Chapter One

Public and Private

What kind of world would make the values of both publicness and privacy equally accessible to all? This question has often been taken up in modern political philosophy. But that apparently simple question raises, and is made complicated by, another one: How would the experience of gender and sexuality have to be different in such a world?

The link between these two subjects has been noticed for millennia. The story is told of the Greek philosopher Diogenes that whenever he felt sexual need he walked into the central marketplace and masturbated. According to a later Greek commentator, he was in the habit of "doing everything in public, the works of Demeter and Aphrodite alike."[1] This was not usual in Athens in the fourth century B.C.E. Diogenes provoked disgust. His behavior was a kind of "performance criticism," as Foucault has called it, a way of calling attention to the visceral force behind the moral ideas of public and private.[2] Diogenes was attempting, to a degree that has scarcely been rivaled since, to do without the distinction entirely. He evidently regarded it as artificial, contrary to nature, the false morality of a corruption that mistook itself for civilization.

More than two thousand years later, a different challenge to the morality of public and private created an equally queasy sensation.

In the late 1820s, the Scottish-born Frances Wright toured America, lecturing against slavery and for women's rights, birth control, and workers' rights. She provoked nearly universal attack for her public appearances, leading the American Catharine Beecher to write:

> Who can look without disgust and abhorrence upon such an one as Fanny Wright, with her great masculine person, her loud voice, her untasteful attire, going about unprotected, and feeling no need of protection, mingling with men in stormy debate, and standing up with bare-faced impudence, to lecture to a public assembly.... I cannot conceive any thing in the shape of woman, more intolerably offensive and disgusting.[3]

Beecher is offended, eloquently so, by a woman in public. To her, this kind of public behavior — mingling with men, lecturing before audiences, going around with no escort, offering ideas in debate — should be left to men. So deep is this conviction for Beecher that Wright's behavior makes her seem masculine. In fact, the abusiveness in this passage is not so much about Wright's ideas or her acts as about her being: her person is masculine, her voice loud, her attire out of taste; she stands up and is seen. Like her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher did more than simply turn away in disgust. She went on to write several books that articulated, more explicitly than ever before, the theory of separate spheres — that women's place was the home and that women's influence on the world should be moral rather than political. Ironically, in doing so, she became one of the most public women of her day.

In both of these examples, the distinction between public and private comes under an explicit challenge. In both cases, it is not just a distinction but a hierarchy, in which the space of the market

or the assembly is given a special importance. In both cases, being in public is a privilege that requires filtering or repressing something that is seen as private. In both cases, too, the transgression is experienced not as merely theoretical, but as a violation of deep instincts about sex and gender. Who can look at it, in Beecher's words, "without disgust and abhorrence"? It is not hard to see, then, why the terms "public" and "private" have often seemed to present a difficulty. The terms are complex enough and shifting enough to allow for profound change; yet in practice they often do not seem theoretical at all. They seem to be preconceptual, almost instinctual, rooted in the orientations of the body and common speech.

The critical literature on public and private is immense, but very seldom does it do justice to the visceral force that the distinction has in these examples. Often the impression seems to be that public and private are abstract categories for thinking about law, politics, and economics. And so they are. But their power, as feminism and queer theory have had to insist, goes much deeper. A child's earliest education in shame, deportment, and cleaning is an initiation into the prevailing meaning of public and private, as when he or she locates his or her "privates" or is trained to visit the "privy." (The word "public" also records this bodily association: it derives from the Latin *poplicus*, for people, but evolved to *publicus* in connection with *pubes*, in the sense of adult men, linking public membership to pubic maturity.) Clothing is a language of publicity, folding the body in what is felt as the body's own privacy. Some bodily sensations — of pleasure and pain, shame and display, appetite and purgation — come to be felt, in the same way, as privacy. Like those of gender, the orientations of public and private are rooted in what anthropologists call habitus: the conventions by which we experience, as though naturally, our own bodies and movement in the space of the world. Public and private are

learned along with such terms as "active" and "passive," "front" and "back," and "top" and "bottom." They can seem quasi-natural, visceral, fraught with perils of abjection and degradation or, alternatively, of cleanliness and self-mastery. They are the very scene of selfhood and scarcely distinguishable from the experience of gender and sexuality.

That makes them hard to challenge. In the case of gender, public and private are not just formal rules about how men and women should behave. They are bound up with meanings of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, at least in Western cultures, is felt partly in a way of occupying public space; femininity, in a language of private feeling. When Diogenes masturbates in the market, the public display of private need may appear disturbing or shameful, but it is not said to throw doubt on his masculinity. His blunt, bold simplicity can be seen as virile integrity in part because it is so very public. When Frances Wright lectures in public, Catharine Beecher perceives her as mannish, even monstrously so. Women, accustomed to being the spectacle displayed to male desire, often experience the visibility of public space as a kind of intimate vulnerability. Men, by contrast, often feel their masculinity challenged when their bodies are on display as objects of erotic desire.[4]

In the case of sexuality, too, not all sexualities are public or private in the same way. Same-sex persons kissing, embracing, or holding hands in public view commonly excite disgust even to the point of violence, whereas mixed-sex persons doing the same things are invisibly ordinary, even applauded. Nelly boys are said to be "flaunting" their sexuality, just by swishing or lisping. They are told to keep it to themselves, even though the "it" in question is their relation to their own bodies. Butch men, meanwhile, can swagger aggressively without being accused of flaunting anything. Just as feminists since Fanny Wright have found that to challenge

male domination in public is to change both femininity and the norms of public behavior, lesbians and gay men have found that to challenge the norms of straight culture in public is to disturb deep and unwritten rules about the kinds of behavior and eroticism that are appropriate to the public.

Public and private are bound up with elementary relations to language as well as to the body. The acquisition of language is an education into public and private speech genres and their different social contexts, which are commonly contexts of gender. In one sense, much emphasized by Ludwig Wittgenstein, all language and all thought are public, a feature of the language games that make intelligibility possible. Yet there are degrees of formality in speech and writing that create a continuum of publicness. In many languages, these are sharply divided and lexically distinct, as with the French *tutoyer* and *vouvoyer*. Among the Xavante studied by Laura Graham, the public speech of the morning and evening adult-male convocations is marked by singing styles, polyphonic discourse, and special protocols of pronoun usage and verb conjugations, as well as body posture.[5] In many societies, including the Xavante, classical Athens, and the antebellum United States, these differences are frankly avowed as differences of status and gender: men can speak in public concourse, women cannot. The difference between genres of private and public speech anchors the sense of home and intimacy, on one hand, and social personality, on the other.

The different senses of self and membership mediated by these contexts can seem scarcely comparable. Parents, lovers, strangers, or peers may appear in one context but not the other. In modern culture, where there are so many different genres of speech and writing, each with a different context for one's personality, the felt gap between public selves or roles and private ones has given rise to a Romantic longing for unity – at least among those with the

privilege of being public. (The most famous example is Rousseau's *Confessions,* a kind of modern successor to Diogenes.) That longing for unity can also be seen in modes of collective public intimacy such as ecstatic spirituality. Inevitably, identity politics itself magnetizes such longings, affirming private identity through public politics and promising to heal divisions of the political world by anchoring them in the authentically personal realm and its solidarity. In the ideals of ethnic identity, or sisterhood, or gay pride, to take the most common examples, an assertive and affirmative concept of identity seems to achieve a correspondence between public existence and private self. Identity politics in this sense seems to many people a way of overcoming both the denial of public existence that is so often the form of domination and the incoherence of the experience that domination creates, an experience that often feels more like invisibility than like the kind of privacy you value.

