Beyond the Public Sphere

Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe
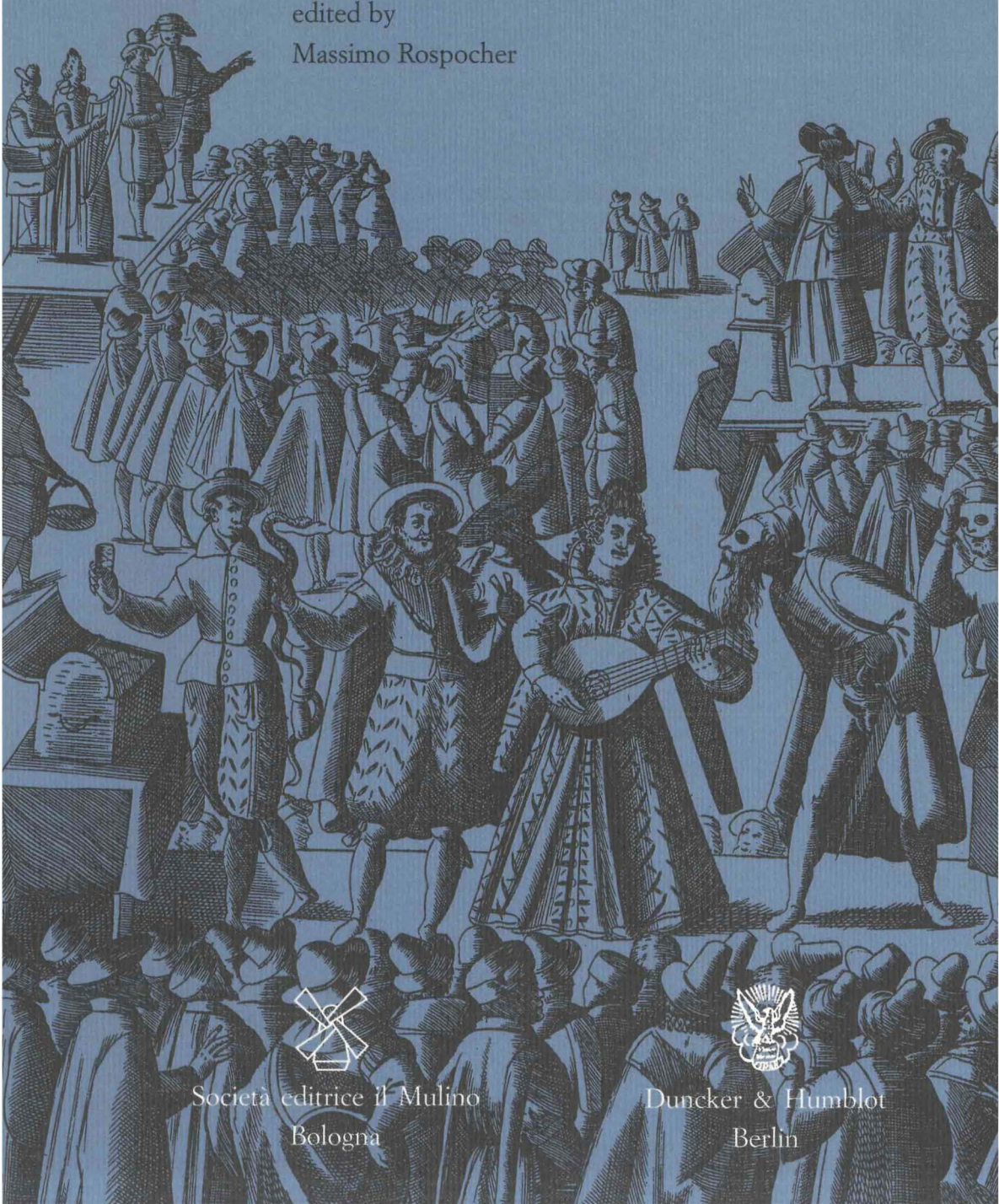
edited by
Massimo Rospocher

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Società editrice il Mulino
Bologna

Duncker & Humblot
Berlin

FBK - Istituto storico italo-germanico

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Introduction

Beyond the Public Sphere:
A Historiographical Transition

by *Massimo Rospocher*

I. HABERMAS GOES TO HELL?

Among the latest scholarship dedicated to the work of the last great exponent of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas[1], titles such as *After Habermas, Farewell Habermas?*, and *Habermas Goes to Hell* are conspicuous[2]. Almost every conference and publication in recent years dedicated to the history of communication has maintained among its theoretical premises an emphasis on the obsolete character of the public sphere and the necessity to move beyond it.

A common thread in contemporary historiography is an anti-teleological orientation toward the deconstruction of epochal narratives; Habermas's, therefore, like other great narratives in the social sciences of the twentieth century, has been subject to a process of demystification and deconstruction. Historians have suggested that Habermas's outlook was a «deformed» vision of the Ancien Régime (Benigno); his abstract model has failed to withstand the progression of historiographical development. Many of the tenets on which it was founded have

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[1] The number of recent intellectual biographies is impressive: D. INGRAM, *Habermas. Introduction and Analysis*, Ithaca NY 2010; M.G. SPECTER, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, Cambridge 2010; L. THOMASSEN, *Habermas: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London 2010; W. OUTHWAITE, *Habermas. A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge - Malden MA, 2009[2]; H. BRUNKHORST, *Habermas*, Firenze 2008; S. MÜLLER-DOOHM, *Jürgen Habermas*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008.

[2] S. VAN DAMME, «*Farewell*» *Habermas? Deux décennies d'études sur l'ancien régime de l'espace public*, in P. BOUCHERON - N. OFFENSTADT (eds), *L'espace public au moyen age. Debats atour de Jürgen Habermas*, Paris 2011, pp. 43-62; J. KUZNER, *Habermas Goes to Hell: Pleasure, Public Reason, and the Republicanism of Paradise Lost*, in «Criticism», 51, 2009, 1, pp. 105-45; N. CROSSLEY - J. MICHAEL (eds), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford - Malden MA 2004.

proven precarious, such as the traditional concept of the state[3], the role of the press in the process of modernization[4], and the repressive effects of censorship.

Nevertheless, despite the heralding of a post-Habermas era; despite the fact that some historians have mused over a possible—and in the minds of a few even desirable—total eclipse of the Habermasian doctrine; despite that the man himself has been allegorically confined to «hell»; Habermas's model still boasts a significant scholarly vitality almost half a century after the publication of his seminal work *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*[5].

Within the field of historical studies, Habermas's theory has been the catalyst for debate about public opinion and has been recognized as an interpretative paradigm of the development of Western modernity. To question the validity of the paradigm means to challenge the episte-mological function of the concept itself[6]. If one considers the paradigm not as a 'positive' historical reconstruction, but rather as an «analytical instrument» whose function it is «to construct and to render intelligible an entire and broader historical-problematic context»[7], the ideal-type of the public sphere retains its heuristic value intact in the interpretation of Ancien Régime society. Deprived of its normative character, the public sphere is still functional as «a paradigm for analyzing historical change»[8].

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[3] G. Chittolini - A. Molho - P. Schiera (eds), *Origini dello Stato. Processi di formazione statale in Italia fra medioevo ed età moderna* (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Quaderni, 39), Bologna 1994.

[4] D. McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order*, Cambridge 2003.

[5] J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Neuwied 1962 (new ed.: Frankfurt a.M 1990); Engl. trans. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge MA 1989.

[6] On the use and function of paradigms in the social sciences, see G. Agambem, *Che cos'è un paradigma*, in G. Agambem, *Signatura rerum. Sul Metodo*, Torino 2008, pp. 11-34.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[8] P.U. Hohendahl, *Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture. Jürgen Habermas and His Critics*, in «New German Critique», 16, 1979, pp. 89-118, here p. 92. For an excellent summary of the «Habermas paradigm», see L. Scuccimarra, *La trasparenza del politico. Habermas e il paradigma della sfera pubblica*, in «Giornale di Storia Costituzionale», 6, 2003, 2, pp. 35-59, especially pp. 41-46.

Some of the answers that the German philosopher supplied have turned out to be inaccurate, but for historians the bigger questions that he posed remain relevant: how—and when—was the critical power of public discussion born? How are 'the public' and 'public spaces' defined? What is the relationship between public discourse and authority? What, ultimately, is the power of communication?

II. THE MODEL

The concept of the public sphere has a complex genealogy and Habermas's is far from being its only theoretical model. Those of Hannah Arendt[9] and especially of Habermas's contemporary Reinhart Koselleck, *inter alia*, also deserve mention[10]. Nevertheless, the Habermasian notion has proven dominant and has become a paradigm in academic debate[11].

In his ground-breaking work of 1962, which was adapted from his *Habilitationsschrift* at the University of Marburg, Habermas formalized the ideal-type of the public sphere. This was a discursive meta-topical space situated halfway between state and civil society, but also a space endowed with a certain social homogeneity, by virtue of its bourgeois nature. Within the public sphere, private citizens (readers, spectators, and listeners) who were excluded from the administration of power found a common arena of critical reflection and political action directed toward the state. Such a space of mediation between authority and the individual, but existing outside of the sphere of the state, would

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[9] H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, Chicago IL 1958.

[10] R. KOSELLECK, *Kritik und Krise: Ein Beitrag zur Parthogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, Freiburg i.Br. 1959 (also translated into English one generation later: *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Parthogenesis of Modern Society*, Oxford 1988). For a comparison between Habermas and Koselleck's two versions of the public sphere, see K. WETTERS, *The Opinion System: Impasses of the Public Sphere from Hobbes to Habermas*, New York 2008, pp. 88-100.

[11] In German intellectual debate Habermas's contribution is just one among many on the topic of «Öffentlichkeit» in a long tradition going back to Idealism of the nineteenth century, when the term appeared for the first time in the German language. For a critical analysis of the history of the concept, see P.U. HOHENDAHL (ed.), *Öffentlichkeit: Geschichte eines kritischen Begriffs*, Stuttgart 2000; see also L. HÖLSCHER, *Öffentlichkeit*, in O. BRUNNER - W. CONZE - R. KOSELLECK (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 4, 1978, pp. 413-467.

first take form in the eighteenth century (initially in England, then in France and Germany) through verbal communication within bourgeois social institutions (coffee houses, literary salons, Masonic lodges, etc.) and through the written word in the form of books and periodicals. Opinions emerged from the private dimension of bourgeois life—which Habermas defined as the «intimate sphere»[12]—to become public opinion, the collective subject that is the historical outcome of the liberal, enlightened public sphere.

For Habermas, the rise of the public sphere epitomized the teleological narrative of the advent of political modernity, succeeded then by a period of decline with the loss of its critical role in a capitalist mass-media society, where communication aims to manipulate consciences. With this book—the first chapter of an articulate critical theory of society developed throughout his entire oeuvre—Habermas constructed an ideal model as a positive counterpart to the decadence of the late-capitalist world in which he lived[13]. This was a pessimistic vision of the present—a now-obsolete present—that post-war European history, with the protest movements of '68 and the revolutions of '89, would help to diminish.

The first part of the book is thus a philosophical work of Kantian and Enlightenment inspiration that represents the foundation on which Habermas bases the socio-political analysis of the latter part. Early modern historians have focused most of their attention on the initial section, especially attempting to verify its historical credibility and to contest the proclaimed absence of a sphere of public debate between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries[14].

[12]   On the importance of the development of a private sphere in the creation of a public sphere, see M. McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity. Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*, Baltimore MD 2005.

[13]   Habermas creates a model 'for' society instead 'of' a model of society; cfr. J. Habermas, *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere*, in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Boston MA 1992, pp. 421-461; see also J.L. Brooke, *Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians*, in «Journal of Interdisciplinary History», 29, 1998, 1, pp. 43-67, especially pp. 61-62; W. Privitera, *Sfera pubblica e democratizzazione*, Roma - Bari 2001.

[14]   A period for Habermas characterized by a «repräsentative Öffentlichkeit» (representative publicness); J. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 5-14.

III. RECEPTION

Habermas's ideal-type still exerts an authority that extends well beyond its strictly sociological and historiographical dimension; some prominent contemporary philosophers, for instance, continue to reference Habermas's model of the public sphere[15]. Its influence in the last few decades has been such—and the studies dedicated to it so numerous—that it has given rise to an autonomous field of study with a truly interdisciplinary character, bringing together historians, literary scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and philosophers[16].

Aside from the fact that it seemed to solve the «difficulties endemic to conceptual modelling in historiography»[17], one of the reasons for the success of Habermas's model can be found in his holistic approach: his ability to compose an exceptional historical, philosophical, economic, and socio-political narrative while portraying the rise and fall of the public sphere, the very *Strukturwandel* («structural transformation») that is expressed in the book's title.

One must also keep in mind the historical contexts in which the work of the German philosopher was received. A focus on the nature of the public sphere crystallized in two fundamental moments: the first corresponded to the student protests of the '60s and '70s, during which the various movements generated interest in the political role of civil society; the second was at the end of the '80s, when the fall of the Communist regimes opened up the debate in the West about processes of democratic transition and gave new impetus to reflection on the transformation of the public sphere.

The reception of his work in these two contexts explains early modern historians' fascination with the first part of Habermas's book; the development of critical rational discourse during the Ancien Régime, a space of interaction between bourgeois society and the absolute state,

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[15] See C. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge MA 2007, pp. 185-196; see also the recent collection of essays *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, New York 2011, with essays by Taylor, Habermas, and Calhoun.

[16] For an overview, see the section «public sphere» of the website of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) at http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/guide/

[17] C. CONDRON, *Public, Private and the Idea of the 'Public Sphere' in Early-modern England*, in «Intellectual History Review», 19, 2009, 1, pp. 15-28, here p. 15.

announced the arrival of political modernity. By showing that it was marked by emancipatory objectives, in respect to oppressive powers, many historians likened the public sphere in the early modern period to the democratizing role that the public sphere assumed at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The persistence of and cyclical return to Habermas's theory today are rooted in our present political reality, in a society dominated by the power of communication where technology has altered both the dynamics of sociability and of political participation and representation. Global protests taking place in Europe, in America and in Arab countries, invite us to consider the varied forms of civil engagement and new modes of political debate, on display. The insurrections of the «Arab spring», in particular, in which accomplices of the old regimes seek to lead the popular protests, force us to reflect on the intrinsically ambiguous nature of the public sphere.

