

# Intellectuals, Culture, Policy: The Practical and the Critical

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There are now ample signs that cultural policy is emerging as an increasingly important area of theoretical and practical engagement for intellectuals working in the fields of sociology and cultural studies. This has occasioned a good deal of debate concerning the roles of intellectuals and the relationships they should adopt in relation to the bureaucratic and political processes through which cultural policies are developed and put into effect. It is with these debates that I engage here with a view to distinguishing the light that might be thrown on them by different accounts of the social roles and distribution of different kinds of intellectual function. My concerns here will center on the relations between two traditions of social theory. The first derives from Jürgen Habermas's classic study of the public sphere (Habermas 1989) and theorizes the role of intellectuals in terms of the distinction between critical and technical intellectual functions which characterizes Habermas's construction of the relationships between different forms of rationality. The second comprises the tradition which, following in the wake of Michel Foucault's essay on governmentality (Foucault 1978), has concerned itself with the roles of particular forms of knowledge and expertise in organizing differentiated fields of government and social management.

My starting-point will be with the Habermasian tradition. The concept of the public sphere is, of course, one that now need no longer be constrained by its Habermasian lineage. In its post-Habermasian history, moreover, the concept has made positive contributions to both the theory and practice of cultural policy. It has supplied the language through which governments have been called on – with some success – to develop forms of media regulation that will inhibit the oligopolistic tendencies of media industries by providing for at least some semblance of democracy and diversity in the role of the media in the organization and circulation of opinion (Collins & Murrone 1996). The differentiation of Habermas's singular public sphere into plural public spheres – feminist and indigenous, for example – has also been important in legitimating claims on the public purse which have helped in winning new forms of public, and publicly educative, presence for groups excluded from the classical bourgeois public

sphere. My concerns, however, are less with these adaptations of the Habermasian concept than with Habermas's initial account of the public sphere and the role it has played, in subsequent debates, when viewed in the light of the splitting of intellectual work between the differentiated functions of *critique* and *praxis* which he proposes. (I should add, to avoid possible confusion, that my attention is limited to Habermas's initial account of the public sphere. While acknowledging that Habermas has subsequently revised this in the light of the critical debates it has generated, no account is taken of these revisions here.)

My engagements with this tradition of work will be of two kinds. First, I shall argue that Habermas's polarizing procedures do not offer us a cogent basis for debating and assessing the politics of contemporary intellectual practice. Their main weakness is that of dividing reason into two without then being able to offer any means of reconnecting its severed parts except through the endlessly deferred mechanism of the dialectic. Second, I shall argue that Habermas's account of the development and subsequent deterioration of the bourgeois public sphere seriously misunderstands the role that the main institutions of public culture have played in the development of modern practices of cultural governance.

The vantage points from which I pursue these concerns are ones supplied by different branches of the post-Foucauldian literature on governmentality. In developing the first argument, I draw on work which stresses the ethical comportment which characterizes the conduct of bureaucratized intellectual functions. This aspect of my argument serves to undercut the view that the exercise of practical intellectual functions within bureaucratic contexts can serve as an "ethics-free zone" in counterpoint to the ethical purity of the critical intellectual. The second point is developed by looking again at Habermas's historical account of the public sphere through the lens of post-Foucauldian inquiries into the development of modern forms of government and culture.

### The Critical and the Practical

Jim McGuigan's *Culture and the Public Sphere* offers a convenient point of entry into the first set of issues. This closes in posing two questions: How can critical intellectuals be practical? And how can practical intellectuals be critical? By critical intellectuals McGuigan has in mind intellectuals whose work is academic in the sense that the conditions in which it takes place disconnect it from any immediate practical outcomes for which those intellectuals can be held responsible. The problem for such intellectuals, then, is that the opportunity for critically reflexive work which such conditions make possible is purchased at the price of a loss of any immediate practical effectivity. The practical intellectuals McGuigan refers to are cultural workers "engaged in some form of communication and cultural management" in practical contexts where, as he defines them, "the possibilities of critical knowledge . . . have already been closed off" by

the need for “recipe knowledge” (McGuigan 1996: 190). Two kinds of intellectual, then, each of whom, at least at first sight, seems to lack what the other possesses. It becomes clear on further inspection, however, that the relations between these different categories of intellectual are not, and cannot become, relations of exchange. Rather, they take the form of a one-way street in which the task enjoined on the critical intellectual is that of dislodging the forms of reasoning – the “recipe knowledge” – which govern the contexts in which practical intellectuals do their work. The most that can be asked of practical intellectuals – parties to a gift relationship in which they can only be receivers – is that they should be prepared to jettison those forms of reasoning which spontaneously characterize their work in favor of the essentially different forms of reasoning represented, and selflessly donated, by critical intellectuals.