Definitions and Contexts

Throughout the Western tradition, private and public have been commonly and sensibly understood as distinct zones. The boundary between bedroom and market, home and meetinghouse can be challenged or violated, but it is at least clear enough to be spatially distinct. Moving from one to another is experienced as crossing a barrier or making a transition — like going from the privacy of one's bedroom to the public room of a convention hall. In medieval thought (which inherited a notion of the *res publica* from Roman law), the public was almost solely a spatial concept, meaning anything open, such as the outside wall of a house. Modern culture has redrawn the spatial distinction, adding new layers of meaning to the term "public" but preserving the idea of physical boundaries. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century middle-class architecture, for example, separates parlors or "living rooms"

from family quarters or "withdrawing rooms," trying to erect literal walls between public and private functions even within the home. (Catharine Beecher specialized in this new style of home economics.) Modern American law frequently defines privacy as a zone of noninterference drawn around the home. So strong is this association that courts have sometimes refused to recognize a right to privacy in other spaces.

But this ideology and its architecture represent an ideal or extreme type. Public and private are not always simple enough that one could code them on a map with different colors — pink for private and blue for public. The terms also describe social contexts, kinds of feeling, and genres of language. So although public and private seem so clearly opposed that their violation can produce a sharp feeling of revulsion, the terms have many different meanings that often go unnoticed. However disgusting Catharine Beecher found the idea of a woman lecturing in public, for example, her own writings on the subject were profoundly public: they were published (that is, printed and marketed); they addressed the powerful ideal of public opinion; and they established Beecher as a figure of public fame and authority. Despite the self-evident clarity of the distinction, different senses of public or private typically intermingle in this way. A private conversation can take place in a public forum; a kitchen can become a public gathering place; a private bedroom can be public and commercial space, as in a hotel; a radio can bring public discussion into a bathroom, and so on. American courts, too, have developed other ways of defining public and private in which the terms refer to relationships rather than places. The right to privacy, for example, can be linked to marriage or the right to form intimate associations. Or it can be defined by ideals of autonomy and self-determination, as in the notion of reproductive freedom. In some of these conceptions, publicness and privacy belong to different

places; in other conceptions, they belong to different relationships, in still others to persons. These differences can have conflicting implications in law as in theory.[6]

In law as in theory, moreover, public and private can sometimes be used as descriptive, value-neutral terms, simply as a way to make sense of observed practice. At other times, they are used as normative, evaluative terms, naming and invoking ideals that are *not* always observed. And they can have one application outside a context, as analytic or quasi-objective categories, while having quite another inside a context, orienting people to different poles in their own experience: people's private conversations, for example, can be regarded by a third party as public opinion.

To confuse matters further, the terms often seem to be defined against each other, with normative preference for one term; but this is not always the case. The private (from *privatus*, deprived) was originally conceived as the negation or privation of public value. It had no value in its own right. But in the modern period, this has changed, and privacy has taken on a distinctive value of its own, in several different registers: as freedom, individuality, inwardness, authenticity, and so on. Public and private sometimes compete, sometimes complement each other, and sometimes are merely parts of a larger series of classifications that includes, say, local, domestic, personal, political, economic, or intimate. Almost every major cultural change — from Christianity to printing to psychoanalysis — has left a new sedimentary layer in the meaning of the public and the private. (Print culture gave us publication; psychoanalysis, a new sense of the private person.) In modern contexts, the terms have been used in many different and overlapping senses, combining legacies from classical thought and law with modern forms of social organization.

It is no wonder, then, that so many thinkers have sought to sort out the terms, to bring to them a kind of clarity that usage

seldom provides, one that might do justice to the visceral conviction that there ought to be a clear distinction. Some thinkers have done so energetically enough that their accounts have become part of the terms' symbolic weight; examples discussed here are Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas. Yet attempts to frame public and private as a sharp distinction or antinomy have invariably come to grief, while attempts to collapse or do without them have proven equally unsatisfying.

It might be useful, therefore, to consider the range of the often conflicting meanings of public and private. The relation of public to private can take any of the following forms at least:

	Public	*Private*
1)	open to everyone	restricted to some
2)	accessible for money	closed even to those who could pay
3)	state-related; now often called public sector	nonstate, belonging to civil society; now often called private sector
4)	political	nonpolitical
5)	official	nonofficial
6)	common	special
7)	impersonal	personal
8)	national or popular	group, class, or locale
9)	international or universal	particular or finite
10)	in physical view of others	concealed
11)	outside the home	domestic
12)	circulated in print or electronic media	circulated orally or in manuscript
13)	known widely	known to initiates
14)	acknowledged and explicit	tacit and implicit
15)	"the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it" (as Arendt puts it in *The Human Condition*).[7]	

Matters are further complicated by several senses of private that have no corresponding sense of public, including:

16) related to the individual, especially to inwardness, subjective experience, and the incommunicable
17) discretely or properly comported, in the sense of the French *pudeur* (grasped in English only through its opposite, *impudence,* as when Beecher accuses Fanny Wright of "bare-faced impudence")
18) genital or sexual

There are also a variety of legal contexts, from constitutional law to property law, each with its own inflection of privacy. In the tradition of *Griswold* v. *Connecticut* and *Bowers* v. *Hardwick*, for example, heterosexual marriage is defined as a "zone of privacy" with special protections against state incursion.[8]

"Public," too, is an exceedingly complex noun, and what is meant by "the public" or "a public" or "the public sphere" will require a good deal of explanation below. (See the following essay, "Publics and Counterpublics.") Publicity, too, is a distinct concept, meaning not merely publicness or openness but the use of media, an instrumental publicness associated most with advertising and public relations. None of these terms has a sense that is exactly parallel to or opposite of private. None are simple oppositions, or binaries. Because the contexts overlap, most things are private in one sense and public in another. Books can be published privately; a public theater can be a private enterprise; a private life can be discussed publicly, and so on. Marriage, too, is thought of in modern culture as the ultimate private relation, but every marriage involves the state if it is to carry the force of law. It will be seen below that the public sphere in Habermas's influential account *is* private in several crucial senses. And much work on gender and sexuality in cultural studies has shown that publics in

various ways enable privacy, providing resources for interiority and contexts for self-elaboration. "Public" and "private" are crucial terms for understanding these examples. But in each case, the terms need to be understood in more than one context and with some attention to their history.

Although many forms of the public/private distinction have been challenged in feminism and in queer theory, we should not forget that a challenge to one form of the distinction may not necessarily have the same implications for others. None of the versions of public and private listed above can be dismissed as merely archaic, since they are immanent to a host of norms and institutions of modern life and may in many respects be desirable. It remains as difficult now as it was for Diogenes's fellow citizens to imagine a world with neither public nor private.