IV. TRANSLATIONS

Part of the success and longevity of Habermas's notion of the public sphere can be attributed to published translations of his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, and even more to the concept's relatively recent reception into the Anglo-American academic mainstream. The transposition of this concept into other languages represents a scholarly form of «transcultural transfer» that would merit its own examination in another forum. I will limit my remarks here to the semantic shift from the *Öffentlichkeit* of the original 1962 publication to the translated titles of editions in other languages. The expression «opinione pubblica» (public opinion) appeared in the title of the first Italian translation in 1971[18], whereas the translator's preference for more comprehensive terms like «dimensione pubblica» and «carattere pubblico» (public dimension and public nature) is apparent in the text itself[19]. The 1978 French title *Espace public*[20] (public space) emphasizes the concept's topical

[18] J. HABERMAS, *Storia e critica dell'opinione pubblica*, Bari 1971.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. XLVI.

[20] J. HABERMAS, *L'espace public. Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, Paris 1978.

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connotation, whereas it was accompanied by a subtitle, *Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, which «managed to imply both a Foucauldian inflection to the book's intellectual history and a more directly class-based social history than it actually possessed»[21]. The 1981 Spanish title refers to the «opinion pública», which is followed by «vida pública» (public life) in the subtitle[22]; in the text, however, the translator frequently opted for the term «publicidad» (publicity), judging it to be more faithful to the original concept of the German title[23].

But the evocative capacity of the metaphor of the «public sphere», as it has been rendered in English and widely accepted in the Anglophone world, especially after *Strukturwandel*'s 1989 American translation[24], has undoubtedly contributed to the definitive success of what has been termed the «Habermas of historians»[25]. This semantic shift accentuates the descriptive character of the concept in its ability to simultaneously represent a discursive ethereal dimension and the physicality of the public spaces in which exchanges and discussions take place. Such a meaning is absent in the original «Öffentlichkeit», which has a complex etymology and cannot be precisely expressed in many other languages. The German term fuses different semantic variants that convey the ideas of publicity/publicness or openness/openicity[26], or even public culture/

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[21] J. ELEY, *Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere*, in «Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique», 10, 2002, 1, pp. 219-236, here p. 220.

[22] J. HABERMAS, *Historia y crítica de la opinion pública: la transformación structural de la vida pública*, Barcelona 1981.

[23] See the translator's note, *ibid.*, p. 44. Manuel Jiménez Redondo chose to translate «Öffentlichkeit» with the formulation «espacio de la opinión pública»; see the translator's note in J. HABERMAS, *Facticidad y validez. Sobre el derecho y el Estado de derecho en términos de teoría del discurso*, Madrid 1998, p. 441.

[24] The expression «public sphere» appeared for the first time in English in 1974; see J. HABERMAS, *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article* (1964), in «New German Critique», 3, 1974, pp. 49-55.

[25] H. MAH, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians*, in «Journal of Modern History», 72, 2000, pp. 153-182.

[26] A term coined by H.J. KLEINSTEUBER, *Habermas and the Public Sphere: From a German to a European Perspective*, in «Javnost-The Public. Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture», 8, 2001, pp. 95-108, for some interesting etymological observations, see esp. pp. 96-98.

public domain, rather than the now-conventional notion of the public sphere. Furthermore, the German word «Öffentlichkeit» describes more of a (communicative) process than a structure, whether topical or meta-topical, which the ambiguous syntagm «public sphere» appears to indicate[27].

V. EARLY MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY: BEYOND THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

The most recent paths explored by historians of the Ancien Régime have consolidated the critical dialectic with this interpretive paradigm, but at the same time have led in a direction that goes beyond the public sphere. Given the enormity of the body of relevant research to date, it would be impossible to summarize it in its entirety; nevertheless, if we focus on what has been produced in the last fifteen years we can identify some general trends, all of which are borne out in the works of the contributors to this volume.

1. *Historicizing the public sphere*

An initial period in which Habermas's model was put to the test of historical experience in Ancien Régime society, especially in the works of historians of the eighteenth century, set the tone for the first few decades of historiography on the public sphere[28]. The great studies on the cultural origins of the French Revolution by the likes of Baker, Chartier, Darnton, Ozouf, and Roche leant substance to Habermas's pioneering text and at the same time highlighted its historical *lacunae*[29].

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[27] J. ELEY, *Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere*, pp. 225-226. The expression has been 'approved' by Habermas himself: «The concept of the public sphere, *Öffentlichkeit*, is meant as an analytical tool»; J. HABERMAS et al., *Concluding Remarks*, in C. CALHOUN, *Habermas*, p. 462.

[28] H. JÜRGENS, *Habermas for Historians. Four Approaches to his Works*, in «Forschungs-berichte aus dem Duitsland Insituut Amsterdam», 5, 2009, pp. 158-170; A. GESTRICH, *The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate*, in «German History», 24, 2006, 3, pp. 413-430.

[29] For an exhaustive synthesis of the historiography on public opinion in eighteenth-century France, see F. BENIGNO, *Mirrors of Revolution: Conflict and Political Identity in Early Modern Europe*, Turnhout 2010; C. WALTON, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech*, New York 2009, ch. 1.

In particular, some remarked on the absence of a feminine component in Habermas's public arena[30] or on the lack of consideration afforded to a popular *doxa*[31] thereby restoring to center stage political actors who had been previously excluded. Habermas was also accused of overemphasizing economic factors and as a result, with the parallel decline of the Marxist perspective, the socio-economic dimension of the advent of the bourgeois public sphere was abandoned.

Recent historiography on public opinion in eighteenth-century France has revived the economic dimension of the public sphere as a subject of research, but this renewed activity has produced results that run contrary to Habermas's assertions. In the revolutionary era, for example, the parallel evolution of political and economic liberalism gave rise to a lively debate over the theme of economic justice, in which the state appealed to and attempted to influence public debate. The tensions that exploded in the Reign of Terror demonstrate that «the public sphere failed to function as a place where opposing opinions on these matters could be transformed into consensus» (Walton).

A revision of the notion of the public sphere also emerges from current research on eighteenth-century censorship. Overturning Habermas's vision, according to which modern public opinion was born from the dissolution of mechanisms of controlling ideas, scholars no longer view censorship and the government of opinions as contrary aspects in the category of public opinion, rather as complementary[32]. In the

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[30] J.B. LANDES, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Ithaca NY 1988; and more recently E. EAGER et al (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, Cambridge 2001; for the role of women in French public life between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see also B. CRAVERI, *The Age of Conversation*, New York 2005.

[31] Some of these critiques have been accepted and integrated by Habermas in the preface of the new edition of the book: J. HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (ed. 1990), pp. 11-50. In particular, he recognized the idea of a «plebeian public sphere», autonomous from the «bourgeoisie public sphere», as a consequence of the important works of early modern historians like E.P. Thompson and N.Z. Davis. This presence has been confirmed by subsequent studies; see, for example, A. FARGE, *Dire et mal dire. L'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1992; J.M. BROPHY, *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland (1800-1850)*, Cambridge 2007.

[32] E. TORTAROLO, *L'invenzione della libertà di stampa. Censori e scrittori nel Settecento*, Roma 2011; S. LANDI, *Il governo delle opinioni*, Bologna 2000; S. LANDI, *Stampa, censura, opinione pubblica nell'età moderna*, Bologna 2011.

eighteenth century, a functional ambiguity existed in civil censorship, an abyss between theory and practice that was occupied by a space of intellectual manoeuvring that allowed the negotiation of forms of «participatory liberty». Censorship appeared to be not only a repressive institutional actor of public discourse, but also a device through which to renegotiate the limits between what could become public and what had to remain secret (Tortarolo).

2. *Deconstructing the public sphere*

A successive historiographical phase demonstrated the model's adaptability to earlier epochs and different socio-political contexts from those of the eighteenth century; they traced the concept of the public sphere—in one variation on the theme or another—back to the Middle Ages[33] and the idea of public opinion to Greco-Roman antiquity[34].

Inspired by the fundamental question of the relationship between power and communication in Early Modernity, one current of historiography has worked to deconstruct Habermas's paradigm. This has taken place in particular in the area of literary, cultural, and political history and in the history of publishing and the media, disciplines that have extended the geographic and chronological boundaries of the public sphere[35].

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[33] L. MELVE, *Inventing the Public Sphere: The Public Debate during the Investiture Contest (c. 1030-1122)*, Leiden 2007; A.E.B. COLDIRON, *Public Sphere/Contact Zone: Habermas, Early Print, and Verse Translation*, in «Criticism», 46, 2004, 2, pp. 207-222; W. FAULSTICH, *Medien und Öffentlichkeiten im Mittelalter 800-1400*, Göttingen 1996.

[34] *Pubblica opinione e intellettuali dall'antichità all'illuminismo*, in «Rivista storica italiana», 110, 1998, 1.

[35] For England: P. LAKE - S. PINCUS (eds), *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Manchester 2007; J. RAYMOND, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge 2003; D. ZARET, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Princeton NJ 2000; A. HALASZ, *The Marketplace of Print. Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Cambridge 1997. For the German area: K. HRUZA (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit (11.-16. Jahrhundert)*, Wien 2002; E.-B. KÖRBER, *Öffentlichkeiten der frühen Neuzeit: Teilnehmer, Formen, Institutionen und Entscheidungen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Herzogtum Preußen von 1525 bis 1618*, Berlin - New York 1998; A. WÜRGLER, *Unruhen und Öffentlichkeit: Städtische und ländliche Protestbewegungen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 1995. For Italy: M. ROSPOCHER, *Versi pericolosi? Controllo delle opinioni e ricerca del consenso durante le guerre d'Italia*, in D. CURTO et al. (eds),

Additionally, in the process of revision, scholars have attempted to restrict the paradigm's structural character in order to strengthen its functionality. In this sense, some have theorized a temporary or contingent public sphere, in contrast to a normative and permanent vision. A kind of ephemeral public sphere emerged in various historical and geographical contexts—the Protestant Reformation, the Italian Wars (Salzberg-Rospocher), the political conflicts in France and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the religious debates regarding the Immaculate Conception in seventeenth-century Spain (Castillo), but also the rise of the early Iranian public sphere during the Safavid period[36]—when exceptional events stimulated the birth of an intense public discussion whether briefly or over a longer period[37].

These numerous studies have undoubtedly expanded our knowledge of Ancien Régime society and have revealed the pluralistic nature of the public sphere, but are limited insofar as they have overlooked the possibility of a comparative approach from both a diachronic and a

From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Tony Molho, Firenze 2009, pp. 381-407; G. CIAPPELLI, *Comunicazione politica e opinione pubblica nel Rinascimento: esempi e considerazioni*, in «Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico», 33, 2007, pp. 27-57; M. MESERVE, *News from Negroponte: Politics, Popular Opinion and Information Exchange in the First Decade of the Italian Press*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», 59, 2006, pp. 440-480. For Spain: J. AMELANG - A. CASTILLO GÓMEZ (eds), *Opinión pública y espacio urbano en la Edad Moderna*, Gijon 2010; F. BOUZA, *Papeles y opinión. Políticas de publicación en el Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2008; J.Mª. PERCEVAL, *Opinión pública y publicidad (siglo XVII). Nacimiento de los espacios de comunicación pública en torno a las bodas reales de 1615 entre Borbones y Habsburgo* unpublished PhD thesis Barcelona, 2004; M. OLIVARI, *Fra trono e opinione. La vita politica castigliana nel Cinque e Seicento*, Venezia 2002. For France: D. ROUSSEL, *L'espace public comme enjeu des guerres de Religion et de la paix civile. Réflexions sur la notion d'espace public et ses métamorphoses à Paris au XVIe siècle*, in P. BOUCHERON - N. OFFENSTADT, *L'espace public au moyen age*, pp. 131-146; J.P. VITTU, *Instruments of political information in France*, in S. BARON - B. DOOLEY (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, London - New York 2001, pp. 160-178; J.K. SAWYER, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France*, Berkeley CA 1990.

[36] B. RAHIMI, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran. Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590-1641 CE*, Boston MA - Leiden 2011.

[37] A. BRIGGS - P. BURKE, *A Social History of the Media. From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge - Oxford 2001, pp. 72-105; see also P. LAKE - S. PINCUS, *Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, in «Journal of British Studies», 45, 2006, 2, pp. 270-292.

socio-geographic point of view[38]. The approach that intended to deconstruct and to reformulate the paradigm of the public sphere has nevertheless reaffirmed its epistemological value.

3. Post-Habermasian perspectives

In the historiography of the Early Modern period, recent lines of research have developed aspects neglected in the original formalization of the public sphere, thereby setting in motion a progressive abandonment of the model that unites them in a post-Habermasian perspective.

The notion of «public» as identified in the public of readers is essential in Habermas's work. Among those engaged in the study of the formation of «the publics» in Ancien Régime society the interdisciplinary research project *Making Publics* stands out[39]. Referring to the theoretical elaborations of Bruno Latour and Michael Warner[40] and instead of concentrating on the 'structural' elements of the public sphere, this group has focussed on the actual ways in which the process of «public-making» occurs. This entails abandoning the conception of the public as passive recipient of cultural and political messages, in order to highlight «the active creation of new forms of association that allowed people to connect with others in ways not rooted in family, rank, or vocation, but rather founded in voluntary groupings built on the shared interests, tastes, commitments, and desires of individuals»[41].

[38] Among the exceptions: L. LACCHÈ (ed.), *Opinione pubblica. Storia, politica, costituzione dal XVII al XX secolo*, in «Giornale di Storia Costituzionale», 6, 2003, 2; S. BARON - B. DOOLEY, *The Politics of Information*; J. VAN HORN MELTON, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, Cambridge 2000. The lack of a comparative approach to the study of the public sphere has been recently emphasized by A. KOLLER, *The Public Sphere and Comparative Historical Research. An Introduction*, in «Social Science History», 34, 2010, 3, pp. 261-290.

[39] http://www.makingpublics.org/; B. WILSON - P. YACHNIN (eds), *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge*, New York - Abingdon 2009; A. VANHAELEN - A. WARD, *The Association of Space: Relations and Geographies of Early Modern Publics* (forthcoming); on the process of the formation of publics, see also B. BORELLO (ed.), *Pubblico e pubblici di antico regime*, Pisa 2009.

[40] B. LATOUR, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005; B. LATOUR - P. WEIBEL (eds), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Cambridge MA 2005; M. WARNER, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York 2002.

[41] P. YACHNIN - B. WILSON, *Introduction*, in *Making Publics*, p. 1.

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As can be inferred from the analysis of the influence of Descartes's treatise *Geometry* on Philip Sydney's *Apology for Poetry*, for example, this could also have happened outside of the common adherence to specialized disciplines: the interaction of the mathematical sciences with other sectors of seventeenth-century culture, in fact, gave rise to the birth of a public in which the various actors recognized each other in sharing a new understanding of rationality (Raman). A public could also coalesce around material objects (rather than around shared knowledge or ethical questions), as is the case of the formation of social networks around artefacts like sixteenth- and seventeenth-century friendship albums (*alba amicorum*), objects that invited encounters with friends and strangers. In a similar way to contemporary social networks and media, these objects constituted spaces of sociability that reveal the potential of the material world to assemble the social (Wilson).