How is it that these lowly servants of a mere “recipe knowledge” find themselves placed on the opposite side of a divide separating them from the realms in which critical intellectuals operate? This separation is the local manifestation of a more fundamental division between critical and instrumental reason which has its roots in Habermas’s account of the division between system and lifeworld and their opposing principles of rationality. In the latter, where communication is relatively undistorted by uneven relationships of power and where there is a common interest in shared horizons of meaning arising out of shared conditions of life, communicative rationality is orientated to mutual understanding. By contrast, the instrumental rationality which characterizes the world of system is one which displaces questions of human value and meaning in favor of a means–end rationality whose direction is dictated by existing structures of class and bureaucratic power. This opposition between system and lifeworld is most economically represented in the terms of Habermas’s distinction between *praxis* and *techne*. The first of these, as Habermas glosses it, is concerned with the reasoned assessment of the validity of norms for action, whereas *techne* is concerned solely with the rational selection of the best instruments for achieving particular outcomes once the normative goals for social action have been determined (Habermas 1974: 1–3).

When these broader aspects of the argument are taken into account, it is clear that the form of mediation that McGuigan proposes for overcoming the separation of critical and practical intellectuals would extend the sway of *praxis*, whose spokesperson is the critical intellectual, beyond the lifeworld into the world of system where it would ideally displace, or provide a superordinate context for, the application of *techne*. At the same time, however, the prospects of this actually happening are not good, to the degree that the conditions of work of intellectuals located within the world of system predispose them to focus exclusively on narrowly technical forms of reason and action. Thus lessons of *praxis*, since they do “not tell us *directly* what to do,” will “always be regarded as unsatisfactory by those who prefer to act without thinking; in effect, those who want recipe knowledge but not critical thought, information but not ideas” (McGuigan 1996: 1987). McGuigan seems not to notice the paradoxical effects

of a body of theory which, on the one hand, holds out the possibility of universally valid norms of communication and mutual understanding arising out of the shared conditions of the lifeworld while, on the other, dividing reason into two antinomial realms – *praxis* and *techne* – whose separation, once established, cannot be overcome except by imposing the values of one on the other. What is perhaps more harmful, however, is the mapping of this opposition between different kinds of reason onto the relations between different kinds of intellectuals working in different contexts.

The dubious value of this procedure is all the more evident when it is considered that, in most other regards, the differences between so-called critical and practical intellectuals would seem to be so slight. From everything that we know of the demographic characteristics and shared occupational cultures of academics and cultural intermediaries and policy professionals, it might have been thought that they would be able to communicate effectively with one another on matters of common practical and intellectual concern from the perspective of a shared horizon of professional, social, and cultural understandings. Indeed, I would contend that this *is* so, except in the world of Habermasian dualities where it *cannot* be so. For once critical intellectuals take it upon themselves to connect their work to the realm of system, the democratic norm that all parties to any communicative interaction should be treated as equal is abandoned as the critical intellectual assumes a discursive position – a capacity for critical independence and detachment – that is, by definition, superior to that of the purely technical competence of the administrator or manager. This superiority is invested with further normative significance in the related assumption that the “culture of dissatisfaction” that results from the restlessly self-reflexive persona of the critical intellectual is the sole source of progressive change within the administration of culture, and one that is pitched constantly against the inertia and conservatism of the agencies and personnel that are actually responsible for the development and implementation of cultural policies. As McGuigan puts it:

The culture of dissatisfaction is the perpetual bugbear of any official cultural policy: the very officialness of governmental policy, in effect, makes it conservative, the upholder of the status quo, from the point of view of a restless dissatisfaction with the way things are presently constituted. (McGuigan 1996: 50)

It is easy to see here how the dualities constructed by the Habermasian apparatus have an element of self-fulfilling prophecy built into them. For if McGuigan’s purpose really is to build bridges between critical and practical intellectuals, the Habermasian spin he gives to this task makes him a poor diplomat in his own cause. For what are the chances that the communications and cultural managers who *do* read his book might feel parties to an open and unconstrained dialogue in which the positions, perspectives, and experiences of intellectual workers situated in different contexts might be regarded as matters for genuine debate? Not

strong, I'd have thought, given that they have been defined in wholly negative terms owing to their incapacity for critical or independent thought.

