies a change in direction from the democratic potential of information technology under Keating, to the economic potential of new technologies under Howard. In this way, it may be argued that the boundaries between public and private have become increasingly elastic under both governments in markedly different ways. Under the Keating Government, the public sphere was enlarged so more people could have access to the democratising potential of CMC technologies, while the Howard Government has actively sought the inclusion of the community sector and the private sphere of the family in forging links between private business

¹⁰³ National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), 'Towards an Australian Strategy for the Information Economy', part:1.1.

and information technology. In these ways, both governments have made a clear move away from the central role of information technology in social policy (under Keating) to a significantly more economically based policy under the Howard Government.

In the policy examples discussed above, both Governments were motivated by the way they were 'being redefined in the context of globalised, new information markets'.¹⁰⁴ In both instances, Government policies have resulted in the expansion of public spheres by harnessing new information and communication technologies. It is in this way that a combination of information technology and ideology has played a significant role in combating the traditional separation of subsystems. Both Governments have succeeded in moves toward manipulating traditional boundaries of public and private, but with different ideological ends.

While Habermas rightly argued in the early 1970s that a technocratic ideology would predominate over economic and social discourse, he could not foresee the extent to which the sphere of the social, or the lifeworld, would not only resist attacks (which he later described in his colonisation thesis), but would actively fight back, seeking in fact to 'colonise the system'. Such a development is evident in the expansion of the public sphere of rational debate. What makes this development characteristically significant is that in the public policy comparisons considered above, the public sphere (as a subsystem of the lifeworld) is expanded rather than

¹⁰⁴ Carol Johnson, 'Keating, Howard, Gates and *The Politics of Cyberfutures*', in *Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the Australasian and European Union Studies Association of New Zealand*, 27-30 September 1998, Christchurch, NZ, vol.1 Refereed Papers, p.393.

impeded by governmental technocratic discourse. In other words, technology has indeed become one of the major sources of public power in modern democratic societies where market systems have begun to wield unprecedented influence.¹⁰⁵

conclusion

In much of Habermas' writing, he is wary of technological advances and is largely pessimistic about the democratic potential of technology. While this concern has a long tradition and is not entirely without its foundations, technical advances in the area of information and communication technology creates a new dimension to the technology debate. Habermas' still growing work on the evolution of social interaction has led to an exploration of the impact of information technology on democracy, the subsequent potential of the public sphere, and of new information technologies to increase the potency of virtual public spheres. The potency of such public spheres is largely dependent on the way they are constructed by government policies, which also shape notions of traditionally demarcated public and private spheres. Information and communication technologies become a major source of public power by enabling debate to be opened up, thus increasing the possibility of achieving Habermas' ideal of communicative action.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Feenberg, 'Subversive Rationalization: Technology, Power and Democracy', in *Technology and The Politics of Knowledge*, eds Andrew Feenberg & Alistar Hannay, University of Indiana Press, 1995, p.3.

While information and communication technology appears capable of opening up new opportunities for Habermasian-type public spheres to flourish, it is important to remember that such public spheres approximate only an ideal. In the late 1980s, it was strongly argued that it was precisely because Habermas' concept of the public sphere was only an ideal that it dropped out of his writings to be replaced by the explicitly normative concept of the 'ideal speech situation'.¹⁰⁶ More recently, the theme of the public sphere and that of the ideal speech situation is addressed by Habermas more often in reference to notions of deliberative democracy, and the limitations of democratic models of participation.¹⁰⁷ This has allowed Habermas to be more specific about public situations while avoiding criticisms about his model of rationality. However, it is worthwhile pursuing the concept of the public sphere somewhat further. It brings out in stark form some of the problems that beset attempts to construct and justify normative concepts of public rationality and deliberation.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the following chapter will look specifically at the potential of computer mediated communication to produce a Habermasian ideal speech situation.

¹⁰⁶ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', in *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, ed. Helen Wilson, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1989, p.16.

¹⁰⁷ For example, see: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1997 (which, incidentally, does give the concept of the ideal speech situation a cursory mention); Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, eds Ciaran Cronin & Pablo de Grieff, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1998; Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.16.

chapter six

virtual(ly) 'ideal speech situations'

Habermasian communicative ethics & computer-mediated communication

Since computer interfaces remove individuals from the physical presence of others, the social context cues to status and power are obscured, reducing some of the means by which distorted communication occurs. Yet computer interfaces can embody unequal social relationships in their design, making power and authority appear as features of a world of objects. When this occurs, opportunities for computer-mediated ideal speech situations are limited.¹

As the use of the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies has become more widespread, a great deal of enthusiasm has been generated about their democratic potential. Although some critics laud the possibilities of CMC technology in creating a new era of participatory democracy, there remain various obstacles of inequality and inequity, which promote communicative exclusivity. This development has prompted a re-evaluation of some of Habermas' earlier concepts. While some commentators have made comparisons between the so-called 'virtual communities' of the Internet and the Habermasian public sphere, as outlined in the previous chapter, others have sought to concentrate on the

¹ Judith A. Perrolle, 'Conversations and Trust in Computer Interfaces' in *Computerization and Controversy: Value Conflicts and Social Choices*, eds Charles Dunlop & Rob Kling, Academic Press, Boston, 1991, p.350.

processes of communication and interaction in CMC, and in effect making the connection between CMC and Habermas' formulation of an 'ideal speech situation'. Indeed, many similarities can be drawn between the structure and potential of CMC technology and the ideal speech situation.² The Internet may be viewed as a medium by which isolated specialists are linked through a discourse medium that enables them to engage with each other in a way which crosses cultural, class, gendered and specialised disciplinary boundaries. Thus, an enlarged public sphere is formed which acts as an arena for rational discourse. Indeed, this also signals a renewal of the possibilities for critical theory, which aims to 'enable agents to critique the dominant ideology and perceive the true state of affairs and how they relate to their own best interests. By enabling agents to critique the dominant ideology, critical theory is supposed to provide a bridge between theory and practice'.³

As technological advances take hold of, and become part of our own system of cultural norms, new information and communication technologies have become indispensable to debates about public spheres, and have led to a revival of a practical link between theory and practice. The development of new communication technologies has prompted many commentators to review many of the concepts presented in Habermas' earlier works and engage with them in terms of their relevance to modern

² See: Charles Ess ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996.

³ Patricia Roberts, 'Habermas' varieties of communicative action: controversy without combat', in *JAC Online: A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol.11, no.2, [<http://www.cas.usf.edu/JAC/112/roberts.html>] 1999.

democratic societies.⁴ Indeed, when placed within the context of new information and communication technologies, Habermas' ideal speech situation, long considered to be more central in his earlier works rather than his later works, becomes a rich and useful way of considering means of communication. Such an approach necessitates an increasing loss of physical identity and social context cues, but also allows for access that is more open to participation in public debate. In such electronic public spheres, new identities and personalities can be explored in a way that face-to-face communication does not permit.

The development of electronic public spheres prompts a series of questions. First, how adequately can computer-mediated communication fulfil the criteria for an ideal speech situation; second, in what ways does this differ from face to face communication; and third, what are the

⁴ For example, see: Mauve Cooke, *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas' Pragmatics*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1997; Charles Ess, 'The Political Computer Democracy, CMC and Habermas', in *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*, Charles Ess ed., SUNY Press, Albany, 1996; Emma Rooksby, 'Computer-Mediated Democracy?' conference paper presented at *Women on the Verge of New Technology Conference*, Fremantle, WA, 20-30 November & 1-14 December 1997, [<http://www.imago.com.au/wov/papers.htm>]; Denis Gaynor, 'Democracy in the Age of Information: A Reconciliation of the Public Sphere', [<http://www.georgetown.edu/bassr/gaynor/intro.htm>] spring 1996.; C. Mukerji & B. Simon, 'Out of the limelight: discredited communities and informal communication on the Internet', in *Sociological Inquiry*, vol.68, no.2, 1998, pp.258-273; V. Navasky, 'Scoping out Habermas', in *Media Democracy*, eds E.E. Dennis & R. W. Snyder, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1998, pp.111-118; S. Sneider, 'Creating a democratic public sphere through political discussion', in *Social Science Computer Review*, vol.14, no.4, 1996, pp.373-393; eds C. Toulouse & T. W. Luke, *The Politics of Cyberspace*, Routledge, New York, NY, 1998; I. Ward, 'How democratic can we get?: The Internet, the public sphere, and public discourse', in *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol.17, no.3, 1997, pp.365-379; Scott London, 'Teledemocracy vs deliberative democracy: a comparative look at two models of public talk', in *Journal of Interpersonal Computing and Technology*, vol.3, no.2, April 1995, pp.33-55; Adam T. Perzynski, 'Habermas and the Internet', [<http://socwww.cwru.edu/~atp5/habermas.html>] 1999; Martin Leet, 'Jürgen Habermas and Deliberative Democracy', in *Liberal Democracy and its Critics: Perspectives in Contemporary Thought*, eds April Carter & Geoff Stokes, Polity Press, Cambridge MA, 1998.

implications for theories of the public sphere? Beginning with a brief introduction to the foundations of Habermas' ideal speech situation and the notion of validity claims, I argue that despite a number of specific limitations, CMC technologies have the capacity to provide an environment in which the elusive ideal speech situation may be achieved. In other words, that the 'ruptures of understanding' are more easily mended in cyberspace.⁵ Indeed, in a number of significant ways, CMC technology is better able to approach the fulfillment of the specific requirements of Habermas' ideal speech situation than face-to-face communicative interaction.

Habermasian validity claims and an ideal speech situation

The development of Habermas' interest in the area of universal pragmatics, which later led to the formation of the notion of an 'ideal speech situation', was largely influenced by Karl-Otto Apel's work in the area of consensual speech actions.⁶ Apel argued that certain assumptions, which he refers to as 'normative conditions of the possibility of understanding', were inherently made by participants in speech. More specifically, Habermas maintains that during or after the performance of a speech act, 'we have involuntarily made certain assumptions, which Apel refers to as 'normative

⁵ Mark E. Warren, 'Can participatory democracy produce better selves? Psychological dimensions of Habermas's discursive model of democracy', in *Political Psychology*, vol.14, no.2, 1993, p.212.

⁶ See: Hudson Meadwell, 'The foundations of Habermas's universal pragmatics', in *Theory and Society*, no.23, 1994, pp.711-727.

conditions of the possibility of understanding'.⁷ Consequently, Habermas developed 'the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be validated'.⁸ From this, Habermas concluded that any participant in the process of reaching understanding through communication could not avoid making the following validity claims:

- a. *Uttering* something understandable;
- b. Giving [the hearer] *something* to understand;
- c. Making *himself* thereby understandable; and
- d. Coming to an understanding *with another person*.⁹

Thus, the four validity claims specified by Habermas include comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness or sincerity, and appropriateness. The universal validity claims also have a pragmatic function, hence the label 'universal pragmatics'. According to Habermas:

The three general pragmatic functions - with the help of a sentence, to represent something in the world, to express the speakers intentions, and to establish legitimate interpersonal relations - are the basis of all the particular functions that an utterance can assume in specific contexts. The fulfillment of those general functions is measured against the validity conditions for truth, truthfulness and rightness. Thus, every speech action can be considered from the corresponding analytic viewpoints.¹⁰

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Heinemann, London, 1979, p.2. Also see: Jürgen Habermas, 'Actions, speech acts, linguistically mediated interactions and the lifeworld', in: *Philosophical Problems Today*, vo.1, 1994, pp.45-74.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.2.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.2.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.33.

These three general pragmatic functions correspond to the three domains of reality, which are expressed by Habermas in the following way:

According to this model [of communication], language can be conceived as the medium of interrelating three worlds; for every successful communicative action there exists a threefold relation between the utterance and (a) 'the external world' as the totality of existing states of affairs, (b) 'our social world' as the totality of all normatively regulated interpersonal relations that count as legitimate in a given society, and (c) 'a particular inner world' (of the speaker) as the totality of his intentional experiences.¹¹

The four validity claims may be examined by concentrating on their correlating 'domains of reality', and considering these aspects in relation to computer-mediated communication technology. That is, when a sentence is uttered, it is placed in relation to: '(1) the external reality of what is supposed to be an existing state of affairs, (2) the internal reality of what a speaker would like to express before a public as his intention, and, finally, (3) the normative reality of what is intersubjectively recognized as a legitimate interpersonal relationship'.¹² These validity claims are universals; they are assumptions which all participants in the processes of communicative action are understood to have in common. In order for an 'ideal speech situation' to occur, a number of further specifications must also be met. Habermas explains that:

Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.67.

¹² Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp.27-8.

Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs. No speaker may be prevented, by his internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down.¹³

That is, all participants in an ideal speech situation, aimed at reaching uncoerced consensus or understanding, must have equal opportunity to participate in an unrestrained discussion; have an equal opportunity to introduce or make arguments; be able to ask questions concerning the validity of any assertion; and have equality of opportunity in the expression of attitudes. The first two conditions have been referred to as the 'symmetry condition', and the latter two as the 'reciprocity condition'. Seyla Benhabib explains:

While the symmetry stipulation of the ideal speech situation refers to *speech acts* alone and to conditions governing their employment, the reciprocity condition refers to existing social interactions and requires a suspension of situations of untruthfulness and duplicity on the one hand, and inequality and subordination on the other.¹⁴

In this sense, Habermas' ideal speech situation is reached as the result of an absence of external constraints upon discourse and of power asymmetries between participants.¹⁵ The ideal speech situation then, is intended to act as a critical yardstick by which the shortcomings of everyday speech situations and communicative interactions can be

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt & Shierry Weber Nicholsen, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1990, p.89.

¹⁴ Seyla Benhabib, 'The utopian dimension in communicative ethics' in *New German Critique*, no.35, spring/summer 1985, p.87.

¹⁵ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', in *Arena Journal*, no.7, 1996, p.78.

measured.¹⁶ Those who take up an oppositional position to Habermas' ideal speech situation have argued that such an approach is problematic because, 'in its utopian attachment to the neutralisation of power between speaker and hearer, it has little to tell us about real issues concerning the distribution and legitimation of power' and power structures in Western societies.¹⁷ On the other hand, others have argued that the construct of the ideal speech situation should be understood only as a process of defining certain rules of discourse. This is a process which participants have no good reason to want to deny.¹⁸ Stated differently, the ideal speech situation is intended to be an ideal rather than a reality against which communicative exchanges can be measured.¹⁹ Although, Habermas only rarely makes specific mention of his concept of an ideal speech situation in his later writings,²⁰ it is still crucial to understand how his thought in this area have developed and incorporated thematically in more recent works. For example, Habermas' ideal speech situation and his writing on language and validity form the foundations of his later works on communicative rationality and his ongoing commitment to critical theory.²¹

¹⁶ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', p.78; also see: Elizabeth Lane Lawley, 'Discourse and Distortion in Computer-Mediated Communication', [<http://www.itcs.corn.elawley/discourse.html>] 1992.

¹⁷ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', p.78. Also see, John B. Thompson, 'The theory of the public sphere', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol.10, no.3, 1993; and, K. Baynes, 'Communicative ethics, the public sphere and communication media', in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol.11, no.4, December 1994, pp.315-326.

¹⁸ Seyla Benhabib, 'The utopian dimension in communicative ethics', p.88.

¹⁹ Marike Finlay & Brian Robertson, 'Ideal speech situation vs particular pragmatics of situation: the microcosm of psychoanalytic discourse', in *Semiotica*, vol.3, no.4, 1992, p.211.

²⁰ The concept of the ideal speech situation is still used in Habermas' writings, although it no longer holds the position of prominence it once held in his work. For example, see: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1996, pp.22, 322-23, 361.

²¹ See: Mauve Cooke, *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas' Pragmatics*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1997.

These early concepts have proven to be very influential for Habermas' later interest in debates about discursive democracy, parliamentarism and public communications. Indisputably, Habermas has been largely concerned with making a practical connection between his communicative theories and contemporary debates in modern Europe's political and public spheres. Habermas' theory of normative validity in the legal-political sphere continues to support his proceduralist notions of deliberative democracy in contemporary Germany. This had led him to undertake analysis of both formal and informal institutionalised processes of political deliberation.²² In particular, this continual concern with issues of the conditions under which improved political discourse can be facilitated, reveals the expanding influence of his early work on both ideal speech situations and the public sphere. In the following chapter, it will be argued that Habermas' earlier writings on ideal speech situations raise issues that are particularly relevant for the information age.

²² See: Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, Ciaran Cronin & Pablo de Grieff eds, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1998, in particular, see: Chapter 2 'Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason', Chapter 9 'Three Normative Models of Democracy', and Chapter 10 'On the Internal Relation between the Rule of Law and Democracy'; Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran P. Cronin, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1995, see: Chapter 1 'On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employment of Practical Reason', and Chapter 2 'Remarks on Discourse Ethics'; Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, trans. & ed. By Max Pensky, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 2001, see: Chapter 1, 'What is a People? The Frankfurt 'Germanists' Assembly' of 1846 and the Self Understanding of the Humanities in the *Vormoz*', Chapter 2, 'On the Public Use of History', and Chapter 4, 'The Postnational Constellation of the Future of Democracy'; Jürgen Habermas, *The Past as Future*, trans. & ed. by Max Pensky, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994, especially pp.41-42, 87-89, 107-115; and Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, esp. pp.287-328, 359-387.

I will now elaborate on the various components of Habermas' theory of communicative ethics, with a focus on his formulation of the ideal speech situation and its relationship to computer-mediated communication technologies. The following discussion will concentrate on the potential of CMC technology to achieve a Habermasian ideal speech situation. In this way Habermas' discourse theory will be considered in light of the recent development of computer-mediated communication and new 'virtual' public spheres, and ways in which progress is realised by the individuals and communities which occupy such spheres.

The first two principles of Habermas' ideal speech situation are known as 'the symmetry condition'. The symmetry condition deals with speech acts as those 'conditions governing their employment'. The first ideal speech situation stipulation demands equal access to participation in unrestrained discussion.

i) equal access to participation in unrestrained discussion

In a Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' every participant 'with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.'²³ This requires an environment where unrestrained discussion is permitted without intervention or inhibition. The requirement of unrestrained discussion when applied to CMC technology would suggest a complete

²³ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p.89.

absence of censorship. In cyberspace, this would mean open access to debates in the absence of moderators whose job it is to screen postings, to ensure relevancy and to remove 'flamings'. Yet, this principle demands more than just a lack of interference, censorship or moderation. This principle also requires equality of access; equality through anonymity; and that participants be communicatively competent. I will deal with each requirement in turn with particular reference to practical application in a computer-mediated context.

equality of access

In earlier manifestations of CMC technology, equality of access was provided by various government initiatives. Such initiatives as California's well known 'Public Electronic Network' (PEN), the smaller-scale, 'Australian Community Information Network' (CIN), or the later *Australia Online* initiative help to ensure that increasing levels of access are available for those who do not own their own personal computer, or who cannot afford the cost of obtaining and or maintaining their own internet link.

In recent years, studies have concentrated on the role of this CMC technology in advancing systems of participatory democracy. Dutton's 1996 study involves a close look at two electronic communities to explore the 'perceived rights and responsibilities of the participants'.²⁴ One electronic community examined by Dutton is the California's 'Public

²⁴ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora' in *Media, Culture and Society*, vol.18, 1996, p.270.