The anonymous circulation of the antipapal pamphlet *Iulius exclusus e coelis* in the sixteenth century is also indicative of the coexistence of different spheres of communication corresponding to various kinds of publics (Seidel Menchi). This satire was composed by Erasmus of Rotterdam for the private enjoyment of a restricted public of humanists, among whom the dialogue circulated in manuscript form, according to a cultivated ideology of communication which excluded the multitudes. Its publication in 1517, against the will of the author, caused an explosion in readership of the text in European political and religious circles, thereby feeding the debate of a much wider public. This provoked the rupture of a separation between a 'private' or 'secret' sphere—in which it was permitted to express dissent—and a public sphere, which only allowed for consensus.

In an effort to uphold the boundary between the public and the secret, Erasmus called for the intervention of censorship. Precisely this dialectic between what is public and what must not become public would prove an enduring element in European culture up to the present day (as the Wikileaks case reminds us); however, it was a particularly urgent issue in the era of the Enlightenment. Between these two poles of publicity and privacy, in fact, lay the Enlightenment concept of public opinion, a filter through which opinions emerged from the obscurity of the secret into the light of the public (Tortarolo).

The rethinking of the notion of publication—the process of «making public» as a constituent act and analytical instrument for a new concep-

tualization of the spaces of publicity-elaborated in the area of political, cultural, and literary history[42], has drawn new attention to forms of manuscript or scribal publication[43]. The widening of the field of research has prompted the consideration of a broader range of discursive practices and has defined the public space as a «multimedia system»[44]. The study of communication has passed beyond the written word to look at the ritual and iconographic components of communication; at the same time, scholars are shifting their attention evermore toward the verbal practices of the political sphere, a central element in Early Modern European culture[45].

The religious and political controversies that erupted in the Iberian Peninsula in the seventeenth century gave rise to a critical public debate about authority stimulated by the simultaneous circulation of sermons, songs, anonymous broadsides, rumours, and defamatory placards (Castillo). «Intermediality» plays a fundamental role also in the process of public-opinion making in the sixteenth-century Netherlands, where a public sphere formed around the discussion of issues, rather than around the social and cultural identity of the people engaged in the public debate[46]. Indeed, the transformation of the Spanish Inquisition into a long-term and controversial public concern was fuelled by the circulation of divergent discourses by elites through texts and images,

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[42] C. JOUHAUD - A. VIALA (eds), *De la publication entre Renaissance et Lumières*, Paris 2002.

[43] F. DE VIVO - B. RICHARDSON (eds), *Scribal Culture in Italy, 1450-1700*, in «Italian Studies», 66, 2011, 2; H. LOVE, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-century England*, Oxford 1993.

[44] R. DARNTON, *An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth Century Paris*, in «American Historical Review», 105, 2000, pp. 1-35, here p. 30.

[45] J. BLOEMENDAL - A. VAN DIXHOORN - E. STRIETMAN, *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650*, Boston MA - Leiden 2011; E. HORODOWICH, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice*, Cambridge 2008; «Voci, Notizie, Istituzioni», special issue of «Quaderni Storici», 121, 2006, 1; A. FOX, *Oral and Literate Culture in England (1500-1700)*, Oxford 2000; B. DOOLEY, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture*, Baltimore MD 1999. See also the research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) «Oral Culture, Manuscript and Print in Early Modern Italy (1450-1700)», coordinated by Brian Richardson and based at the University of Leeds, at http://arts.leeds.ac.uk/italianvoices/

[46] G. HAUSER, *Vernacular Voices. The Rhetoric of Public and Public Spheres*, Columbia SC 1999.

but especially by opinions spread orally in urban public spaces (Van Dixhoorn).

In the latest research on political communication[47], greater attention has been dedicated to physical spaces and theatres of public debate. After the postmodern drifts of the «linguistic turn», research has entered a new historiographical avenue, the so-called «spatial turn»[48]. In the wake of the theoretical suggestions of De Certeau and Lefebvre[49], historians are researching the forms of resistance to power, of «re-employment»[50] of urban public spaces, and the spatial dialectic that took place between the governors and the governed in Modern Europe[51]. Space is understood as the dynamic product of interactions between places, objects, and human actors rather than as a static entity ordered from above.

The spatial dimension has renewed the debate on the public sphere[52], while the interdisciplinary approach involving geographers, sociologists, urban planners, and architectural historians has expanded the analytical and physical confines of public space[53]. In this way, the traditional

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[47] On political communication as a research field, see L. Schorn-Schütte, *Politische Kommunikation als Forschungsfeld. Einleitende Bemerkungen*, in A. De Benedictis et al., *Die Sprache des Politischen in actu*, Göttingen 2009, pp. 7-18.

[48] A. Torre, *Un «tournant spatial» en histoire? Paysages, regards, ressources pour une historiographie de l'espace*, in «Annales», 63, 2008, 5, pp. 1127-1144; *The Spatial Turn in History. Symposium at the German Historical Institute*, in «German Historical Institute Bulletin», 35, 2004; R. Kingston, *Mind over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn*, in «Cultural and Social History», 7, 2010, I, pp. 111-121.

[49] M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley CA 1984; H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford - Malden MA 1991.

[50] On this concept, see J. Ahearne, *Michel De Certeau. Interpretation and its Other*, Palo Alto CA 1995, pp. 29-33.

[51] B. Kümin (ed.), *Political Space in Pre-industrial Europe*, Aldershot 2009; S.J. Milner, *The Florentine Piazza della Signoria as Practiced Place*, in R.J. Crum - J.T. Paoletti (eds), *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 83-103; C.H. Dayton, *Rethinking Agency, Recovering Voices*, in «American Historical Review», 109, 2004, 3, pp. 827-842, esp. pp. 7-9; L. Nussdorfer, *The Politics of Space in Early Modern Rome*, in «Memoirs of the American Academy of Rome», 42, 1997, pp. 161-186.

[52] For a critical discussion of the historian's spatial interpretation of the public sphere, see H. Mah, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere*, pp. 156-168.

[53] See, for example, «Le Piazze. Lo spazio pubblico dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea», special issue of «Rivista internazionale di Storia urbana e territoriale», 54-55-56,

panorama of the places of debate—understood as institutional spaces such as palaces, courts, and political assemblies or as bourgeois social establishments such as salons and coffeehouses[54]—has extended to informal spaces of political communication, such as pharmacies, barbershops, markets, pubs, streets, as well as town and neighbourhood squares[55].

Due to its exceptional urban geography that favored the circulation of opinions, Early Modern Venice has proven to be a laboratory for the observation of communicative phenomena. In early sixteenth-century Venice an evanescent form of public sphere emerged, which drew power from its capacity to dissolve and to reform itself within the urban space (Salzberg-Rospocher). This was an ephemeral political space that appeared in the city's various public places (both official and informal), it was populated by a heterogeneous public (merchants, clerics, patricians, laborers, etc.), and manifested itself both through written and, especially, oral forms of communication (rumours, voices, songs, etc.).

4. *Empirical models*

Within Italian historiography of the Early Modern period, in particular in the areas of religious and political communication and of the study of political thought, scholars empirically demonstrated the existence of spaces of public debate that were not simply, and entirely, acquiescent to the authorities[56].

1993; on urban spaces as places for observing the relationship between knowledge and society, see A. ROMANO - S. VAN DAMME (eds), *Sciences et villes-mondes, XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, in «Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine», 55, 2008, 2.

[54] A. LILTI, *Le monde des salons. Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 2005; B. COWAN, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*, New Haven CT 2005.

[55] E. WELCH, *Space and Spectacle in the Renaissance Pharmacy*, in «Medicina & Storia», 15, 2008, pp. 127-158; F. DE VIVO, *Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern Venice*, in «Renaissance Studies», 21, 2007, pp. 505-521; J. MASSCHAELE, *The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England*, in «Speculum», 77, 2002, 2, pp. 383-421; P.J. ARNADE - M.C. HOWELL - W. SIMONS, *Fertile Spaces: The Productivity of Urban Space in Northern Europe*, in «Journal of Interdisciplinary History», 32, 2002, 4.

[56] C. NUBOLA - A. WÜRGLER (eds), *Operare la resistenza: Suppliche, gravamina e rivolte in Europa (secoli XV-XIX)*, (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento) Bologna 2006; F. BARBIERATO, *Politici e ateisti. Percorsi della miscredenza a Venezia fra Sei*

There are, then, empirical models in operation, alternative but not formalized, that derive from research on the theory and practice of politics in the Early Modern period[57]. The analysis of Venetian political communication between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, suggests the abandonment of Habermas's static notion of public sphere and its substitution with the dynamic interaction of different levels of communication (De Vivo). The Venetian public space can be envisioned metaphorically as a communicative triangle fed from different poles, instead of as a sphere: the authorities, i.e. the government and its representatives; the political arena, dominated by factions and political professionals, i.e. bureaucrats, informants, and spies; and the city, i.e. the majority of the population, who had no political role, but was interested in and participated in politics.

If the critical use of reason is the cornerstone of Habermas's idea of the public sphere, the analysis of political discourse seeks to shatter the paradigm of rationality and to reflect on the 'emotional' dimension of the collective *doxa* as well[58]. The category of «humor», ever-present in Machiavelli's political language, circumscribes a more organic than discursive notion of public opinion (Landi). For Machiavelli this innate and classical notion determined how the masses of his time behaved; it can be connected to the ethnographical idea of «moral economy» formulated by E.P. Thompson in relation to the crowd of eighteenth-century England[59]. The presence, among these ordinary people, of a pre-political consciousness that is activated politically in times of crises makes one reflect both on the forms of aggregation that today char-

acterize protests in Southern European societies struck by economic crisis and on the intrinsic authority-defying quality that characterizes the public sphere (Benigno).

5. *Theoretical alternatives*

Finally, scholars have tried to elaborate alternative theoretical models to replace the normative notion of the public sphere. Historians have used Foucault, more or less explicitly, as an antithetical model to Habermas in confronting the power-communication relationship[60]. Foucault has been used in this sense, in studies on the history of communication centered on relationships of power generated by discourses, rather than those on the emancipatory capacity of public opinion.

Ironically, among the possible theoretical alternatives that have gained ground within recent historiography (especially in German scholarship[61], and in the history of law and of political philosophy in Italy), one is the work of Niklas Luhmann, considered a sort of opposite of Habermas (and not only in a scientific sense)[62]. The study of practices and communicative processes in the artistic, political, juridical, literary, and scientific realms has shown how much more complex Modern European society is compared to how it is described in Habermas's ideal-type. Luhmann's «dynamic systems theory» would allow for a better representation of the complexity of the social and political systems of the centuries preceding the Enlightenment, and of the richness of «Old Europe» (*Alteuropa*) (De Benedictis). In particular, historians are now unanimous in confirming the existence of a variety and plurality of public spheres, in which the interconnection of different media is crucial; and the abstract theory of Luhmann would be able to restore importance to analyzing the dynamics of this media system (Gestrich). The system-theory approach offers an alternative, especially from an epistemological point of view: this theory distinguishes itself as an ana-

[60] M. FOUCAULT, *L'ordre du discours*, Paris 1971.

[61] See R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik beobachten. Öffentlichkeit und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in «Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung», 35, 2008, 4, pp. 581-616; A. GESTRICH, *The Public Sphere*, pp. 427-429.

[62] See J. HABERMAS - N. LUHMANN, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie. Was leistet die Systemforschung?*, Frankfurt a.M. 1971.

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lytical instrument for the interpretation of society, while in Habermas's normative vision interpretation is provided a priori. «Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation of European societies offers great potential for re-interpreting the rich and diverse findings of recent historical research» (Gestrich).

Scholars have referenced the work of thinkers like Bourdieu as another possible instrument for extending and deepening Habermas's analysis of the public sphere[63], whereas others have suggested Bakhtin as an alternative capable of restoring the complexity and the ambiguity of relationships between the state and the public sphere, and between public and private[64].

All such suggestive formulations deserve further attention from early modern historians, but they have yet to reach the paradigmatic status of Habermas's work. The intellectual revolution that comes about in a discipline when an old interpretive paradigm is replaced with a new one has yet to take place in this field; we are rather in a situation in which new paradigms have appeared on the scene but still remain to be recognized as such[65]. This volume intends to present that which more than a revolution shows the characteristics of a historiographical transition.

This book is the fruit of two colloquia held at the Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento of the Fondazione Bruno Kessler: the international conference «Beyond the Public Sphere» (September 2010) and the workshop «Public Sphere and Public Opinion: Historical Paradigms?» (October 2008). For their contributions, I would like to thank the participants of the two meetings (Fernanda Alfieri, Marco Cavarzere, Paolo Costa, Claudio Ferlan, Serena Luzzi, Renato Mazzolini, Ottavia Niccoli, Cecilia Nubola, Gian Enrico Rusconi, Rosa Salzberg, and Marica Tolomelli). I also owe gratitude to the successive directors of the Institute (Gian Enrico Rusconi and Paolo Pombeni) for supporting

[63] See N. CROSSLEY, *On Systematically Distorted Communication: Bourdieu and the Socio-analysis of Publics*, in N. CROSSLEY - J.M. ROBERTS (eds), *After Habermas*, pp. 88-112.

[64] See the contributions of Gardiner, Hirschkop and Roberts in N. CROSSLEY - J.M. ROBERTS (eds), *After Habermas*.

[65] T. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago IL 1961.

Theory and Practices

The Early-Modern State and the Rise of the Public Sphere

A Systems-Theory Approach

by *Andreas Gestrich*

I. Introduction

The American translation of Jürgen Habermas's classic study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*[1] unleashed a new and ongoing debate on this seminal text. Whereas the controversy, which followed its original German publication in 1962, was primarily fought by social and political scientists within Germany, it is now above all historians who engage, world-wide, critically with this text. While the book is politically still extremely successful and important for democratic movements, an almost endless number of historical studies refers to it as empirically and theoretically unsatisfactory. Historians of early modern Europe in particular have pointed out several problems in Habermas's master narrative and detected flaws in his use of specific historical examples. However, despite this bourgeoning research there has been little effort so far to use its findings for the design of a new theoretical framework, which could replace Habermas's model.

Only recently and almost entirely restricted to German historiography[2] has an alternative theoretical approach gained some influence amongst historians of the public sphere. It is the work of Habermas's great opponent of the time, the late Bielefeld sociologist Niklas Luhmann,

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[1]   J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge MA 1989.

