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## Author's Preface

This investigation endeavors to analyze the type "bourgeois public sphere" (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*). Its particular approach is required, to begin with, by the difficulties specific to an object whose complexity precludes exclusive reliance on the specialized methods of a single discipline. Rather, the category "public sphere" must be investigated within the broad field formerly reflected in the perspective of the traditional science of "politics."<sup>1</sup> When considered within the boundaries of a particular social-scientific discipline, this object disintegrates. The problems that result from fusing aspects of sociology and economics, of constitutional law and political science, and of social and intellectual history are obvious: given the present state of differentiation and specialization in the social sciences, scarcely anyone will be able to master several, let alone all, of these disciplines.

The other peculiarity of our method results from the necessity of having to proceed at once sociologically and historically. We conceive bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that "civil society" (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, idealtypically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations. Just as we try to show, for instance, that one can properly speak of public opinion in a precise sense only with regard to late-seventeenth-century Great Britain and eighteenth-century

France, we treat public sphere in general as a historical category. In this respect our procedure is distinguished *a limine* from the approach of formal sociology whose advanced state nowadays is represented by so-called structural-functional theory. The sociological investigation of historical trends proceeds on a level of generality at which unique processes and events can only be cited as examples—that is, as cases that can be interpreted as instances of a more general social development. This sociological procedure differs from the practice of historiography strictly speaking in that it seems less bound to the specifics of the historical material, yet it observes its own equally strict criteria for the structural analysis of the interdependencies at the level of society as a whole.

After these two methodological preliminaries, we would also like to record a reservation pertaining to the subject matter itself. Our investigation is limited to the structure and function of the *liberal* model of the bourgeois public sphere, to its emergence and transformation. Thus it refers to those features of a historical constellation that attained dominance and leaves aside the *plebeian* public sphere as a variant that in a sense was suppressed in the historical process. In the stage of the French Revolution associated with Robespierre, for just one moment, a public sphere stripped of its literary garb began to function—its subject was no longer the “educated strata” but the uneducated “people.” Yet even this plebeian public sphere, whose continued but submerged existence manifested itself in the Chartist Movement and especially in the anarchist traditions of the workers’ movement on the continent, remains oriented toward the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere. In the perspective of intellectual history it was, like the latter, a child of the eighteenth century. Precisely for this reason it must be strictly distinguished from the plebiscitary-acclamatory form of regimented public sphere characterizing dictatorships in highly developed industrial societies. Formally they have certain traits in common; but each differs in its own way from the literary character of a public sphere constituted by private people putting reason to use—one is illiterate, the other, after a fashion, post-literary. The similarity with certain aspects of plebiscitary form cannot conceal the fact that these two variants

of the public sphere of bourgeois society (which in the context of the present investigation will be equally neglected) have also been charged with different political functions, each at a distinct stage of social development.

Our investigation presents a stylized picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public sphere and of their transformation in the social-welfare state.

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