Electronic Network' (PEN) which was established in February 1989. The PEN is an e-mail and computer conferencing system 'designed to facilitate access to public information, government departments and agencies and public officials by the city's residents. Its developers strove to create an "electronic city hall".²⁵ Residents may 'access information about city services; complete some transactions with the city; send e-mail to city departments, elected officials or other PEN users; and participate in numerous computer conferences on topics of local concern'.²⁶ For those individuals who do not have a computer terminal in their own home, access is available via any of the 20 terminals in 16 public locations scattered around the city.²⁷

Indeed, as outlined in more detail in the previous chapter, government initiatives have been set up at various locations around the world in order to provide increased levels of public access to still developing communications technologies, and to promote government services and procedures. Such initiatives have provided a good step toward the ideal speech requirement, which maintains that all that desire to take part in discourse are able to do so without the limitations of a low income. However, the provision of universal access to CMC is not without its difficulties. Indeed, as one critic has argued, the fact that the majority of

²⁵ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.273.

²⁶ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.273.

²⁷ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.273.

the world's population cannot access a telephone is a sobering thought amid much of the 'myopic fervour surrounding the Internet'.²⁸

equality through anonymity

Great claims have been made which argue that CMC technology liberates participants because of the anonymity generated by the very nature of the medium itself. Likewise, it is argued that the computer serves to create anonymity, and that 'anonymity grants all participants equal status'.²⁹ This view contrasts quite sharply with the view of Susan Herring who, after lurking in various Internet Relay Chat (IRC) sites and questioning participants, has concluded that men and women communicate differently and have noticeably different conceptions of communicative ethics, clearly demarcating a marked gender division. Therefore, while CMC fosters anonymity, it does not appear to mask gender differences and so retains many of the unequal gender relationships of face-to-face communication.³⁰ Herring's argument consists of two main points. First, she maintains that 'women and men have recognizably different styles in posting to the Internet, contrary to the claim that CMC neutralizes distinctions of gender'; and second, that 'women and men have different communicative ethics -

²⁸ Luke Goode, 'Media system, public life and the democratic project', p.91.

²⁹ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer Mediated-Communication' in *Cyber Society: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, ed. Steven G. Jones, Sage Publications, London, 1995, p.140. Also see, Stephen G. Jones ed., *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, Sage Publications, London, 1998.

³⁰ Lynne Bennett & John Palmer, 'Experiencing Computer Mediated Communications on the Internet - Does Gender Still Equal Difference', conference paper presented at *Women on the Verge of New Technology Conference*, Fremantle, WA, 20-30 November & 1-14 December 1997. [<http://www.imago.com.au/WOV/papers.htm>].

that is, they value different kinds of online interactions as appropriate and desirable'.³¹

Thus, while participants may have equal access to IRC discussion groups, the styles, personalities and identities of other users may still intimidate them. Research performed by Kiesler *et al* reinforces this point. Nevertheless, it shows that, while specific personality traits are carried into computer-mediated conversation, these traits tend to be less prominent. They reach this conclusion based on 'analyses of who talked and how much they talked (that is, the distribution of remarks among group members), and found that group members using the computer participated more equally than they did when they talked face to face'.³² Notably, the study by Kiesler *et al* found that 'Although one person tended to dominate in both face to face and computer-mediated interaction, this dominance was less strong in computer-mediated groups.'³³ Regarding gendered differences in both a discursive and an ethical sense together with the study by Kiesler *et al*, it may be argued that certain identity characteristics are carried over from the so-called 'flesh world' into the more decentred world of the computer-mediated communication. Such residual power relationships and characteristics however, take on less prominence in a sphere that is lacking physicality, relying instead on an entirely

³¹ Susan Herring, 'Gender Difference in Computer-Mediated Communication: Bringing Familiar Baggage to the New Frontier', [http://www.net_culture/Gender_issues/cmc_and_gender.article] 1994. Also see: Sherry Turkle & Seymour Papert, 'Epistemological pluralism: styles and voices within the computer culture', in *Signs*, vol.16, no.11, 1990, pp.128-157.

³² Sara Kiesler, Jane Siegel & Timothy W. McGuire, 'Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication', in *American Psychologist*, vol.39, no.10, 1984, pp.1123-1134.

³³ Sara Kiesler, Jane Siegel & Timothy W. McGuire, 'Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication', pp.1123-1134.

discursively constructed environment to shape a sense of identity and/or character development of individual subjects who participate in such forums.

communicative competence

Finally, participation in unrestrained discussion requires participants to be communicatively competent.³⁴ This introduces the Habermasian validity claim of comprehensibility. The condition of unrestrained discussion is reliant upon the communicative competence of participants and is linked with the validity claim of comprehensibility. This validity claim necessitates that 'the speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that the speaker and hearer can understand one another'.³⁵ Comprehensibility differs from the other validity claims in that it is the only one of the four that 'can be fulfilled immanently to language'.³⁶ It is on the linguistic or communicative competence of the speaker that the legitimacy of the other validity claims rest. For Habermas, communicative competence is 'the ability of a speaker oriented to mutual understanding to embed a well-formed sentence in relations to reality'.³⁷ That would then result in a situation where, the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker, can trust the sincerity of the speaker's intentions, and in which

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'Towards a theory of communicative competence', in *Inquiry*, vol.13, no.4, 1970, pp.360-375.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.2.

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.28.

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.29.

both the hearer and the speaker can be in agreement about shared value orientations.³⁸

In the context of CMC, some have argued that communicative competence is compromised; that while difficulties in typing and issuing appropriate commands for utilizing the communication network are not likely to be interpreted as a failure to use language, they may be treated by others as indicators of incompetence. That is, the awkwardness of computer-mediated communication creates user incompetence and distorts communication.³⁹ Yet grammatical errors, spelling mistakes or the apparent 'awkwardness of computer-mediated communication' do not create any additional incompetence or distorted communication in a Habermasian sense than do errors in more traditional forms of written communication. Delay in communicative exchange of interaction caused by the physical requirement to type sentences as opposed to their verbal utterance may be regarded as a factor, which actually enhances the communicative potential of the participants. Such a delay can provide the speaker with time to order ideas, to justify arguments and to clarify expression in order to state their case more clearly, thereby actually improving the comprehensibility of what has been 'said'.

Dutton argues that 'Compared with other forms of communication, electronic communication such as e-mail tends to be more spontaneous and more like a conversation, with many of the grammatical errors and

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.29.

³⁹ Judith A. Perrollé, 'Conversations and Trust in Computer Interfaces', p.352.

spelling mistakes that come with spontaneity.⁴⁰ In the case of Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where participants communicate with one another in 'real time', the only delay depends upon individual typing speeds. It is in this way that the interaction bears many similarities with a spoken conversation. For example, in many cases, IRC does involve poor usage of grammar and syntax, and often involves repetition, which in turn leads to a confused or poorly made argument. However, it can lead to the development of a distinct chat room slang in which participants 'talk' in a type of discursive shorthand.

While face-to-face communication often involves some repetition and participants rarely speak consistently in perfect sentences, this is not generally considered an indication of linguistic incompetence, nor is it generally treated as such except in more formal or professional settings, such as a court room where the exactness of any verbal account is paramount. Even in such a case, it would not be immediately assumed that the speaker does not have an adequate level of linguistic competence to be understood merely because they have used incorrect syntax. Indeed, any apparent 'awkwardness' to which critics of CMC refer, may very well be attributed to user inexperience and unfamiliarity with computer interfaces and computer technology as a communicative medium.⁴¹

⁴⁰ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.270.

⁴¹ Don Langham, 'Preserving democracy in cyberspace: the need for a new literacy', in *CMC Magazine*, vol.1, no.4, [<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1994/aug/literacy.html>] August 1994.

ii) equality of opportunity to make assertions & challenge justifications

The second ideal speech stipulation that all participants have equal opportunity to make assertions and to challenge justifications correlates to the validity claim of truth. Habermas argues that the validity claim to truth holds that the 'speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition ... so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker'.⁴² The function of this requirement is to represent the true facts; 'to represent something in the world.'⁴³ This is what Habermas refers to as the 'external nature of reality' and includes 'all objects and states of affairs that are directly or indirectly accessible to sensory experience'.⁴⁴ This is contrasted with the 'internal nature of reality' that will be covered below and which deals with those internal background assumptions and characteristics that may not be apparent from a survey of environment alone. The processes of expressing the 'external nature of reality', or to 'represent something in the world' requires an exploration of the relationship and interplay between notions of truth and social context cues. In CMC, such a relationship can prove to be particularly complicated.

truth and social context cues

The correlation between social context cues and the Habermasian project of arriving at a 'rational truth' is fundamental to this ideal speech specification. The emergence of social context cues in CMC technology has

⁴² Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.2.

⁴³ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*, Minerva, Melbourne, 1995, p.27.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.66.

been quite widely documented.⁴⁵ For example, Judith Perrolle has argued that CMC reduces some of the means by which distorted communication can occur. She argues that this is largely because interaction with computer interfaces removes individuals from engaging and interacting with each other in a physical manner, resulting in the obfuscation of social context cues to status and power.⁴⁶ This results in an arena where participants have, essentially, equal status and power.

Rheingold writes at length about the creation, operation and maintenance of norms and values which provide social context cues within the Internet's virtual communities. Similarly, the successful formation of communities on the Internet has been widely documented by a number of theorists. Baym in particular, is an enthusiastic advocate of the potential of CMC technology to create communities which establish their own social context cues. Like Habermas, Baym asserts that the communicative styles of participants in communication are oriented around common social practices before they even enter into CMC, and further, that such practices are unlikely to be supplanted by computer mediation.⁴⁷ She concludes that:

... even the most mundane interaction requires that people draw upon preexisting resources that have meaning within a community to create and invoke event types, identities, relationships, and norms. It is through the use of resources to

⁴⁵ See, Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*; Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication'; and Elizabeth Reid, *Electropolis: Communication and Community on Internet Relay Chat*, Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1995; Elizabeth Reid, 'Virtual Worlds: Culture and Imagination' in ed. Steven G. Jones *Cyber Society: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, Sage Publications, London, 1995.

⁴⁶ Judith A. Perrolle, 'Conversations and Trust in Computer Interfaces', p.350.

⁴⁷ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.141.

invoke social meanings that culture is continually recreated and modified.⁴⁸

Baym maintains that participants are not constrained by the computers but rather that 'members of these groups creatively exploit the systems features so as to play with new forms of expressive communication, to explore possible public identities, to create otherwise unlikely relationships, and to create behavioural norms'.⁴⁹ It is through such a process that participants create new communities.

While face-to-face interaction occurs within a common physical locale and may take the form of horizontally structured dialogue, communications media has enabled the 'disembedding' of the social relations which are characteristic of modernity. It is in this way that communicative interaction is uprooted from shared spatial and temporal contexts.⁵⁰ John Thompson, for example, regards CMC in the same light as telephone conversation or letter writing in that it differs from face-to-face interaction only in as much as it requires a greater exchange of 'contextual interaction'.⁵¹ This enables participants to familiarise themselves with the context from which they are physically absent.⁵²

The social context cues that guide communication, which for Habermas are inherent in the validity claims that are involuntarily made when participants engage in speech oriented toward understanding, are

⁴⁸ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.150.

⁴⁹ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.151.

⁵⁰ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', p.72.

⁵¹ John B. Thompson, 'Social Theory and the Media', in *Communication Theory Today*, eds D. Crowley & D. Mitchell, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.35.

⁵² Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', p.73.

those which guide (communicative) action. In this way, participants form group-specific forms of expression, identities and relationships, and normative conventions. Indeed, 'Community is generated through the interplay between pre-existing structures and the participants' strategic appropriation and exploitation of the resources and rules those structures offer in on-going interaction'.⁵³ This view provides an opportunity to explore the effect Habermas' ideal speech situation has on the formation of community. If communicative practices do indeed shape the structure of communities, then communication itself becomes paramount. This adds credence to Habermas' position that the self is linguistically constituted.⁵⁴

Social context cues may well be a feature of the virtual communities, which emerge via CMC, but this does not entirely put the critics' case to rest. It should be observed that while it is difficult to determine the true intentions of participants in CMC, it is only marginally more so than in 'flesh space', where in numerous instances intentions are masked in order to facilitate goal-oriented action. Indeed, CMC should be no more or less guilty of masking intentions than other written debates like those which appear in 'letters to the editor' pages or in magazine and journal articles. This merely reveals one of the limitations of the ideal speech situation as

⁵³ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.139.

⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.2, chapter 5; also see: Donald McIntosh, 'Language, self, and lifeworld in Habermas' theory of communicative action', in *Theory and Society*, vol.23, 1994, pp.1-33; and Karen L. Murphy & Mauri P. Collins, 'Communication conventions in instructional electronic chats', in *firstmonday*, [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue2_11/murphy/] 1998.

an ideal, since intention cannot be monitored empirically the way speech acts themselves can.

Conversational norms are developed in CMC partly through the formation of a sense of community, and partly through convention, or what has become known as 'netiquette'. Through this process, common lifeworlds are formed and community norms and values emerge and become established. It is a process by which formal behavioural rules develop. Baym explains:

Usenet etiquette, or as it is called on-line, 'netiquette', includes norms aimed at preventing others from having to read useless material, limiting the extent to which one can fictionalize identity, protecting other users' privacy, retaining attribution when following up on ideas, and remaining readable. The repertoire of emoticons used on Usenet also comes with a number of conventions about their appropriate use, including what kinds of messages should be marked and how many smiley faces is too many.⁵⁵

Others employ the term 'netizen' to refer to those people who use the Internet (and Usenet in particular) and who 'work towards building the cooperative and collective nature which benefits the larger world'.⁵⁶ Netizens then, are those who actively contribute to the building of community and the development of background norms and values that accompany it through regular participation.

Despite the development of some quite comprehensive norms, values and rules of order for network use, what concerns Dutton is the

⁵⁵ Nancy K. Baym, 'The Emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication', p.159.

⁵⁶ Michael Haubens, 'The netizens and community networks', in *CMC Magazine*, [<http://www.december.com.cmc.mag.1997/feb/hauben.html>] February 1997.

apparent dis-inhibiting effect of CMC systems. He sees the frequency of 'flaming' - 'the rapid escalation of terse remarks or insults in an electronic interchange'⁵⁷ - as evidence of such a dis-inhibiting effect of non face-to-face communication. He argues that computer-mediated communication has a tendency to eliminate social context cues, and because of this, it lacks the social presence of face-to-face communication. It is in this way that the absence of social context cues 'reduces constraints of such interpersonal factors as unequal status on the individuals expression'.⁵⁸ Thus, while some such as Judith Perrolle view the absence of social context cues in a negative way, William Dutton maintains a more positive argument. However, either way, there must remain some existing normative structures for communication to actuate. As Habermas argues, 'Without the normative background of routines, roles, forms of life - in short, conventions - the individual action would remain indeterminate. All communicative actions satisfy or violate normative expectations or conventions.'⁵⁹ Moreover, it is such 'normative expectations or conventions' that allow CMC participants to give order to their communicative processes and structures.

This is one reason why the computer-mediated communication on bulletin boards, in particular, is an ideal environment in which to foster the

⁵⁷ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.270.

⁵⁸ William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.221.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.35.

attainment of an ideal speech situation and the reaching of a communicatively achieved consensus. While bulletin boards have the capacity to involve large numbers of participants who all have equal access, they are also restricted to a particular topic or an area of related topics. This allows diverse opinions to emerge within certain parameters, while also allowing new ideas to be introduced if individual participants choose to do so. Such a process occurs in accordance with the ideal speech situation stipulation that all participants have equal opportunity to make arguments and raise new concerns. Any such new topical introduction, will however, be made subject to any opposition, counter-argument, or objection from any other participant in regard to its rightness, appropriateness, truth or intent. In this scenario, bulletin boards are more accessible than more traditional forms of contribution to public opinion, such as 'letters to the editor', newsletters pieces, journal articles and other conventional forms of public debate because of the potential equality of access and interaction offered by the nature of the technology itself. This is not to say, however, that all bulletin boards or news groups behave in such a manner. Indeed, there are numerous groups that have certain rules about topics that may be raised and which also monitor responses and contributions. Often such a process is defended as a means of maintaining order, and can include ways to avoid vicious attacks on participants when constructive contributions to the debate are absent.

The remaining two ideal speech stipulations form what is known as 'the reciprocity condition'. The reciprocity condition 'refers to existing social interactions and requires a suspension of situations of untruthfulness and duplicity ... [of] inequality and subordination'.⁶⁰ The third ideal speech situation condition requires all participants to have an equal opportunity to express feelings and intentions. The expression of feelings and intentions is linked to the validity claim of truthfulness.

iii) equal opportunity to express feelings and intentions

The validity claim of truthfulness requires that 'The speaker must want to express his intention truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him).'⁶¹ The inclusion of 'intention' is especially interesting when Habermas' ideal speech situation is applied to CMC. The validity claim of truthfulness corresponds to what Habermas refers to as 'the internal nature of reality', and it is in this domain of 'reality' that the speaker expresses intention.⁶² Habermas explains what he means by 'internal nature' in the following way:

I class as *internal nature* all wishes, feelings, intentions, etc., to which an 'I' has privileged access and can express as its own experience before a public. I is precisely in this expressive attitude that the I knows itself not only as subjectivity but also as something that has always already transcended the bounds of mere subjectivity, in cognition, language, and interaction simultaneously. To be sure, if the subject adopts an objective

⁶⁰ Seyla Benhabib, 'The utopian dimension in communicative ethics', p.87.

⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.66.

⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.67.

attitude toward himself, this alters the sense in which intentions can be expressed.⁶³

The validity claim of truthfulness can be further explored in relation to CMC technology by looking at notions of identity and sincerity since both express feelings and intentions, or what Habermas would refer to as the 'internal nature of reality'. '[A]lthough we are aware that people lie and equivocate, communication relies upon our suspending our disbelief to some extent. If we cannot suspend skepticism, we ask for assurances. In the ideal speech situation, people give those assurances.'⁶⁴

identity

One of the problems with CMC technology is that 'In the absence of social context cues, it is even difficult to tell who is speaking let alone what they intend'.⁶⁵ Indeed, concern about identity, self representation or the question of who is speaking to whom in computer-mediated interaction is quite complex depending on what form of CMC is being considered. The treatment of identity in what is known as Multi-User Dungeons or MUDs, IRC and e-mail systems differ quite substantially. In MUDs and IRC, it is easier to alter one's *true* identity or even to discard it altogether, exchanging it instead for a completely different one. While it is not so easy to alter or discard ones identity in e-mail systems, it is nonetheless possible. 'All

⁶³ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.67.

⁶⁴ Patricia Roberts, 'Habermas' Varieties of Communicative Action: Controversy Without Combat', [<http://www.cas.usf.edu/JAC/112/roberts.html>] 1999.

⁶⁵ Judith A. Perrolle, 'Conversations and Trust in Computer Interfaces', p.355.

[MUDs] provide worlds for social interaction in a virtual sphere, worlds in which you can present yourself as a "character", in which you can be anonymous, in which you can play a role as close or as far away from your "real self" as you choose.⁶⁶ Indeed, as Howard Rheingold explains:

Identity is the first thing you create in a MUD. You have to decide the name of your alternate identity - what MUDders call your character. And you have to decide who this character is, for the benefit of the other people who inhabit the same MUD. By creating your identity, you help create a world. Your character's role and the roles of the others who play with you are part of the architecture of the belief that upholds for everybody in the MUD the illusion of being a wizard in a castle or a navigator aboard a starship: the roles give people new stages on which to exercise new identities, and their new identities affirm the reality of the scenario.⁶⁷

What is most interesting about the creation of new identities in MUDs is the lack of physicality; that conceptions of self are linguistically constructed, and the subsequent implications of this for notions of identity and authorship.