[2]   See particularly R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik beobachten. Öffentlichkeit und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in «Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung», 35, 2008, 4, pp. 581-616; R. SCHLÖGL, *Kommunikation und Vergesellschaftung unter Anwesenden. Formen des Sozialen und ihre Transformation in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 34, 2008, pp. 155-224.

which is becoming increasingly influential among social scientists as a challenging theoretical approach. Over many years, Luhmann designed in an impressive multi-volume Œuvre a theory of modern society and its evolution from the early modern period to the present day[3]. Its basis is modern systems theory. Although communication is at the center of his theory, Luhmann is in a provocative way uninterested in individual human agency and the social integration of society through shared values and meaning. His analysis of the functioning and development of social systems detaches them completely from any intentions and actions of individuals. He is also radically opposed to any form of teleological narrative of historical development. Social evolution is attributed to contingent events rather than powerful social forces, which determine the long-term path of historical change.

Coming from the politically engaged Marxist tradition of the Frankfurt School of critical social theory, Habermas's theoretical approach and self-understanding as an academic sociologist and social philosopher was radically opposed to Luhmann's[4]. The two sociologists had fierce and famous academic exchanges in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, unlike Habermas, whose work has been translated world-wide, the international reception of Luhmann's highly abstract sociological analysis is very small.

This article argues that despite its high level of abstraction and anti-humanist rigor, Luhmann's work can be interesting for historians of the public sphere. It provides some challenging theoretical impulses for rethinking its structural changes in an unorthodox and non-teleological way. It is also more flexible to integrate those research results, which run contrary to Habermas's model. Building on the critical assessment of Habermas's study the paper will, therefore, suggest Luhmann's system-theoretical approach as an alternative. It will do this in three stages: after a brief summary of Habermas's argument and some of the main

[3]   On Luhmann's work in general, see e.g. D. HORSTER, *Niklas Luhmann*, München 1997; W. RASCH, *Niklas Luhmann's Modernity. The Paradoxes of Differentiation*, Stanford CA 2000.

[4]   For the theoretical basis of their different approaches, see the classic debate in J. HABERMAS - N. LUHMANN, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie*, Frankfurt a.M. 1971. For an interesting comparison, see M. FÜLLSACK, *Geltungsansprüche und Beobachtungen zweiter Ordnung. Wie nahe kommen sich Diskurs- und Systemtheorie*, in «Soziale Systeme. Zeitschrift für soziologische Theorie», 4, 1998, pp. 185-198.

challenges to his model, the paper will outline some core assumptions and arguments of Luhmann's theory as far as they are relevant for understanding his perspective on the functions and transformations of public spheres. The final section will show how Luhmann's approach is able to integrate the historical research which contradicts Habermas's model into a more comprehensive and satisfying explanatory model[5].

II. HABERMAS'S STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND ITS CRITICS

Habermas's book on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is a classic text in the tradition of critical theory. Critical theory has Marxism as one of its roots and shares with it primarily the common tenet of detecting and overcoming the causes of the alienation and suppression of the individual in modern society[6]. Like Marx (as well as enlightened liberalism), Habermas holds free public discourse as a prerequisite for «the subjection of political domination, as a domination of human beings over human beings, to reason»[7]. Underlying his theory is also a moderate Marxist model of historical development. It bases historical change primarily on the rise of economic power of social classes and their specific relationship to state power. Even though historical analysis is not the main interest of Habermas's analysis, he opens up a wider historical context for his scathing attack on the rise of manipulative, consumer-oriented «publicity work» and «staged public-

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[5]   I have first pointed out the potential of Luhmann's theory for historians of the public sphere in A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit. Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1994, pp. 28-33 and in A. GESTRICH, *The Public Sphere and the Habermas-Debate* in «German History», 24, 2006, 3, pp. 413-431. In the meantime, Rudolf Schlögl (see above, footnote 2) has started to elaborate a complex new reading of early modern European history from this perspective. This paper owes many valuable insights to Schlögl's path-breaking essays.

[6]   The secondary literature on Habermas is massive. See e.g. R. GÖRTZEN, *Jürgen Habermas: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften und der Sekundärliteratur 1952-1981*, Frankfurt a. M. 1982. For an interesting short overview over Habermas's place in the intellectual traditions of German philosophy and sociology see D. SCHECTER *The Functional Transformation of the Political World: Reflections on Habermas*, in «Studies in Social and Political Thought», 1, 1999, pp. 33-49.

[7]   J. HABERMAS, *Transformation*, p. 128.

ity»[8] in contemporary (1950s) capitalist welfare states. This allows him to explain the forces behind the depravation of the political public spheres and the loss of their emancipatory potential.

Habermas attributed the contemporary process of increasing corruption primarily to the fusion of state power and civil society under late capitalism. This fusion resulted in a usurpation of the public sphere by political and economic power structures (*Vermachtung*). The modern public sphere has, therefore, lost its critical and emancipatory potential, and public opinion is no longer the «critical authority in connection with the normative mandate that the exercise of political and social power be subject to publicity»[9]. The public sphere in the modern welfare state has, according to Habermas, deteriorated into an arena of manipulation, hidden power through well-staged acclamatory consent.

As an analytical counterpoint, Habermas constructed an ideal-type, which he named «bourgeois public sphere»[10]. This was the social space where in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries propertied people reasoned in public on those private interests that were of general relevance, such as the rules of markets and economic production, and referred these interests back to the state. They debated in Parliament and used the media for their purposes without having to fear censorship or political prosecution for their open criticism. It is the ideal public of a liberal theory of democracy. According to Habermas, the emergence of this social space of critical and rational public debate depended on the rise of private property and consequently the division between state and civil society as diagnosed in particular by Hegel and Marx[11].

Extending this line of argument backwards historically, Habermas constructed an early modern pre-bourgeois public sphere as a mirror image

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-26.

[11] G.W.F. HEGEL, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 1972; K. MARX, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts* (MEW, vol. 1), Berlin (Ost) 1957, pp. 201-333, esp. pp. 277-280; *ibid., Einleitung* (MEW, vol. 1), pp. 378-391. On the general theoretical background of this core model of political theory, which goes, of course, further back than Hegel see e.g. J. COHEN - A. ARATO, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge MA 1992.

of the present-day corrupt public sphere, which he called «representative publicness»[12]. Under early modern rulers, the people merely functioned as an «environment» for their rulers' demonstration of splendor and power. The political role and participation of the people was reduced to that of bystanders in the streets, when the princes «re-presented their lordship not for but 'before' the people»[13]. According to Habermas, in twentieth-century society public participation in political power and the control of it became quasi-«refeudalized» and was, again, reduced to sporadic acts of acclamation through general elections. In the media, people were presented with images rather than arguments[14].

Over the past decades, Habermas's notion of the early modern as well as the bourgeois public sphere has been dismantled in various ways. This criticism has been frequently repeated and summarized in recent research[15]. Five aspects seem particularly relevant:

First, Habermas's notion of the bourgeois public sphere as a platform of critical and rational debate of independent citizens has been questioned. The historical example, which Habermas considered as matching his ideal-type best, namely late eighteenth-century British society with its relatively free press, its associations and clubs, and above all

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[12] J. HABERMAS, *Transformation*, p. 5. In the German original Habermas uses the term «Öffentlichkeit» in both contexts and speaks of «repräsentative Öffentlichkeit» as well as «bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit», the English translation differentiates between «bourgeois public sphere» and «representative publicness» indicating that it was not a social sphere in its own right.

[13] J. HABERMAS, *Transformation*, p. 8.

[14] «Representative publicity of the old type is not thereby revived; but it still lends certain traits to a refeudalized public sphere of civil society whose characteristic feature, according to Schelsky's observation, is that the large-scale organizers in state and society 'manage the propagation of their positions'»; J. Habermas, *Transformation*, p. 200 with reference to H. SCHELSKY, *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart 1953, p. 357.

[15] See particularly C. CALHOUN (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge MA 1993; H. MAH, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians*, in «The Journal of Modern History», 72, 2000, 1, pp. 153-182; P.U. HOHENDAHL, *Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jürgen Habermas and his Critics*, in «New German Critique», 16, 1979, pp. 99-108. For more summaries of recent research on the early modern public sphere see also the bibliography in R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik*, p. 582, fn. 4.

its parliamentary tradition, was neither particularly bourgeois in character nor critical in the sense that it saw itself as being in opposition to the state apparatus. On the contrary, the associations and clubs which Habermas puts at the center of his model as new institutions of independent critical reasoning, were characterized by a mixture of elites, of old nobility, civil servants, academics, priests, and a few bourgeois men and women[16]. They were by no means primarily bourgeois institutions. Tim Blanning has summed up this social mix of the eighteenth-century public sphere with an image of its being socially «more like Noah's Ark than a merchantman»[17].

Similarly, historical research has demonstrated that the eighteenth-century British parliaments were dominated by the interests of the power elites and were, above all, utterly corrupt or, put more positively, integrated into a closely-knit system of patronage, which linked parliament and the executive. About 75 powerful families dominated all parliamentary seats and effectively governed Britain in close liaison with the monarch and his government. Habermas's idealizing portrayal of the British political system in the late eighteenth century had little in common with the reality of that system[18]. Geoff Eley has pointed out that the British system after the parliamentary reform of 1832 matches Habermas's

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[16] U. DANIEL, *How Bourgeois Was the Public Sphere of the Eighteenth Century? Or: Why it is Important to Historicize 'Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit'*, in «Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Gesellschaft für die Erforschung des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts», 26, 2002, pp. 9-17; R. CHARTIER, *The cultural origins of the French Revolution*, Durham N.C. - London 1991, pp. 20-37 formulates massive doubts as to whether the French political public in the decades before the revolution could be described as having been in its majority a bourgeois one. For similar doubts see K.M. BAKER, *Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century France*, in C. CALHOUN, *Habermas*, pp. 181-211, esp. pp. 190 f.

[17] T. BLANNING, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture, Old Regime Europe 1660-1789*, Oxford 2001, p. 12. Hanco Jürgens uses the same quote adding: «It [the public sphere] was not only socially heterogeneous; it was also politically multidirectional. One may indeed ask if this public sphere was as rational, critical and as modern as assumed»; H. JÜRGENS, *Habermas for Historians*, in «Forschungsberichte aus dem Duitsland Insituut Amsterdam», 5, 2009, pp. 158-170.

[18] Ph. HARLING, *The Waning of «Old Corruption»: The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846*, Oxford 1996; W.D. SMITH, *Corruption and Eighteenth-Century Social Science: Mapping the Space of Political Economy*, in «Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture», 38, 2009, pp. 261-276.

model quite well—albeit with a radically changed social structure and a strong plebeian element[19]. Habermas himself, however, places the onset of the decline of his ideal-type bourgeois public sphere in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Secondly, historical research has shown that Habermas's model of Ancien Régime «representative publicness» does not meet the complexity of the relationship between early modern rulers, governments, and a wider public. The political role of the people as a public for political action cannot be reduced to that of mere bystanders. It has been convincingly argued that all forms of political dominance and rulership need to rest on a certain degree of public acceptance of their legitimacy and of public trust in order to last. There are by now many studies, which analyze how widely information on political affairs was disseminated, received, and discussed in early modern European societies and how this process of information and communication was part of the legitimacy of political decision-making and, therefore, affected it[20].

There is, thirdly, increasing skepticism about Habermas's emphasis on the Hegelian notion of civil society as a new intermediary sphere between the private and the state which—in Habermas's model—forms the basis for the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, just as the contemporary fusion of civil society and the state causes its decline. Critics of this model question the theoretical roots of Habermas's argument. They doubt whether civil society can really be regarded as the main *locus* of an independent public sphere, and whether it was really here that the interests of the individuals as private people were mediated.

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[19] G. ELEY, *Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century*, in C. CALHOUN, *Habermas*, pp. 289-339, here pp. 304 f.

[20] For Italy see particularly the path-breaking study by F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford 2007; for England see D. ZARET, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England*, Princeton NJ 1999; D. FREIST, *Öffentlichkeit und Herrschaftslegitimation in der Frühen Neuzeit: Deutschland und England im Vergleich*, in R.G. ASCH - D. FREIST (eds), *Staatsbildung als kultureller Prozess. Strukturwandel und Legitimation von Herrschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Köln - Weimar - Wien 2005, pp. 322-351; for the field international relations see H. KLEINSCHMIDT, *Legitimität, Frieden, Völkerrecht. Eine Begriffs- und Theoriegeschichte der menschlichen Sicherheit*, Baden-Baden 2010, ch. 2: «Öffentlichkeit, Legitimität und Sicherheit in der europäischen Tradition des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit».

There are many recent studies on German history which question this model in its entirety. Isabell Hull's study on *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815* shows how difficult it is to support the view that this notion of two emerging separate spheres was more than a theoretical construct of nineteenth-century philosophy. Contemporary state officials as well as German and Austrian cameralists such as Joseph von Sonnenfels maintained that state and society were in fact one and the same thing. In 1777 Sonnenfels wrote «the state is a society», maintaining that in fact their interests could not be separated from each other, and that it was particularly consumption which bound their diverse interests together and which, therefore, had to be encouraged also by the state[21]. Similarly, Ian McNeely in his book *The Emancipation of Writing. German Civil Society in the Making, 1790s-1820s* shows how civil society in Germany was so inextricably intertwined with the state, formed by state officials and their enlightened notion of the common good, that it is difficult to see it as a separate entity from the state[22].

Thus, if there was critical public debate on matters of the state, it was rather initiated within the administration than directed against it and often enough it was conducted with explicit state support. In late eighteenth-century Bavaria—as in Prussia—the enlightened reform discourse was able to unfold under the protection of the state administration and its system of censorship, which tolerated critical political treatises as long as they were not directed against the person of the elector or king[23]. In fact, almost everywhere in eighteenth-century Europe, as Tim Blanning reminds us, «for the most time, the relationship between the public sphere and the state was amicable and mutually supportive. Indeed,

[21] I. HULL, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815*, Ithaca NY 1996, p. 158 f.; J. VON SONNENFELS, *Antrittsrede. Ueber das Verhaeltnis der Staende. Gehalten 1763*, Wien 1764.

[22] I. MCNEELY, *The Emancipation of Writing. German Civil Society in the Making, 1790s-1820s*, Berkeley CA 2003.