This is a pity, and especially so as there are no good reasons for taking the virtues of *critique* so much for granted. There is now a substantial body of work which, far from taking *critique* to be a transcendent and self-subsistent norm, historicizes and relativizes it in ways which seriously question its ethical and epistemological credentials. Indeed, it is possible to read the tradition of critical sociology, to which Habermas's work belongs, as itself a powerful form of "recipe knowledge." A significant case in point is Bruno Latour's recent questioning of emancipatory rhetorics. Contending that the prospect of revolutionary simplifications of the social has now ceded place to the challenge of "coexistence between totally heterogeneous forms of people, cultures, epochs and entities," he argues that the complexities this entails mean that the arrow of time can no longer run from "slavery to freedom" but only from "entanglement to more entanglement" (Latour 1999: 13–15). As heir to the tradition of post-Kantian philosophy, it guarantees a continuing role for *critique* by its formulaic construction of the historical process as one which establishes divisions (in this case, between *praxis* and *techne* and its various derivatives) which have then to be overcome and reconciled with the aid of the philosopher-sociologist's critical intellectual mediation. It is by means of this operation that *critique*, as a stylized intellectual practice, is substituted for more grounded forms of critical inquiry in making an entirely predictable set of intellectual routines whose form, moves, and conclusions – in setting up oppositions and projecting their reconciliation while simultaneously regretting the factors which impede the unfolding of this ideal dialectic – stand in the place of an analytical engagement with the recalcitrant positivity and dispersed diversity of social relations and forces.

I am more concerned, here, however with the other side of the Habermasian division of the sphere of reason into two. For the purely means–end rationality of bureaucratic reason can be rescued from the terms of Habermas's condemnation by recognizing that it can lay its own claims to virtue on grounds that are simultaneously ethical, critical, and historical. Ian Hunter's spirited defense of the bureaucratic vocation will serve as a good point of entry into these concerns. For in restoring an appropriate degree of virtue to the bureaucrat, Hunter also calls into question the absolutist forms of authority which those who speak in the voice of the critical intellectual spontaneously and unreflectively claim as their own.

Hunter takes his initial bearings from those ways of depicting the persona of the bureaucrat which project it "as 'one side' of a full moral personality, the other side of which is represented by the 'humanist intellectual'" who is the mirror image of the bureaucrat in espousing "a commitment to substantive values" while lacking the "technical means for realising them" (Hunter 1994: 146). While this division of the world of reason into two rests on Weber's neo-Kantian distinction between instrumentally rational and value-rational forms of social action, Weber's position differed from Kant's in refusing to make the humanist

intellectual the ultimate arbiter of value-rational action. Weber's stance was rather pluralistic and sociological, regarding the ends of value-rational action as being multiple and specific to particular spheres of life and giving rise to distinctive ethical dispositions and capacities. This included, Hunter is shrewd to note, an assessment of the bureaucracy's commitment to instrumentally rational action as itself constituting a distinctive ethos of office requiring particular ethical capacities rather than figuring as a sphere of moral vacuousness and critical emptiness.

This leads Hunter to suggest that what Habermas devalues as mere *techné* is the result of a specific ethical training rather than a form of ethical lack. The bureau, he says, is not something that has been separated off from critical reason as a result of some split in the lifeworld or the opening of some historical chasm in the organization of public life. Rather, it is the site for the formation of a distinctive ethical persona in the sense that "the office itself constitutes a 'vocation' (*Beruf*), a focus of ethical commitment and duty, autonomous of and superior to the holder's extra-official ties to kith, kin, class or, for that matter, conscience" (Hunter 1994: 156). From this perspective, to denounce the instrumentalism of bureaucracy for its apparently amoral indifference to qualitative ends is to fail to appreciate the historically distinctive form of morality which such an ethos of office represents:

The ethical attributes of the good bureaucrat – strict adherence to procedure, acceptance of sub- and super-ordination, *esprit de corps*, abnegation of personal moral enthusiasms, commitment to the purposes of the office – are not an incompetent subtraction from a "complete" (self-concerned and self-realising) comportment of the person. On the contrary, they are a positive moral achievement requiring the mastery of a difficult milieu and practice. (Hunter 1994: 156–7)