In the MUDs, the projections of self are engaged in a resolutely postmodern context Authorship is not only displaced from a solitary voice, it is exploded. The MUDs are authored by their players, thousands of people in all, often hundreds of people at a time, all logged in from different places. And the self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit.⁶⁸

There is, then, an unequalled opportunity in MUDs to alter one's identity and conception of self. While the same may be said of telephone

⁶⁶ Sherry Turkle, 'Constructions and Reconstructions of the Self in Virtual Reality', [gopher://home.actlab.utexas.edu:70/00/conferences/3cyberconf/selfinvr.txt] 1996, p.2.

⁶⁷ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.148. Also see: Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Phoenix/Orion Books, London, 1997, pp.180-186.

⁶⁸ Sherry Turkle, 'Constructions and Reconstructions of the Self in Virtual Reality', p.2.

or face-to-face communication, Rheingold maintains that it is easy 'to be fooled about people in cyberspace'.⁶⁹ Indeed, he argues that computer-mediated interaction provides new ways to fool people and 'In some ways the medium will, by its nature be forever biased toward certain kinds of obfuscation. It will also be a place that people often end up revealing themselves far more intimately that they would be inclined to do without the intermediation of screens and pseudonyms'.⁷⁰ In addition, he notes that:

An artificial but stable identity means that you can never be certain about the flesh-person behind an IRC nickname, but you can be reasonable certain that the person you communicate with today under a specific nickname is the same one who used that nickname yesterday.⁷¹

Nicknames help to forge and shape identity in many ways and the relationship between 'nicks' and the participants identity can become very complex. Of course there is nothing to prevent participants from creating new identities with new nicknames, but 'The stability of nicknames is one of the few formally structured social requirements of IRCland; and automatic 'Nickserv' program ensures that nobody can use a nickname ('nick') that has been registered by someone else'.⁷²

In a sense, the Internet provides an opportunity to explore notions of hybridity; of the possibility of possessing characteristics of the systemic

⁶⁹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.27.

⁷⁰ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.27.

⁷¹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.176.

⁷² Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p.176.

and the social, of technology and humanity simultaneously.⁷³ This is played out not only through online experimentation with identity and character but also in the simple act of participating in the formation of online communities.

sincerity

The validity claim to sincerity is closely linked with notions of identity and truthfulness. One of the least considered, immediate contributions to CMC is the practice of 'flaming' where sincere, but highly charged emotional responses are not masked or suppressed as is often the case in face-to-face communication. The proliferation of 'flaming' on the Internet is interesting because it has been used as evidence as to the lack of social context cues.⁷⁴ Even if CMC encourages flaming because of what Dutton refers to as the 'dis-inhibiting effect' of CMC technology, the communicative potential of CMC technology is not diminished any more than face-to-face communication. Indeed, the suppression of 'flaming' communication would result in what Habermas would regard as a form of systematically distorted communication.⁷⁵ Moreover, the practice of flaming is quite compatible with Habermas' communicative model based on universal pragmatics. The validity claim of truthfulness necessitates that participants

⁷³ See: Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*, ed. Steven Seidman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK & New York, 1994; Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, pp.258-262.

⁷⁴ See: William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora'.

⁷⁵ See: Jürgen Habermas, 'On systematically distorted communication', in *Inquiry*, vol.13, no.3, 1970, pp.205-218.

do not conceal their views or intentions, and requires sincerity of expression. In this sense, flaming aids the aim of reaching mutual understanding by promoting communicative sincerity. Research by Kiesler *et al* found that participants in 'computer-mediated groups were more uninhibited than they were in face-to-face groups as measured by uninhibited verbal behaviours, defined as frequency of remarks containing swearing, insults, name calling, and hostile comments.'⁷⁶ Therefore, it is largely by way of the very nature of the medium itself that CMC develops a public sphere in which participants are less inhibited about expressing displeasure or disagreement with dominant points of view, and are thus more communicatively sincere.

It can also be argued that flaming and other such expressions of online outrage fulfil Habermas' validity claim to truthfulness. Flaming discloses the speaker's subjectivity; it expresses the speakers' true attitude, and denotes the speakers' 'world of internal nature'. In doing so, the act of flaming is an important (although not entirely necessary or compulsory) component of Habermas' theory of communication which rests on fundamental notions of sincerity and honesty. Flaming requires that participants do not conceal their true feelings or responses to the discussion at hand. It does need to be pointed out that there is not way to confirm authenticity of any flaming, but this however, is also a problem of face-to-face communication.

⁷⁶ Sara Kiesler, Jane Siegel & Timothy W. McGuire, 'Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication', p.339.

iv) equal distribution of chances

The final requirement of Habermas' ideal speech situation is that there be an equal distribution of chances for all participants. Not only does this raise issues about equal access, which has already been covered at length elsewhere, but it also introduces the question of inhibition in computer-mediated discourse. It has been argued that CMC does away with inhibitions that prevent some participants in claiming their full participatory entitlement in face-to-face interaction.

inhibitions

Elizabeth Reid has argued that 'if all computer mediated communication can be said to have one single unifying effect upon human behaviours, it is that users of such systems become less inhibited'.⁷⁷ Indeed, flaming is often cited as evidence of the ability of non face-to-face communication to encourage 'uninhibited behaviour'.⁷⁸ While commentators such as Judith A. Perrolle have argued that the lack of inhibition in CMC is a result of the lack of social context cues that non-verbal communication provides, there is a strong case to be made that there are socio-emotional cues present in CMC, and in MUDs in particular. Indeed, according to Reid, 'Description, communicative commands, and specialized language and textual forms play much the same role in MUDs as do physical contexts and gestures in

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Reid, 'Virtual Worlds: Culture and Imagination' p.173.

⁷⁸ Laura Gurak, 'Utopian visions of cyberspace', in *CMC Magazine*, [<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/may/last.html>] May 1997; and, K. Baynes, 'Communicative ethics, the public sphere and communication media'.

everyday life.⁷⁹ In this sense, a lack of inhibitions enables a more successful and equal distribution of chance or opportunity to participate in debate, even going some way to overcoming individual handicaps or personality difficulties, and specific prejudices which lead to exclusion of individual subjects with particular backgrounds or specific needs. Of course increased scrutiny of employee email in the workplace have seen a newfound trend toward self-censoring.

CMC technology and the social nature of reality: self-governing behaviours and the subsystem divide

The external nature of society is the domain of shared reality. For Habermas the notion of society designates that 'symbolically pre-structured segment of reality which the adult subject can understand in a nonconformative attitude, that is, as one active communicatively (as a participant in a system of communication)'.⁸⁰ It is in this domain that legitimate interpersonal relations belong along with institutions, traditions, cultural values and so on. The validity claim to rightness requires that 'the speaker must choose an utterance which is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background'.⁸¹ What is significant here is that Habermas sees validity as something communally

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Reid, 'Virtual Worlds: Culture and Imagination', p.174.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp.66-67.

⁸¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.3.

determined. For Habermas, it is the task of universal pragmatics to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding.⁸² That is, the utterance must correspond with agreed representations of the 'external nature of reality'. More specifically, according to Habermas, 'In everyday life we start from a background consensus pertaining to those interpretations taken for granted among participants'.⁸³ He argues that such a background consensus must meet generalisable interests of all individuals who form that particular community. That is, 'For a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person's particular interests must be acceptable to all'.⁸⁴ Rasmussen argues that it is this very ideal, that validity is somehow determined communally, that is at the very base of a discourse ethic:⁸⁵

What is significant about Habermas' approach to the creation of an ethic is that he explores the nature of the formation of normative categories at a level of pure abstraction, considering the conditions for the possibility of an agreement on normative claims, independent of any material or historical determinism.⁸⁶

Thus, what is 'right' or 'appropriate' is determinable by its generalisability in that community in which the discourse is taking place. The arguments about what is right or appropriate opens debate about whom should govern in cyberspace.⁸⁷ Most commonly, rules of conduct

⁸² Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.1.

⁸³ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.3.

⁸⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p.197.

⁸⁵ David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1990, p.59.

⁸⁶ David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, p.59.

⁸⁷ See: John Shattuck & Muriel Morisey Spence, 'The Dangers of Information Control', in *Computers in the Human Context: Information Technology, Productivity and People*, ed. Tom Forester, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1989; and Richard S. Rosenberg, 'Free speech, pornography, sexual harassment, and electronic networks', in *The Information Society*, vol.9, pp.285-331.

and procedure are decided through a process of community argumentation,⁸⁸ that is, through a process of rational renegotiations of social reality. This provides flexibility to Habermas' formation of a communicative ethic since norms and values, in his view, have the capacity to differ in accordance with social context or place.

Despite the possibility of the fluidity of generalisable interests between groups, Habermas does claim a level of universalisation in the use of language. Rasmussen explains that it 'is precisely through the introduction of the principle of universalization that a rational consensus can be achieved in the context of a multitude of opinions which may conflict. The cognitivist principle involved here is that a norm is right when it corresponds to a general or generalizable interest'.⁸⁹

CMC technology serves to not only bridge the gap between lifeworld and public sphere, but also obfuscate the very categories themselves. The Internet promotes a notion of community based on a pastiche of normative structures and provides a sense of online lifeworld in which to ground further critical reflection and discussion. CMC technologies provide a community (lifeworld) where people meet and form opinions through an ongoing public discourse (public sphere). In this way, critical discussion without a doubt merges any distinction between the lifeworld, the political

⁸⁸ See: David R. Johnson & David G. Post, 'The new 'civic virtue' of the Internet', in *firstmonday*, [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_1/johnson/index.html] 1997; and Edward J. Valauskas, 'Lex networkia: understanding the Internet community', in *firstmonday*, [<http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue4/valauskas/index.html>] 1996.

⁸⁹ David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, p.60.

public sphere, and the state (and thus the traditional categories of public and private).

To engage in discussion the participants must rely on normative structures, which were formulated in the realm of the lifeworld, thus maintaining a level of public sphere exclusivity. In other words, in order to argue one's case effectively, one must necessarily draw on the same or similar normative structures of a common lifeworld. If participants do not share the same or culturally similar normative structures, then the communicative process will become confused and convoluted, and meanings will become clouded and/or open to misinterpretation. This is precisely why the public spheres of coffeehouses and salons of the 18th and 19th centuries were not as conducive to 'rational' deliberation or free and open discourse, as Habermas originally believed. The multiplicity of public spheres on the Internet and the development of community and 'netiquette' is evidence that one may belong to and master multiple normative cultural structures or communities.

Furthermore, the obfuscation of the boundaries between the public and private spheres is largely renegotiated by the application of communication and information technologies. What then becomes of particular interest is the transformation of the relationship between private households and public spheres.⁹⁰ Silverstone *et al* see the relationship

⁹⁰ Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch & David Morley, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, eds R. Silverstone & E. Hirsch, Routledge, London & New York, 1994, p.15.

between public/private boundaries and communication and information technologies as differing from the relationship between public/private separations and other forms of technology. They explain:

But communication and information technologies have a functional significance as media; they provide, actively, interactively or passively, links between households, and individual members of households, with the world beyond their front door, and they do this (or fail to do this) in complex and often contradictory ways. Information and communication technologies are ... doubly articulated into public and private cultures.⁹¹

In this sense, the household is conceived of as 'part of a transactional system of economic and social relations within the formal or more objective economy and society of the public sphere'.⁹² Furthermore,

Objects and meanings, technology and media, which cross the diffuse and shifting boundary between the public sphere where they are produced and distributed, and the private sphere where they are appropriated into a personal economy of meaning, mark the site of the crucial work of social reproduction which takes place within the household's moral economy.⁹³

This 'double articulation' of communication and information technologies echoes Nancy Fraser's argument about the dual aspect activity of certain processes of social reproduction.⁹⁴ Furthermore, information and communication technologies are implicated in the work of

⁹¹ Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', p.15.

⁹² Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', p.16.

⁹³ Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', pp.18-19.

⁹⁴ See: Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1989.

social reproduction, 'not just as commodities and appropriated objects, but as mediators of the social knowledges and cultural pleasures'.⁹⁵ Thus, the private sphere of the household is able, through such technologies, to transgress the boundary between public and private. 'To understand the household as a moral economy, therefore, is to understand the household as part of a transactional system, dynamically involved in the public world of the production and exchange of commodities and meanings.'⁹⁶

In this view, the household (private sphere) is seen as embodied by moral and ethical exchanges and reproductions, whether they are of commodities or relationships, while the public sphere is embodied by instrumental relationships and commodity production and reproduction. Information and communication technologies serve to obfuscate the divide between public and private by virtue of their 'double articulation' in the spheres of both economy and culture. That is, information and communication technologies are the means by which 'public and private meanings are mutually negotiated'.⁹⁷

It is through information and communications technologies that public and private meanings, cultures and knowledges transverse the boundaries between public and private. For example, the Internet provides a vehicle by which private households connect with the public

⁹⁵ Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', p.19.

⁹⁶ Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', p.19.

⁹⁷ Roger Silverstone *et al*, 'Information and Communicative Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household', p.28.

sphere and exchange specific meanings and knowledges in an open and accessible forum. It is within this process that Rheingold finds hope for the revitalisation of democratic potential. He argues that 'the public sphere is also the focus of hope for online activists, who see CMC as a way of revitalising the open and widespread discussion among citizens that feed the roots of democratic societies'.⁹⁸

Computer-mediated communication technologies provide a vehicle whereby the public/private divide is blurred to an extent that it no longer becomes a useful method or tool to describe the mechanism by which societies function and interact. The communicative potential of the Internet is most significant for Habermas and the dilemma of integrating the social and systemic because it is a medium by which 'the power of technical control [can] be brought within the range of the consensus of acting and transacting citizens'.⁹⁹

Virtual communities are localities where, in Habermasian terms, technology and democracy converge; it provides a means by which a reified system and lifeworld may be reconciled. Cyberspace's virtual communities provides an example of how technological advances have increased both public and private use of Habermasian communicative rationality, and also show ways in which attempts have been made to nullify the distinction between the two separate categories of public and private.

⁹⁸ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, pp.279-280.

⁹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971, p.57.

conclusion

This chapter has argued that Habermas' notion of an ideal speech situation is more attainable in computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face communication. This is not however, to ignore the many criticisms of the ideal speech situation, not least its idealistic nature and reliance on universalising foundations which require a suspension of communicative power structures. While it remains highly dubious that a pure ideal speech situation can ever be attained, not to mention sustained, CMC offers more potential to achieve this end by overcoming many of the problems of exclusivity based on gender and race that obscure any chance of such an attainment of ideal speech in face-to-face communication. Indeed, the ideal speech situation was never intended as something that could be pragmatically attained; rather it was devised an ideal by which to measure processes of communication. What remains important about the application of Habermas' ideal speech situation to communication and information technologies is the implication it has for the distribution of communicative entitlements among citizens.¹⁰⁰

Habermas' design for free and open discussion provides a standard by which public discourse may be measured in terms of equity. It provides rules by which understanding and open communication can ideally take place. Computer-mediated communication technology provides access that was not so freely available to non-elites before its inception and widespread use. However, such technologies will probably

¹⁰⁰ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project', p.69.

not be responsible for transforming the elitist style of democracy, which Habermas outlines in his depiction of the 18th and 19th century public sphere comprised of coffee houses and salons, into a more inclusive participatory form of classical government or self government. The most important aspect of the ideal speech situation is not its democratising potential, but the equity and opportunity of access to which it aspires.

CMC technology will not convince all citizens in modern democratic societies to register their opinion on all topical political issues that enter the public sphere(s). It may, however, encourage people to engage more, and provide them with a sense that they are directly involved in debates on issues which affect them. It is in this way that people will exercise patterns of self-government in the formation of new communities and rules for their functioning, and that changes to the nature of the public sphere(s) which they inhabit and live their daily lives will eventuate.

As in face-to-face communication, CMC does not manage to overcome the problems involved with larger-scale participation: 'As participation becomes wider and more diverse, discourse becomes less efficient. This leads to the conclusion that beyond small and relatively homogenous groups, discourse cannot serve as an efficacious or even realistic method of decision making.'¹⁰¹ However, there appears to be a legitimate case that computer-mediated communication 'seems to overcome some barriers to participation in face-to-face and other

¹⁰¹ Simone Chambers, 'Feminist Discourse/Practical Discourse', in *Feminists Read Habermas; Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p.164.

- conventional forms of interpersonal communication, thereby facilitating the inclusion of some who might otherwise be left out'.¹⁰² Indesputably,
- CMC has the capacity to 'bring together people who would not otherwise interact and who have no pre-existing social structures'.¹⁰³

In recent times, Habermas has pursued the problem of how democracy, which is informed by ideas embodied in the bourgeois public sphere, can be developed and applied to modern societies. It is an interesting development that many writers are now enthusing about the prospect of computer-mediated communication renewing hope for the revitalisation of democratic public spheres. However, positive assessments of the possibilities of CMC have more to do with the nature and structure of the technology than with its application. What remains significant is that such projects of self-governance have the capacity to alter both the structural and ideological depictions of public spheres and their social function.

Whereas Habermas wants to reinvent the public sphere and applauds its expansion, I remain cautious about the impact of an enlarged public sphere on discourses of public and private. When the expansion of the public realm leads, in part at least, (as I have argued) to a program of over-governing by the state of the traditional private or domestic sphere, processes of cultural and social reproduction become severely restricted.

¹⁰² William H. Dutton, 'Network rules of order: regulating speech in electronic public fora', p.274.

¹⁰³ Nancy K. Baym, 'The emergence of computer-mediated communication', p.148.

Continuing with this theme, the following section will look at theories of governmentality, the role of the state, and the ways in which they shape notions of the public sphere, and control participation within such public spheres.

PART IV

discourses of governance

chapter seven

legitimacy and bureaucracy

state interactions with the public sphere

...governmentality, which is at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of general tactics of governmentality.¹

The preceding chapters have argued that traditional boundaries between public and private spheres can be manipulated in a variety of ways. I have used case studies of social policy to illustrate such processes of boundary manipulation. For example, this thesis so far has shown how the role of social movements and new information and communication technologies have, in specific instances, expanded the public sphere and access to it. This section will continue with this theme by looking at ways in which techniques of government determine what is considered public and private in contemporary liberal democratic societies. This process is largely determined by social policy, and also by cultural value placed on various

¹ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago Il., 1991, p.105.

spheres of life by policy-makers. Habermas' four-termed model of public and private is a useful tool for looking at societal structures and for examining the prominence of traditional 'private sphere' concerns in the formation of public policy. While this framework rests on a system/lifeworld dichotomy, it recognises other spheres of life thus avoiding a true replication of the traditional public and private split and the duplication of gendered behavioural roles which Nancy Fraser is critical of.

This chapter will begin with an examination of theories of governmentality and various ways of defining the role of the state. This is followed by a discussion of economic rationalism as a dominant tool for governing in modern liberal democracies. This method of government has a number of implications for Habermasian notions of rational consensus and processes of deliberative democracy. I use a number of policy examples to show ways in which techniques of government shape how notions of public and private are constructed. I have chosen to look specifically at the issue of women's health, and will once again pick up the theme of women and paid employment, and its relationship to childcare policy. These case studies were chosen primarily because they all involve traditional women's private sphere concerns which have been taken up by policy makers and debated in the public sphere. In recent times, debate about such issues has shifted between conservative and more liberal approaches concurrently with changes in government. This has resulted in the development of more fluid conceptions of public and private spheres,

but also has a number of implications for bureaucratic legitimacy and Habermasian notions of a rational deliberative public.