[23] M. SCHAICH, *Staat und Öffentlichkeit im Kurfürstentum Bayern der Spätaufklärung*, München 2001, esp. pp. 157-161. For Prussia, see E. TORTAROLO, *Censorship and the Conception of the Public in Late-eighteenth-Century Germany: Or, Are Censorship and Public Opinion Mutually Exclusive?*, in D. CASTIGLIONE - L. SHARPE (eds), *Shifting the Boundaries. Transformations of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, Exeter 1995, pp. 131-150, esp. pp. 133-141.

one might well go further and argue that the public sphere was both the creation and the extension of the state»[24]. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that historians have, fourthly, pointed out the fact that the development of the media system itself as the basic infrastructure of a more than local public sphere was highly intertwined with state action and state interest. Wolfgang Behringer's ground-breaking work on the imperial postal system[25] has demonstrated how the development of a close network of postal connections not only became a vital prerequisite for efficient government but that this network of postal routes was also opened to the public[26]. It was through the communication channels of this European postal network that regular information provided from all parts of the known world became the subject of private and public discussion. This resulted in a new perception of space and the interconnectedness of events and processes, which was vital for the emergence of a public sphere that went beyond the local community. It was above all the regularity of the incoming news, which prompted sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printers to turn their 'news books', which were published biannually, into newspapers published weekly or even daily. By the end of the seventeenth century a pan-European, if not global market for regular news had developed, which was spread by printed newspapers[27]. These appeared not only in capital cities such as London and Paris and in the major imperial cities of the Empire such as Hamburg or Frankfurt but also in the larger towns of the Empire's many territorial states. This meant that they must have been tolerated and approved of by the rulers even if they insisted on other occasions that politics were no matter for the common people[28].

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[24] T. BLANNING, *Culture*, p. 13. For an interesting perspective on Spain, see V. PÉREZ-DÍAZ, *State and Public Sphere in Spain during the Ancient Regime*, in «Daedalus», 127, 1998, 3, pp. 251-279.

[25] W. BEHRINGER, *Im Zeichen des Merkur. Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2003.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 66 ff.

[27] S. SCHULTHEISS-HEINZ, *Politik in der europäischen Publizistik. Eine historische Inhaltsanalyse von Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 2004; S. KÜSTER, *Vier Monarchien – vier Öffentlichkeiten. Kommunikation um die Schlacht bei Dettingen*, Münster 2004; A. HALASZ, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Cambridge 1997.

[28] Cf. A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus*, pp. 168 ff.

There were probably two main reasons why newspapers enjoyed court approval. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, an enormous quantity of broadsides was printed and circulated. No effective control could be exercised over their production or their contents. They appeared anonymously and were sold secretly by hawkers or peddlers. A regular newspaper, however, could not appear over a longer period without the printer being known. So a license was needed, which then exposed the paper and its printer to government control. It can, therefore, be presumed that newspapers were supported by governments precisely because they could be effectively censured. The other reason was that the courts themselves used the press for inter-court communication. Court news played an important role in all early newspapers. Courts released official news to the press and made sure that the right information was spread. Diplomats did the same. Thus, the courts and governments were on the giving as well as the receiving end of newspaper production[29].

This was not only an important factor for the rise and stabilization of the early newspaper market, but had more far-reaching effects on the formation of a public sphere. The fact that ordinary people could read about political subjects several times a week sparked off conversations in taverns, coffee houses, reading clubs, and similar locations where newspapers were normally available and often read out loud, so that even those who were not able to read could partake in the political debate. The limited public sphere of the courts and of inter-court communication *via* the press had unintended consequences and gave rise to a debating public that was by no means restricted to the nobility. What these studies on the development of the media seem to have in common is that they stress the role of the state and particularly the power of the rising market of the periodical press and its intrinsic dynamics for the transformation of the public sphere. It was the media that caused public communication to become institutionalized and permanent, quite independently of the social strengths or weaknesses of the bourgeoisie or of unfolding capitalism[30].

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[29]   D.A. BELL, *The «Public Sphere», the State, and the World of Law in Eighteenth-Century France*, in «French Historical Studies», 17, 1992, pp. 912-934, 916 f.; A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus*, pp. 75-100.

[30]   Similar arguments now in R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik*.

Finally, many of these critical studies work more or less explicitly with a more complex model of the transformation of the public sphere, which takes into account a multiplicity of public spheres each with their own social backgrounds, dynamics, and potential for criticism[31]. The European courts and court societies mentioned above as providers and consumers of news were only one of these spheres. The universities, academies, and learned societies are also increasingly perceived as a transnational communication network with its own type of public sphere, which could also become very political[32]. Open discussion not only within the universities, but also in learned journals and other printed publications was seen as pivotal to academic life and progress. Academic interest in the subject of public law rose considerably during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in academies for young noblemen as well as in normal universities courses on *notitia rerum publicarum*, the forerunners of the modern subjects of contemporary history and political science became increasingly fashionable. It is interesting that newspaper-reading formed an important part of these courses[33].

To summarize, historians of early modern Europe find Habermas's model of a structural transformation of the public sphere increasingly unconvincing on various levels: Habermas's notion of one eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere seems neither reconcilable with recent research on the complex and multi-layered structure of public discourse in early modern Europe nor with that on the mixed social basis of all those institutions and arenas of public exchange which he attributed to the bourgeois public sphere. The dichotomy between the civil society and the state, which Habermas adopts from Hegel and Marx also poses a problem, as this forms the core of his master narrative of the rise and decline of the bourgeois public sphere. It rests on a particular notion of relations between state and society, which is derived from abstract

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[31]   The concept of a plurality of public spheres was particularly emphasized in a work on sixteenth-century Prussia by E.-B. KÖRBER, *Öffentlichkeiten der frühen Neuzeit. Teilnehmer, Formen, Institutionen und Entscheidungen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Herzogtum Preußen von 1525 bis 1618*, Berlin - New York 1998; see also with slightly different categories for the early eighteenth century A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus*, pp. 75-78.

[32]   See also H. BOSSE, *Die gelehrte Republik*, in H.-W. JÄGER (ed.), «Öffentlichkeit» im *18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1997, pp. 51-76 or D. GOODMANN, *The Republic of Letters. A Cultural History of French Enlightenment*, Ithaca NY - London 1994.

[33]   A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus*, pp. 110-114.

models rather than empirical facts. Finally, research on the development of early modern media has shown a much greater and a much more complex dynamic of this sector than Habermas accounted for. It is clear that the state played a much greater role in the development in particular of political periodicals than conceded by Habermas. It is also clear, however, that the intrinsic dynamic of the media market was a historical force of its own. It induced structural changes in public spheres, which could no longer be controlled by governments or institutions.

III. LUHMANN'S THEORY OF MODERN SOCIETY AND ITS POLITICAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Luhmann's sociological analysis of modern societies and the function of the media and the public sphere within them is based on Talcott Parsons theory of functional differentiation[34]. He is critical of models like Habermas's Hegelian-Marxist notion of a separation of state and society as opposing social entities[35]. Like Parsons, he rather suggests that the main feature of modern societies is to be seen in a new form of social differentiation, namely the increasing dominance of functional systems over other possible forms of social differentiation such as segmentary[36] or stratificatory[37] ones. Stratificatory differentiation had

[34] T. PARSONS, *The System of Modern Societies*, Englewood Cliffs NJ 1971. The idea to use different types of social differentiation as a main tool for social analysis and for the explanation of social change can be traced back to sociologists like Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim or Georg Simmel, but has been particularly used by Talcott Parsons. Niklas Luhmann, who studied under Parsons, adopted his system-analytical approach to society, but refused its normative aspects. For a general introduction into the history of the concept of social differentiation see N. LUHMAN (ed.), *Soziale Differenzierung. Zur Geschichte einer Idee*, Opladen 1985; for an overview see also A. ZIEMANN, *Systemtheorie*, in G. KNEER - M. SCHROER (eds), *Handbuch Soziologische Theorien*, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 469-490.

[35] For a good overview on Luhmann's critique of this tradition, see A. ARATO, *Civil Society and Political Theory in the Work of Luhmann and Beyond*, in «New German Critique», 61, 1994, pp. 129-142.

[36] E.g. societies primarily differentiated into different families or clans each of which fulfills all social functions through internal specialization.

[37] E.g. late medieval and early modern societies dominated by social hierarchies or societies dominated by class divisions.

been characteristic of all European societies from antiquity to the early modern period, due to the clear distinction between a noble upper class and the rest of society. Social order could only be represented by differences in rank; and ranks were multifunctional in the sense that ranks entailed advantages or disadvantages for all members of society in nearly all spheres of life[38].

In contrast to this, functional differentiation means, firstly, that «every function which is part of the differentiation process ... is only dealt with in one subsystem of society»[39], such as legal disputes in the legal system, economic transactions in the economic system or politics in the political one. Functionally differentiated modern societies are, secondly, characterized by the fact that, irrespective of their social status, individuals—in principle—have access to all subsystems «which are related to specific problems, or, to use a different and somewhat problematic formulation, fulfill a specific function in society»[40].

Unlike the state-society-division in the Hegelian tradition, the emergence of such functional subsystems is an evolutionary process partly based on contingent events and partly on specific developments in other systems. Luhmann presumes, however, that the emergence of an independent functional system of politics is only possible in the context of stratified societies as it is only here that certain functions and offices become centralized in the hands of a few, which leads to the fact that political forms of power can be differentiated from other forms of social pressure[41]. This is the basis for power becoming the center of system formation, i.e. the basis for the political sphere becoming a separate functional system[42]. Whereas the state is opposed to civil

[38] N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 2 vols., Frankfurt a.M. 1998, vol. 2, p. 679.

[39] N. LUHMANN, *Die Politik der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, pp. 76 f.

[40] B. ZIEMANN, *The Theory of Functional Differentiation and the History of Modern Society. Reflections on the Reception of Systems Theory in Recent Historiography*, in «Soziale Systeme», 13, 2007, pp. 220-229.

[41] N. LUHMANN, *Politik*, pp. 70 -73.

[42] In Luhmann's terminology power is the 'medium' of the political system like money is that of the economic system and truth that of the scientific/academic system of society, N. LUHMANN, *Politik*, pp. 38-54.

society in Habermas's theory, the political functional system is one of several subsystems 'of' society.

Functional systems of society are constituted and reproduced through communication[43]. For the purpose of understanding the process of system differentiation, Luhmann's interest lies with the mechanisms and functions of communication rather than with its content. Every communication provokes and requires subsequent communications in order to verify the meaning conveyed. However, every communication is also a process of selection, which chooses certain information and messages rather than others and excludes certain subject matters as irrelevant, thereby creating or sustaining a social system through processes of distinction between what belongs to it and what does not[44].

A core assumption of Luhmann's theory is that systems observe how they themselves and how other systems communicate[45]. There are

[43] This is not the place to go into the details of Luhmann's systemstheoretical approach to communication. It is necessary, however, to point out two things. Firstly, for Luhmann communication is the unity of information, message, and understanding, which are all perceived in a mechanistic way as binary selections of the addressed who decides which information and interpretation is chosen and thereby excludes others. Understanding in Luhmann's sense is, therefore, different from the everyday meaning of the word. It is independent of psychic systems and individual actors. Secondly, communication always needs subsequent communication in order to verify or correct the preceding communication, or, in Luhmann's terms, it is not man who communicates, only communications can communicate. See N. LUHMANN, *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 1992, p. 31.

[44] «In contrast to this [the action theory approach] a system-theoretical approach stresses the emergence of communication itself. Communication creates redundance in the sense that it creates a memory, which can be used by many in very different ways. If A conveys a message to B, further communication can address either A or B. The system pulsates with a permanent production of too much information and consequently processes of selection. This procedure of system building was immensely intensified by the invention of writing and printing, with consequences for social structure, semantics, even for language itself, which only gradually get into the focus of research»; N. LUHMANN, *Was ist Kommunikation?*, in F.B. SIMON (ed.), *Lebende Systeme. Wirklichkeitskonstruktionen in der systemischen Therapie*, Berlin 1988 (transl. A.G.).

[45] Systems can observe as observation and communication for Luhmann do not presuppose a conscious subject: «Only in psychic systems does the concept presuppose consciousness ... Other systems must acquire their own possibilities of observation. Accordingly self-'observation' is the introduction of the system/environment distinction within the system, which constitutes itself with the help of that distinction»; N. LUHMAN, *Social Systems*, transl. by J. Bednarz jr with D. Baecker, Stanford CA 1995,

two categories or levels of observation: observations of the first order observe what is being communicated, observations of a second order observe observers. It is in this context that Luhmann places the origin and function of public opinion and the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). The process of observing can take place on both levels within a system. However, in order to be able to discern its borders and to classify operations as belonging to itself and not to a different system, a system must realize that there is an outside and look at itself from the outside. Luhmann calls the generalized outside of all functional subsystems of society from which such observation can take place «Öffentlichkeit»—a term which he uses in a slightly ambiguous way, partly meaning the fact of something being public, partly meaning the public sphere, albeit in an abstract sense[46]. However, as far as the political system is concerned, Luhmann becomes very concrete when he turns to the question of what happens in this public sphere. It is the sphere of public opinion, a term which for him means public communication about observation of the system. For Luhmann public opinion is not the opinion of a large but essentially finite number of individuals, but a potentially infinite and unpredictable process of communication of a system whereby second order observations are exposed to observation themselves. Luhmann writes:

«On the level of active politics, politicians observe themselves and others in order to judge actions which expose themselves to observations. Like markets, the field of politics is one of competition. However, this competition is staged in a way that takes into account the fact that it is also being observed by observers whose participation as a public is assumed. Unlike in markets there are no prices in politics whose observation could ... make the observation of observers easier, but there are continuous narratives, in which one can find one's own name and that of others, and these narratives can be observed as being the result of observations themselves. Instead of prices, there are also morals. For the public (so it is at least assumed) the observation of the mutual observation of observers makes choices in the case of political elections easier. For this, it suffices to reduce such multilevel observation processes for oneself and presume that politicians can be observed as actors, i.e. first-order observers. The political system uses such simplifications on all levels—and thus gives up the chance of a converging integration of various observation settings. Instead, it works with the presupposition,

pp. 36 ff. The basis for this argumentation is the differentiation between three different types of systems, which are perceived as being categorically independent from each other: living, psychic, and social systems. All three have different *modi operandi*, that of social systems is communication.

[46]   N. LUHMANN, *Politik*, p. 285.

that different plays are being performed on stage and behind the scenes. However, one can see through this without any effect»[47].

According to Luhmann, therefore, in a political functional system, public opinion is a potentially endless and mostly contingent chain of communications concerning first and second order observations within this system. The public is mostly unaware of the fact that it is itself the object of observation by the political actors. As far as Luhmann is concerned, the continuous mutual observation of observers and the public communication about such observations does not imply an increasing rationality of public opinion, but an increasing level of contingency of all follow-up communication[48].

In summary, Luhmann argues that the development of the political public sphere is, on the one hand, bound to the development of an independent functional subsystem of politics which he (fairly traditionally) parallels with the rise of the modern state. On the other hand, it is not an arena where debating individuals strive for increasing transparency and rationality of political decision-making[49], but where anonymous processes of knowledge selection take place, which create facts and determine what can be treated in subsequent communications[50]. Modern media-driven public spheres in particular do not, according to Luhmann, aim at some sort of consensus in their portrayal of reality, but at making the results of communication accessible to future communication.