Why, then, is the critical intellectual more likely, instead, to devalue the bureaucrat as a one-sided and incomplete embodiment of the function of reason? In answering this question, Hunter draws on Weber's general sociological principles, treating the post-Kantian construction of the critical intellectual as a person committed to a higher and universal sense of moral duty as itself a particular ethos requiring analysis in terms of its relations to particular kinds of social prestige and power. When considered sociologically, "the persona of the self-reflective scholar acting on the basis of inner conviction is no more ethically fundamental than that of the official, whose ethos involves subordinating his inner convictions to the duties of office" (Hunter 1994: 163). Both represent specific moral dispositions cultivated through the exercise of particular spiritual disciplines and routines. *Critique*, however, arranges these differences hierarchically by "treating its own status-persona – the self-reflective scholar, the 'complete' person . . . – as 'ultimate' for all comportments of the person, the bureaucrat and citizen included" (Hunter 1994: 163). Hunter is clear in seeing this absolutizing tendency of *critique* as part of a tactics of intellectual life through

which a particular stratum of intellectuals, while disconnected from the actual administrative forms through which social life is organized, aspires to a distinctive kind of social influence. This is to be achieved by cultivating the status of moral notables who, speaking to the world at large, claim the mantle of a “secular holiness” which, as part of a practice of “world flight,” allows them to “criticise the dominant organisation of social life by practising an exemplary withdrawal from it” (Hunter 1994: 167).

Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* provides a convenient example of this practice of “secular holiness” and of the forms of critical intolerance and ethical bullying it entails. For Said’s strategy in elaborating his view of the intellectual as an exile and marginal, as an amateur whose true vocation is “to speak the truth to power” (Said 1994: p. xiv), depends on trapping professionals, experts, and consultants – those false intellectuals who have traded their critical independence for wealth, power, and influence – in the contaminating mire of their associations with worldly powers and the limitations, of perspective or of moral capacity, that these entail. Said’s “world flight” into universality is thus sustained by the role in which the bureaucratic or managerialist intellectual is cast as the low other against whom the stellar trajectory of the true intellectual – the amateur whose activity “is fuelled by care and affection rather than by profit, and selfish, narrow specialisation” (Said 1994: 61) – can be mapped:

In other words, the intellectual properly speaking is not a functionary or an employee completely given up to the policy goals of a government or a large corporation, or even a guild of like-minded professionals. In such situations the temptations to turn off one’s moral sense, or to think entirely from within the speciality, or to curtail scepticism in favour of conformity, are far too great to be trusted. (Said 1994: 64)

But how clear-sighted is this particular universal intellectual when he has cut a moral trench between himself and other intellectual workers? In truth: not very. Said, in what he has to say about the relationships between intellectuals and government, surveys the world through the tinted lenses of a metropolitan parochialism whose belief in its universal validity is based on nothing so much as a constitutive blindness to its own forms of limiting particularity. For when Said – speaking to and for all the world – places true intellectuals outside of government and charges them to speak the truth to power, it is clear that he imagines government always and only in the form of some branch of the US science-military-industry complex that has rightly been at the center of his engagements with US Israel–Palestine policies. The possibility that, in other parts of the world, intellectuals might see themselves as speaking the truth to *and for* more local forms of power with a view to muting or qualifying the effects of other forms of power is simply not thinkable from within Said’s elementary bipolar construction of the relations of truth and power. I have in mind here the role that intellectuals – whether as academics, government employees, or as

public intellectuals – have played in the development of progressive nationalist cultural policies in contexts (France, Australia, Scotland, Wales, Canada) where this is seen as involving both setting limits and nourishing alternatives to the invasive influence of other dominant national cultures (American, English). The same is true of intellectuals who work within government as cultural workers of various kinds – curators, community arts workers, arts administrators – in cultural diversity, community, or art and working life programs.

This is not to suggest that any of these contexts for intellectual work are without their ambiguities and contradictions. Nor is it to suggest that it should be the *only* focus for intellectual work: there are, in the complex relations between government and civil society, many different ways (from action research linked to social movements to applied policy research) in which intellectuals can be productively practical. My point is rather that the simplified and polarized construction Said places on the politics of intellectual life does not allow an adequate recognition, let alone resolution, of those ambiguities and contradictions. More important, it eviscerates the work of the critical intellectual in sanctioning a refusal to engage with those ambiguities and contradictions. For Said, the intellectual must choose “the risks and uncertain results of the public sphere – a lecture or a book or article in wide and unrestricted circulation – over the insider space controlled by experts and professionals” (Said 1994: 64). Yet this either–orism is misleading owing to its inability to distinguish the radically different forms in which – depending on the issue and the context – the relationships between specific regions of government and specific realms of public debate might be related to one another.