If we understand the state through reference to its 'general tactics of governmentality', or more plainly, by the way it governs, we become aware of its more dominant discourses. In recent times, steering rationality has become the most dominant discourse of the state and its accompanying bureaucratic apparatuses. Certainly, processes of ordering both traditional public and private spheres have increasingly relied on growing support for economically rationalist ideologies. Fundamentally, this involves a clear split between those sections of society, which are controlled by the market and those that are not. The preceding chapters have, in large part, focused on Habermas' view of the public sphere as an intermediary between system and lifeworld. In much of the literature about the public sphere, what has traditionally constituted a public sphere is simply defined as that which is not private, and is subsequently set aside from public scrutiny. However, the public sphere also has a more encompassing function, which at times merges the political public sphere with that of the personal or private lives of citizens. Likewise, the Habermasian lifeworld draws on a tradition of social norms, some of which involve the practice of economic rationalism. Governed by norms and values drawn from cultural traditions, the lifeworld is often governed by the state as well. As seen in Chapter Four, this occurs particularly through legislation, which is aimed at protecting individuals at a domestic level. For government then, this becomes a matter of legislating clearly

differentiated areas of life - public life, including the market and the judiciary, as well as the private sphere, which includes family life. What is significant here is how governments legislate and shape the private or domestic sphere and how this in turn affects the shape and function of public spheres in liberal democracies.

A Habermasian framework has been useful so far in ascertaining the impact of private upon public and vice versa.² What constitutes a public sphere has already been covered in some detail in previous chapters, the focus now will turn to the role of government in contemporary public spheres. This will include some policy examples that contrast 'rational governance' (in a Habermasian sense) with the ideology of economic or market rationalism. This revolves heavily around a Habermasian framework of society that draws on systems theory, which will be covered more comprehensively in the next chapter. By using recent policy examples it becomes apparent that clear subsystem differentiation is not readily apparent in many liberal democracies. Yet, as we shall see, somewhat paradoxically, governments rely on the longevity of traditional subsystem demarcations such as that between public and private, the state, the economy, and the public sphere when devising legislation. In terms of Habermasian theory, what this shows is that Habermas is unable to

² For an interesting welding of theories of democracy, postmodernism and critical theory, see: Anna Yeatman, *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political*, Routledge, New York, 1994. In this work Yeatman draws on many of the same themes as this thesis, but does so without the Habermasian focus.

accommodate a line of thought which argues that a level of social fragmentation has occurred, often making it difficult to distinguish between what is public and what is private. Habermas' four-termed conception of society (split into the categories of family, public sphere, economy/market, and state) accounts for a certain level of subsystem fluidity, but cannot account for the constantly shifting boundaries between lifeworld, system, economy and family life.

Foucault's work on governmentality is also useful for developing an understanding of the role of modern democratic government and its functioning apparatuses.³ While Foucault would have reservations about referring to state governance in terms of 'domination' or 'legitimation', his perspective remains useful for revealing the diffusion of modes of governing, including shifting processes of self-governing in society. It also shows us that effective legislation demands established bureaucratic legitimation. Bureaucratic or administrative legitimation needs clearly identifiable legitimating bases. In other words, there needs to be a source from which legitimate power is derived. In modern democratic societies, this legitimation source is the voting public. In this chapter, theories of governmentality will help to define the changing role of the state from a largely interventionist role to a more administrative one. The result is a

³ For a more detailed discussion on this see: Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, Sage Publications, London & Thousand Oaks CA, 1999. In Particular, see: Chapter 8, 'Neo-Liberalism and Advanced Liberal Government'. Also see: Mitchell Dean & Barry Hindess, 'Government, Liberalism, Society', in *Governing Australia: Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government*, eds Mitchell Dean & Barry Hindess, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp.1-19.

state that is primarily concerned with legislating for the traditionally private realm of the family and an enlarged public sphere rather than the market.

theories of 'governmentality' and defining the role of the state

The role of the modern democratic state involves a number of duties with inherent contradictions that must be balanced in order to secure the legitimation of government. Aside from matters of foreign affairs, defence, justice and the police,⁴ the main concerns of modern democratic states are the regulation of economic and social systems.

Economic and social change also produce the dichotomy between adapting the economy to rapidly changing demand patterns and maintaining some degree of stability in the interest of existing produces and settlement patterns.⁵

Thus, disputes over the best method for the regulation of economic and social systems stems from interventionist versus market-oriented views. It is a conflict between their primacy, and the balance between the two needed to ensure government legitimacy. Divergent views on the function of government are significant because of the way a government governs and shapes the sphere in society designated as the public sphere. Indeed, Habermas understands the existing modern state as:

⁴ Christopher Hood, 'Rolling Back the State or Moving to a Contract and Subsidiary State?', in *What Should Governments Do?*, eds Peter Coaldrake & J. R. Northcote Hale Iremonger, Sydney 1989, p.89.

⁵ Peter Self, 'Redefining the Role of Government', in *What Should Governments Do?*, eds Peter Coaldrake & J. R. Northcote, Hale Iremonger, Sydney 1989, p.15. Also see, Bettina Cass, 'Defining the Proper Role of Government: Social Expenditures in a Period of Economic Restructuring', in *What Should Governments Do?*, eds Peter Coaldrake & J. R. Northcote Hale Iremonger, Sydney 1989, pp.207-219.

... the result of the differentiation of an economic system which regulates the production process through the market - that is, in a decentralized and unpolitical manner. The state organizes the conditions under which the citizens, as competing and strategically acting private persons, carry on the productive process.⁶

The state should also be regarded as a guarantor of 'bourgeois civil law, the monetary mechanism, and certain infrastructures', all of which are 'prerequisites for the continued existence of a depoliticized economic process set free from moral norms and orientations to use value.'⁷ Habermas argues that because the state does not participate in capitalist enterprise, one of its primary roles is that of taxing private incomes in order to provide administrative and security services. It is largely from this role that the relationship between state and civil society is shaped.⁸ In other words, the state apparatus is comprised of 'a distinct ensemble of institutions and organisations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will.'⁹ However, recent trends toward state 'outsourcing' have seen many government services, such as public transport for example, being provided by private enterprise. In this way, the role of government can be largely defined by the interrelationship between the state and civil society.¹⁰

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Heinemann, London, 1979, p.189.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.189.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.189.

⁹ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1990, p.339.

¹⁰ John Urry, *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State*, Macmillan, London, 1981, p. 122.

The role of government for Habermas then, includes 'shaping a business policy that ensures growth, influencing the structure of production in a manner oriented to collective needs, and correcting the pattern of social inequality.'¹¹ Indeed,

The state is a set of institutions defined in public and constitutional law as having two monopolies in a given territory: a fiscal monopoly over taxation and the money supply, and a monopoly over the use of violence. The state is a public legal form which is institutionally separate from private economic activities.¹²

Thus, Habermas understands the responsibilities of the modern state in terms of these areas, but views these areas of responsibility as causing a conflict. The difficulty for Habermas does not arise because the state has to juggle a number of complex tasks or functions, but rather, because 'the state is supposed to perform all these tasks without violating the complementary relations that exclude the state from the economic system and, at the same time, also make it dependent on the dynamic of the economy'.¹³ Such conflicts between the main functions or responsibilities of the modern state, if not managed, result in what Habermas has termed a 'legitimation crisis'. Habermas has argued that it is only 'when members of a society experience structural alterations as critical for continued existence, and feel their identity threatened can we speak of a crisis.'¹⁴ Habermas thus focuses on 'the notion of a crisis in order to explore the

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp.194-5.

¹² John Scott, *Corporations, Class and Capitalism*, p.150.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp.194-5.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston MA, p.3.

logical possibilities for the transformation of advanced capitalism into post-capitalist 'rational' society.'¹⁵

Foucault's consideration of the rationality or art of government on the other hand is concerned more with the locus of power than economic dependency. For Foucault, 'the objective of the exercise of power is to reinforce, strengthen and protect the principality'.¹⁶ Foucault makes it clear that 'having the ability to retain one's principality is not at all the same thing as possessing the art of governing'.¹⁷

To govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.¹⁸

While Foucault's more well known works on sexuality shifted his theoretical focus away from themes of governmental rationality, an underlying preoccupation with the question of multiple sites of power influenced his subsequent varying areas of research. Foucault's work on sexuality, governmentality and penal reform, all espoused a 'representation of society as a network of omnipresent relations of subjugating power'¹⁹, or what is often commonly referred to as 'the

¹⁵ L. J. Ray, 'Habermas, legitimation and the state' in *Journal of Theory and Social Behaviour*, vol.8, no.2, 1978, p.150.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', p.90.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', p.90.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', p.92.

¹⁹ Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p.4.

technique of power'.²⁰ In this sense, Foucault's various projects have all been concerned with 'the formation of the modern subject as a historical and cultural reality; the question of the forms in which power is exercised over life; and the associated matter of the government and self-government of individuals and populations.'²¹ Or in other words;

A rationality of government will thus mean a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced.²²

In Foucault's view we can see the significance of the relationship between the state and the public sphere in terms of power exercised in each realm. Since the 'practical implication of his model of power is that resistance must be carried out in local struggles against many forms of power exercised at the everyday level of social relations.'²³ This view ascribes a great level of autonomy to the public sphere whereas Habermas would merely consider that sphere purely as a site of resistance.

The demarcation of society into separate and distinct sections is a direct continuation of more traditional conceptions of the state and its various spheres of responsibility. For example, Barry Hindess has defined the state as 'a relatively permanent set of institutions concerned with the

²⁰ Barry Smart, 'Michel Foucault', p.130.

²¹ Barry Smart, 'Michel Foucault', p.121.

²² Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality', p.3.

²³ Jana Sawicki, 'Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference', in *Feminist Interpretations of Political Theory*, eds Mary Langdon Shanley & Carole Pateman, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994, p.222.

government of society - where government is understood primarily as a matter of the making and enforcement of laws on the one hand and the external defense on the other'.²⁴ This definition of the sphere of government clearly defines the role of the state in relation to the rest of society. In this sense, the state is defined by its function and 'it establishes clear links between the state and the political sphere and, indeed, the wider society'.²⁵ John Keane's identification of four stages of the conceptual distinction between state and civil society are useful to note at this point:

... these stages can be identified as: (a) a view which counterposed a sovereign, centralized constitutional state standing over its subjects to a series of independent societies which could check its potential to become authoritarian; (b) an anti-state impulse which called for the strengthening of civil society against the state in the interests of justice, equality and liberty; (c) a u-turn in which the need for a strong state was stressed to check the paralysis, conflict and anarchy of civil society; and (d) a renewal of the pluralist approach, in which the self-organization of civil society was emphasized as a means of resisting encroachment by the state.²⁶

It is the last stage of Keane's analysis that is of interest from a Habermasian perspective, which would concur with this analysis. However, the new right economic ideology of market rationalism has resulted in the withdrawal of a large part of state intervention from the economy. The result of this has been the concentration of the state's efforts

²⁴ Barry Hindess, 'Rehearsing a venerable debate: comments on *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*' in *ANZJS*, vol.29, no.3, 1993, p.375.

²⁵ Bob Jessop, *State Theory*, p.341.

²⁶ Bob Jessop, *State Theory*, p.350.

in legislating the so-called Habermasian lifeworld, or sphere of familial relations of the family. While this phenomena in itself is not new if we consider factors such as old age pensions, welfare payments and health policies to name a few, what is of significance here is the motivation for the state's interest in the lifeworld. In this sense, clear boundaries are drawn between public and private as the private sphere of the family becomes the state's new area of responsibility. This is crucial because the private sphere then becomes the main sphere from which the state may now draw its legitimacy. This is the paradox. While no clear or constant demarcation exists between public and private, or between government, market, and society, the state must ensure a field of jurisdiction over which it wields power and may legislate order. In other words, the discourse of separate realms of public and private must be perpetuated in order for governments to maintain legitimacy. The state must maintain an appearance of control of economic affairs (inflation rates and so on) in order to procure popular approval and subsequent legitimation. Jessop outlines an additional paradox when he describes the state as 'just one institutional ensemble among others within a social formation', which is 'peculiarly charged with overall responsibility for maintaining cohesion of the social formation of which it is a part.'²⁷ Part of the state's approach then has been to minimise market interventionism while still convincing society that it is responsible for the results of a largely self-regulating market when it produces positive outcomes.

²⁷ Bob Jessop, *State Theory*, p.360.

The problem then, for Habermas is his failure to anticipate the move from a Keynesian-based economic paradigm to an increasingly neo-liberal approach. This development contributes to a more difficult relationship between state and society, and as such forms part of the background of what I term 'the paradox of state and society'. On the other hand, as Foucault has argued, modern governmental authority is concurrently about individualizing and totalizing. That is to say, that modern government must answer the question of 'what it is for an individual, and for a society or population of individuals, to be governed or governable'.²⁸ In other words, techniques of government are implemented in ways, which encourage individuals to be 'governable' or 'self-governing'. That is, to be both self-regulating and willing to submit themselves to governmental authority.

This raises a number of interesting questions about the subsequent relationship between (private) individuals and (public) institutions such as the state. The state becomes involved in an ongoing process of mutual interaction and negotiation. Such 'mutual interaction' serves to override hitherto strictly observed boundaries between the two categories of public and private. The connection between governmentality and governmental rationality²⁹ raises a number of interesting questions about the role of modern administrative states that have widely adopted the ideology of economic rationalism. For Foucault, the crucial issue in the establishment

²⁸ Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality', p.36.

²⁹ Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality' p.1.

of what he calls 'the art of government' is the 'introduction of economy into political practice ... the art of good government is just the art of exercising power in the form and according to the model of the economy'.³⁰ In this view, the technique of government involves governing at a distance, rather than through direct interventionist methods.

economic rationalism, state governance and processes of globalisation

More recently, Habermas has turned his attention to the impact of processes of globalisation on the nature and function of the nation-state.³¹

Habermas has argued that since the end of the 1970s, 'the nation-state has come under increasing pressure from the force of globalization'.³² It is important to note here that Habermas understands globalization as a process, not as an end-state.³³ Habermas sees processes of globalisation in terms of a potential global domestic policy and considers its impact on local competition.³⁴ This thesis however, is more concerned with the problems posed by processes of market globalisation for nation-states on an internal level. Whether a society is conceived of as a nation-state or as a player in a 'postnational constellation', it is now faced with the challenge

³⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality' in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago Il., 1991, p.92.

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. & ed. by Max Pensky, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 2001.

³² Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.65.

³³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.65.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.62.

of adapting to the pressure of an 'economically driven unravelling of the welfare state'.³⁵

Habermas argues that: 'under pressure of de-nationalization, societies constituted as nation-states are "opening" themselves to an economically driven world and society.'³⁶ While Habermas is interested in the desirability and possibility of a 'political response to the challenges of a postnational constellation',³⁷ this thesis has concentrated on an analysis of a process not yet concluded, with a still definable notion of a democratised nation-state. Whether considered at a micro or a macro level, the process remains much the same. That is to say, while internal policy produced by the nation-state is largely influenced by global market factors, the nation-state itself is still able to cling to a legitimate function. Habermas refers to this process as a 'self-dismantling' of neo-liberal politics and argues that this consists largely in 'finding appropriate forms for the democratic process to take *beyond* the nation-state'.³⁸ The crux of the matter though, that of the tension between systemic and lifeworld rationality dredges up the same problems whether society is considered as a nation-state or at a postnational level. This is precisely why more recent theoretical focuses in Habermas' thought do not constitute any significant change in his views or in his overall modernist project. Indeed, since many of the theoretical

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, pp.60-61.

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.61.

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.61.

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.61.

developments in Habermas' more recent works were first introduced in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* or in the two volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, these works still remain relevant in regard to his analysis of public spheres. Given this, both works have played a major role in the theoretical grounding of this thesis.

The sphere of the economy has an ambiguous relationship with traditional notions of both the state and society. While governmentality is about how to govern, economic sovereignty of government can be understood as economy.³⁹ Thus, notions of economic rationalism and Foucault's 'art of governing' are both important for measuring the impact of bureaucracy on the public sphere. It is necessary however, to make the distinction between a government who acts rationally, in a Habermasian sense, and an economically rationalist government.⁴⁰

Economically rationalist policies adopted by government have affected the nature of the civic public, the role of citizen and of the state itself. Increasingly, the government uses economically rationalist policies and rhetoric to legitimise itself, and to maintain the appearance of a social democracy in which the generalisable interests of the public are taken into

³⁹ Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality' pp.7-11.

⁴⁰ For example, see: David Burchell, 'The curious career of economic rationalism: government and economy in the current policy debate', in *ANZJS*, vol.30, no.3, November 1994, pp.322-333.

account. The 'art of governing' as Foucault has called it, has somehow become the 'art of rationalising' and has tended to have an increasingly detrimental effect on the needs of the citizenry. The processes of economic rationalism are 'always aimed at moving some of the coordination functions of nation-societies away from states and bureaucracies to economies and markets'.⁴¹ Pusey views this as 'an immanent connection between public policy and the 'generalisable interests' (rather than particular and partial power interests) on a community of people who share, however precariously, a culturally shared identity'.⁴²

Moreover, the rhetoric of new right economic rationalism has become the normalised discourse of the political public sphere. This leaves government in the position of maintaining economic stability by creating a discourse of autonomous market stability. Public policy then, becomes streamlined and government takes the position of merely coordinating the economy and market sectors. Where once the bureaucracy existed to legitimate and order the paternalistic state, it is now the market which governs not only the official state but also reaches into evolving discourses of the public sphere. Generalisable interests are those that the market reveals in terms of demand and supply. In terms of a Habermasian analysis, this is indicative of a quintessential period of steering media.

⁴¹ Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-building State Changes its Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p.3.

⁴² Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*, p.171.

It is interesting to note at this juncture the state's necessary insistence on a clear division between the economy and the private sphere of the family, between goal-oriented rationalism and communicative rationality; or to put it more broadly, between public and private. Even in the invading language of Habermas' theory of steering media, economic rationalist ideology assumes a division between the traditionally demarcated categories of public and private. Despite rhetoric, which argues the opposite, the dichotomy is preserved. The state and its bureaucratic apparatuses have declared along with early feminists that the personal is political and have consequently legislated quite widely in what Habermas would consider to be the cultural realm of private citizens: the lifeworld.⁴³ In the very ideology of economic rationalism, a division is made.

For Pusey, under the ideology of economic rationalism the,

... economic system treats civil society as part of an objectified environment, and as an economic 'resource', in a new set of relationships that overshadow, or perhaps even supersede relationships [that were hitherto used] to set irreducible limits and imperatives on state action.⁴⁴

Economic policy is not decided in the same way as social policy, which is by deliberative interventionism, but rather by the force of market mechanisms. Herein lies the quandary. The insistence that there is no longer any distinction between public and private exists simultaneously

⁴³ Carol Johnson, 'Shaping the social: Keating's integration of social and economic policy', in *Just Policy*, no.5, February 1996, pp.9-16.

⁴⁴ Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*, p.211.

with the re-affirmation of a clear division between spheres. The role of government then evolves as a purely moral administrative apparatus; primarily as legislative or interventionist in the private sphere. At another level, these changes are themselves treated as evidence of a radical shift in Australian public policy making'.⁴⁵ This follows the shift, as Pusey sees it, from a governmental ideology of enlightenment rationalism to one of market driven economically rationalist ideals. In Pusey's account, many critics regard economic rationalism as a clear manifestation of societal *irrationalism*.⁴⁶

I am arguing that the interplay between state, society and economy have a direct impact on not only directional developments of social policy, but also on the development of dominant Australian cultural ideologies. This is one of the reasons why the use of a Habermasian framework provides room for a more indepth analysis of the often complex interrelationship between societal subsystems; of social and political communication and economic transactions. Hindess describes 'state' and 'society' as 'distinct, interrelated and largely overlapping systems of social organisation.'⁴⁷ This will be examined in the following section through an analysis of some contemporary examples of Australian social policy which incorporate Habermas' ideals of rationality and show some of the complexities of theorising subsystem demarcation.