Public and Private in Feminist Theory

Any organized attempt to transform gender or sexuality is a public questioning of private life, and thus the critical study of gender and sexuality entails a problem of public and private in its own practice. Both the contemporary women's movement and gay liberation took shape as social movements in the 1960s, when counterculture had begun to imagine a politics that would transform personal life across the board, giving public relevance to the most private matters. Other social movements — temperance, abolition, labor, suffrage, antiracism — had also challenged prevailing norms of public and private. A leading defense of racial segregation in the American South, for example, was that private owners of property or businesses had the right to admit whom they chose, just because it was private property. To fight such arguments, it was necessary to advance a strong vision of the public relevance of private life, a vision expressed in the phrase "civil rights." Even more, though, the women's and gay movements represented

groups who were by definition linked to a conventional understanding of private life – gender roles, sexuality, the home and family. They were public movements contesting the most private and intimate matters. Their very entry into public politics seemed scandalous or inappropriate. An understanding of public and private was implied not just in their theories and policy platforms but in their very existence as movements.

In second-wave feminism at the height of identity politics, many took a fairly radical, even draconian solution to the problem of public and private. They argued that the distinction was virtually synonymous with patriarchy. Male was to public as female was to private. In a 1974 essay titled "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo claimed that the gendering of public and private helped to explain the subordination of women cross-culturally. In this context, private meant domestic spaces and functions, and public referred to contexts in which men spoke and made decisions for the community.[9]

There has been much debate about how widely this pattern holds. The women's rights movement had come into being against an especially rigid version of this spatialized and gendered scheme, the separate-sphere ideology of the nineteenth century. But Rosaldo's theory laid it at the origins of masculinist culture. Jean Bethke Elshtain, concerned with the normative development of the terms in Western thought, was critical of the oversimplifications in this argument. Yet she traced the endurance of a gendered opposition of public and private from Plato and Aristotle to modern thought.[10] Either way, the scale of the problem was enormous. Carol Pateman was able to claim that "the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about."[11]

One consequence was to see domestic and private matters,

normally outside the public view, as now being a legitimate area of common concern. In practice, this meant not just public opinion but state intervention in things like marital rape, spousal abuse, divorce, prostitution, and abortion rights. Encountering male domination mainly in the spaces usually called private, notably the home, women could only struggle against that domination by seeing it as a kind of politics. In the words of Catharine MacKinnon, "For women the measure of intimacy has been the measure of the oppression. This is why feminism has had to explode the private. This is why feminism has seen the personal as the political. The private is the public for those for whom the personal is the political. In this sense, there is no private, either normatively or empirically."[12] This is a fairly extreme formulation, and to some degree a contradictory one, since one meaning of privacy is bodily autonomy and its protection from violence; MacKinnon draws on this normative ideal even as she claims to "explode" privacy. She does so because she is writing in the context of *Roe* v. *Wade*, criticizing what she sees as the inadequate liberal logic by which abortion is legitimated only as a private privilege rather than as a public right.

Other feminists put a different emphasis on the critique of public and private. Pateman argued that the practical consequence of the feminist critique would be much broader than women entering public arenas reserved for men, the way Fanny Wright tried to do in the 1820s; rather, it would be an entire transformation of gender roles, for men as well as women, leading to a world in which the differences between women and men would be systematically uncoupled from the divisions between home and public, individual and collective life, personal and political. Most immediately, "If women are to participate fully, as equals, in social life, men have to share equally in child-rearing and other domestic tasks." More generally, "Equal parenting and equal participation in other activities of domestic life presuppose some radical changes

in the public sphere, in the organization of production, in what we mean by 'work' and in the practice of citizenship."[13]

These arguments in feminist scholarship are related to the political strategy declared in the famous slogan "The personal is political."[14] This slogan can be taken to mean many different things. The most basic is that the social arrangements structuring private life, domestic households, intimacy, gender, and sexuality are neither neutral nor immutable, that they can be seen as relations of power and subject to transformation. The implications of this insight, I hardly need to add, are still unfolding. In the words of one scholar, it is the "unique and world historical achievement" of the women's movement to have laid bare "the social nature of the family, the 'public' nature of the 'private,' the internal connections that exist between the family and the economy."[15]

For others, "the personal is political" means not that personal life could be transformed by political action but that politics should be personalized; that is, everyone's political views should be read as expressing his or her particular, subjective interests — identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality inevitably color everyone's perspective. This second interpretation of "the personal is political" leads to a sometimes disabling skepticism about any claim to transcendence or any appeal to universal ideals or the common good. Both of these views — the political critique of personal life and the identitarian critique of political life — are often described, confusingly enough, as identity politics.

The very success of the feminist critique of public and private has led to new questions. If "the personal is political," is a distinction between public and private always to be rejected, or exploded, as MacKinnon puts it? The slogan requires a relatively broad sense of "political," to mean contested or shaped by domination; it leaves vague the question whether inequities in "personal life" are to be redressed through private action, non-state

public action, or state intervention, all of which can be political in this broad sense. For many, it has been understood to mean that these distinctions should no longer matter.

Perhaps rhetorically, Joan Wallach Scott claimed in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988) that the politics of gender "dissolves the distinction between public and private."[16] Such rhetoric lumps together the enormous range of the meanings of public and private, and it has therefore been blamed for everything from the rise in confessional memoirs to political correctness and the totalitarian tendencies of some legislative reform programs (hate-speech laws, antipornography statutes, and such). MacKinnon's legal programs, in particular, have been seen as justifying an authoritarian style of state regulation in the way they lead to the criminalization of pornography and sex rather than domination or harassment per se. Should nothing be private? Or, on the other hand, should everything be privatized? Should the state intervene to transform gender relations in the workplace and household?[17]

The answers to these questions have consequence for matters of equity, affirmative action, abortion, birth control, rape, adoption, divorce and child support, palimony, sexual harassment, welfare, health care, day care, segregated education, and so on. In many of these areas, feminism encouraged an activist state to assert the public relevance of private life. Yet the effect was not, as some feminists had hoped (and others feared), to eliminate or "dissolve" the boundary between public and private. Often state action was justified in the name of private right. Ironically, in the United States, it was largely in the contexts of feminist agitation — especially over birth control and reproductive freedom — that privacy came to be fully recognized as a domain of Constitutional law. Some distinctions have eroded, or changed: at the very least, these initiatives of the women's movement, and the understanding of public and private implied by them, enabled a significant

expansion of the liberal welfare state into new areas of social life.[18]

Nancy Fraser, for one, has pointed out that some feminists' insistence on an oversimplified distinction between public and private blinded them to these consequences. By using "the public" or "the public sphere" to mean everything outside the home, they blurred together official politics, the state, the market, and other forms of association. Making these distinctions among different meanings of public and private has practical advantages, Fraser writes, "when, for example, agitational campaigns against misogynist cultural representations are confounded with programs for state censorship or when struggles to deprivatize housework and child care are equated with their commodification."[19] In other words, while the personal is "political" in a broad sense, state regulation may not always be appropriate. And while the private realm of the home should often be a matter of public care and concern, the market – like the state and like the majoritarian public of the mass media – has its own destructive tendencies and may be a bad model of "the public."