There is a need, then, for those who aspire to be critical intellectuals to look more closely at their own practice and the conditions which sustain it. This, in its turn, will require a clearer differentiation of *critique*, as a highly specific practice – a moral technology, in effect – dependent on the discursive coordinates of post-Kantian philosophy, from the more general categories of criticism or critical thought. This is necessary if we are to recognize that intellectuals can both contribute critically to public debate about particular forms of social and cultural policy, assessing these in terms of their shortcomings when viewed from particular ethical and political standpoints, while at the same time contributing their expertise to particular areas of policy formation and learning from the other intellectuals, working within the policy process, with whom such work brings them into contact. To engage in critical thought in this way, however, does not require – and is not assisted by – any rigid separation of means–end from normative rationality of the kind proposed by *critique*. Nor does it require any elevation of the latter over the former. Critical thought, no matter who its agent might be, is most productive when conducted in a manner which recognizes the need to take account of the contributions of different forms of expertise without any *a priori* prejudicial ranking of the relations between them and, equally, when it takes account of the forces – social, economic, political, and moral – which circumscribe the field of the practicable.



This would be greatly assisted if questions of mediation, rather than being seen as ones concerning how to overcome the apparently irreconcilable divisions which split the realm of reason into its critical and instrumental forms, were posed as questions concerning the need for new forms of *institutional and organizational* connection capable of interrelating the work that intellectual workers of different kinds do in different contexts. For there is no cognitive or, indeed, ethical gulf separating intellectuals working in government and industry centers of cultural management from those working in universities. There are, to be sure, different pressures, exigencies, and priorities bearing on these different contexts. The very real benefits afforded by academic contexts – the latitude to canvass a broader range of issues, to bring a historical perspective to bear, to have long-term considerations in view, to take the points of view of constituencies who might otherwise be marginalized – should, of course, be valued as enabling distinctive contributions to be made to the actual, and no doubt compromised and contested, processes through which cultural life is organized and managed. However, intellectuals working in such contexts will constantly marginalize themselves and what they have to offer if they broach this task as involving haughtily hailing across a moral and cognitive divide rather than a matter of devising institutionalized mechanisms of exchange that will allow academic knowledges to connect productively with the intellectual procedures of policy bureaux.

To approach these matters productively, however, will require that we review our sense both of where public spheres are and the nature of our relations to them. This requires a cautious assessment of the value of Habermas's work on this subject. For the support it has lent the view that the public sphere or spheres comprise an institutional and discursive realm which might provide a critical exterior in relation to the power effects of both state and economy is both historically misleading and politically unhelpful.

### Relocating the Public Sphere

The general contours of Habermas's account of the rise and fall of the classical bourgeois public sphere are well known. The classical bourgeois public sphere is understood in terms of its role in forming a public which, through reasoned debate, aspired to articulate a public will as a set of demands arrived at independently of the state or public authority and advanced in the expectation that they would need to be taken into account in the exercise of state power. The radical implications of this commitment to a critical rationality are then subsequently lost as a consequence of the increasing commercialization and bureaucratization of public communications from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. While I cannot engage here with the detail of this account, I want to propose a different way of reading the historical unfolding of the relations between government and culture. Rather than seeing the founding ideals of the public sphere as being

subsequently overturned through bureaucratic forms of statism and new forms of commercial cultural production and distribution, this would trace the steps through which the institutions and practices of the public sphere have been translated into modern forms of cultural governance in which cultural resources are applied to varied tasks of social management. This is not, though, a matter of offering a history that is entirely at odds with Habermas's account. Rather, the view I wish to develop can be arrived at by means of, first, highlighting an aspect of his discussion of the classical bourgeois public sphere that has not always received the attention it merits, and, second, commenting on an equally little-remarked absence in the account he offers of the subsequent structural transformation of the public sphere.

The first point is most easily introduced via a commentary on Habermas's diagrammatic representation of the bourgeois public sphere at the moment of its emergence in the eighteenth century. His depiction is reproduced in figure 2 (from Habermas 1989: 30).

The division that most concerns Habermas is that between the sphere of public authority and the private realm: hence the double line separating the two. He accordingly approaches the manner in which the different components of the private realm interact with one another from the point of view of their common differentiation from the sphere of public authority. From this perspective, what matters most about the public sphere in the world of letters (or, as Habermas also calls it, the literary public sphere) is its role as a set of sites for forming opinions that are to be taken heed of in the exercise of state power. Similarly, the market for cultural products plays a historical role in desanctifying cultural products with the consequence that they are able to play a role in these secular processes of opinion formation. In detaching such products from their aura, the market allows works of culture to become objects of critical discussion with the consequence, first, that they become embroiled in the critique of both the state and courtly society and, second, that they become vehicles for the enunciation of new generalized rights of public accessibility: the public for culture becomes, for the first time, theoretically universal.