⁴⁵ Barry Hindess, 'Symposium on the impact of Economic Rationalism in Canberra', p.374.

⁴⁶ Barry Hindess, 'Symposium on the impact of Economic Rationalism in Canberra', p.376.

⁴⁷ Barry Hindess, 'Symposium on the impact of Economic Rationalism in Canberra', p.37

rationality and rational consensus: some policy examples

At this juncture, it is useful to return to the Habermasian emphasis on free and open discourse with the aim of achieving rational consensus. Habermas' notion of a *rationally* motivated consensus was touched on in previous chapters but should be explored in more detail in terms of governmental policy decisions in the public domain. For Habermas,

This concept of *communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationality motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.⁴⁸

Habermasian rational consensus assumes mutual understanding through discursive interaction. In this view then, the production of social policy should ideally be the result of a drawn out process of debate and public input, not only from elected officials, but also by way of submissions by private citizens. It is a type of search for locating deliberative truth and is the foundation of Habermas' notion of deliberative democracy. This notion is complicated, as Seyla Benhabib has noted, because it is unclear whether Habermas sees the meaning of truth as being defined by rational consensus, or whether he sees the attainment of rational consensus as a criterion of truth.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*; trans. Thomas McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, p.10.

⁴⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p.286.

For a rationally motivated consensus to be achieved, it is assumed that all discursive participants are rational, or at least behave rationally while participating in Habermas' ideal discourse model. It could be said that Habermas is working by a process of exclusion here; he is restricting discourse only to those who are considered 'rational' or who have something 'rational' to contribute. Habermas defines rationality in the following way:

An assertion can be called rational only if the speaker satisfies the conditions necessary to one other participant in communication. A goal directed action can be rational only if the actor satisfies the conditions necessary for realizing his intention to intervene successfully in the world. Both attempts can fail to come to pass, the desired effect can fail to take place. But even the nature of these failures shows the rationality of the expressions - failures can be explained.⁵⁰

So, for Habermas, the conditions necessary for communicative action to occur are largely determined by his conception of rationality. Clearly, there are several difficulties with the Habermasian conception of rationality. Rationalism, in this sense, holds that 'there is always an objectively correct answer to normative questions, and moreover that this answer is in principle accessible to us through a process of discursive argumentation terminating in a justified consensus.'⁵¹ On a theoretic level, Foucauldian conceptions of rationality⁵² have been used to highlight the exclusionary nature of Habermas' notion of rational communication.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, 1984, p.11.

⁵¹ Allen W. Wood, 'Habermas' defense of rationalism', in *New German Critique*, no.35, spring/summer 1985, p.146.

⁵² As explored in Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, Pantheon, New York, 1967.

However, here I will consider a select number of Australian policy examples to explore the so-called 'private' or 'lifeworld' discourses, which have often been excluded, from deliberative political agendas and so-called rational discussion in the past. This exclusion has largely been based on historical ideas as to what is considered 'rational' and appropriate to include in public debate.

There is an established tradition that is critical of state intervention in domestic life.⁵³ Although government intervention into private lives of citizens has regularly occurred, for example, in the form of welfare payments, child protective services and wage structuring, there have remained a number of issues that have continued to be largely regarded as variously irrational or inappropriate to discuss in the open arena of the public sphere. Such issues could include the (traditional) lifeworld issues of domestic violence or women's health.⁵⁴ In particular, such issues like women's health and childcare for working parents were deemed to be under the jurisdiction of the patriarchal head of the household and thus

⁵³ Bettina Cass, 'Population Policies and Family Policies: State Construction of Domestic Life', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Cora Baldock & Bettina Cass, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p168.

⁵⁴ For a look at different ways in which the state intervenes in the private life of citizens through social policy like welfare payments, means testing, and tax benefits, see: Jill Roe, 'The end is where we start from: women and welfare since 1901', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Cora Baldock & Bettina Cass, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; Cora V. Baldock, 'Public policies and the paid work of women', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Cora Baldock & Bettina Cass, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; and Bettina Cass, 'Redistribution to children and to mothers; a history of child endowment and family allowances', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, eds Cora Baldock & Bettina Cass, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

outside the realm of 'responsible government'. Eventually, however, these issues found themselves at the top of many political agendas and as the objects of much public debate as feminists moved into the federal bureaucracy during the Whitlam labor government. This not only suggests a social shift of sorts, but more importantly, an ideological shift, since it highlights the transitory and continuously changing nature of what is publicly and politically considered rational, appropriate, and eligible for public debate. The nature of discourse about private domestic issues that can be found in recent political policy debates bear many similarities to those with which early 'femocrats' also engaged. In other words, the development of legislation, which deals with private sphere issues, is more often than not, aimed directly at women. The proliferation of legislation which orders the traditionally private or domestic sphere of women reveals a dominant force of rational relativism. It is also symptomatic of the reinvented role of government as no longer the regulator of material production (which is now overwhelmingly taken care of by market forces), but as legislator for the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld. This type of legislation is most significant in the current context in terms of the way it constructs a gendered notion of the liberal citizen. Such a construction carries with it an ideological approach understood by a conception of the market as a tool for shaping processes of symbolic reproduction in the domestic sphere.

If the 'femocrat phenomenon' (as discussed in more detail in Chapter Four) is an indication of the gradual bureaucratisation of feminism, then

the Habermasian colonisation thesis would argue that femocrats would be increasingly 'steered' by the media of money and power, and would consequently be unable to achieve rational consensus through the processes of communicative action. First, Habermas' colonisation argument does not recognise the high levels of rationality achieved in economic debate over the emergence of economic rationalism; in fact, Habermas would view this kind of rationality as a debased form. Second, this highlights again that Habermas' social-theoretical framework does not allow for the emergence of the femocrat strategy, which draws on both systematically and socially integrated action contexts.

While I have focused on some of the difficulties associated with Habermas' conception of rationality, some feminist theorists argue that the potential exists in Habermasian theory for the development of a less exclusive conception of rationality than that espoused by liberal theorists.⁵⁵ Because Habermas sees the lifeworld as the realm of communicative action, he recognises the high degree of rationality that is communicatively achieved in this sphere, which is generally only highlighted by feminist theorists.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See: Christine Everingham, *Motherhood and Modernity: An Investigation into the Rational Dimension of Mothering*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994; and Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory' in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on The Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1987, who have both argued along these lines.

⁵⁶ Nancy Fraser, 'What's so critical about critical theory? The case of Habermas and gender', in *New German Critique*, no.35, spring/summer 1985, pp.97-131.

In the following section, I will examine some of the complexities that arise when the state bureaucracy attempts to negotiate specific areas of social policy. When modes of social reproduction are legislated for, the boundaries between public and private become less concrete. Femocrat motivated legislation of the private sphere enlarges the public sphere, but more importantly, it is motivated by a definite ideological difference to traditional governing of the domestic sphere by governments who support traditional patriarchal notions of gendered roles. In this way, feminist bureaucrats work to resist dominant notions of a gendered private or domestic sphere by working within state apparatuses to alter boundaries of a rational public. Most often, complications occur because a stable subsystem differentiation is difficult to obtain. Indeed, shifting boundaries between notions of public and private remain one of the largest obstacles to blanket bureaucratic legitimation.

Women's Health Initiatives

Women's health is, for two main of reasons, a particularly interesting area of policy to consider at this stage. First, women's health is an area of social policy where feminist lobbying of the state has been comparatively successful,⁵⁷ and second, legislation and policy formation in the area of women's health fairly recent and has been progressing quite consistently since the 1970s. While family health has been targeted in the past,

⁵⁷ Dorothy Broom, *Damned if We Do: Contradictions in Women's Health Care*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p.62.

especially for low income families, it is a relatively new development to target women's health with specific campaigns encouraging women themselves to undergo health checks such as breast examinations and cervical screening. This is significant because discussion about women's health issues, and indeed men's health issues, has traditionally taken place in the private realm. Issues such as these have been hitherto considered ineligible for public or political debate, or have been regarded as matters that are not the direct responsibility of the state.

Recent legislation has provided women with better access to health resources. The introduction of *Medicare* in 1984 provided many low income and single parent families (the majority of which are headed by women) with better access to quality health care. This is an important development in light of the Office of the Status of Women findings is that 'Women are the most frequent users of health services, largely because they are over-represented in the aged population and because of their role as child bearers and carer for family members.'⁵⁸

In 1989, the National Women's Health Program was established. The program grew from a proposal, which was forwarded at a National Women's Health Conference held in Adelaide in 1985. According to the New National Agenda for Women, the specific policy relating to women's health was developed in conjunction with extensive consultation with over

⁵⁸ Office of the Status of Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future: The New National Agenda for Women 1993-2000*, AGPS, Canberra, 1993, p.75.

one million women nationally. The final policy was later developed to match the needs that these women expressed.⁵⁹

The cost of the program is shared between the state and commonwealth governments. Total government funding (federal and state) for the period from 1989-90 to 1992-3 reached \$35,971,472.⁶⁰ This funding was used to help community-based groups to establish projects which address the seven main priority health issues identified by the women consulted about the new health policy. These priority health issues are as follows:

... reproductive health and sexuality, the health of ageing women, emotional and mental health, violence against women, occupational health and safety, the health needs of women as carers and the health effects of sex-role stereotyping on women.⁶¹

These seven areas of priority for women's health policy expanded on the 1970s State focus on refuges. Moves toward legislating against domestic violence rather than a focus on funding women's shelters gained momentum. By 1990, the government was targeting specific areas of women's health and providing more funding to achieve some concrete results. The national program for the early detection of breast cancer was established in 1990 and allocated \$64 million by the federal government.⁶²

⁵⁹ Office of the Status of Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.76.

⁶⁰ Office of the Status of Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.76.

⁶¹ Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.76.

⁶² Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.67.

Between 1991 and 1992, approximately 95,000 Australian women were screened nationally for breast cancer under the program. A large television campaign followed, further encouraging women (especially older women) to undergo a free breast examination. In 1992, the government allocated \$23.4 million over a four-year period for a cervical cancer-screening program. An alternative birthing services program is also funded by the National Women's Health Program. In addition, government initiatives saw the inclusion of women as a target group as part of the National AIDS strategy.

In addition to these programs, the Federal government has taken initiatives to address the issue of health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is fourteen years less than other Australian women. To help overcome this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have access to all existing health programs under the National Women's Health Program, as well as those established under the National Aboriginal Health Strategy.⁶³

Women's health is a pivotal aspect of social policy when considering societal reproduction since it quite literally effects both the material and symbolic reproduction of people and their subsequent socialisation (symbolic reproduction). Government initiatives in this area of women's health (reproduction of social labour) is an overt display and legitimation

⁶³ Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.

of the value of the 'dual aspect' activity, of the symbolic and material reproduction performed by women in their capacity as mothers, nurturers and carers. Further, state initiatives for women's health and the public discourses surrounding this issue serve as illustrations of the use of socially integrated action contexts in the systemic realm of public policy formation by the femocracy. Under the more conservative Howard Coalition Government the private sphere continues to be the focus of heavy scrutiny and new legislation. For example, the federal budget speech for 2000-1 focused largely on the domestic sphere such as health education, welfare and a strengthening of commitment to 'stronger families and communities'.⁶⁴ The cornerstone of this budget is the emphasis on 'self-reliance and self improvement'. This represents a further step toward legislating self-governing behaviours.

Women and Paid Employment

In the period between 1983 and 1992, the overall number of Australian women in paid work rose from 44% to 52% of the total workforce.⁶⁵ Similarly, the number of married women in paid work rose 8.1%, from 45.7% to 53.8% of the total paid workforce.⁶⁶ While there was significant growth in the number of women who joined the workforce during the

⁶⁴ Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, 9 May 2000, second reading, Budget Speech 2000-1, [http://www.budget.gov.au/speech/html/speeChapter.htm#P71_17522].

⁶⁵ Office of the Status Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.43.

⁶⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia*, ABS, Canberra, 1994, p.157.

1983-1992 period, it is important to note that trends revealed a predominance of women employed in part-time, lower paying jobs. While the overall participation of women in the paid workforce totaled 52% in 1992, the average wage for women still remained lower than that for men, suggesting fewer hours at the same or lesser rates of pay.

The House of Representative Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (HRSCCLA) 1992 *Report of the Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status of Women in Australia* concluded that a number of factors were responsible for preventing more women from entering non-traditional forms of employment:

... factors mitigating against women attempting non-traditional work training relates to student and teacher preconceptions, lack of prior training, parental attitudes and possible harassment still operates to discourage women and girls from moving into non-traditional areas of employment in large numbers.⁶⁷

Barriers to the incorporation of women into unorthodox employment also take the form of less obvious opposition, which support traditional sex role stereotyping. For example, the HRSCCLA found that,

A word of caution was sounded by representatives of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association who felt that there was a possibility of devaluing women in traditional female jobs in an attempt to gain access to non-traditional forms of employment for women.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (HRSCCLA), *Half Way to Equal: Report of the Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1992, p.39.

⁶⁸ HRSCCLA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.39.

This cautioning however, did not extend to the ongoing devaluation of traditional women's occupations where there remains overall substantially lower pay and work conditions than those occupations in which men dominate the workforce. Extended devaluation of traditional work of women as underpaid; menial, part-time and generally undervalued has been the focus of too numerous studies to mention here in any detail.⁶⁹ While the Hawke-Keating Labor governments made a concerted effort to encourage women to enter non-traditional areas of employment, it continued to rely on notions of gender which maintained a strong link between women and domestic sphere commitments. For example, despite Keating's insistence that the Australian economy needed to fully utilise the female labour force, his government 'tended to emphasise the importance of part-time jobs for women, particularly married women with children, in an economy in which traditional areas of male full-time employment were in decline'.⁷⁰

While recent government reports acknowledge the structural and social barriers faced by many women who choose to enter arenas of non-traditional employment, little actual change has occurred. Participation rates of women in these (non-traditional) industries remains low and the division of labour in the home remain inequitable. Recent studies have

⁶⁹ For an account of how women's labour is largely omitted from the 'official' economy, see: Marilyn Waring, *Counting For Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington NZ, 1988; also see Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Occupational Segregation: Women's Work, Women's Pay*, AGPS, Canberra, 1990, for a summary of women in the paid workforce, the implications of occupational segregation and varying rates of pay.

⁷⁰ Carol Johnson, *Governing Change*, p.72.

shown that a gendered division of labour still prevails despite popular rhetoric about equality.⁷¹ The productiveness of women, particularly of those who endeavour to work in non-traditional fields, is not only restricted by their 'excessive share of domestic and community responsibilities and the lethargy of forces in the labour market to respond to women's specific needs',⁷² but also by sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace, and availability and affordability of childcare.

Recent legislation in the area of employment has been of great assistance to working women. The 1984 Sex Discrimination Act 'made it unlawful for any employer to discriminate against a person on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy'.⁷³ The 1986 Affirmative Action Act 'requires employers with more than a hundred employees to devise and report on strategies to achieve equality of employment opportunity for women'.⁷⁴ For Ranald, the former women's officer of the Administrative and Clerk Officers Association (ACOA) NSW branch, the legislation takes on special significance:

... the most important aspect of the EEO and AA legislation and programs is that they are a public acknowledgement that

⁷¹ For example, see: Michelle Gunn, 'Rhetoric Beats Equality in Sharing Family Workload', in *The Advertiser*, Thursday, August 24, 1995, p.3; Kim Sweetman, 'Housework is a Woman's World', in *The Advertiser*, Wednesday, February 14, 1996, p.3; and Jennifer Foreshew, 'Call for Flexibility in Jobs for Women', in *The Australian*, Friday, September 29, 1995, p.4.

⁷² HRSC/LCA, *Half Way to Equal*, p.47.

⁷³ Office of the Status of Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.47.

⁷⁴ Office of the Status of Women, *Women - Shaping and Sharing the Future*, p.47.

discrimination exists, and that there is an obligation on the part of the state and employers to remedy it.⁷⁵

Both Acts are 'clear examples of feminist-inspired reforms [which have] clearly challenged conventional legal characterisations of public and private.'⁷⁶ In terms of Habermasian theory, both Acts serve to (re)shape the traditional processes of material production by altering traditional social attitudes toward the value and rights of women working in the paid workforce. Both Acts clearly illustrate the 'dual aspect' of the role of femocrats in the public bureaucracy.

The most significant aspect of this process in Habermasian terms, is that it is steering media (money and power), as opposed to the force of the better argument (communicative action) as postulated by feminist movements, which are encouraging women to seek work in the official economy of the public sphere (material reproduction), thus instigating social change.

Access to childcare

The construction of the liberal citizen under the Hawke-Keating Governments and the Howard Government produced very different

⁷⁵ Chris Ronalds, *Affirmative Action and Sex Discrimination: A Handbook on Legal Rights for Women*, Pluto Press, Sydney, p.25.

⁷⁶ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.8. Also see: Meredith Edwards, *Social Policy, Public Policy for a more specific discussion on feminist involvement in policy formation.*

discourse about the role of women in the public sphere and the domestic sphere. Despite both governments outwardly supporting increases in availability and affordability of childcare, each have displayed a very different set of ideas with quite different implications of such policies for mothers who have undertaken paid employment. While legislation in areas of social policy under the recent Labor governments attracted some feminist criticism, they are a good illustration of the slow march forward of the femocracy even in the shadow of the Keating Labor Government implementation of an economic rationalist style of governing. While the Hawke-Keating Government encouraged the participation of women in the workforce, and indeed cited it as an important factor for the growth of the Australian economy, the Howard Government has taken a very different ideological approach. Indeed, rollback of the femocracy and feminist policy reform has been a surprisingly swift outcome of the re-election of the Howard Government for a second term. In broad terms, this can be contrasted with the femocrat friendly environment of the Hawke-Keating Labor Governments, despite their predilection toward economic rationalism.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ For more on such a comparison, see works by Marian Sawer who has detailed both the checkered advancement of the femocracy under previous governments, and its rollback under Howard. See: Marian Sawer, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1990; and Marian Sawer, 'Policy Shapers or Policy Takers? Women and the Australian State', in *Public Policy and the State*, ed. Linda Hancock, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1999.

The Howard Government has developed a number of tax initiatives aimed directly at benefiting single income families.⁷⁸ The Family Assistance Office was established in July 2000 to provide service delivery to families of the new family payments, including Family Tax Benefit Parts A and B and Child Care Benefit. The aim here is to provide 'a better, more streamlined service by amalgamating the current range of family payments and delivering them through a single agency'.⁷⁹ If we couple this type of legislation with a sample of Howard's views about the role of women in society, the ideological position of his government becomes very clear. For example, as Carol Johnson points out, 'Howard has mentioned the possibility of men staying home to look after the children, although he says, this is "normally but not always" the role of the mother'.⁸⁰ Indeed, the fact that he uses women's conventions to introduce issues of childcare legislation and tax reform which benefits 'stay at home' mothers or fathers evidences the intended target audience of such policies.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Peter Costello, *Tax Reform: Not a New Tax, a New Tax System. The Howard Government's Plan for a New Tax System*, Circulated by the Honourable Peter Costello, M.P., Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, August 1998, Table 0.1, p.28.