IV. FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION AND THE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

How can we re-interpret the structural transformation of the public sphere in light of this abstract systems-theoretical approach to the evo-

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 292 (transl. A.G.).

[48] A very interesting problem is that of the possibility of scientific sociological analysis of society, which is also an operation of second level observation. See N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 1128-1142. See on this also the insightful essay by M. FÜLLSACK, *Geltungsansprüche*.

[49] For Luhmann's scathing critique of action theory and its notion of the subject, see his foreword to the English edition of N. LUHMANN, *Social Systems*, especially pp. XL-XLIII.

[50] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 1106.

lution of society? Following the main criticisms of Habermas's model, three perspectives will be suggested in which Luhmann's approach could serve as a particularly helpful guideline for such a re-interpretation.

1. *Variety of public spheres*

Habermas's traditional model of fusion, separation, and renewed fusion of state and society proved particularly unsatisfactory for the early modern period. The richness of early-modern print culture, the multiplicity of interactions between a wider public and rulers and political office-holders, or the variety of groups, which used the unfolding media system cannot satisfactorily be explained within a framework of representative publicity. Equally unsatisfactory is the reduction of the bourgeois public sphere to a mediating role between the private sphere of economy and politics. However, Rudolf Schlögl also rightly criticized the trend among historians to take every piece of print or early public political discourse as proof that the bourgeois type of public sphere existed in fact much earlier[51].

Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation of European societies offers great potential for re-interpreting the rich and diverse findings of recent historical research. The formation of functional subsystems based on first and second order observation of inner-systemic communication suggests that we have to look closely at which topics were treated when, by whom, and in which form and medium. If we take this approach, we will find that there was a link between the emergence of functional subsystems of society and an increasingly intensive and specialized public discourse on matters dealt with in these systems.

The formation of functional subsystems was a gradual and mainly random process. The religious, political, economic, legal, or academic systems emerged and became independent or—in Luhmann's terms— operationally closed systems at different points in time. The formation of an independent legal system, for example, may have started as early as the twelfth century with the rise of Roman law. However, it was only completed with the decline of natural and the rise of positive law, i.e. the changeability of legal norms, in the nineteenth century. From then on, not only the administering of legal procedures, but also the pos-

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[51] R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik*, p. 583.

sible future definition of the difference between legal and illegal rested entirely on debates within the legal system[52].

The functional differentiation of the legal system was accompanied by social processes such as the professionalization of judges and legal advisors, a system of communication between experts, which encompassed many countries where interpretations of legal stipulations and decision were exchanged and commented on in learned commentaries, which were studied at universities and duplicated and distributed first handwritten, but very early also in printed form. Such a rise of inner-systemic mutual observation and public communication of these observations through the media resulted in a public sphere specific to this system.

Similar processes, however, can be observed in most other cases of functional differentiation of subsystems, which all form their own sphere of public observation. The political system, which became increasingly independent with the rise of the territorial states from the fifteenth century onward, is the most prominent example. If we analyze its public sphere from the perspective of Luhmann's theory, it makes no sense to draw a sharp distinction between the state and civil society as opposed entities. They must be seen as bound together by mutual first and second order observation thereby creating a multilayered system of follow-up communications.

Seen from this perspective, the richness and diversity of proofs of lively public exchange is not particularly surprising, but can be related back systematically to the process of successive functional differentiation, which started to gain momentum in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in fields like politics or scholarly research (*Wissenschaft*) that emerged as functional subsystems. Historians should relate the sources of public discourse primarily to these contexts. Habermas interpreted the intensive eighteenth-century literary discourse as a pre-school for the formation of a political public sphere[53]. In fact, it would have been much more appropriate to analyze it as part of the formation of an independent functional system of the arts. As many studies have shown, the roots of the political public sphere can be traced to this domain itself and go back even further.

[52] N. LUHMANN, *Rechtssoziologie*.

[53] J. HABERMAS, *Transformation*, pp. 51-56.

2. Structural coupling and connected public spheres

This model of separate public spheres emerging at different times and evolving with different speed is helpful as a heuristic tool to differentiate between various contexts of public debates. However, it hardly seems complex enough to describe the real structure of public debates, their multilayered contents, and the social mix of the participating individuals or institutions. Luhmann's theory primarily takes account of this by introducing the concept of structural couplings between functional subsystems. This is a theoretically difficult operation within systems theory[54]. As for historical research, it suffices to note that the theory allows for even operationally closed functional systems to be closely linked and—in Luhmann's terminology—continually «imitated» by other equally closed systems without losing their independent structure. There is, for example, a structural coupling between the system of politics and that of the economy, which is stabilized in modern societies, among other things, through taxes, which form long-term links between these systems[55]. Of course, this has effects on the mutual observation of these systems and the way public discourses are linked. Such a structural coupling exists between the modern political system and the modern media system «where the media rely on politics for a constant stream of newsworthy information, whereas the political system needs the media to increase its visibility»[56]. Such structural couplings can change over time and it is important for historians of the public sphere to register these changes.

Apart from structural couplings, observation in social systems is not limited to innersystemic 'events'. Systems observe themselves and each other and communicate on these observations. In addition, there is also society at large or—in Luhmann's term—the generalized outside of all functional systems, which forms their environment. It was here, that Luhmann located a general public sphere.

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[54] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, pp. 92-120.

[55] *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 781.

[56] H.-J.BUCHER, *Die Medienrealität des Politischen. Zur Inszenierung der Politik im Fernsehen*, in U. FREVERT - W. BRAUNGART (eds), *Sprachen des Politischen. Medien und Medialität in der Geschichte*, Göttingen 2004, pp. 268-303.

To analyze historical evidence critically, it is helpful to differentiate between all these different levels of observation and public exchange on these observations. In this way, the dynamics of the development of public communication can be examined in a framework, which does not rely on factors such as the formation and antagonisms of social classes as their driving forces but on the emergence of specific subject contexts.

3. *The importance of the media*

Habermas perceived his model of the bourgeois public sphere as one unified social space inhabited by a reasoning public, which in some instances was communicating with each other directly in clubs, coffee houses, or parliaments, and in other cases (and increasingly) through the media. He takes very little notice of the intrinsic dynamics of the media system itself. This is important for Luhmann and perhaps one of the most crucial aspects for explaining the institutionalization of public spheres through the development of independent media systems. Within systems, observations of communications and the public communication of such observations produce unlimited and unforeseeable further communication. The fact that this is taken up by an evolving media system, which relies exactly on this potentially unlimited chain of follow-up communication for its own existence, cannot be underestimated. Rudolf Schlögl places particular emphasis on the role of the media in his studies on the different types and qualities of public spheres created in societies, which function *via* face-to-face communication and those where communication is facilitated *via* the media. The political public sphere of early modern urban societies seems to be primarily characterized by such face-to-face communication[57], whereas those of the territorial state become increasingly integrated through printed media. As modern media historians have shown, the rise of printed information revolutionized the way societies communicate. Printing freed information from its limitation to communication processes within groups or institutions and turned this information into potentially public information accessible to everyone at anytime, at present or in the future. It also drastically altered the

[57] See, however, F. DE VIVO, *Information* for early modern Venice, where we find a mixture of different types of communication.

possible complexity of knowledge itself as well as of its presentation[58]. The impact of printing on the public spheres of functional systems as well as the changing mixture of face-to-face communication and media reporting are aspects that still needs further study in order to describe public spheres adequately[59].

V. CONCLUSIONS

If one looks at European societies and the rise of the public spheres from these Luhmanian perspectives, many inconsistencies between Habermas's model and modern historical research become easier to solve. Luhmann's very formal description of what happens in a public sphere has been criticized as unsatisfactory or even cynical from the point of view of a normative theory of democracy. Luhmann explicitly rejects Habermas's basic presupposition that public discourse undistorted by power relations increases the rationality of political decision-making[60]. However, for historians this barren description of communication processes offers a solution to the irritations brought about by Habermas's fusion of the public sphere as a normative and a historical concept and its separation from general political communication. It forces us to examine individual sectors or subsystems of society more closely and analyze how their particular type of public communication was transformed under the pressure of the emergence of a functional mode of societal differentiation. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were times of intensified functional differentiation in many fields. What happened to the political public sphere in this period should be seen in this context[61].

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[58] See particularly M. GIESECKE, *Der Buchdruck in der frühen Neuzeit. Eine historische Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991.

[59] See for an elaborated research program in this direction R. SCHLÖGL, *Politik* and R. SCHLÖGL, *Kommunikation*.

[60] See N. LUHMANN, *Politik*, pp. 282 ff. For an interesting new systems-theoretical approach to this problem, see M. BEETZ, *Die Rationalität der Öffentlichkeit*, Konstanz 2005.

[61] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, Bd. 1., Frankfurt a.M. 1980; N. LUHMANN, *Politik*, particularly pp. 274 ff. on public opinion.

Historical research into the transformation of the public sphere has only begun to discuss this alternative model[62]. Similarly to Habermas's account, Luhmann's own historical research on this topic is limited. More studies and theoretical reasoning are needed in order to reach a coherent and empirically sound framework for the transformation of the political public sphere. So far, empirical historical research seems to be less at odds with Luhmann's cold dissection of social structures and functions of communication processes than with Habermas's normative approach, however convincing his model may be as a lodestar for democratic political development.

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[62] See, however, systems-theoretically oriented historical works like R. STICHWEH, *Der frühmoderne Staat und die europäische Universität. Zur Interaktion von Politik und Erziehungssystem im Prozess ihrer Ausdifferenzierung (16.-18. Jahrhundert)*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991; M. GIESECKE, *Buchdruck* and the works of Rudolf Schlögl (above fn. 2).

Absolutism and the Birth of the Public Sphere
A Critical View of a Model

by *Francesco Benigno*

1. *Introduction*

The extraordinary success registered by Jürgen Habermas's *Struktur-wandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962)[1] in European culture, and, for the last twenty years, even within Anglo-American culture[2], has been widely recognized in a variety of academic disciplines. Virtually every general history on the evolution of information and communication systems published in the last twenty years will be dominated by a model which explains along Habermasian lines the birth and the evolution of the modern public sphere between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, a metaphorical space believed to be separated from the institutional one and thus provided with its own particular independence. Despite the fact that historical and sociological criticism has revealed how unreliable this particular interpretation is by engaging in a very thorough decon-struction of the three main terms on which it is based («bourgeois», «public», and «sphere»), none of which appears solidly rooted[3], it has nevertheless managed to retain a vast audience and considerable public acclaim: an ironic demonstration, perhaps, of the complexity of the

mechanisms which underlie scientific communication, let alone communication in general, and how the power of 'reasonable' argument is not enough to guarantee its validity.

At first glance one of the reasons for this overwhelming success is the interdisciplinary nature of Habermas's text: a philosophical work, written in the wake of the reading of the major idealistic tradition of Meinecke and Tönnies produced by the Frankfurt School; yet, at the same time, it is also a historical-sociological treatise very much in line with Weber's thinking and thoroughly permeated by Marxism; and finally, it is a vast historic-economic portrait, capable of tracing, and transfiguring, the progressive prospectus suggested by Maurice Dobb in his *Studies*[4]. Its ability to merge into a single text so many different input sources is what confers upon it such a symphonic quality where magically *tout se tient* in the orchestrated plan of a sort of «rise and fall of the public sphere»[5]. On the one hand (in the rising stage of the bourgeois public sphere) it provides an account of the development of the market and the growth of social differentiation, the rise of an individualistic bourgeois sensibility, the development of rational criticism and the widespread distribution of the press and new areas that are open to social intercourse. But also, vice versa, during the downward spiral of the bourgeois public sphere, it offers a description of the transformation of the late capitalist economy and the merging of public and private, the confluence of state and civil society, and the structuring of new intermediate institutions, right through to the announcement of the failure of the public sphere to retain its critical function and the dismantling of those mechanisms which helped set up the political debate following the advent of the new media.

At a deeper level however, the ongoing success of Habermas's outline (which he himself upheld as being essentially correct well into the '90s) is in actual fact due to its being one of the most effective versions of the great narratives of European modernity: a classical arrangement, which during the course of the eighteenth century, due to particular situations, saw the birth of a new world, radically different and therefore heavily juxtaposed with the world of the so-called «Ancien Régime». What is

[4]   M. DOBB, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, London 1946.

[5]   N. CROSSLEY - J.M. ROBERTS, *Introduction*, in N. CROSSLEY - J.M. ROBERTS (eds), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford 2004, p. 2.

striking today, in this construct, is Habermas's reluctance to include within it what he terms the «Social Welfare State Mass Democracy», which would represent a senile (and if it were not too charged with implications we might even say «degenerate»[6]) version of the public sphere that had been idealistically connoted and historically glimpsed during the very early days of the bourgeois sociability. The outcome of this view was to suggest that the twentieth century was no longer just short, it was exceedingly brief. It left room for both the pessimism of intelligence about the devastating neo-capitalist tendencies and the optimism of the will over unlikely regeneration through movements: and in this mixture of cultural pessimism and political optimism lies another hardly secondary reason for the success of the book among Germany's 1968 generation[7], and more besides.

At the heart of this seminal narrative there is also a core element that Habermas has not developed but simply inherited and revamped: this is a very particular conception of the relationship between state and society or, alternatively, between absolute politics and the rise of democracy. This core element is what to my mind explains both the deeper and truer reason for the success of Habermas's text and the cause of the various difficulties that his ideas have gradually encountered. I will try to demonstrate this by showing how Habermas is strongly reliant in this area on the major thesis presented by Reinhart Koselleck in his *Kritik und Krise,* written in 1954 and published in 1959[8]. The resemblance between the reconstructions in which Habermas and Koselleck engage in their famous works has often been pointed out[9], as, on the other hand, have the very different and, in fact, opposing political and ideological choices on which their discussions are based[10]. However, the common core element has not perhaps been sufficiently highlighted.

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[6]   M. NORDAU, *Entartung,* Berlin 1892 (English transl. *Degeneration,* London 1913).

[7]   P.U. HOHENDAHL - P. RUSSIAN, *Jürgen Habermas: «The Public Sphere»* (1964), in «New German Critique», 3, 1974, pp. 45-48.

[8]   R. KOSELLECK, *Kritik und Krise. Ein Beitrag zur Pathogene der bürgerlichen Welt,* Freiburg - München 1959; I quote from the English translation *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and Pathogeneis of Modern Society,* Cambridge MA 1988.

[9]   L. CEPPA, *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo e opinione pubblica: i modelli di Habermas e Koselleck,* in «Studi storici», 25, 1984, pp. 343-352.

[10]   P.U. HOHENDAHL, *Recasting the Public Sphere,* in «October», 73, 1995, pp. 27-54.