Private Realm	Sphere of Public Authority	
Civil society (realm of commodity exchange and social labor)	Public sphere in the political realm	State (realm of the "police")
Conjugal family's internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)	Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)  (markets of culture products) "Town"	Court (courtly-noble society)

**Figure 2** The bourgeois public sphere

Source: Habermas 1989: 30.

It is noteworthy that Habermas sees the historical emergence of culture's autonomy as a necessary precondition for the process through which culture is then enlisted as a political instrument in the formation of a public opinion critical of, and opposed to, the realm of public authority. This instrumental view of culture – the notion, that is, that cultural forms and institutions are shaped into new instruments to serve new purposes – emerges from the language of “functional conversion” which Habermas uses to account for the detachment of the literary public sphere from its earlier tutelage to the publicity apparatus of the prince's court and its refashioning into a properly bourgeois public sphere. This bourgeois status, however, is clearly an historically acquired rather than an autochthonous attribute. The procedures and the composition of the institutions comprising the public sphere, and the role these play in allowing cultural resources to be harnessed in the cause of rational and public critique, are the results of a historical process through which earlier institutions and practices are functionally converted to new uses:

The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion. (Habermas 1989: 51)

The institutions of the literary public sphere, then, comprised a site in which culture, via the new forms of critical commentary and debate through which its reception was mediated, was forged into a means of acting against the sphere of public authority. It did so in a manner that was conditioned by the role those institutions played in forging a critical and public rationality out of the differentiated interests comprising the private realm. But this does not exhaust what Habermas has to say about this new realm of public culture, or about the directions in which it faced and the surfaces on which it acted. To the contrary, he is clear that, through the literary public sphere, cultural goods became involved in new spheres of action in the relationships they entered into in connection with what Habermas variously characterizes as civil society or the sphere of the social: that is, with the institutions comprising the left-hand column in figure 2. For if the public sphere mediated between the sphere of public authority and the social, it faced both ways in doing so, with the result that the use of cultural resources within the public sphere also had a dual aspect to it. It was, at one and the same time, a means for forming a public opinion in a rational critique of state power, and a means of acting on the social to regulate it. This is made clear in the terms Habermas uses to differentiate the functioning of the modern public sphere from that of the ancient public sphere:

With the rise of a sphere of the social, over whose regulation public opinion battled with public power, the theme of the modern (in contrast to the ancient) public

sphere shifted from the properly political tasks of a citizenry acting in common (i.e., administration of law as regards internal affairs and military survival as regards external affairs) to the more properly civic tasks of a society engaged in critical public debate (i.e., the protection of a commercial economy). The political task of the bourgeois public sphere was the regulation of civil society (in contradistinction to the *res publica*). (Habermas 1989: 52)

This dual orientation of the public sphere is reflected in the contrasting positions that the personnel of culture were obliged to adopt according to whether their activities were directed toward the sphere of public authority or that of the social. In the early stages of the public sphere's formation, the new cultural role of art critic was thus, according to Habermas, "a peculiarly dialectical" one in view of the requirement that he serve "at the same time as the public's mandatary and as its educator" (Habermas 1989: 41), both taking a lead from the public and directing and organizing it. The point, however, is a general one: all of the new forms of criticism (art, theatrical, musical, moral weeklies) and institutions (theaters, museums, concerts, coffee houses) Habermas is concerned with had, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this dual orientation. Nor, at this time, was this perceived as a contradiction: it was by acting on the social that the institutions of the public sphere formed a public opinion which was then able to act on the sphere of public authority.

Habermas associates these aspects of the public sphere with what he characterizes as "the tension-charged field between state and society" (Habermas 1989: 141). His account of the subsequent social-structural transformation of the public sphere rests mainly on his argument concerning the tendencies which, in closing down the gap between state and society, led to what he calls a "refeudalization of society." This resulted from two intersecting processes in which public functions were transferred to private corporate bodies (the modern firm) while, at the same time, the sway of public authority was extended over the private realm. "Only this dialectic of a progressive 'societalisation' of the state," as Habermas puts it, "simultaneously with an increasing 'stratification' of society gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere – the separation of state and society" (1989: 142). Caught in the pincer movement comprised by these two tendencies, the public sphere, in its liberal form, ceased to exist. The contradictory space in which it had operated was no longer there: the autonomy of the social as an independent realm was no longer sustainable as a result of the new forms of private and public administration which directly repoliticized society in subjecting it to increasingly direct and extensive forms of control. At the same time, the development of new forms of mass consumption deprived culture of that hard-won historical autonomy that had earlier allowed it to function as an instrument of criticism through its connection to the public sphere. The forms in which the new mass culture was distributed – book clubs, for example – disconnected it from any public context of debate and criticism

except for administered forms (Habermas's examples are the adult education class and the radio panel discussion). The commercialization of culture which had once provided for culture's autonomy now takes it away.