⁷⁹ *Commonwealth Child Care News*, Special Edition, Number 2, Edition 6, May 2000, p.3.

⁸⁰ Carol Johnson, *Governing Change: Keating to Howard*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2000, p.78.

⁸¹ For example, see: John Howard, Transcript of the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Opening Address to The Liberal Women's Conference, Brisbane Convention And Exhibition Centre, 13 March 1998; John Howard, Transcript of the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Questions and Answers, South Australian Liberal Party State Council, 15 August 1998; and, John Howard, Transcript of the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Launch of Women's Policy, Stamford Hotel, Adelaide, 15 September 1998. Also see: Carol Johnson, 'The Fragility of Reform: Challenges to Australian Women's Citizenship', in *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, ed. Shirin M. Rai, Macmillan, London, 2000, especially, pp.192, 196. Johnson also argues that despite Howard's gender neutral language, women are his target audience when he addresses issues of childcare initiatives.

The Howard Government's implementation of family tax benefits has been described as a move toward, in Howard's own words, 'greater choice for Australian families'.⁸² Specifically, the family tax initiatives target single income families with children under five. What is interesting about the government's tax package is Howard's argument that it has been designed to 'increase choice available to parents'.⁸³ Yet, the tax benefit does not benefit all parents or families, but rather, is aimed quite specifically at a particular sort of family; that is, the single income family. Yet, Howard maintains: 'It is not the role of the government to dictate a stereotype. It is not for the government to say that one parent should be at home when children are young, or that both parents should be in the workforce, that's not our business, that's the business of the parents. But it is our business and it is our responsibility to facilitate choice.' Howard continues:

And what you have to do is to find, to set a paradigm that allows people to freely choose how to organise their lives. And we don't want one side of the argument saying what the others are doing is wrong. I am fed up with people attacking women who stay at home full time to look after their children. I am fed up with those people being sort of treated as somehow or other they're second class citizens Equally, the women who have a career and who are looking after their children and are making their own arrangements in the way that they think fit for their own families, they shouldn't be told that they are neglecting their parental responsibilities. So, in other words, we all ought to recognise that what we should be on about is choice and respecting the decisions that parents make. It's for parents to make the decision. It is for us to set the framework

⁸² John Howard, Transcript of The Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Questions and Answers, South Australian Liberal Party State Council, 15 August 1998, and, John Howard, Transcript of the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Launch of Women's Policy, Stamford Hotel, Adelaide, 15 September 1998.

⁸³ John Howard, Transcript of The Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Questions and Answers, South Australian Liberal Party State Council, 15 August 1998.

to allow them to make the full range of the decisions that they want to make.⁸⁴

This passage tells us a number of very interesting things about the way Howard views the role of women in liberal democratic society. First, it sets up working women (as opposed to men) as those responsible for making childcare arrangements. Second, it places women in paid employment in opposition to 'the second class citizens' who stay at home full time to care for their children. In other words, this type of discourse constructs 'stay at home mothers' (private sphere workers) in direct opposition not only to working mothers (primarily public sphere workers), but also to feminist demands for equality.

While such tax initiatives indeed benefit single income couple families, they can also deter both parents from taking up full time paid employment, since this would make them ineligible for the newly legislated family tax benefits. This legislation, then, is about structuring choice within conservative ideological parameters. Indeed, despite Howard's rhetoric about 'choice' for families, recent studies have shown that the Howard Government has introduced a number of 'financial disincentives for many women in low income couple families with

⁸⁴ John Howard, Transcript of The Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Questions and Answers, South Australian Liberal Party State Council, 15 August 1998.

children to work, or work more, including increases in childcare costs.⁸⁵ Further, it has been noted that under the Howard government, 'the increase in total funding [for childcare] does not even fully cover the growth in the system let alone allow for qualitative improvements to the system'.⁸⁶

Compared with the discourse constructed around working mothers and accessibility to childcare under the Keating Labor Government as outlined in more detail in Chapter Four, the more conservative Howard Coalition makes no such enthusiastic gestures about the importance of women to the Australian economy. Rather, more emphasis is placed on their role in relation to very rigid notions of the heterosexual nuclear family unit. Indeed, in the instance of tax reform and tax incentives used here, women are excluded from any financial benefits if they do not meet the criteria for eligible families (heterosexual, one income parent families). This is important since, as Johnson notes, 'Providing financial incentives for women to stay at home also involves providing financial disincentives for women to go out to work. The state is once again transferring caring functions to the domestic sphere of women'.⁸⁷ Despite Howard's

⁸⁵ Carol Johnson, *Governing Change*, p.79. Also see: Gillian Beer, 'Is it worth working? The financial impact of increased hours of work by married mothers with young children.' National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling, Faculty of Management, University of Canberra, paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference of Economists, University of Tasmania, 28 September-1 October, 1997, p.30; and Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Child Care: Philanthropy and Beyond*, Cambridge, Melbourne, second ed., 1998, pp.223-227.

⁸⁶ Greg McIntosh, 'Childcare in Australia: current provision and recent developments', background papers, Information Research Service (IRS), (Social Policy Group), 1997, p.7.

⁸⁷ Carol Johnson, *Governing Change*, pp.77-78.

protestations that, what parents want is choice and that 'they don't want the government saying, you will do this, or you will do that and rigging the tax scales to bring about that result',⁸⁸ coalition tax reform has set some very deliberate boundaries for traditional gendered behaviour in both public and private spheres.

This example evidences the continuing trend toward private sphere legislation by liberal governments, and is significant in terms of the remapping of traditional public/private boundaries. As Thornton has argued, public campaigns have been responsible for generating a variety of feminist law reform efforts which, have been designed 'to compel the state qua polity to take responsibility for the harms occurring to women and children within families. These initiatives have directly challenged the barriers surrounding the family as a sacrosanct private sphere'.⁸⁹ In addition, as the role of women in society and the economy has changed over time, more conservative governments have been forced to intervene rather than relying on 'nature' to prescribe the role of women.

The main areas of change in which femocrats have made headway and continue to work is that of social policy. While substantial changes have been made, and many so-called 'women's issues' have become part of

⁸⁸ John Howard, Transcript of The Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, Questions and Answers, South Australian Liberal Party State Council, 15 August 1998.

⁸⁹ Margaret Thornton, *Public and Private*, p.9.

the social and political scenery, there is little evidence to suggest that the femocracy has achieved all it had set out to. Indeed, the domestic or private sphere has now become what some might view as a largely over-governed arena. This is part of a larger problem with the feminist agenda of politicising the personal. Once again, the femocrat position is structured by the agenda and concerns of the wider femocrat movement.

As the proceeding case studies have illustrated, state intervention in so-called women's issues increased with the growing prominence of femocrats in the state apparatus. This is not to say that all women in the state bureaucracies, or involved in the machinations of party politics were feminists or experienced political activists. Many women on the more conservative side of politics also took up such private sphere concerns in the public political realm. For example, by 2000, the Howard coalition's federal minister of family and community services announced that 'The Government's number one priority is reforming social policy - an issue of vital importance to all Australians - particularly women'.⁹⁰ The minister continues on to add, 'women's issues are central in many portfolio areas...'⁹¹ In this sense, social policy is still equated with the feminised domestic sphere. The domestic sphere then, has become one of the

⁹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, 'Strengthening our Commitment to Women', statement by senator the Honourable Jocelyn Newman minister for family and community service and minister assisting the Prime Minister for the status of women, 9 May 2000, [http://www.budget.gov.au/minst/women.htm#P236_37589].

⁹¹ Commonwealth of Australia, 'Strengthening our Commitment to Women', statement by senator the Honourable Jocelyn Newman minister for family and community service and minister assisting the Prime Minister for the status of women, 9 May 2000, [http://www.budget.gov.au/minst/women.htm#P236_37589].

primary sources for state legitimation and signals a crisis of governmental authority, or at least a definite change in the role of modern democratic governments.

Earlier Australian examples of state intervention into the private realm rested on conservative discourse that worked to reproduce traditional gender relations. For example, legislation that demanded that women leave paid employment upon marriage or pregnancy, worked to reinforce the legitimacy of the notion of the male breadwinner. Whitlam's Labor government was unusual in its over-reaching into the domestic sphere because, in doing so, it sought to break down many of the traditional notions about gendered roles. It can be argued that the recent return under Howard to a focus on policy making for the private sphere is a result of the transference of much of the economic decision making processes to the markets. This reliance on market legitimation is viewed, in Habermasian terms, as relying on steering media which remain outside of the bounds of rational debate. In the case of the Howard government, this has resulted in the reliance on the private sphere for legitimation of governmental authority. Indeed, economic changes brought about by globalisation and market rationalism have demanded that government policy under Howard focuses on legislating for the private or domestic sphere under the guise of social nostalgia for a 1950s Australia.

the crisis of governmental authority

Habermas views democracy strictly as a process of procedural legitimacy.⁹²

He argues that the jurisdiction of the state does not involve either the establishment of society's collective identity; or the processes of social integration through norms and values (which in any case are not at the state's disposal).⁹³ However, Habermas recognises that,

... inasmuch as the state assumes the guarantee to prevent social disintegration by way of binding decisions, the exercise of state power is tied to the claim of maintaining society in its normatively determined identity. The legitimacy of state power is then measured against this; and it must be recognised as legitimate if it is to last.⁹⁴

In which case, legislation of the social sphere as viewed in opposition to the economic sphere is indeed a major determinant of social identity. In more recent works such as *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas explores the connection between modern legal theory in ordering democratic societies.⁹⁵ As already noted, many of these ideas are built upon earlier notions of the role of democratic governments. In *The Communication and Evolution of Society*, Habermas argued that there were three main areas of responsibility for governments. These are, 'shaping a business policy that ensures growth, influencing the structure of

⁹² Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, London, Heinemann, 1979, p.186.

⁹³ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.180.

⁹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.180.

⁹⁵ See: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1996. Also see Matthieu Deflem ed., *Habermas, Modernity and Law*, Sage Publications, 1999, in which a number of commentators trace the development of Habermas' thought up to and including his work in *Between Facts and Norms*.

production in a manner oriented to collective needs, and correcting the pattern of social inequality'.⁹⁶ The resulting problem for Habermas is that the state is meant to be able to fulfil all these functions 'without violating the complementary relations that exclude the state from the economic system and, at the same time also make it dependent on the dynamic of the economy'.⁹⁷ The legitimation of the modern state is a problem of,

... representing the accomplishments of the capitalist economy as, comparatively speaking, the best possible satisfaction of generalisable interests - or at least insinuating that this is so. The state thereby programmatically obligates itself to keep dysfunctional side effects within acceptable limits. In this assignment of roles, the state provides legitimating support to a social order claiming legitimacy.⁹⁸

For Habermas, political legitimation problems occur when the state intervenes to resolve economic crises. In this view, such interventionist methodology merely displaces or shifts the fiscal problems into other areas of the internal bureaucratic system. As we have seen earlier, Habermas optimistically regards the public sphere as a sphere for the rational deliberation of private citizens about the affairs of social, political and economic organisation. Thus, Habermas' re-constructive theory of legitimation returns us to the fundamental question of 'practical philosophy'.⁹⁹ However, recent trends toward an economic rationalist ideology, change the conditions of state legitimation and effect the role of the Habermasian public sphere within such a society. A shift has occurred in which government sees itself as more concerned with imposing

⁹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.194.

⁹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.195.

⁹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.196.

⁹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p.205.

market relations on all spheres of life, including areas such as health care provision, child care and education. This creates an increased capacity for government to devote energy toward social intervention and concentration on the hitherto self-governing lifeworld.

This leaves the role of the public sphere as an arena for critical reflection in a precarious position. Habermas argues however, that 'the trends toward social disintegration pose a challenge especially for politics and law The question of how the unity of society can be secured now that the state can no longer represent it is ... a question of legitimation.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Habermas speaks of legitimation problems in *Between Facts and Norms* only in terms of specific and particular legal and political questions. He maintains that 'the routine business of procuring legitimation is burdened by problems of macrosocial irrationality, because law and politics have assumed a kind of surety for the cohesion of the entire system'.¹⁰¹ Habermas argues that this kind of social rationality should be managed 'through politically mediated processes of attunement among different functional systems'.¹⁰² Habermas draws on H. Wilke's view which:

... aims at shaping intersystem relationships among autonomous, active, and interdependent subsystems that no longer submit to the primacy of one part [namely politics]. Hence, they do not derive total system rationality from the

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1997, p.343.

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, p.343.

¹⁰² Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, pp.343-344.

validity of the universal but from the reflexive attunement of the particular.¹⁰³

From this, Habermas views Western societies as largely governed in an indirect manner by what he terms 'supervising states'. Such states rely more on the self-governing behaviour of individuals because of indirect 'hints' or 'guidance', rather than through direct forms of social and economic control.¹⁰⁴

conclusion

The Habermasian system as a combined state and economic system is pitted against the Habermasian lifeworld that consists of both political and sociocultural subsystems. However, complications arise because the state is also necessarily involved in the 'name of 'public interest' in supporting the private interests of capital', and this has a deep tendency to result in crises of legitimation.¹⁰⁵ This supports Habermas' notion that 'advanced capitalism cannot definitely sustain its legitimating structures'.¹⁰⁶ I am not asserting as Habermas does in *Legitimation Crisis*, that 'ephemeral opposition to legitimating structures can become mass withdrawals of legitimacy'.¹⁰⁷ Rather, that state legitimacy has eroded as ideological approaches to governing take away the responsibility of the state to

¹⁰³ H. Wilke, *Ironies des Staates*, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, p.207, cited in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, p.344.

¹⁰⁴ See: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, p.555, Chapter 8, ff.32.

¹⁰⁵ L. J. Ray, 'Habermas, legitimation and the state', p.159.

¹⁰⁶ L. J. Ray, 'Habermas, legitimation and the state', p.162.

¹⁰⁷ L. J. Ray, 'Habermas, legitimation and the state', p.163.

regulate markets and economies. In other words, the legitimating structures of Australian capitalism have not been challenged and opposed, but have been weakened as a result of the state's ideological direction that has followed market determinism. This results in a concentration of the state's efforts in the political and the sociocultural subsystems, thus narrowing the hitherto broader base from which governments could derive legitimation.

The shift from an ideological position under the Hawke-Keating Labor governments which supported and promoted legislation for social policy in the private sphere in order to expand the role of women in the private sphere can be contrasted to that of the Howard coalition Government. In this view, increased regulation of the private sphere through new childcare legislation for example, has restricted access for women to the public sphere.

Both the Hawke-Keating and Howard Governments have contributed to a steady trend toward enlarging public spheres, but have had very different motivations for doing so. These different ideological positions on gendered roles and the contribution of women to the public sphere determine not only the ability of women to transcend barriers between public and private spheres, but also shape the nature of a rational public sphere in contemporary Australian society. The next chapter will take a closer look at the expansion of the public sphere as shifting barriers between public and private alter its role and function in larger society.

chapter eight

normalising discourses

crises of modern publics

More complex societies are dependent on functional differentiation. Because of this, they must provide both for more dependence and for more independence among their subsystems. This is possible in principle because of increased complexity ... but in concrete cases, it places high demands on behaviour, for example, with regard to the precision with which system boundaries and social processes have to be perceived.¹

As societies become more complex, processes of locating system boundaries become more involved and fraught with difficulties. Indeed, while imagining a unified public sphere has always been a rather utopian aim, in modern democracies it is a most perplexing and difficult task at best. Yet the discursive notion of a unified public that has a definite will and which provides governments with legitimation or 'mandates', is strongly embedded in the public or national identity. This thesis so far has explored how social movements, new information technologies, and discourses of governance have all combined to complicate and fragment early Habermasian notions of a unified public sphere. These factors, among others, have combined to produce something of a crisis for practices of

¹ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', in *Modern German Sociology*, eds Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld & Nico Stehr, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p.185.

theorising about modern public spheres. Furthermore, Habermas' idealised conception of the public sphere has been the focus of much of this thesis. At the heart of the matter lies the location of both formal and informal societal boundaries. This is most significant for Habermas' conception of a theory of society, and also for the implementation of a systems theory approach in this process. Habermas has long wrestled with the problem of how it may be possible to reconcile the social and the systemic components of modern society. Chapter Five has already examined early attempts of a theoretical reconciliation between separated subsystems of public and private, or what would later manifest as Habermas' system and lifeworld paradigm. This chapter looks at the question of how systems theory can be used to accommodate reconciliation between the subsystems of public and private. Such complexities, I argue, are largely a result of Habermas' insistence on a systems theory approach, but are also partly due to his persistent loyalty to an overall modernist project.

In this chapter I explore the difficulties for the deeply modernist systems theory approach in a climate of multiplicities, fragmentation, and fluidity; that is to say, an era of the so-called postmodern. Much of Habermas' work is based on the assumption of a universal public sphere. This is true for his work on communicative ethics and rationality, and for his expanding work on legal norms and governmental authority. The development of not only multiple publics (which Habermas recognises), or of fragmented public spheres, but of an expanded public which includes

the private sphere of the family, raises some difficulties for political public practice. Indeed, the question of how an enlarged and fragmented public sphere can continue to produce the quality of democratic output needed to provide a source of state or government legitimation, as a smaller and more coherent Enlightenment public sphere, is worthy of some in-depth consideration.

Habermas & Luhmann: systems theory and the boundaries of modernity

In broad terms, systems theory involves the identification of 'boundaries of the system of society.'² Such boundaries range from cultural boundaries to territorial and institutional boundaries. Niklas Luhmann reminds us that what is important about locating and identifying boundaries of social systems is that they are 'boundaries of meaning and not, as in the case of organisms, physical boundaries.'³ Boundaries of meaning then, tell us about how we order our culture and ascribe meaning and value to behavioural systems. It is also necessary to identify system boundaries because 'internal differentiation of a system depends on well-established external boundaries and then serves, as functional differentiation, to stabilize the external boundaries.'⁴ Luhmann understands the development of systems theory in terms of the categories of functionalism, environmental reference and meaning, and complexity reduction.⁵

² Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.176.

³ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.176.

⁴ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.181

⁵ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.184.

It is apparent then, that systems theory encompasses a variety of important interconnected processes. Such processes include differentiation into parts, such as hierarchy formation, boundary maintenance, differentiation of structure and process, and selective projections or models of the environment. Luhmann argues that all of these factors, combined in one form or another, can be 'analyzed functionally as reduction of complexity.'⁶ In other words, the general trend in theorising about systems has largely resulted in the idea that 'systems serve the reduction of complexity'.⁷ Luhmann hypothesises that:

... the more complex a system is to become, the more abstractly defined its boundaries must be. As differentiation increases, i.e., as society becomes more complex, we can expect more abstract system boundaries. This would appear to be the reason why society today cannot be adequately defined as an association of individuals, or on the basis of a particular territory or a common culture. All of these relatively concrete boundaries are cut across by unregulated interdependencies. The boundaries of society can no longer be symbolized so concretely.⁸

Indeed, processes which aim to construct definite boundaries or locate concrete boundaries of a subsystem or system are flawed on even the most abstract level, as components of society are engaged in continual renegotiation of boundaries, and are variously interdependent with other systems. Throughout this thesis I have concentrated on the public sphere as an illustration of this point, and have used the notions of public and private to illustrate concomitant interdependence and separation between

⁶ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.176.

⁷ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.176.