2. *Critique as the origin of the crises*

Derived from a doctoral thesis directed by Carl Schmitt in Heidelberg in 1954, *Kritik und Krise* is a painful and passionate meditation, of both a political and personal nature, on the German tragedy. Following the end of the war in which Koselleck had taken an active part (as a *Wehrmacht* volunteer and subsequently a prisoner of war) the dramatic issue around which the entire German intellectual community was debating was to establish the cause and development of the national *Sonderweg*, what manner of fatal attraction, of slippery slope towards despotism, the irrational and the satanical had dragged the country into the abyss[11]. All the major German intellectuals in those years were trying to find an answer to what Friedrich Meinecke had duly christened as *Die Deutsche Katastrophe*[12] and not everyone was prepared to go along with the essentially self-forgiving verdict suggested by Karl Jaspers in *Die Schuldfrage*[13]. So while on the other side of the Atlantic Horkheimer and Adorno were suggesting their recipe on the causes and consequences of the so-called eclipse of reason, publishing *Dialektik der Aufklärung*[14] before returning to Germany in 1950 and re-establishing the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, and Ernst Cassirer was denouncing what he referred to as the myth of the state[15]; in Germany, intellectuals such as Alfred Döblin were attributing the responsibility for the German tragedy to utopianism, Franz Borkenau was attacking Isaac Deutscher's pro-Stalinist positions, and Karl Löwith, who after 1949 was in Heidelberg, was imposing his own reflections on the transformation of secularized redemption into the mundane philosophy of progress, outlining utopia as the lay incarnation of salvation[16]. In other words,

[11] L. Scuccimarra, *La 'Begriffsgeschichte' e le sue radici intellettuali*, in «Storica», 10, 1998, pp. 7-99; L. Scuccimarra, *Uscire dal moderno. Storia dei concetti e mutamento epocale*, in «Storica» 32, 2005, pp. 109-134.

[12] F. Meinecke, *Die Deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, Wiesbaden 1946.

[13] K. Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, Heidelberg 1946.

[14] T. Adorno - M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: philosophische Fragmente*, Amsterdam 1947.

[15] E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven CT - London 1946.

[16] J.A. Pardos, *Introduction* to the Spanish edition of R. Koselleck, *Crítica y crisis. Un estudio sobre la patogénesis del mundo burgués*, Madrid 2007. For a general

what was taking place was a broad civil discussion of the «burden of our times» (which is after all the title of the first 1951 English edition of Hannah Arendt's book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)[17].

Even *Kritik und Krise* is, as we know, a fierce and alarmed denunciation of the rise of a «new form of barbarism», of the tragic side of progress, the self-destruction of Enlightenment which becomes a blindly pragmatic form of thinking, a positivist degeneration, and in the end a revisiting of the Schmittian theme (that will be later developed by another of Schmitt's pupils, Roman Schnur) of the European civil war[18]. In the preface to the second edition, in 1969, Koselleck acknowledges how his own reflection is centered on how the inability of the Enlightenment to recognize its political limitations leads to a utopian way of thinking and, as a consequence of opposed philosophies of history, opens the way for civil war.

As he states quite clearly in the subtitle (*Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*), Koselleck's thesis is that the *critique*, the rise of a utopian philosophy of history, is the cause of the revolutionary «crisis», and consequently stands as the root of the ills of the contemporary world. At the time this meant not just Europe and Germany divided into two blocks, like Berlin, by a wall, but also the creeping civil war hidden beneath the so-called Cold War, which Schmitt for this reason used to refer to as the «cold civil war» (referring to the denazification and the search for scapegoats reported in 1950 in *Ex captivitate salus*)[19].

For Koselleck the bourgeois philosophy of history developed during the successful rise of the concept of *critique*, which took place at the time of absolutism. Initially, artistic and literary criticism taking place within a highly developed intellectual community came to acknowledge the contrast between ancient and modern, thus developing a historical conception, which separated past and present. Subsequently, the eschatology

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overview, see S. BROCKMANN, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour*, Rochester NY 2009.

[17]   H. ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. The Burden of our Times*, London 1951.

[18]   R. SCHNUR, *Revolution und Weltbürgerkrieg*, Berlin 1983. But see also J. FREUND, *Guerre civile et absolutisme. Contribution historique à une sociologie de la politique*, in «Archives Européennes de Sociologie», 9, 1968, pp. 307-322.

[19]   C. SCHMITT, *Ex captivitate salus: Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945-47*, Köln 1950.

(and here the reference is clearly to Karl Löwith) was transposed into a progressive view of history. The plan for divine salvation, which up to then had been inscrutable, was transfigured, mutating into the future plans, both morally right and reasonable, of the new bourgeois elite.

Following in Schmitt's footsteps, but more in general within the framework of a vision that had become entrenched in the German historiography of the thirties and which clearly granted pride of place to the theories of Otto Brunner, the absolutist French state, the archetype of the modern state, having triumphed over the divisions produced by the wars of religion, subsequently took on a Hobbes-like absolute sovereignty and responsibility, which required and presupposed an unbridled domination over its subjects: «Only if all subjects were equally under the ruler's thumb could he assume sole responsibility for peace and order»[20]. It should be highlighted here how this intrusion of absolute power is responsible for leading to the separation between interior and exterior. Once more in line with Hobbes: «A prudent man withdraws into the secret chambers of his heart, where he remains his own judge, but external actions are to be submitted to the ruler's judgment and jurisdiction»[21]. What's more, Absolutism, by disintegrating the traditional class structure, created individuals as subjects, a necessary prerequisite of the bourgeois state.

The bourgeois intelligentsia was born in this internal private space to which the state had relegated its subjects. From this interior, moral context, this space of the *Anderssein,* the being otherwise, private persons gradually moved towards the external space, which is entirely political: and each step towards the light, Koselleck writes, is an act of enlightenment in contrast to the political secrecy of the *arcana imperii.* The private internal space spreads out until it becomes a public space in the «republic of letters» and in the Masonic lodges, where the principle of equality takes root, a phase to which Koselleck, who revalues Augustin Cochin before Furet, dedicates many important pages. From the realm of criticism and that of the Masonic brotherhoods rise impulses, which corrode the absolutist system, thus, managing to overcome Hobbes's internal/external dichotomy. The omnipotent critique now encompasses

[20] R. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis,* p. 18.

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 19.

politics without relinquishing its rational-moral pretensions, which guarantee it the privilege of truth.

Yet during this unmasking process the critique gradually loses sight of its object, it becomes self-referential and blind. By self-proclaiming itself a supremely public entity, in the name of the supremacy of morality over political decision-making, it sets the stage for the revolution. The conscience is now subordinate to the political imperative, and the political decision becomes a verdict in a moral trial. A new state order is being sought, as happens in Rousseau, the outcome is a permanent revolution and the total state. The long-wished-for domination to which public opinion aspired becomes ideology, the construction of a dominant position. An ideological domination which can no longer be limited to the external space but must penetrate the internal space of individuals and dominate the site of conscience. Utopia as an inheritance of Enlightenment and the answer to absolutism thus inaugurates the advent of modernity.

Caught between the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, absolutism represents a decisive turning point. It has been recently demonstrated that the publication of Tocqueville's works between 1951 and 1953 was an important influence for Koselleck, and that at the beginning of the third part of Tocqueville's *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution* there is a chapter whose title announces what will be the central theme of Koselleck's reconstruction: «How towards the middle of the 18th century the men of letters became the main political personalities in the country and the consequences of this transformation»[22]. Nevertheless, beyond Tocqueville's influence, at the heart of the *Kritik und Krise* analysis lies the Schmittian thesis (which Roman Schnur would describe in more formal terms in *Individualismus und Absolutismus*)[23] of the absolutist foundation of bourgeois individualism. The actual syntagm of *Kritik und Krise* had already been used in Schmitt's own essays from 1949, who in 1950 had kicked off, with *Der Nomos der Erder*, a thought process that he would complete in 1963 with *Theorie des Partisianen*. But even more significantly, Schmitt had already set up the interior-exterior dialectic in his famous *Der Leviathan in der*

[22] J.A. PARDOS, *Introducción*, p. 14.

[23] R. SCHNUR, *Individualismus und Absolutismus. Zur politischen Theorie von Thomas Hobbes (1600-1640)*, Berlin 1963.

Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes in 1938[24]. In short, it can be said that at the heart of Koselleck's plot interpretation is an elaboration of a Schmittian theme that had become dominant in German culture: the definition of modernity as a universe based on the forced separation of morals and politics performed by the absolute state.

3. *A communication utopia*

Habermas has acknowledged his debt to *Kritik und Krise* in his text, yet has generally speaking played down its importance: in footnote 2 of Chapter 4 he writes that he owes many indications to Koselleck's excellent research. Now there is no doubt that Habermas was responding to other and new stimuli that had grown in importance during the late fifties. In the nineties, Habermas himself underscored the influence on his work that stemmed from the broad debate on the essence and value of the *Wohlfahrtsstaat* that was taking place at the time within German legal science circles, and from his desire to support the socially progressive interpretation of the German constitution developed by Wolfgang Abendroth, which opposed the thesis of more conservative jurists such as Ernst Forsthoff. From this point of view, Habermas's work should be seen as «an attempt ... to bring back to light the participatory and critical-rational constellation present ever since the origins of the legal framework of the parliamentary state, through the category of the 'Öffentlichkeit'»[25]. Yet the evolutionary process that leads to the success of the new bourgeois argumentation unerringly brings us back to the framework that Koselleck devised along Schmittian lines. The two evolutionary movements, which at the socio-historical level establish the premises for the new form of bourgeois argumentation are, it must be said, on the one hand the birth of the cultural industry (as a consequence of capitalist processes being extended to culture) and on the other the development of a new private and emotional sensibility, a new family intimacy. However, they also fall within the frame of a monopolization of the political discourse on behalf of the absolute state not unlike that suggested in *Kritik und Krise*.

[24] F. BENIGNO - L. SCUCCIMARRA (eds), *Il governo dell'emergenza: poteri straordinari e di guerra in Europa tra XVI e XX secolo*, Roma 2007.

[25] L. SCUCCIMARRA, *La trasparenza del politico. Habermas e il paradigma della sfera pubblica*, in «Giornale di Storia Costituzionale», 6, 2003, pp. 33-60, here p. 43.

And after all, it is only in this context that Habermas detects the two-faced character of a new individual who is both *bourgeois* and *homme,* embodying, like a new Janus, the classic representation of the contradictions of the age: the theoretically universal and liberating aspirations produced by the consistent application of the values of rationality juxtaposed to the concrete conservation of class interests, the latter being delimited by an affiliation that was both cultural and proprietary. The terrain on which the new bourgeois public sphere engages in its dress rehearsals is therefore, even for Habermas, the field of cultural, literary, and artistic criticism, which becomes the training ground for a public debate of ideas, which germinates, is nourished, and gradually expands. If, at the beginning, the public sphere is born from the bourgeois strata of society as a broadening and at the same time a fulfillment of the intimate family sphere, it subsequently expands to include a literary debate that does not set itself precise boundaries and in actual fact tends to confront political issues and thus contrast absolutism. This literary pre-figuration of a public sphere with political aims carries considerable weight in Habermas's argument in that once it is extended to more general public issues the discussion would have maintained that sense of rational selection of the arguments between actors with the same culture and equal levels of reasoning, which Habermas considers the most fundamental of the goals achieved. At the end of this process, one would therefore be left with an overturning of the principle of absolute power formulated by Hobbes: «veritas non auctoritas facit legem». Habermas is very clear on this point: historically the polemical claim that this kind of rationality is based on the power of justice and the rationale of the law has developed in conjunction with the public debate among private persons: private people insofar as they are an audience carry out their political apprenticeship in a literary republic which unites learned men as equals and prepares them to consider the best argument as decisive, according to a moralistic form of rationality which aspires to make reason and justice coincide. So, in the end, «a political consciousness developed in the public sphere of civil society which, in opposition to absolute sovereignty, articulated the concept of and demand for general and abstract laws and which ultimately came to assert itself (i.e. public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law»[26]. In short, in order to generate a «public sphere with political

[26] J. HABERMAS, *Structural Transformation,* p. 54.

functions» one must have a space where men learn to verify their own subjectivity through communication using materials stemming from their own intimate sphere. This is a utopia of communicative rationalization, imagined as a dissolution of power structuring, which will later accompany Habermas in his subsequent works right through to the *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*.

4. A «deformed» Ancien Régime

Habermas's thesis has been widely debated both on theoretical and philosophical grounds and on concrete historical ones, which led to the coining of the term «the Habermas of historians»[27]. From this latter perspective, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the presence in Habermas's text of an excess of economic reductionism and Marxist schematism, the failure to consider the presence of alternative public spheres, either connected to popular criticism or open to gender dimensions, the abstract nature of the constitution of a bourgeois universe, which could be more realistically seen as being composed of *gentry*, the underestimation of religious dynamics, the absence of the dimension of repression and exclusion, and so on. The fact of having considered the public sphere as stemming from a Literary Republic has also raised quite a few eyebrows. It should be noted (and it has) how Habermas's tendency to identify the literary space with the bourgeois space is somewhat strained; just as the Freemasonry, rather than being an association of private subjects, often included the rulers in its lodges and was often organized by rulers themselves in order that it should serve their policies. Other areas that have led to misgivings involve the style of the critical discussion that Habermas describes, which is too idealized compared to the reality of a universe of conflicts which were neither innocent nor disinterested, and the same can be said of the outcome of public controversies, which rather than being decided by the success of the best argument, often resulted in the triumph of the most suitable or convenient vision[28]. And yet, the reason why, despite

[27] H. MAH, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians*, in «The Journal of Modern History», 72, 2000, 1, pp. 153-182.

[28] F. WAQUET, *La République des Lettres: un univers de conflits*, in B. BARBICHE - J.-P. POUSSOU - A. TALLON (eds), *Pouvoirs, contestations et comportements danns l'Europe moderne. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Yves-Marie Bercé*, Paris 2005, pp. 829-840.

the rising level of criticism, Habermas has never abandoned his original approach lies in the fact that in the organization of his discourse the idea of the creation of a universal community on behalf of likeminded thinkers was and has remained fundamental: as one can well see in the final part of the book where Habermas evokes the ideal of a universal critical public sphere, free of all bourgeois ambiguity between the human and the bourgeois-proprietary aspect, as a solution for the future[29].