There are two aspects of this account which, taken separately, might occasion no particular concern but which, when looked at together, suggest a different light in which the tendencies Habermas is concerned with might be described and accounted for. The first concerns his characterization of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the period in which the public sphere is structurally transformed, as marking the end of the liberal era. The second concerns the marked narrowing in the focus of his attention which results from his limiting his account of the transformation of the public sphere to the press and the book industry. The broader range of institutions which form a part of his account of the historical formation of the classical bourgeois public sphere – museums, concerts, art galleries – do not enter into his account of this later period any more than does the new institution which arguably ought to have been at the center of an account organized primarily in relation to the literary public sphere: the public library.

Habermas's perspectives on the first of these matters are drawn from what were, at the time he was writing, the standard Marxist accounts of the shift from liberal to monopoly capitalism. For Habermas, this transformation in the structure of the economy entailed a related move away from liberal forms of government and a consequent closure of the relations between state and society which he summarizes as a tendency toward the "refeudalization" of society. This is extremely questionable. It is, of course, true, to take the British case that he dwells on so much, that the last quarter of the nineteenth century did see the introduction of a new form of liberalism which, in comparison with the "Manchester liberalism" of the earlier period, supported a stronger role for state intervention, particularly in the moral sphere. But it is equally true that the programs of liberal government developed over this period, especially insofar as they involved using cultural resources to regulate the moral sphere, depended on – and worked to maintain – a separation between state and society. This was evident in their construction of the social as a realm which the state might intervene in only indirectly, through the mechanisms of moral reform, primarily with a view to making the members of society voluntarily self-regulating and self-directing without the need for more direct forms of state intervention. It is clear, moreover, that the programs of late nineteenth-century liberal cultural reformers and administrators were explicitly motivated by a commitment to retain the separation of state and society in opposition to the closure of the gap between the two that was involved in the panoptic and directly interventionist forms of state action implied by eugenic conceptions of the role of government.

However, I shall not pursue this line of analysis further except to suggest that, to the degree that the separation of state and society was undermined in this period, this had little to do with any "refeudalization" of state-society relations. Rather, it was an effect of the increasing racialization of relations of government

as new conceptions of biopower gave rise to increasingly direct forms of state administration orientated toward the purification of the population (see Stoler 1995). My interest here, to come to my second point, concerns the role that was accorded the institutions Habermas neglects – museums, art galleries, and libraries – in the liberal programs of cultural management characterizing this period. For, although enabling legislation for the establishment of public museums, libraries, and art galleries had existed since the mid-century period, it is not until the last quarter of the century that European governments – at both the national and local levels – begin to invest significantly in the provision of such institutions which, alongside public schooling, constituted the backbone of the public cultural infrastructure until the advent of public broadcasting. While this might accurately be described as a process which resulted in the incorporation of components of the earlier liberal or bourgeois public sphere into the state, this did not result in a closure of the gap between state and society. To the contrary, the purpose of redeploying these institutions of public culture as instruments of government was, precisely, to obviate the need for the state to exercise direct forms of social control by developing a capacity for moral self-regulation in the population at large. The realm of public culture, however much it was now integrated into and directed by the state, continued to function – as in Habermas’s account of its earlier phase of development – as a means for acting on the social as a realm that was still conceived as separate from government. What had changed was not the action of culture as a set of resources deemed capable of shaping the conduct and attributes of individuals through their voluntary self-activity, but the social relations within which that action was put to work. The field of “the social” to which the action of culture was to be applied now comprised not the civil society of Habermas’s private realm but a set of problematic behaviors – defined mainly in class terms – that were to be managed while, just as important, this action was to be put to work in the context of institutions that were located within the sphere of government rather than in a realm outside of and opposed to it (see Bennett 1995 and 1997).