Scholars have also argued that public and private have always been more than a dichotomy. Some feminist scholars have shown that women have been involved in both public and private realms in most historical periods, often to a surprising degree.[20] Women's networks – of gossip, kinship, affect, and countereconomies – have had important public aspects even at the height of Victorian ideology. We have seen, for example, that while she was criticizing Fanny Wright for violating a boundary between public and private, Catharine Beecher was herself pursuing an active and innovative career in the public sphere. Recent versions of feminism, stressing the diversity of women's positions in different contexts of class, race, religion, or locale, have emphasized that the dominant dichotomies often fail to account for these variations. Other feminists, elaborating deconstructive readings of

gender categories that emphasize their uneven deployment or internal incoherence, have tried to conceive public and private in less spatializing, hypostatized ways.[21]

It may be doubted whether any group, even in the most restrictive contexts of power, has been able to monopolize all dimensions of publicness or all dimensions of privacy in the way MacKinnon suggests men have done. At any rate, the distinction is never drawn solely in one way or solely as an antinomy. The gendered division of labor, for example, is a classic and seemingly clear instance of the ideological distinction between public and private – in this case, between public work and private labor. In this system, as many feminists have noted, gender, labor, and publicness are so closely aligned that they seem synonymous. Public work is paid, is performed outside the home, and has long been the realm of men. Private labor is unpaid, is usually done at home, and has long been women's work. Far from being symmetrical or complementary, this sexual division of labor (and division of sexual labor) is unequal. Public work, for example, is understood to be productive, forming vocational identity, and fulfilling men as individuals; private labor is understood as the general reproduction of society, lacking the vocational distinction of a trade or a profession, and displaying women's selflessness. This gendered difference in callings persists, with its unequal mapping of public and private, though the entry of women into trades and professions has weakened it somewhat.

Yet the same separation of spheres has always had other, more complex meanings of public and private besides this direct correlation in gender domination and economic systems. Even the most extreme separation of spheres turns the home and its adjunct spaces into a functional public for women – spaces that can be filled with talk and with the formation of a shared world. There are normative countercurrents as well. In capitalism, paid work came

to be understood as private economic life. The workplace lost some of the publicness that had been the hallmark of the guilds and trades. So while men were marking their workplace off more sharply from the increasingly female domestic space, they were also marking it off from the public. Professionalism recuperated some of that publicness for its highly trained classes, in a new rhetoric of expertise — but not for wage labor. Male workers, in other words, underwent a loss of public life as artisanal household economies yielded to new, more modern separations of workplace and home life.[22] The domestic and reproductive functions of the family, meanwhile, acquired ever greater public significance as reform movements made them the objects of so much discourse and as nationalism came to be symbolized through them. Many women, like Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet, found an entry into public life exactly through these discourses about privacy in reform, in nationalism, in evangelical Christianity, and in antislavery. They could do so in large part because private markets for print linked women as readers and writers.[23] Women in many places also elaborated parallel or informal economies — private, but public in the sense that they lay beyond the home. These developments were simultaneous with the rise of separate-sphere ideology, not simply later reactions against it.

The economic separation of the male public from the female private, in short, was never a static system. It was one normative strand among others in the elaboration of public and private. To say this is not to minimize its power or to underestimate the degree of male domination that it represented. In fact, because the interweaving of gender, labor, and publicness was indirect rather than definitional, it could often go unrecognized, and still does. To see this might help us to understand why inequality persists despite the apparent breakdown of the most static form of the gendered division of labor — why, for instance, so many of the

publics of women's culture continue not to recognize themselves as publics because they think of their authenticity and their femininity as rooted necessarily in private feeling and domestic relations; or why so many men failed to understand the privatization of economic life as a loss because they thought of their work as having an extradomestic, vocational publicness.

The Liberal Tradition

Given these complexities, how did the notion of public and private come to be imagined as a binary in need of demolition? The answer lies in the way a whole set of distinctions were powerfully aligned in the liberal tradition, reaching back at least to John Locke but widely institutionalized in politics and law by the nineteenth century. This tradition began as a critique of patriarchy, and one of its unintended consequences was the development of modern feminist thought in the eighteenth century. But by the time of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, this liberal tradition had come to pose serious limitations to both feminist and gay movements.

In liberal thought, private persons, no longer defined by privation or powerlessness, had become the proper site of humanity. They possessed publicly relevant rights by virtue of being private persons. Rights meant no longer the privileges that went with various public legal statuses — fief owner, copyholder, husband, lord of the manor, chief eunuch, citizen, princess — but rather claims that all persons could make on the basis of private humanity. The public, no longer understood as the audience or subjects of the ruler, became a community with independent existence, even sovereign claims and the ability to resist or change rulers. Both public and private were redefined, and both gained enormously in significance following the conception of state power as limited and rights as vested in private persons.[24]

This language for politics also gained in forcefulness from the use of similar terms in arguments for capitalism.[25] The motto of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714) is a famous example: "Private vices, public benefits." According to Mandeville, the competitive pursuit of self-interest ("private vices") could be counted on to yield good effects ("public benefits"), counteracting mere selfishness through the interactions of the market. Such thinking, as later developed by Adam Smith and others, lent powerful support to the idea that economic life, as a realm of private society, should be kept free from state or public interference. In time, capitalist culture would give this distinction between public power and a private economy an additional dimension, remapping social life into distinct arenas of work and "personal life," including the intensified privacies of intimacy, friendship, and the domestic.[26]

Meanwhile, the state was evolving into a modern bureaucracy, with its normative distinction between the public function of office and the private person of the officeholder. And as private persons came to be seen as driven by self-interest, the public came to be defined as disinterested. Those aspects of people's lives that particularize their interests came to be seen as inappropriate to public discussion. To be properly public required that one rise above, or set aside, one's private interests and expressive nature. (This notion of a separation between public voice and private selfhood is often called "bracketing"; a closely related idea in John Rawls's liberal legal theory is called the "veil of ignorance."[27])

All of these characteristically modern developments made possible a vision of freedom as negative liberty, inherent in private persons, and a vision of political life as the restraint of power by a critical public. In these respects, they lent great resources to the development of a critique of gender and sexuality. Early feminism, in writers such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, and the Grimké sisters, was articulated through

the normative language of the liberal tradition. They were especially enabled by its vision of the rights-bearing private person, its role for a critical public, its principled skepticism about power.[28] Sarah Grimké, for example, was able to take the universal self of reason as an argument for women's access: "When human beings are regarded as *moral* beings, *sex*, instead of being enthroned upon the summit, administering upon rights and responsibilities, sinks into insignificance and nothingness."[29] Having bracketed sex in this way, Grimké goes on to argue for a thorough degendering of social relations: "We approach each other, and mingle with each other, under the constant pressure of a feeling that we are of different sexes; and, instead of regarding each other only in the light of immortal creatures, the mind is fettered by the idea which is early and industriously infused into it, that we must never forget the distinction between male and female."[30] Grimké longs to transcend sex, and in order to do so she declares it irrelevant, something "infused" into the individual, something to "forget." The ideal of the universal voice of reason has allowed her a kind of public participation. But the price she pays is that differences of sex have been ruled out of consideration as merely private.