⁸ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.182.

the two spheres. The difficulties of theorising about the relatively simple abstractly demarcated dualism of public and private reveals only a hint of the difficulties more complicated systemic interrelationships endure. The reduction of system complexity is achieved by the stabilisation of a system's internal and external differences. In fact, Luhmann characterises systems theory by the functional reduction of complexity. In this form, he argues, systems theory 'can approach that transcendental problem of the social contingency of the world; and that means: become the starting point for a theory of society'.⁹

Like Luhmann, Habermas has been fascinated by the possibility of constructing a universal theory of society. It has been central to Habermas' ongoing project of modernity to determine how society may be simultaneously socially and systematically integrated. This process has involved a deep commitment to systems theory. However, in the tradition of Durkheim, Habermas does not subscribe to the view that society is integrated through 'unintentional functional interdependence of consequences of action'.¹⁰ Rather, Habermas argues, 'that every society needs to be integrated both socially and systematically and is thus confronted with the fundamental problem of how to combine them.'¹¹

The systems theory paradigm provides a means by which Habermas' project of merging or reconciling the systemic and the social

⁹ Niklas Luhmann, 'Modern Systems Theory and the Theory of Society', p.176.

¹⁰ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: or the Seductions of Systems Theory', in *Communicative Action: Essays on Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action*, eds A. Honneth & H. Joas, trans. J. Gaines & D. Jones, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge UK, 1991, p.121.

¹¹ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy', p.121.

may be achieved. Despite this almost poststructural goal of deconstructing a society's categorical boundaries, systems theory is anchored firmly within a modernist paradigm, relying on clearly defined categories and boundaries. This again raises difficulties for less stable notions of public and private which previous chapters have explored. Abandoning systems theory does not serve to solve or simplify the problem. The systems theory approach is a necessary tool for initially defining the boundaries of the subsystems Habermas needs to explore before he may set about merging them. Before collapsing the sub-system parameters, Habermas first needs to be able to define them. In this way:

Habermas undertakes to demonstrate that society cannot be represented exclusively, or even fundamentally, as a boundary maintaining system. It must be grasped also, and primordially, as the lifeworld of a social group. The central problem of social theory thus becomes how to combine the two conceptual strategies, that is, how to conceive of a society as simultaneously socially and systematically integrated.¹²

Using a systems theory framework, Habermas draws clear binary distinctions, for example, between system and lifeworld, the technical and the social, and between literature and science. Such distinctions, in most cases, cannot really be secured for any set period of time, or outside of the intended context. Indeed, social structures are not just 'boundaries of meaning' as Luhmann argues, but are also 'patterns of interaction that are relatively stable at a given time [which] may be altered or dismantled as well as sustained by the ongoing interaction of members.'¹³ This contrasts

¹² Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy', pp.121-122.

¹³ Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy', p.123.

with Habermas' more traditionally modernist approach which requires a set normative framework or theory of society. What is more, Habermas has argued that 'When the containers of an autonomously developed cultural sphere are shattered, the contents get dispersed. Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructed form; an emancipatory effect does not follow.'¹⁴ This is clearly a critique of postmodernity which, in 1981, Habermas saw as undermining those normative values which provide meaning and social order, and what he saw as the unfinished project of modernity.

One of the most interesting features of modernity is that it has been defined and interpreted in so many different ways. Multiple and often seemingly contradictory definitions of modernity and modernism pervade much of the academic analysis devoted to social theory. 'Modern' can refer to any type of knowledge that legitimates itself by making an appeal to a grand narrative or metanarratives.¹⁵ Whereas the period classified as modernity can also be any form of society or social organisation that is characterised by industrialisation or so-called high capitalism.¹⁶ For Anthony Giddens modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge. He sees doubt as a pervasive and fundamental feature of modern critical reason, which permeates everyday

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', p.10.

¹⁵ Robert Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, Routledge, London & New York, 1991, p.46.

¹⁶ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Modernity and modernism, postmodernity and postmodernism: framing the issue' in *Cultural Critique*, Special Issue, no.5, winter 1986/87, p.6.

life.¹⁷ Other commentators view modernity more broadly as a matter of movement, of flux, change and unpredictability.¹⁸ In this view, modernity boasts a history of grand narratives, is characterised by a reliance on universalised norms and values, on categories and order, and aims at societal rationalisation. These ideas of modernity are of central concern for Habermas since the 'course of reason throughout history and the potential for its realisation that is held to exist in what he calls modernity.'¹⁹ Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly for Habermas, this would undermine the rationalisation of the public sphere. In some respects, a postmodern approach that allows for competing perspectives or 'rational truths' is able to counter this. For example, Jochen Schulte-Sasse argues that 'In modern societies, the experience of our life-world is fragmented because of its reduction to subsystems that are in many cases quite incompatible with or at least independent from one another.'²⁰

Yet, in our very language, the public sphere remains most often thought of in binary terms; it continues to be defined as everything that is not private. This remains significant because the ways in which we order modern industrial societies and interact with one another in both public and private spheres will continue to be essential for the successful social and economic functioning of the state we create. This is the juncture where

¹⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, Oxford UK, 1991, p.2.

¹⁸ Jonathon Friedman and Scott Lash, *Modernity and Identity*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK & Cambridge MA, 1992, p.1.

¹⁹ Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.121.

²⁰ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Modernity and modernism, postmodernity and postmodernism', p.10.

many feminists argue that the way we think about gender helps to determine how we order society and more specifically, how we separate spheres and allocate power largely according to gender. For example, Susan Moller Okin argues that the:

... personal and the political are mixed in a way that confounds the separate categories of public and domestic, and points to the incompleteness of theories of politics that persist in confining themselves to the study of what has been defined in a pre feminist era as legitimately political.²¹

In this way, the universal categories which Habermas separates in order to create his theory of society are not entirely unrelated where gendered power relations are taken into account, and where individual emancipation does not only mean male emancipation. The achievements of modernity involve the expansion of individual freedom and autonomy in relation to traditional customs and authorities, and the difficulty of modernity lies in the reconciliation of these factors.²² Similarly, for Habermas, the project of modernity is identical to the project of the Enlightenment. The main aim is to promote the increased rationalisation of each societal sphere while at the same time releasing 'the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their esoteric forms'.²³ Habermas' characteristic use of universals and norms in the process of attaining rational consensus anchors him firmly within a

²¹ Susan Moller Okin, 'Gender, the Public and the Private', p.8

²² Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *Modernity, Justice and Community*, Franco Angeli, Milan Italy, 1990, p.28.

²³ See: Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus postmodernity' in *New German Critique*, trans. Seyla Benhabib, vol.22, winter 1981, p.9; and Robert Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, Routledge, London & New York, 1991, p.136.

modernist/structuralist tradition. In doing so, Habermas emphasises the importance of categorical divides and the continued use of norms and values that provide society with rational goals and structured order.

the relationship between the family and the state

Conceptions of governmentality and its sometimes problematic relationship with the public sphere take on a new significance at a time when modern societies are complicated by increased fragmentation, specialisation, and economic rationalisation.²⁴ At a time when postmodern theories challenge the traditionally modernist formulation of society, Habermas' work on legitimation is particularly useful. What Foucault refers to as the 'art of governing' has a direct impact upon the nature of the public sphere in democratic societies. In turn, this impacts upon the nature of public/private relations. This section will explore the relationship between the family and the state. In particular, this involves the role of government in the creation and manipulation of what constitutes a public sphere. This is achieved largely by processes of juridification of the private sphere, which, in turn has effected conceptions of public and private in contemporary Australian society. Anti-discrimination legislation in particular relies on the traditional liberal perception of the public/private split, while simultaneously challenging it. Such legislation has been 'assiduous in endeavoring to restrain the state from crossing the boundary

²⁴ Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1989, esp. pp.176-203.

into the politically dangerous territory of the private sphere, as the prospect of transposing equality discourse to the private sphere is both radical and destabilising'.²⁵ This is interesting to note since it has largely been a conservative discourse that has reproduced gender relations in the home. State legislation of the traditionally private domestic realm, and a market rationalist approach in all spheres of society, helps set the parameters of gendered behaviour in each sphere. In other words, it is 'the dissolution of the borderline between private and public realms that politicises everyday life.'²⁶

Rational deliberation grounded in Habermas' lifeworld encompasses both the domestic or private sphere, and the political public arena. Indeed, if we return to Habermas' blurred blueprint of public/private relations in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, it is evident that Habermas places a great deal of importance on the communicative processes of lifeworld rationality.²⁷ The Habermasian 'four-termed model of public and private' destabilises the traditional public/private dichotomy allowing for broader categories which give the private sphere, traditionally marginalised for its largely feminised nature, greater cultural value.

To be sure, in feminist terms Habermas has performed a great service by reconstructing a largely forgotten concept that still lies,

²⁵ Margaret Thornton, *The Liberal Promise: Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p.103.

²⁶ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.161.

²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger in association with Frederick Lawrence, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, p.175.

officially, at the foundation of constitutional government: the idea of a sovereign, reasonable public nourished by the critical reporting of the press, and which is also engaged in a mutually enlightening clash of arguments. Over time, the idealised function of the 'civic forum' is to arrive at a rational 'public opinion' which then both dictates and legitimises the actions of the government. Ongoing rhetoric of a participatory and reasonable public continues to normatively ground the constitutional state. That is to say that the rational lifeworld forms the foundations of the modern democratic state.

As Donzelot has noted, the family, under the ancient regime, was simultaneously subject and object of government.²⁸ In this respect, the relationship between the state and the family was a 'system of protections and obligations'.²⁹ That is to say, it was primarily based around the regulation and policing or enforcement of laws and taxes. The historical relationship between the state and the family is significant in terms of present interaction between the two realms. As Donzelot has outlined at some length, the relationship between the patriarchal head of the family and the state was viewed as an ideal balance which was beneficial to both parties, and also worked to legitimate the authority of both parties within their respective spheres of influence. Donzelot explains:

In compensation for his responsibility toward the authorities that bound him, the head of the family had virtually *discretionary* power over those around home. He could make use of them for all the operations that were intended to further

²⁸ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, p.48.

²⁹ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, p.48.

his *etat*; he could determine the children's careers, decide how the family members would be employed and which alliances would be contracted. He could also punish them if they did not live up to their obligations toward the family, and for this he could get the support of the public authority that owed him aid and protection in his endeavour. The notorious *lettres de achet de famille* derived their significance from this regulated exchange of obligations and protections between the public agencies and family authority, playing alternately on the menace to public order constituted by an individual who had broken with religion and morality, and on the threat to the family interest posed by the disobedient acts of one of its members.³⁰

The exchange between the family and the state created a more or less balanced exchange, 'to ensure public order, the state relied on the family for direct support, trading indiscriminantly on its fear of discredit and its private ambitions'.³¹ However, as Claus Mueller has argued, the expansion of government into institutional and private spheres causes complications:

The expansion of government into institutional areas and everyday life and the resultant direct or indirect management of the population makes a political system more vulnerable. It assumes at least the passive collaboration of the public. Any extension of rule into areas traditionally alien to politics requires plausible legitimating rationales without which such rule would meet resistance.³²

In modern democratic societies, systems of *representative* democracy emerge precisely because societal complexity dictates a division of labour between specialised roles of decision-makers, on the one hand, and a mass citizenry as a source of legitimation, on the other.³³ The language and ideology manifest within such a notion, frames the discourse of economic

³⁰ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, pp.49-50.

³¹ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, p.50.

³² Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.128.

³³ Luke Goode, 'Media systems, public life and the democratic project: theorizing public spheres in an era of mass communication', in *Arena Journal*, no.7, 1996.

rationalism and the manufacture of boundaries between the fictitious categories of public and private realms. Moreover, Habermas has warned that 'When the state does attempt to act in the general interests of capital, it can only do so at the cost of generating new problems of finance and administration.'³⁴ That is, problems of legitimation arise.

The accretion of governmental influence is compounded by the complexity of advanced industrial society which interlocks all institutional areas and requires a coordination of all units of the social system.³⁵

We view social integration in terms of the systems of social institutions in which speaking and acting subjects are socialised. Social systems appear here under the aspect of a lifeworld that is symbolically structured. The notion of system integration is regarded with a view to specific steering performances of a self-regulated system. Social systems appear here in terms of their capacity to maintain their boundaries and their stability through mastering the complexity of inconstant environment. Both of Habermas' main paradigms, lifeworld and system each have a specific purpose.³⁶ Each must continually strike a balance of interaction and interdependence on the other. In a practical sense, this results in a state that has abdicated responsibility or its interventionist role in the market, and whose only remaining sphere of influence is the

³⁴ John Scott, *Corporations, Class and Capitalism*, p.155.

³⁵ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization, and Legitimation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p.127.

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p.5.

lifeworld, where it must now compete with the judiciary and lifeworld institutions like churches and family groups.

normalising discourses: processes of self-government in the sphere of the social

The expansion of the public sphere to include the hitherto private sphere of the family, introduces difficulties that accompany a juridification versus self-regulation debate. In Habermas' depiction of the role of the public sphere in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he argued that it was when private citizens came together to deliberate on affairs of the market and the state, that practicing rationality became evident. In this way, through a process of communicative rationality, citizens (that is rational citizens) came together to reach consensus about matters that were of concern to them both as individuals and as a community. From such a process of rational deliberation, the state was then entrusted to act on behalf of its citizens. As I have argued, various processes including a juridification of the private sphere have led to a blanket expansion of the so-called public sphere to include the hitherto abstractly separate realm of the private sphere. This has resulted in a mega-sphere of sorts, which I refer to simply as the 'social'. Rather than increasing such a sphere's capacity for communicatively rational deliberation in a Habermasian sense, I contend the collapse of non-state, non-market spheres into each other has reduced the ability of citizens to take an active and meaningful role in the making of decisions which affect them.

The autonomization of the family with respect to the old allegiances and networks of solidarity was accompanied by a displacement of morality from the level of public relations to the private relationship with the economic sphere. In short, a technology of needs was established which made the family into the cornerstone of autonomy, based on the following alternative: control its needs or be controlled by them.³⁷

By 'normalising discourses' then, I mean those discourses or ideologies that are taken up by the state and are thus artificially introduced into a culture and accepted as the traditional way of seeing and ordering that society. In this case, the normalising discourse to which I am referring is that of market rationalism, in which market value or productivity takes precedence over social and cultural outcomes. Alternatively, as already discussed in Chapter Seven, in a more Habermasian sense, processes of rational deliberation are largely replaced by market mechanisms (steering media).

This has significant implications for the function of the public sphere. If the normalised discourse of the public sphere becomes an entrenched ideology of economic rationalism, then the public sphere's deliberative capacity will not only be eroded, but will eventually result in a market steered process of public decision-making. This, coupled with the state's increasing juridification of the social sphere (what I refer to as the combined non-market, non-state spheres of a society: private and public), results in a crisis of sorts for the role of the public sphere. A public sphere that has traditionally been understood as a sphere for individual citizens to come together and deliberate about community decisions is replaced by

³⁷ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, pp.69-70.

outcomes decided by the market or the state. Habermas explores alternative models of public deliberation:

Fortunately, modern law is a medium which allows for a much more abstract notion of the citizen's autonomy. Nowadays, the sovereignty of the people has constrained itself to become a procedure of more or less discursive opinion and will formation. Still on a normative level, I assume a networking of different communication flows which, however, should be organized in such a way that these can be supposed to bind the public administration to more or less rational premises and in this way enforce social and ecological discipline on the economic system without nonetheless impinging on its intrinsic logic. This provides a model for deliberative democracy that no longer hinges on the assumption of macro-subjects like the 'people' or 'the community' but on anonymously interlinked discourses or flows of communication. The model shifts the brunt of fulfilling normative expectations to the infrastructure of a political public sphere that is fuelled by spontaneous sources.³⁸

The essence of Habermas' concept of deliberative democracy resides in the *process* whereby legislative universality is achieved, and not merely in the fact that it has been achieved at all.³⁹ While an increasing trend toward self-regulation of the market sphere effectively leaves the market largely to rely on its own intrinsic logic, the state maintains control and domination over the private realm most effectively through legislation.

Processes of deliberative democracy have their foundations in the public sphere and the state draws legitimacy from the results of such deliberation. The capacity of the public sphere to participate in effective or productive rational deliberation has been simultaneously eroded by the

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, 'Citizenship and national identity: some reflections on the future of Europe', in *Praxis International*, vol.12, no.1, April 1992, p.11.

³⁹ Robert Shelly, 'Habermas and the normative foundations of a radical politics', in *Thesis Eleven*, no.35, 1993, p.69.

state and surrendered by citizens themselves as they become more concerned with economic rather than social issues. In this sense,

Directive legislation, federal regulations, subsidies, government contracts, and the tremendous growth of the state's administrative apparatus has narrowed the realm open to unfettered private initiative. Collective bargaining is subject to governmental regulations; fewer and fewer institutions are strictly private ... In the social sector, the increase of governmental responsibility has paralleled the institutionalisation of social rights.⁴⁰

State legislation works to replace the self-regulation of processes of rational deliberation, thus playing on and expanding the notion of what is considered 'public'.

Where the lifeworld, consisting partly of the private sphere of the family and partly of the public sphere of private citizens acting together in a process of rational deliberation for the common good, becomes the singular sphere of influence of governmental authority, a very significant clash arises. By its very definition, the lifeworld, described by Habermas as those background and taken for granted assumptions or norms and values perpetuated by tradition, is the arena of social reproduction. The main determinate of such social reproduction is the family. Whatever form the family takes, it is one of the pivotal lifeworld institutions that determines its own norms and values in conjunction with other community institutions. Lifeworld institutions decide the moral conditions or standards of the community in which they reside; they provide the self-

⁴⁰ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.161.

government of the moral structures in the lifeworld. For example, as Mueller has argued,

In order for legitimating beliefs to be normatively binding, there has to have been a norm prior to the norm in operation, be it a moral principle, a religious precept, a philosophical tenet, or an ideology which is independent of any particular system of government.⁴¹

The normalising discourse of market rationalism is not independent of any system of government; instead, it is closely bound with particular forms of liberal democracy, which focus on the individual. As Mueller has argued, this does indeed result in a situation where 'The overarching presence of the government in the economic and social sectors and the institutionalization of social rights provide a normative justification for governmental remedies.'⁴² Where then, does this leave Habermas' notion of a public sphere of rational deliberation?

wither the public sphere?

Habermasian theory has been useful so far in ascertaining the impact of private upon public and vice versa. However, the primary criticism that I make, is that Habermas is unable to accommodate a line of thought that argues that a level of social fragmentation has occurred. It is this that makes it difficult to distinguish between what is public or what is private. Habermas' conception of society (split into the categories of lifeworld and

⁴¹ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.132.

⁴² Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.162.

system) account for a certain level of duality, but does not deal fully with the level of fluidity and fragmentation that has developed.

Two main notions of the public sphere are significant here. The first notion of the public sphere sees it as essentially plural, as a sphere which fosters the formation of multiple public opinions. However, 'in another more important sense it designates an ideal of how public opinion *ought* to be formed. In this sense, the concept is that of a sphere which is open to all citizens, where information is unrestricted, and where free critical and self-critical discussion goes on.'⁴³

Constrained, rather than open, political communication is required for a system where legitimacy emanates neither from higher principles nor from the belief of the population, but is produced, like another candidate, missile, or foreign policy, by the political system itself.⁴⁴

As Luhmann has argued, in a democracy an increasingly bureaucratic state ensures complexity, and in doing so, entrenches representative style democracy. The role of the social sphere then is to reproduce norms and values, which is the symbolic reproduction that Habermas refers to as being one of the main functions of his concept of lifeworld. Theoretical difficulties arise when the dualism of public and private are invoked not only by the government, but also by the market in reference to non-state sectors of the social realm.