Indeed, from a global perspective, this location of the public sphere within the realm of government has more typically characterized its origins as well as its point of contemporary arrival. To read these institutional complexes in terms of their colonial histories proves instructive in this regard. For the late nineteenth century was also the period in which the public cultural institutions developed in western Europe first began to go global. They did so, however, as parts of histories which fall quite outside the terms of the story Habermas proposes for their European origins, early development, and subsequent transformation. Martin Prosler has written usefully on this subject, remarking that, in the case of museums, their initial spread up to and including the mid-nineteenth century was limited to white settler colonies in the Americas, India, Australia, and South Africa, and to British colonial territories in Asia (Madras, Lucknow, Lahore, Bangalore, Mathura, and Colombo) (Prosler 1996). It is clear, however, that the functioning of these institutions in these colonial contexts was sharply different

from their European origins. In Australia, for example, museums were parts of a public sphere that was nurtured into existence by government rather than having an earlier history in a preexisting and separate realm (see Finney 1993). Their formation was, in this sense, as parts of a process through which a civil society was fashioned into being. Similar tendencies characterized their major period of growth in the late nineteenth century (see Kohlstedt 1983) which, like that of the other institutions of public culture such as libraries, art galleries, and art schools (see Candy & Laurent 1994), relied more extensively on direct forms of government support than had been true of early stages in the development of their European counterparts. There was, to put the point bluntly, no point at which these institutions had ever been developed in opposition to, or in critique of, the state in a way that would make it intelligible to view their integration into government as a structural transformation of an earlier condition. In Australia, public culture was thoroughly governmentalized from the outset.

### Conclusions

My purpose, then, is to suggest that, with a little “tweaking,” Habermas’s account of the “‘societalisation’ of the state” and the “‘statification’ of society” can usefully be seen as addressing the same historical processes Foucault is concerned with – albeit from a different theoretical perspective; Foucault is explicit in his critique of the concept of “the *étatisation* of society” (Foucault 1978: 103) – in his account of the “governmentalization of the state.” I do so not because Foucault’s approach to governmentalization or the role that it plays in his account of the emergence of liberal forms of government is without problems. There are, however, some advantages in superimposing a Foucauldian optic on the historical processes Habermas is concerned with. The first is that it becomes possible to account for a transformation in the functioning of the classical bourgeois public sphere which results from the incorporation of its institutions into government in a manner which leaves open to inquiry the ways in which such institutions operate in the context of historically mutable relations between government and the social rather than attributing to them a generalized function of social control arising from some general historical closure of state/society relations. The advantages of this for a historical approach to cultural policy are evident. It makes thinkable a much greater variability in the relations between government, culture, and the social as a consequence of the ways in which cultural resources are organized to act on the social in different ways in accordance with shifting governmental conceptions and priorities.

A second advantage is that an account couched in these terms can help prevent a polarization of the relations between critical and practical intellectuals of the kind that Habermasian constructions tend to propose. I have suggested, in my discussion of Habermas’s approach to the early formation of the public sphere, that the action of culture within this had a dual orientation in both acting on the

social to regulate it while also functioning as means for forming an opinion in which state power was subjected to rational forms of critique. If my emphasis so far has fallen on showing how the transformation of this first orientation might be viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, there is also much to be gained from considering how the institutions of public culture have continued to perform aspects of the second function in spite of their having become branches of government. Indeed, it is, in some cases, precisely because they are branches of government that these institutions have assumed a function of criticism that is, now, more or less institutionalized. The translation of antisexist and cultural diversity policies into the exhibition practices of collecting institutions, for example, has resulted in a considerable amount of cultural effort being dedicated to depicting both past and, where they persist, present culturally discriminatory practices as unacceptable with a view to the role this might play in fashioning new norms of civic conduct. In such cases, where the institutions of public culture have comprised the cultural and intellectual spaces that have played leading roles in both developing and disseminating specific forms of social and cultural criticism, governing and criticism go hand in hand.

#### Notes

This chapter is a shortened version of a paper originally published under the title “Intellectuals, Culture, Policy: The Technical, the Practical and the Critical,” *Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research*, no. 2, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

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### Further Reading

This bibliography provides guidance in relation to two further areas of reading: the critical literature on, in response to, and in extension of, Habermas's concept of the public sphere; and the positive revaluation of bureaucratic and other forms of technical expertise associated with post-Foucauldian scholarship.

On the first of these, see Calhoun (1992) for an excellent collection of essays on Habermas from a series of European and Anglo-American perspectives, including an essay in which Habermas revises the concept of the public sphere in the light of the various criticisms it has spawned. For feminist engagements with the concept, see Landes (1988), Riley (1988), and Ryan (1990). On the question of its relations to indigenous cultures, see Michaels (1994). For a selection of the issues raised by attempts to relate the concept to the sociocultural structures of a variety of Asian countries, see Chun (1996), Hanada (1995), and Milner (1995).

For post-Foucauldian perspectives on bureaucracy and other technical forms of expertise, see Minson (1993), Rose and Miller (1992), and, for a longer historical perspective, Saunders (1997). See also Latour (1987) for a defense of bureaucracy from the scorn of scientific forms of intellectual elitism.

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