In this respect, the same liberal tradition that enabled the first wave of the feminist movement also posed immediate obstacles to it as a movement, as it would later to the gay movement. Women such as Wollstonecraft and Grimké argued that their rights as individuals needed new respect. In doing so, they appealed to the ideal of a disinterested, abstract, universal public—just the kind of public in which particularized views and the gendered body would always seem matter out of place, like Fanny Wright's mannish impudence or Diogenes's masturbation. This tension was felt subjectively by many women, including Sarah Grimké's sister, Angelina, who braved the denunciation of relatives, friends, and strangers, as well as the occasional violent mob, in her willingness

to appeal to "the irresistible torrent of a rectified public opinion" but whose scandalous appearances in public caused her, as she confessed to her diary, great shame and self-doubt. When she married the abolitionist Theodore Weld, her public speaking tours ended.[31]

This subjective anxiety over the public display of the body and the gendered norms of comportment also has a direct equivalent in liberal notions of what is appropriate for public discussion and political action. Because the home was the very realm of private freedom that liberalism had wanted to protect from state intervention, it was off-limits to politics. And the rights of women, seen as an issue internal to the home, were therefore best left to the private judgment of each family. They were inappropriate to politics. Women would have to deal with men in the privacy of their own families, not in public. But of course the private context of the family was just where men were thought naturally to rule. As Eli Zaretsky puts it, "The separation between public and private occluded the perpetuation of relations of domination – those beyond legitimate authority – into modern society. It did this politically by rendering those relations 'private.'"[32] The curbing of the state, in the name of private liberty, had entailed a curb on politics as well, freezing in place all those for whom the private was the place of domination rather than liberty.

This side of the liberal tradition continues to limit the transformative ambitions of feminism, and of the gay movement as well. For example, the gay writer Andrew Sullivan ends his book *Virtually Normal* with an appeal to the liberal distinction between public and private, arguing for a politics based on "a simple and limited principle":

> that all *public* (as opposed to private) discrimination against homosexuals be ended and that every right and responsibility that heterosexuals enjoy as public citizens be extended to those who grow up and find themselves emotionally different. *And that is all.* No cures or re-educations, no wrenching private litigation, no political imposition of tolerance; merely a political attempt to enshrine formal public equality, whatever happens in the culture and society at large.[33]

Everything else, "whatever happens in the culture and society at large," is private, and therefore off-limits to politics. But that includes almost the entirety of homophobia and sexism and the countless daily relations of privilege and domination they entail. Any political attempt to change those conditions is seen, in Sullivan's scheme, as an illegitimate attempt to get government involved in private life, a "political imposition of tolerance." Although this conception of politics is often called neoconservatism, its core ideas derive from the heyday of nineteenth-century liberal thought.[34]

In fact, the liberal distinction between public authority and private freedom has always been in tension with other views, notably with civic humanism since Machiavelli.[35] Liberalism still has powerful contemporary exponents, such as Rawls.[36] But most of the major figures of our time on the subject of public and private have reacted against the liberal tradition. Feminists such as Pateman and MacKinnon, for example, point out that the liberal protection of the private from public interference simply blocked from view those kinds of domination that structure private life through the institutions of the family, the household, gender, and sexuality. Arendt tried to show how many of the strongest conceptions of humanity had been lost or forgotten when freedom was identified with the protection of private life rather than with the give-and-take of public activity. Habermas showed that modern society is fundamentally structured by a public sphere, including the critical consciousness of private people, but that these

public ideals and norms are betrayed by modern social organization. And Michel Foucault rendered a strong challenge to the liberal tradition almost without using the terms "public" and "private" by showing in great detail how its key terms and immanent values—public, state, private, freedom, autonomy—fail to account for power relations.

The Public Sphere

A rather different face of liberalism's distinction between public and private can be seen in Kant's celebrated essay "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784). "The *public* use of reason," Kant writes, "must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the *private* use of reason, however, may often be very narrowly restricted without the progress of enlightenment being particularly hindered." Kant's has been called a "two hats" theory; he imagines men (not women) moving constantly between these two contexts, having different freedoms and different relations to power in each.[37] But the surprising turn comes in his definition of public and private uses of reason: "I understand, however, under the public use of his own reason, that use which anyone makes of it *as a scholar* [*Gelehrter*] before the entire public of the *reading world*. The private use I designate as that use which one makes of his reason in a certain *civil post* or office which is entrusted to him."[38]

To most readers, this will seem counterintuitive. The holder of a civil post would in most senses be a public figure—paid by the state, working for the common good, accountable to the community, acting in full view. The scholar or writer would commonly be thought of as private—unofficial, not supported by the state, speaking on behalf of no one but himself, perhaps unknown except through his writings. Yet to Kant the telling fact is that the holder of a civil post cannot simply follow his own will; he must

obey rules established by his role. He may disagree with something he is required to say; but his thoughts remain private whether he agrees or not. The scholar or writer makes his views known as widely as possible. He is not limited to his role but speaks "as a member of the entire commonwealth, or even of cosmopolitan society." He can freely criticize church or state. Kant makes it clear that this reasoning takes place in a print public, "the entire public of the *reading world*," and that it is more than national; but a clergyman speaking officially to his congregation addresses "only a domestic assembly, no matter how large it is; and in this respect he is not and cannot be free, as a priest, because he conforms to the orders of another."[39]

A striking feature of this account is Kant's emphasis on the different publics to which thought can be relevant, ranging from inner freedom to domestic assemblies, commonwealths, cosmopolitan society, the transnational public of scholars, and even "the entire public of the *reading world*." Some publics are more public than others. They give greater scope to criticism and exchange of views. But by the same token, they may be less directly political, perhaps not anchored in a state or locality.

With this conception, Kant articulates a key distinction—though one that continues to be confused or overlooked even in sophisticated theoretical accounts—between public and political. These are often thought to be synonymous. They are very nearly so, for example, in Arendt, where the model of the public is clearly the polis (the Greek city-state); and equally (or oppositely) in the slogan "the personal is political." What belongs to the polity is by definition of public relevance. But Kant recognizes that there are publics, such as the reading world, that do not correspond to any kind of polity. They enable a way of being public through critical discourse that is not limited by the duties and constraints of office or by loyalties to a commonwealth or nation.

These critical publics may, however, be political in another or higher sense. They may set a higher standard of reason, opinion, and freedom — hence the subversive potential in his picture of enlightenment. (In later years, Kant was forced to hedge on this implication; as he ran afoul of the censors, he narrowed the definition of *Gelehrter* to the scholar per se rather than the reader in general.)[40] Locke, too, had recognized the existence of a critical public not limited to the official politics of the state and having all the freedom from authority of private right. But in Locke this public tends to be imagined as the national people, endowed with the sovereign ability to change rulers. It is in a sense a back-projection from the state. Kant's publics, though less literally revolutionary, range more widely, at least in print.

The difference between the public and the political has been taken up, closer to our own day, by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).[41] Subtitled "An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society," the book reflects the Frankfurt School tradition of "immanent critique"; Habermas does not set out to invent or celebrate a putatively lost ideal of the public (though he has sometimes been read this way); he wishes to show that bourgeois society has always been structured by a set of ideals that were contradicted by its own organization and compromised by its own ideology. These ideals, however, contained an emancipatory potential, Habermas thinks, and modern culture should be held accountable to them. But far from moving toward a more radical realization in practice, modern culture has compromised the ideals further. "Tendencies pointing to the collapse of the public sphere are unmistakable," Habermas declares at the beginning of the book, "for while its scope is expanding impressively, its function has become progressively insignificant."[42]

The main structural transformation of the title is the historic shift that Habermas assigns to the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Habermas begins with an aristocratic or monarchical model that he calls the "representative public sphere," in which power is displayed before a public (and in which Louis XIV was able to say, "L'état, c'est moi"). The publicity of the court was embodied and authoritative. The monarch's presence was always public, and courtliness always had an audience. This kind of publicity yielded to a newer model of publicness in which the public is composed of private persons exercising rational-critical discourse in relation to the state and power. (The "sphere" of the title is a misleading effect of English translation; the German *Öffentlichkeit* lacks the spatializing metaphor and suggests something more like "openness" or "publicness." The French translation, *L'Espace public*, is worse.)