⁴³ Ross Poole, 'Public Spheres', p.13.

⁴⁴ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.133.

While Lilburn argues that the New Right seek to 'reverse the politicisation of the social',⁴⁵ I am suggesting that the juridification of the social is a result of New Right ideology that limits the scope of government to a surveillance role in an enlarged social sphere. That is not to say however, that New Right ideology and the changing role of the state are the only contributing factors in the transformation of the modern public sphere.

Luhmann refers to the concept of social solidarity in reference to the state's responsibility toward the social sphere. In such terms, 'the concept of solidarity simply expresses the rationality of the organization practices of society'.⁴⁶ So, argues Luhmann,

The state can act in the name of social solidarity, in accordance with the existing conditions of social advancement and the measures which these necessitate It is in the name of social solidarity that the republican state develops its social legislation and, subsequently, its economic intervention. The concept of solidarity makes it possible to arrive at a situation where the state itself is no longer at stake in social relations, but stands outside them and becomes their guarantor of progress.⁴⁷

Thus, state interventionism, both economic and social, is characterised by this notion of solidarity. Indeed the framework that the state uses to govern separate, yet interrelated systems is set down by the concept of solidarity as outlined above. As Luhmann notes, this also

⁴⁵ Sandra Lilburn, *Dividing the Political: A Feminist Critique of the New Right*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, September 1995, p.105.

⁴⁶ Luhmann cited in Jacques Donzelot, 'The Mobilization of Society', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p.172.

⁴⁷ Jacques Donzelot, 'The Mobilization of Society', p.173.

'affects the forms of the social bond rather than the structure of society itself.'⁴⁸ In addition, Meuller argues that:

The popularly acknowledged legitimacy of a governmental system permits the successful forwarding of the claim that governmental decisions are normative and therefore obligatory. Legitimizing beliefs provide the necessary inducement to accept domination as manifested in governmental rule.⁴⁹

If the function of the modern state is to (over)govern the so-called private sphere or the newly expanded public sphere, the main function of this contemporary public sphere is to act as a purely legitimating realm for state authority. In this sense, any traditional demarcation between the public and private spheres have in actuality collapsed into one another to form a social-political sphere, which is theoretically, although not practically, separate from the administrative state and the apparently self-regulating economy or market sphere. Indeed, the role of the so-called public realm becomes increasingly opaque as it becomes less important for deliberation on market function and/or directional decisions.

One of the most significant outcomes here is that, despite argument to the contrary, civil society has not entirely withered.⁵⁰ While the relationship between the state and the economy has undergone an ideological shift, the state has retained its capacity to impose market relations on all spheres of life. The sphere of the social, on the other hand, takes on an increasingly expansive role not just as 'the institutional

⁴⁸ Jacques Donzelot, 'The Mobilization of Society', p.173.

⁴⁹ Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, p.130.

⁵⁰ Michael Hardt, 'The withering of civil society', in *Social Text* 45, vol.14, no.4, 1995, pp.27.

infrastructure for political mediation and public exchange',⁵¹ but also as the target for state economic and social policies. The public sphere has undergone processes of fragmentation and expansion and has, at times, emerged larger than ever, but is now more heavily legislated than ever before. If state and bureaucratic apparatuses so heavily govern the public sphere, then questions arise about its rational deliberative capacity.

conclusion

Legitimation crises and conceptions of governmentality alter both the traditional and the ideal nature of the public sphere. This highlights the fact that Habermas' conception of the public is too rigidly confined in a systems theory approach to cater for the level of fluidity and fragmentation in modern democratic societies like that of contemporary Australia.

Techniques of government, especially the rise in popularity of New Right economic rationalism, have seen a decrease in state interventionism into the economic or market spheres, and a concomitant increase of state interventionism into the lifeworld, or the private sphere of family life. This is not to suggest that the relationship between the Habermasian system and lifeworld is defined in colonisation and resistance terms. For instance, as explored in Chapter Three, the feminist movement is not confined purely to a resistance role, but is also actively involved in policy making and legislative reform (despite growing restrictions under the Howard

⁵¹ George Yudice, 'Civil society, consumption, and governmentality in an age of global restructuring', in *Social Text*, vol.14, no.4, 1995, p.1.

Government). It is in this capacity that the necessarily more bureaucratic state concentrates its efforts on legislating notions of Habermasian reason in the social sphere. Interest groups, technological advances, and the over-governing interventionist strategy of government have enlarged the public sphere. By virtue of its very size, the public sphere has lost any effective deliberative capacity or ability to participate in functional reason with any significant success. The paradox is thus realised when the primary role of the modern administrative state becomes one of legislating its own legitimation. This of course is the extreme outcome, but the median result of these contributing factors is a state with a largely decreased ability or capacity for interactive reason, and a serious lack of venue(s) in which such deliberation may be performed.

conclusion

... public and private life are reflected in one another. Private life is not private from social policy, and public life reflects divisions in the home. And the boundary between public and private is not constant ... I therefore find analysis in terms of public and private domains as essential, as long as it is recognized that the division between public and private is neither unchanging nor unchangeable.¹

This thesis has worked toward a reconsideration of Habermas' distinctions between the social and the political, between the categories of system and lifeworld, and more broadly, between the traditional public and private binary of liberal theory. For Habermas, the public sphere can be understood as being composed of a plurality of social institutions, that is, as a 'pluralist society of men and women deliberating and acting in a participating collective order ... as [forming] the basis of political obligation and legitimacy, rather than the individual consent of liberalism'.² As explored in Part One of this thesis, such a process fosters the development of social movements. The apparent longevity of social movements evidences an on-going renegotiation of the relationship between lifeworld and system, and a continual process of social change and political contestation.

¹ Gillian Pascall, *Social Policy: A Feminist Analysis*, Routledge, London, 1991, p.24.

² Richard R. Weiner, 'Retrieving civil society in a postmodern epoch', in *The Social Science Journal*, vol.28, no.3, 1991, p.311.

Communicative processes are crucial to social interaction, defining processes of social meaning and value, and contestations for social change, are fundamental to the structuring of social institutions. This is precisely because communicative processes maintain and reproduce the sex-role stereotyping of the public and private split of traditional liberalism.

Discourses of governance compound difficulties associated with the problematic subsystem demarcation of public and private, which is at the heart of Habermas' technocracy thesis.³ The changing role of government plays a significant role in the shaping of public spheres as arenas for democratic participation. Concomitantly, discursive notions of the public sphere have an entrenched effect on the way in which we view our social and political systems. The broadening of modern governmental spheres of influence has the capacity to confuse and blend more traditional notions of separate public and private spheres. In recent times, as I have argued in Chapters Seven and Eight, governments have concentrated their efforts on an enlarged public sphere, in part by manipulating understandings of public and private demarcation.

In Part One of this thesis, I suggested that the traditional demarcation between plural public and private spheres reinforce gender inequalities. For example, as Susan Moller Okin has argued:

One reason why the exclusion of women from the scope of ostensibly universal arguments goes unnoticed is that the separation of the private and the public is presented in liberal

³ Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*, University of California Press, London, 1995, pp.79-80.

theory as if it applied to all individuals in the same way. Clearly, this is still to a very large extent true of contemporary theory. The liberal ideal of the non-intervention of the state into the domestic realm, rather than maintaining neutrality, in fact reinforces existing inequalities within that realm.⁴

Such reinforcement of existing inequalities (not only of gender) has generated support for various resistance groups. Such groups, which later developed into organised social movements, like the women's movements explored in Chapter Three, have specific aims and work largely to both criticise and lobby the state and its legislative apparatuses for change. Chapter Three I took into account Habermas' view of New Social Movements as resistance movements and compared this with the role and function of women's movements in Australia.

By examining the engagement between social movements, the public sphere and the state, (whether that involves a strategy of resistance or a more antagonistic process) I have endeavored to show how Habermas' depiction of public spheres is lacking for broader theories of emancipation, such as that which the women's movement espouses. This is especially important because, as Eyerman and Jamison have articulated, while movements create themselves and their own particular movement spheres, their praxis is conditioned by the society around them.⁵

Although there are many other examples of social movements which have and continue to influence the state in many ways, I chose to confine

⁴ Susan Moller Okin, 'Gender, the Public and the Private', p.83.

⁵ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1991, p.64.

my research to the specific case of femocrats primarily because their strategy and progress raise some specific difficulties when analysed in a Habermasian context. In Chapter Four, I contend that the femocrat strategy is unique in that it aims to change the system, not by resistance to the system, but by acting through systemic mechanisms. In this way, femocrats in Australia (and New Zealand) have made considerable headway in the struggle for gender equality in ways that the myriad of feminist and women's groups in many other countries have not.

A great deal of material has already been produced which deals with the issue of whether or not femocrats have been substantially compromised. For this reason, I found it unnecessary to launch into a discussion of this issue on its own. Although this is a significant and interesting area of debate, my primary aim remained the critical engagement with Habermas' social theory. An examination of 'the femocrat phenomenon' is an interesting way to achieve this since it draws out Habermas' system and lifeworld framework and puts his colonisation thesis to the test. Even if their achievements have been limited, the existence of a femocracy which serves as both a social movement and as an arm of state bureaucracy still poses several problems for Habermas' colonisation thesis and his conception of the role of social movements and their interaction(s) with the state.

The transference of traditional private sphere concerns into the public realm has had significant impact on processes of widening notions

of the public sphere. Thus, Chapters Three and Four of this thesis have engaged with Habermasian theory by examining the extent to which lifeworld norms and values have colonised the system by way of femocrat strategy. Femocrat strategy is a pertinent example in this case because it involves working within the system to effect change, rather than resisting the system from outside. Habermas caters for the emergence of social movements, but assumes they will try to influence the system by resistance from the site of the lifeworld, not through inside participation from *within* the system itself. Furthermore, femocrats remain of interest at a time where its theoretical basis has begun to move toward the inevitable 'post-feminism' and governmental strategy moves closer to renegotiating the position of women in the federal bureaucracy. Coherent resistance strategies continue to matter in approaches to utilising notions of the public sphere, shifting between social subsystems and negotiating the primacy of 'steering' system institutions.

The femocrat phenomenon shows that it is possible for social movements to use the system as the site of resistance against the system itself. In addition, Habermas' colonisation theory does not account for ways in which private sphere norms and values influence the structural evolution of the modern state, especially in Australia where the femocrat strategy has been broadly implemented. As public servants, the contribution of femocrats to the process(es) of free and open discourse in the public sphere through the formation of policies in women's affairs units help to (re)shape the public sphere. In some respects and despite

various compromises, the femocracy has played a crucial role in transforming the traditional (patriarchal) nature of the public sphere into a more open arena of public discourse. It is important to note however, that that levels of femocrat involvement in shaping and implementing women's interest policy varies according to Government ideology. For instance, the example of child care in Chapter Four and later in Chapter Seven, shows that under the Howard government steps have been taken to legislate for private sphere concerns in ways that tend to reinforce rather than renegotiate traditional gender roles in demarcated social subsystems.

Another factor in the expansion of the public sphere has been the development of new information and communication technologies. As the public sphere grows due to new information technologies, the potential for communicative interaction between an increased number of participants also grows.⁶ Indeed, at this time, there lies an opportunity like no other to test the ability of liberal subjects to achieve a Habermasian conception of communicative competence. As Chapter Five argues, computer mediated communication (CMC) technology will probably not be responsible for transforming the elitist style of democracy, which Habermas evokes in the form of the 18th and 19th century coffee houses and salons, into a more inclusive participatory form of government or self government. What CMC technology does provide are access, opportunity and the choice for citizens

⁶ Stephen D. Parsons, 'Explaining technology and society: the problem of nature in Habermas', in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vo.22, no.2, June 1992, pp.218-230.

to participate, if they wish, in a way that is meaningful and not too time-consuming. CMC technology will not convince all citizens to register their opinion on all topical political issues which cross the agenda of the public sphere(s). It may, however, encourage people to engage in more discussion, at least at a local level, providing citizens with more of a sense of involvement; a sense that they actually can have a say on issues which directly and indirectly impact upon them, and raise issues which concern them. In a more abstract sense, information technologies have the capacity to enlarge public spheres; to enable greater levels of participation than would otherwise be practicably possible.

Chapter Six explores ways in which information technology and CMC technology enlarge the public sphere not only in a discursive way, but also in a practical sense. Habermas' ideal speech situation formula has received criticism for his specification of mutual understanding because, as Chambers argues, it 'never deals with the possibility that citizens might generally lack such an interest or not possess the competencies to pursue such an interest.'⁷ However, participants or potential participants should at least be given the choice and the opportunity of access. The exploration of the ideal speech situation in this way provides an opportunity to think about ways in which Habermas' ideal speech situation can be applied to everyday life.

⁷ Simone Chambers, 'Feminist Discourse/Practical Discourse', in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan, Routledge, New York & London, 1995, p.176.

The final section of this thesis engages with ways in which discourses of governance have a significant impact on the shape of the public sphere. I have argued that this is achieved largely through legislating social policy that reinforces traditional notions of the nuclear family. Chapter Four illustrated how early femocrats strategised to bring hitherto private sphere issues into the public realm with the intention of validating marginalised women's concerns. Picking up on this theme, Chapters Seven and Eight have argued that the encroachment of the state into the traditionally private realm of the nuclear family, largely by way of social policy, can be used as a strategy to reinforce traditional conceptions of the nuclear family. In this case, the Howard government has relied on a process of market legitimation as a major strategy of governmentality. As Foucault has argued, the nature of the state can be found in its 'function of changes in practices of government'.⁸ Similarly, the 'procedures and presuppositions of free arrangement and discursive will-formation' should thus define democracy for Habermas.⁹ Habermas argues that:

... the modern state directs its ordering achievements to delaminating a subsystem from its domain of sovereignty, a subsystem that replaces (at least in part) the social integration accomplished through values and norms with a system integration operating through exchange relations.¹⁰

⁸ Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds G. Burchell & P. Miller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p.4.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Heinemann, London, 1979, p.187.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp.189-90.

The economy has consequently been viewed as 'a self-regulating system of production and exchange, endowed with a natural tendency to grow'.¹¹ The shrinking private arena and the expansion of the public sphere is not so much a matter of viewing traditional separations between public and private differently, but is a combined result of changes in norms and values, technology and social legislation by government. As I argue in Chapter Seven, the compounded result is a public sphere with enlarged but no more or less secure boundaries.

While the idea of a sacrosanct private arena is perpetuated, technology, legislation and social developments combine to ensure that notions of 'privacy' are more symbolic or imagined than actual. While the distinction between public and private is becoming increasingly obsolete, discursive maintenance of the boundaries remains useful for what each category signifies about the way we order increasingly complex matrix of social and moral relations.

While the aim of Part One of this thesis is to familiarise the reader with Habermasian notions of the public sphere and interactions with critics and proponents alike, the subsequent sections look, in turn, at three main factors which, I argue, have all contributed to a revitalisation of the Habermasian public sphere, but which also reshape and remodel it. In

¹¹ Barry Hindess, 'Rehearsing a venerable debate: comments on *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*', in *ANZJS*, vol.29, no.3, 1993, p.375.

addition, they also highlight the fluidity and malleability of any attempt at strict categorisation. The perpetuation of public and private divisions through the demarcation of the public sphere says something about the society that we have created. Whilst the inability of 'rational' liberal subjects to think in a way that does not use notions of public and private to order our everyday lives, norms and values, and our social institutions, shows us how difficult it is to dislodge gendered distinctions and binaries of socialisation. Where boundaries between demarcated subsystems have been challenged, as in the case of femocrats, subsystem parameters are revealed not as porous, but as fluid. They exist but do not remain in the same places constantly. Thus, the eradication of subsystem boundaries altogether seems unlikely and in any case, not altogether desirable.

As Seyla Benhabib has noted, Habermas' work has initiated a 'philosophical shift from legislative to interactive reason'.¹² However, what I have been concerned with is the move away from the so-called interactive reason of participatory democracy toward a more comprehensive culture of legislated reason. I am not arguing that this is a new phenomenon, as political histories are full of accounts of government by legislative reason. Rather, the current trend toward a renewed concentration by democratic governments on a strategy of prescriptive governing by legislation is the end result of a combination of factors which are specific to the turn towards an embracing of market rationalism or New Right ideology.

¹² Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p.7.

Addressed in this thesis are three main factors: social movements, new information and communication technologies, and discourse of government. Each is crucial to ongoing processes of boundary renegotiation and public sphere expansion.

This thesis has not argued that the public/private split is a false dichotomy, or that the division does not exist. Rather, it has argued that there are a number of ways in which the division is reinscribed by the normalisation of market ideology. Put simply, sometimes the dichotomy is needed and sometimes it is not. Sometimes the division is only necessary at the very moment it is discarded. As the case studies illustrate, there are different ways of manipulating traditional conceptions of public and private depending on intended outcome. Often this process is driven by specific ideological motivations. On a theoretical level, the divide also helps to order societal subsystems, thus ordering the many fragments of social and economic life.

Population growth, technology and increasing globalisation began the expansion of representative style democratic states. While social movements and pressure groups have worked toward influencing governments and legislative processes, often with a large measure of success, such breakthroughs have largely resulted in the recognition of subsystem differentiation. This has been followed swiftly by ongoing processes of collapsing and or merging of hitherto differentiated subsystems such as the public and private spheres. What remains

significant about such a trend is that the conceptions of public and private have had surprising longevity, and continue to be evoked in the democratic and legislative processes by which we order and define our public spheres, and govern modern democratic systems. In sum, processes of defining enlarged public spheres have been influenced by a number of major factors.

I have examined ways in which some major factors have contributed to this process. In the first instance, this has involved a critical overview of Habermas' conception of the public sphere in Part One. The subsequent sections of the thesis have involved a critical examination of the role of social movements, the advent of communications technology, and an exploration of ways of governing liberal democracies which have become increasingly reliant on economic rationalism. Each of these three factors can be analysed in light of a Habermasian framework. This has enabled a line of inquiry that shows the benefits and limitations of a Habermasian approach to examining notions of the public sphere. I have argued that the augmentation of the public sphere can be attributed to a marked decrease of government intervention in the market or economic sphere, and the subsequent increase of government intervention in the private sphere of family relations. Such a process confounds traditional universal understandings of the role of an open public sphere as rational and static. In this view, Habermas' theory of the public sphere becomes problematic as fluidity confounds modernity. However, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six, a reworked conception of Habermas' public sphere has proved

useful in understanding how public arenas can be made more open and accessible.

On the one hand, I argue that Habermas' theory of the public sphere and his larger communicative theory of society are good for emancipatory politics and for an understanding of society itself, because of its recognition of social, political and economic complexity. For example, in Chapters Five and Six I show how, when combined with technological advances in communication systems, Habermas' discourse ethics incorporates a broader conception of the liberal citizen. However, I also conclude that Habermas' four-term model of public and private flounders despite its capacity for depicting complexities in social, political and economic relations, and the crucial role it plays in opening up debate to hitherto marginalised or altogether excluded groups. Despite Habermas' more recent efforts to demonstrate the fluidity of relations between the public and private spheres, rigidity creeps back into his model of the public sphere and it thus fails to integrate gender. Given this, Habermas' model has a tendency to reproduce the existing simplification of social structures that reinforce traditional gendered notions of public and private. When reconsidered in this light, Habermas' distinctions between the social and the political through his system and lifeworld framework enable us to critically engage with system boundaries. In this way it has been possible to emphasise the complexity of the relationship between shifting notions of public and private spheres and associated gender roles.

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