This shift came about, Habermas claims, through a wide range of cultural and social conditions that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the rise of newspapers, novels, and other private forms of print; coffeehouses, salons, and related private contexts of sociability in which argument and discussion could take place; the rise of critical discussion of art, music, and literature; the reorientation of domestic architecture; the development of an idea of the family and intimate life as the proper seat of humanity, from which persons could come together to form a public; and the development of a notion of the economy, beyond the household, as a realm of civil society that could be taken as the object of discussion and debate. Through these developments, a public that "from the outset was a reading public" became "the abstract counterpart of public authority" and "came into an awareness of itself as the latter's opponent, that is, as the public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*."[43]

The public in this new sense, in short, was no longer opposed to the private. It *was* private. As the self-consciousness of civil society, it was opposed to the state:

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason.[44]

The public sphere in this sense is "a category of bourgeois society," as the subtitle maintains, not just because its members are mostly bourgeois but also because the reorganization of society around the institutions of public criticism was one of the means by which bourgeois society came into being, conscious of itself as "society." Habermas cites Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" and its ideal of a private citizen as a scholar "whose writings speak to his public, the world." This "world" is both broad, stretching notions of cosmopolitanism and world progress to include "the communication of rational beings," and particularized, being grounded in "the world of a critically debating reading public that at the time was just evolving within the broader bourgeois strata. It was the world of the men of letters but also that of the *salons* in which 'mixed companies' engaged in critical discussion; here, in the bourgeois homes, the public sphere was established."[45]

As Craig Calhoun points out, a radical reversal has taken place between the bourgeois conception traced by Habermas and the Greek conception of public freedom: "Unlike the Greek conception, individuals are here understood to be formed primarily in the private realm, including the family. Moreover, the private realm is understood as one of freedom that has to be defended against the domination of the state."[46]

Habermas shows that this understanding of the public sphere

had its early critics. Chief among these was the young Karl Marx, who objected to the nature of this new private freedom leading "every man to see in other men, not the *realization*, but rather the *limitation* of his own liberty."[47] Noting the contradiction between the universal claims of public reason and its particular basis in bourgeois society, Marx wanted to imagine "the social conditions for the possibility of its utterly unbourgeois realization."[48] Indeed, workers and excluded groups of many kinds were beginning to grasp this possibility, as the explosion of nineteenth-century social movements makes clear. Labor, Chartism, temperance, and other movements were enabled by the new conditions of the public sphere. But liberal critics, such as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, saw this expansion of critical discussion as a threat to the public sphere and began to treat the public as a force of unreason. Habermas thinks that at this juncture liberal thought began to betray its own best ideals: "The liberalist interpretation of the bourgeois constitutional state was reactionary: it reacted to the power of the idea of a critically debating public's self-determination, initially included in its institutions, as soon as this public was subverted by the propertyless and uneducated masses."[49]

Habermas does not here mention the playing out of the same contradiction regarding gender, an omission for which he has been taken to task by feminist critics and which he has since acknowledged.[50] The important point for him is that the emancipatory potential of the public sphere was abandoned rather than radicalized and that changing conditions have now made its realization more difficult than ever. Habermas stresses especially two such conditions: the asymmetrical nature of mass culture, which makes it easier for those with capital or power to distribute their views but harder for marginal voices to talk back; and the growing interpenetration of the state and civil society, which makes it harder to conceive of the private public sphere as a limitation on

state power. These tendencies amount to what Habermas calls a "refeudalization" of the public sphere – in effect, a second "structural transformation." They produce a public that is appealed to not for criticism but for benign acclamation. Public opinion comes less to generate ideas and hold power accountable and more simply to register approval or disapproval in the form of opinion polls and occasional elections. "Publicity once meant the exposure of political domination before the public use of reason; publicity now adds up the reactions of an uncommitted friendly disposition," Habermas writes. "In the measure that it is shaped by public relations, the public sphere of civil society again takes on feudal features."[51] Even the bourgeois conjugal family, which had in theory served as the basis of private humanity (an appearance that, according to Habermas, had always been contradicted by its real functions), now finds most of its functions taken over by mass culture and by other institutions such as schools. As a result, it "has started to dissolve into a sphere of pseudo-privacy."[52]

Habermas's analysis has been the subject of a voluminous debate, much of it marred by reductive summaries and a naive confidence that highly capitalized mass media can be defended and celebrated as "popular culture." Three themes from this debate are important enough to warrant some comment here. First, the public-sphere environment Habermas describes can be seen as the context of modern social movements, including identity politics. Social movements take shape in civil society, often with an agenda of demands vis-à-vis the state. They seek to change policy by appealing to public opinion. They arise from contexts of critical discussion, many of them print-mediated. The question for debate, then, is to what extent the environment for critical social movements is becoming more undemocratic, "refeudalized," or colonized by changing relations among the state, mass media, and the market. This is not a simple issue. It has to do with the increas-

ingly transnational nature of publics, of civil-society structures such as corporations or nongovernmental organizations, and of interstate regulatory apparatuses.[53] It has to do as well with the apparently conflicting trends of an ever higher capitalization of media, which are increasingly controlled by a small number of transnational companies, and the apparent decentralization of new media.

Second, movements around gender and sexuality do not always conform to the bourgeois model of "rational-critical debate," especially as that model has been subsequently elaborated by Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas speaks of "people's public use of their reason." But what counts as a use of reason? In later works, he has put forward a highly idealized account of argumentative dialogue.[54] But movements around gender and sexuality seek to transform fundamental styles of embodiment, identity, and social relations – including their unconscious manifestations, the vision of the good life embedded in them, and the habitus by which people continue to understand their selves or bodies as public or private. Because this is the field that people want to transform, it is not possible to assume the habitus according to which rational-critical debate is a neutral, relatively disembodied procedure for addressing common concerns, while embodied life is assumed to be private, local, or merely affective and expressive. The styles by which people assume public relevance are themselves contested. The ability to bracket one's embodiment and status is not simply what Habermas calls making public use of one's reason; it is a strategy of distinction, profoundly linked to education and to dominant forms of masculinity.

Just as the gendered division of public and private kept women from challenging their role in any way that might have been political, public interactions are saturated with protocols of gender

and sexual identity. Just as Diogenes's masturbating in the market will be seen by some as philosophy, by others as filth, the critically relevant styles of publicness in gay male sexual culture are seldom recognized as such but are typically denounced as sleaze and as crime. For modern gay men and lesbians, the possibilities of public or private speech are distorted by what we call the closet. "The closet" is a misleading spatial metaphor. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown so well, it is a name for a set of assumptions in everyday life as well as in expert knowledge: assumptions about what goes without saying; what can be said without a breach of decorum; who shares the onus of disclosure; what can be known about a person's real nature through telltale signs, without his or her own awareness; and who will bear the consequences of speech and silence.[55] Speech is everywhere regulated unequally. Yet ironically, common mythology understands the closet as an individual's lie about him- or herself. We blame people for being closeted. But the closet is better understood as the culture's problem, not the individual's. No one ever created a closet for him- or herself. People find themselves in its oppressive conditions before they know it, willy-nilly. It is experienced by lesbians and gay men as a private, individual problem of shame and deception. But it is produced by the heteronormative assumptions of everyday talk. It feels private. But in an important sense it is publicly constructed.

In such a regime of sexual domination, publicness will feel like exposure, and privacy will feel like the closet. The closet may seem to be a kind of protection. Indeed, the feeling of protection is one of the hallmarks of modern privacy. But in fact the closet is riddled with fear and shame. So is publicity under the conditions of the closet. Being publicly known as homosexual is never the same as being publicly known as heterosexual; the latter always goes without saying and troubles nothing, whereas the former carries echoes of pathologized visibility. It is perfectly meaning-

less to "come out" as heterosexual. So it is not true, as common wisdom would have it, that homosexuals live private lives without a secure public identity. They have neither privacy *nor* publicness, in these normative senses of the terms. In the United States, the judiciary, along with the military and its supporters in Congress and the White House, has gone to great lengths to make sure that they will have neither.[56] It is this deformation of public and private that identity politics — and the performative ritual known as coming out — tries to transform.

In some ways, a more daunting version of the same problem faces the transgendered, who do not always wish to appeal in the same way to a private identity as the basis for a public revaluation. Often it is the most private, intimate dimension of sex assignment and self-understanding that must be managed at the same time with the public and social presentations, though these may move at different rates and to different degrees. The task of managing stigma may often present itself as being like the closet; and it may display a similar inequality in claims to knowledge. The epistemological leverage of medical experts, for example, appears as a very public kind of knowledge and authority, objective and neutral where the patient's claims are understood to be subjective and interested, perhaps even pathological. Transgendered people typically have to struggle against that superior claim to know what's good for them or what their true nature is, even while they are dependent on those same experts for assistance, care, and public legitimacy. But of course a sex transition is not something that can be managed privately, and because it is a transition rather than a newly revealed prior condition, "coming out" is not an entirely helpful analogy.

A notion of privacy as a right of self-determination may prove in many contexts to be extremely valuable to the transgendered. A merely naturalized privacy, on the other hand, might block

access to the health services and other kinds of publicly available assistance that self-determination might require. The private facilities of public institutions — locker rooms, bathrooms, and such — can be the most public of battlegrounds, especially for FTMs. And the transgendered routinely have to cope with the public, institutional, and state dimensions of such otherwise "personal" and private issues as naming, sex classification, health, and intimate associations. Transgender activism continually points to the public underpinnings of privacy, and probably nowhere more so than in its own practice, which seeks to put into circulation a new publicly available language for self-understanding.

As these examples illustrate, the meaning of gender and sexuality in dominant culture is only partly determined in domestic or familial life. It is also constantly being shaped across the range of social relations, and perhaps especially in the mass media, with their visual language of incorporation and desire. The public sphere as an environment, then, is not just a place where one could rationally debate a set of gender or sexual relations that can in turn be equated with private life; the public sphere is a principal instance of the forms of embodiment and social relations that are themselves at issue.

This is a reason for skepticism about the reigning protocols of what counts as rational-critical debate, including the idea that one need's to bracket one's private self in order to engage in public discussion. But the same reciprocity between public and private is also an advantage to public-sphere analysis in relation to some other critical methods, notably psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis as a cultural phenomenon, as Zaretsky points out, has contributed profoundly to the twentieth-century revaluation of personal and private life. But as a method, psychoanalysis has been limited in its ability to deal with issues of public and private. Most psychoanalytic analyses of gender and sexuality focus on intrasubjective

dynamics and familial relations, generalizing from these to abstract levels of culture such as the Symbolic and the law of the father. In so doing, they methodically embed the equation of gender and sexuality with the realm of the family and the individual — blocking from view the mediation of publics and the multiple social, historical, and political frames of privacy. Freud himself struggled to overcome this limitation in *Group Psychology*, and some later reconstructions of psychoanalytic method, from Frantz Fanon to feminist film theory, have further revised his vocabulary with the aim of incorporating social contexts of domination into our understanding of psychic life and vice versa. Yet the distance between psychoanalytic generality and the complex histories of public and private remains great.[57]

Finally, there is some tension between the publics of gender or sexuality and the public sphere as an ideal. On this point, there has been some confusion; critics commonly accuse Habermas of having adopted a false ideal of a unitary public.[58] But Habermas does not imagine a public unified in reality, as a constituency or a single media context. "Nonpublic opinions are at work in great numbers," he writes, "and 'the' public opinion is indeed a fiction."[59] From the beginning, his account stressed many different kinds of public discourse, from tavern conversation to art criticism. The ideal unity of the public sphere is best understood as an imaginary convergence point that is the backdrop of critical discourse in each of these contexts and publics — an implied but abstract point that is often referred to as "the public" or "public opinion" and by virtue of that fact endowed with legitimacy and the ability to dissolve power. A "public" in this context is a special kind of virtual social object, enabling a special mode of address. As we saw in Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" it is modeled on a reading public. In modern societies, a public is by definition an indefinite audience rather than a social constituency that could

be numbered or named.[60] *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* can be read as a history of the construction of this virtual object and its mode of address, where a key development is the fiction of "public opinion" as the ideal background of all possible publics. Habermas did not describe it in these terms, and in his later work on communicative rationality he increasingly collapsed public reason into the model of face-to-face argumentative dialogue – thus making the special context of publics disappear from the analysis. But there is no necessary conflict between the public sphere and the idea of multiple publics.

Counterpublics

The stronger modification of Habermas's analysis – one in which he has shown little interest, though it is clearly of major significance in the critical analysis of gender and sexuality – is that some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The sexual cultures of gay men or of lesbians would be one kind of example, but so would camp discourse or the media of women's culture. A counterpublic in this sense is usually related to a subculture, but there are important differences between these concepts. A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the

like. Counterpublics are often called "subaltern counterpublics," but it is not clear that all counterpublics are composed of people *otherwise* dominated as subalterns. Some youth-culture publics or artistic publics, for example, operate as counterpublics, even though many who participate in them are "subalterns" in no other sense. At any rate, even as a subaltern counterpublic, this subordinate status does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed.

Habermas's rich historical account of the norms and practices of publicness in modernity can thus reopen the relations between the personal and the political. A public, or counterpublic, can do more than represent the interests of gendered or sexualized persons in a public sphere. It can mediate the most private and intimate meanings of gender and sexuality. It can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy. It can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship – meaning active participation in collective world making through publics of sex and gender.

Such a model of citizenship or public personhood would be very different indeed from the bourgeois public sphere, though deeply indebted to it as a background set of conditions. The bourgeois public sphere consists of private persons whose identity is formed in the privacy of the conjugal domestic family and who enter into rational-critical debate around matters common to all by bracketing their embodiment and status. Counterpublics of sexuality and gender, on the other hand, are scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate. Homosexuals can exist in isolation; but gay people or queers exist by virtue of the world they elaborate together, and gay or queer

identity is always fundamentally inflected by the nature of that world. The same could be said of women's counterpublics, or those of race, or youth culture. These public contexts necessarily entail and bring into being realms of subjectivity outside the conjugal domestic family. Their protocols of discourse and debate remain open to affective and expressive dimensions of language. And their members make their embodiment and status at least partly relevant in a public way by their very participation.[61]

It is in part to capture the profound difference between the conception of citizenship made possible in such counterpublics and the one prevailing in the bourgeois public sphere that so many critics in gender and sexuality studies have recently turned to the long-unfashionable work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt was especially unfashionable in second-wave feminism. Far from "dissolving the distinction between public and private," Arendt insists on it. For many feminist readers, what stood out was that "when Hannah Arendt defines politics in terms of the pursuit of public happiness or the taste for public freedom, she is employing a terminology almost opposite to that adopted within the contemporary women's movement."[62] Both Adrienne Rich, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, and Mary O'Brien, in *The Politics of Reproduction*, interpreted Arendt as embracing the system in which male is to public as female is to private. They dismissed her as an essentially masculinist thinker. Lately, however, an impressive range of feminists and other thinkers have begun a reconsideration. They argue that for Arendt public and private refer less to the norms of gender than to the different conditions for action that define humanity. For those who think that gender and sexuality are defined through action in relation to others, and that they can be made subject to transformation for that reason, Arendt can be read as prescribing what Bonnie Honig calls "an agonistic politics of performativity."[63]

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt tries to reconstruct dimensions of humanity put at risk by the world alienation of the modern age. Against the current of her time, in which privacy and personal life came to be viewed as the realm of individuality and freedom, Arendt sees both freedom and individuality in the world-making public activity of the polis, because it is a common framework of interaction that is needed to allow both a shared world of equals and the disclosure of unique agency. The private, by contrast, is the realm of necessity and the merged viewpoints of family life. Arendt believes that the necessities of private life are inappropriate to politics. But she does not say this out of a prudish morality; her ideal of political life is a creative fashioning of a common world, and she understands the word "private" to refer to those conditions—including love, pain, and need in general—that she thinks of as not being defined or transformed by such creative fashioning. As Mary Dietz emphasizes, both public and private in this usage are existential categories, not social descriptions. They are different contexts for personhood. The public that Arendt values so much is the scene of world making and self-disclosure; it is therefore to be distinguished both from the prevailing system of politics and from any universalist notion of rational debate. It is a political scene, necessarily local because the self and the shared world disclosed through it emerge in interaction with others.[64]

Arendt sees at least three great ruptures separating our own time from the classical culture in which the world-making dimension of public action was understood. The first is Christianity, with its eternal private person and devaluation of the public world; the second, Romantic individualism, which leads us to see the private not as the privation of publicness but as an originary value in its own right; the third, what she calls the rise of the social. By "the social" she means the modern way of understanding human relations

not as the medium of action and speech but as behavior and regulation. Fundamental human capacities of world making are restricted in scope and consequence by mass society, administration, and instrumentality.

In the context of the Cold War (*The Human Condition* was published in 1958), this was a bold argument, fundamentally criticizing both totalitarianism and liberalism. Because Arendt's public is an action context for speech and an agonistic scene of interaction, it is the realm of rhetoric, not command; there is an implicit contrast here to the totalitarianism that Arendt had treated in her previous book, as well as to juridical models of power generally.[65] But Arendt also offers her description of public and private as a contrast to the distinction between state and society with which it is often made synonymous, especially in liberalism.[66]

The difference between Arendt's pragmatic sense of the public and the liberal universalist sense is sharp. It also occasions unforeseen tensions in Arendt's own thought, and thus opportunities for reading her against the grain. The women's movement and queer culture would represent model cases of public world making, and for the same reason that they are generally understood to be opposed to "family values":

> 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 offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives. The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family, it can even become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family "world" can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators.[67]

Familialist conceptions of national or public membership come in for such withering remarks in part because Arendt has in mind the background of fascism; but this analysis has not lost its relevance in the post–Cold War period. Arendt writes that in mass society "people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor."[68] While mass society might seem to be in many respects the opposite of the family, the commodity-ridden waste against which the intimacy of the hearth is usually contrasted, for Arendt these two models of social space share a basic limitation on action and speech. (The point might be illustrated through the mid-1990s phenomenon of the Promise Keepers movement, or "family values" rhetoric generally.) Of course, some feminists (especially in what is called "difference feminism") and some queer theorists might take a more expansive view of the family. Arendt clearly has in mind a classic middle-class model of family life, with its ideals of property interest, ethnic subjectivity, primary allegiance, and undisputed will.

Much of the energy currently being derived from Arendt's work by feminist and queer thought lies in the possibility of reading the slogan "The personal is political" with an Arendtian understanding of the political. This entails the working assumption that the conditions of gender and sexuality can be treated not simply as the given necessities of the laboring body but as the occasion for forming publics, elaborating common worlds, making the transposition from shame to honor, from hiddenness to the exchange of viewpoints with generalized others, in such a way that the disclosure of self partakes of freedom.

The challenge facing this project in transgender activism, feminism, and queer theory is to understand how world making unfolds in publics that are, after all, not just natural collections of people, not just "communities," but mediated publics. Arendt's

language of "speech" and "action in view of others" sounds, in this context, fairly antiquated—an unfortunate faithfulness to the metaphor of the polis rather than a complex understanding of how politics happens. Habermas, meanwhile, has a more careful attention to the practices and structures that mediate publics, including print, genre, architecture, and capital. But he extracts from them such an idealized image of persuasion that the world-disclosing activity of a counterpublic falls out of view. Both thinkers share a strong sense that the utopian ideals of public and private have been contradicted by the social conditions for realizing them in modern mass culture.

What remains, then, is a need for both concrete and theoretical understandings of the conditions that currently mediate the transformative and creative work of counterpublics. Counterpublics of sex and gender are teaching us to recognize in newer and deeper ways how privacy is publicly constructed. They are testing our understanding of how private life can be made publicly relevant. And they are elaborating not only new shared worlds and critical languages but also new privacies, new individuals, new bodies, new intimacies, and new citizenships. In doing so, they have provoked visceral reactions, and necessarily so, since the visceral meaning of gender and sexuality is the very matter that they wish to disclose as publicly relevant. It is often thought, especially by outsiders, that the public display of private matters is a debased narcissism, a collapse of decorum, expressivity gone amok, the erosion of any distinction between public and private. But in a counterpublic setting, such display often has the aim of transformation. Styles of embodiment are learned and cultivated, and the affects of shame and disgust that surround them can be tested, in some cases revalued. Visceral private meaning is not easy to alter by oneself, by a free act of will. It can only be altered through exchanges that go beyond self-expression to the making

of a collective scene of disclosure. The result, in counterpublics, is that the visceral intensity of gender, of sexuality, or of corporeal style in general no longer needs to be understood as private. Publicness itself has a visceral resonance.

At the same time, these counterpublics are encountering—without always recognizing—limitations in their public media, their relation to the state and to official publics, their embeddedness in larger publics and larger processes of privatization, and their reliance on distorting models of privacy and intimacy. One doesn't "go public" simply as an act of will—neither by writing, nor by having an opinion, nor by exposing oneself in the marketplace. The context of publicness must be available, allowing these actions to count in a public way, to be transformative. How does that come about? Habermas would have us ask whether it is even possible to be public in the validating sense when the public media are mass media, and to some extent this remains a question for counterpublics as well. Counterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably entails distortion. Mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy.[69]