From this point of view, his description of an Ancien Régime featuring a «representative public sphere» of a ceremonial nature, which could be considered as the exclusive playground of the aristocratic classes, a view which now seems fairly debatable, is essential for Habermas in order to accentuate the contrast with his strongly idealistic bourgeois public sphere. Over the last half century, the acquisitions of historical research have swept away this scheme of things and today it is no longer possible to imagine a state being formed in the same way as was postulated at the beginning of the sixties, that is to say by applying what were essentially late-nineteenth-century models, which tended to emphasize the development of the bureaucratic apparatus as the backbone of centralization, the true core of the modernization processes. It has gradually emerged how political participation, along with the *droit de conseil*, was not an exclusive prerogative of the aristocracy[30] during the Ancien Régime. In various ways and forms—from petition to supplication—European subjects had maintained a right to appeal to a sovereign who was viewed as a restorer, that is to say someone capable of righting wrongs and curing social malaise[31]. Moreover, seasons that

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[29] G. CIVILE, *Per una storia sociale dell'opinione pubblica: osservazioni a proposito della tarda età liberale*, in «Quaderni storici», 35, 2000, 14, pp. 469-504.

[30] B. DOOLEY - S.A. BARON (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, London 2001.

[31] See for instance the three volumes edited by C. NUBOLA and A. WÜRGLER and produced by the Istituto storico italo-germanico di Trento on «Petizioni, 'gravamina' e suppliche in età moderna in Europa (secoli XV-XIX)»: *Suppliche e «gravamina». Politica, amministrazione, giusticzia in Europa (secoli XVI-XVIII),* (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico. Quaderni, 59) Bologna 2002; *Forme della comunicazione politica in Europa nei secoli XV-XVIII. Suppliche, gravamina, lettere / Formen der politischen Kommunikation in Europa vom 15.bis 18. Jahrhundert. Bitten, Beschwerden, Briefe* (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Contributi/Beiträge, 14), Bologna - Berlin 2004; *Ballare col nemico? Reazioni all'espansione francese in Europa tra entusiasmo e resistenza (1792-1815) / Mit dem Feind tanzen? Reaktionen auf die französische Expansion*

saw the intense participation of social groups in the fate of the community such as the one featuring the Spanish *arbitristas* are difficult to explain as a sign of a renewed interest in the public management of the economy produced by the development of capitalism. Above all, Habermas steers well clear of going into any depth on a very crucial issue on which the question of the lawfulness of state action hinged: the tax issue. Whether the *princeps* could claim the total availability of his subjects' life and goods was a crucial issue, which in Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries separated the followers of the so-called absolute authority (which was nevertheless seen as tyrannical) and those who believed that the monarch should be bound by regulations and restrictions.

Subsequent developments in political historiography have broadened the conception of representation even further. Habermas tends to let those represented, the subjects of the institutional power, coincide with the bourgeoisie, which we now know not to be true, and that in Ancien Régime society representation was not completely monopolized by a single class[32]. Within the concept of a tiered society after the *oratores* and the *bellatores* there was a place—albeit a subordinate one—even for the *laboratories*. This is testified by the composition of the European parliaments with their third chambers, their Houses of commons, and so on. Moreover, one has to take into account the influence of a seminal book such as *The King's Two Bodies* by Ernst Kantorowicz, which has greatly complicated our conception of representation, influencing even the discovery of the importance in the contemporary age of what we might term the public presentation of power[33].

It should also be pointed out that the idea we had of the system of decision making that operated during these so-called absolute monarchies, which historiography has been busy reconstructing over the past thirty years, is much more complex than the traditional one, modeled on the structure of the so-called «golden cage», with a clear reference to Louis XIV's court in Versailles. We now know much more than we

[32] But see now B. BORELLO (ed.), *Pubblico e pubblici di Antico regime*, Pisa 2009.

[33] E. KANTOROWICZ, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton NJ 1957.

did in the past about how the construction of a firmament with a single shining sun was much more of a propagandistic construction than the actual reality. We now recognize how the theoretical prescriptions of the absolutist teachings were set apart from the tangible existence of a court as a center of influence and interests, clienteles, and factions; and we are also aware of how the court operated as a large compensation chamber, with a positively osmotic purpose, a «point of contact» to use the words of Geoffrey Elton[34].

A last indication can also be useful to complete the picture of what we might term the necessary distortion of the Ancien Régime picture operated by Habermas in order to bring to the fore what he considered to be the distinctive features of the bourgeois public sphere. This is the claim that for a certain time the only public opinion belonged to the Versailles court while later on, during the course of the eighteenth century, Paris with its sitting rooms, cafés, and its places for socializing was to replace the court in this role.

This is clearly a simplification[35]. In the first place, Versailles had never been the only location of French public opinion. The fact that the process of political decision-making was limited to a restricted elite does not mean that this elite was unaware of what the people thought, of their broad or prevalent point of view. The people were considered a dumb, amorphous, and maneuverable entity, which could be tamed like a horse and was generally fickle and voluble like the feminine soul[36]. Yet, at the same time, the people had to be listened to, one had to sense their moods and passions, voiced in the *rumeurs*, in the lampoons on the boards, in the satires, fearsome clues of sudden changes, capable of breaking into storms[37]. Secondarily, the outline of an eighteenth-century Paris as a place of culture that ousts Versailles, which is from

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[34] G.R. ELTON, *Tudor Government: the Points of Contact. III. The Court*, in «Transactions of the Royal Historical Society», 26, 1976, pp. 211-228.

[35] But see the very different perspective offered by R. SENNETT, *The Fall of Public Man*, Cambridge 1976.

[36] S. LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du peuple et savoir du gouvernement de Machiavel aux Lumières*, Rennes 2006; on which F. BENIGNO, *Nascita dell'opinione pubblica*, in «Storica», 37, 2007, pp. 175-182.

[37] A.I. CARRASCO MANCHADO, *El rumor político. Apuntes sobre la opinión pública en la Castilla del siglo XV*, in «Cuadernos de Historia de España», 80, 2006, pp. 65-90.

then on only interested in *politique d'abord* or politics above all else, is manifestly false: the great public debates of the second half of the eighteenth century in France, the ones on the Maupou affair, on the war, on taxation, on Jansenism, on grain commerce, on the *farines* crisis, on the summons for the state of the nation, and—finally—on the doubling of the Third Estate do not juxtapose the city and the court but instead permeate both, dividing them into groups and factions, which meet and clash in ministerial corridors just as they do in the salons, the Masonic lodges, and the *cabales* of the courtesans.

In brief, the description of Ancient Régime society afforded by Habermas is, in light of what historiography is discovering, completely unrealistic today: yet it played a fundamental role in his intellectual construct: it acted as a the backdrop against which Habermas could silhouette the formation of the bourgeois public sphere by contrast.

5. *The possible pluralism*

The decisive point here is, however, another one: the absolutist germination of privacy incites Habermas, via Koselleck, to outline a path for the formation of the public sphere that revolves around certain specific spaces (the coffeehouses and the salons, the Masonic lodges and the academies) and certain equally well-defined periods (England during the first half of the eighteenth century, France during the second half of that century, Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century). Habermas thus performs a selection, which has subsequently taken root as a sort of *vulgata*. As has been pointed out, this vision leaves certain spaces out of the picture (such as the mobilization in squares, the demonstrations, the political associations), and the same is true of certain periods (the long Dutch revolt against Spain, the two English revolutions, the French revolution, the national revolutions of the nineteenth century) where the fundamental nature of the public sphere revolves around protest, politics, and criticism. I think that in this perspective Habermas's handling of Chartism assumes quite considerable significance, seeing as it is considered not as the peak of the public debate but rather as the moment where the bourgeois public sphere begins to weaken once social powers take on public functions and private functions are performed by the public powers. In short, the use that Habermas makes of the internal/external scheme of things

forces him—given the ideological purpose of the description of a public sphere which was originally well separated and distinct from the state and was rationally led—to choose those specific spaces and those particular times.

One cannot help but wonder if the monistic option that clearly underlies this use was unavoidable and whether there were not, at the same time, any alternative options available. In the first place, it should be remembered that at the time Habermas was writing, the pluralist experience was broadly accepted, even though it was then on the wane. Thinkers such as Harold Laski, George D.H. Cole, and John Neville Figgis had in various ways, between the thirties and forties, tried to construct what perhaps may not have been a truly pluralist theory of the state, yet what can certainly be viewed as an alternative to monist statalism; by processing materials and suggestions provided by historians and jurists such as Otto von Gierke and Friedrick William Maitland, moving in close conjunction with the fabianist and guild socialist schools of thought, these scholars, often working in an unsystematic and theoretically weak fashion, had nevertheless tried to describe democracy as a stable and constitutionalized form of political competition[38].

Now, if we were referring to a pluralist perspective, for example, the opposition suggested by Habermas between a pre-modern period dominated by an eminently representative dimension of the political discourse and a modern period centered around the constitution of a 'public body' that could ideally be reunited in an unrestricted fashion would seem to be historically fairly doubtful and more importantly not compulsory. As an alternative to «communicatively generated rationality», it has been recently suggested to rethink «corporate citizenship» and the methods of incorporation, meaning the legalization of groups through official certifications and the inherent processes of political apprenticeship; that is to say that complex universe of bodies and *personae fictae*, of ideal conversations inspired by classical models and institutions, modeled on Middle Ages invented by the very same European Ancient Régime, but that extended even beyond the French Revolution[39].

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[38] P.Q. HIRST (ed.), *The Pluralist Theory of the State. Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis, and H.J. Laski*, New York 1989.

[39] P. WITHINGTON, *Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship and State Formation in Early Modern England*, in «The American Historical Review», 112, 2007, 4, pp. 1016-1038.

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It is interesting how Habermas also completely ignores another, very different point of view, which also originated in the twenties: that suggested by the classic text *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippman (1922), which, in the words of Robert Peel, investigates «that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy and newspaper paragraphs which is called public opinion»[40]. Far from being rationally ordered, as it was for Habermas, public opinion is viewed here as opaque, distorted, streaked with misunderstandings and prejudice, molded out of internalized stereotypes, and more than anything manipulated. The world to which it essentially refers is the political one, it is not the real world but a world that is «out of reach, out of sight, out of hand. It has to be explored, reported and imagined». Moreover, the public does not exist, it is an abstraction, a «phantom public» and its incarnation—the omni-competent citizen capable of having his/her own idea on everything—should be viewed as imaginary. Average people cannot be rationally informed of many important things that take place. They shape their ideas not on the basis of «certain knowledge», but in an indirect way, through images they create or that are created for them. The understanding that they have of the facts depends on many things: on the way they are presented, on their emotional context, and, particularly, on prejudice. And there again, the citizen (like the historian) conceives of the relationship with the world through allegory, that technique which enables abstract concepts to be personalized such as «social movements, economic forces, national interests, public opinion»; and they feel and identify with them through symbols that manage to catalyze emotions and cause them to congregate around an authoritative image and/or person. Finally, and most significantly, reality—a surfeit of hard-to-grasp facts—is not transparent, it is mediated: the world and what there is to be seen in it is categorized differently by each different culture and the different stereotypes that belong to it, so that they become re-cognizable. This gives rise to the famous statement: «We do not first see then define, we define first then see»[41].

From Lippmann onwards, plenty of water has flowen under the bridge and public opinion has not only become an element of politi-

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[40] W. LIPPMANN, *Public Opinion*, New York 1922; I quote from the Free Press edition, New York 1997, p. 127.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

cal rhetoric but also a necessary rhetorical trimming of a technique of social investigation, the opinion poll. In a world that has become increasingly complex, only opinion polls seem capable of investigating the contemporary mumblings of the silent crowds, their anxieties, and their passions. Therefore, the «powerful men» of today find themselves in a position relative to their audience that is in many ways similar to that of the «greats» of the Ancient Régime who were particularly attentive to the unrest in the souls of their peoples: old and new political authorities believing that the people (the public) were a manipulable entity. Today's opinion polls (as was the case with certain relations of yesteryear) therefore appear two-faced: besides an informative role, they also perform another one that can be even more important, a performative role, where they support the positions of the client and earn, by outlining and prefiguring it, the consent of public opinion[42].

This point of view first voiced by Lippman, in addition to being one of the fundamental texts for the discussion of the concept of public opinion, was to be further investigated already in the thirties by theorists of political symbolism such as Harold Lasswell in his research into the function of symbols in the construction of power, and by the 'constructivist' school of Nelson Goodman for whom the world was linguistically construed. This led to the general thesis that would eventually have an even greater success in another context, that language contains a reifying force 'through' which its arguments actually take the shape of true realities. According to this school of thought (and right on through to Murray Edelman), people only see after having perceived. In the metaphorical political world, perceptions are shaped by a mythical construction of time, they are carried out by past selections and future projections in the service of the interests of the present[43].

In short, around the themes of relations between internal and external and between privacy and politics, what could be defined as the American school of political symbolism introduces[44] a perspective for the analysis

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[42] G. BUSINO, *Alla ricerca d'una teoria dell'opinione pubblica*, in «Giornale di storia costituzionale», 6, 2003, pp. 17-33.

[43] F. BENIGNO - L. SCUCCIMARRA (eds), *Simboli della politica*, Roma 2010.

[44] This happened way before the seed sown by Georges Herbert Mead would produce the broad harvest of symbolic interactionism (but it should also be noted that *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by E. GOFFMAN was published in 1959), before

of the relationship between the objectivity of power and the subjectivity of politics, which lies completely outside the perspective in which the category of «Öffentlichkeit» had already been forged.

6. Conclusions: opposed rhetorics

Contributions such as these have made it possible to consider the public sphere as a field of discussion on all that is public (the public good, the public thing, public affairs) orchestrated not so much by individuals but by ideal and material forces, by old and new social identities, by pressure groups, by economic potentates, by corporations and associations with the most disparate interests: the mirror, to a certain extent, of democracy. And this has led one to imagine public opinion not so much as an almost metaphysical entity (an «oversoul», as Lippmann puts it), but more as a rhetoric that has gradually staked its claim; a rhetoric designed to legitimize sovereignty and therefore the actions of authority, which at a certain point—long before the modern age and consequently the affirmation/opposition of the theory of absolute sovereignty—could no longer rest its case entirely on the theory of the divine rights of kings and was forced to come up with new justifications of a more rational nature. In other words, the language of power and authority must now express itself less in theological-political terms and more in terms of utilitarian political rationality.

But this does not mean that the political decision must from some point onwards be submitted, as Habermas suggests, for approval to the «court of public opinion», but rather, that there is a politically relevant arena where it has to be justified differently and differently contested[45]. At a closer look, it also has to be said that the image of the court would seem to refer to a conception of public opinion as a legal verification which, it has rightly been pointed out, is very French: French parliaments were after all required to examine and render implementable the regal edicts in the name of the realms' fundamental laws and therefore,

the appearance of Alfred Schultz's ethnomethodology, before the birth of Victor Turner and Max Gluckman's ritualist anthropology, and clearly before Clifford Geertz's critical hermeneutics.

[45]   G.A. HAUSER, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*, Columbia SC 1999.

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implicitly, in the name of the common good. There again, the concept of public opinion in eighteenth-century France owed much to the English example and in fact was largely influenced by the widespread Anglomania of the times. As is well known, the idea that the voice of the people as opposed to that of the king and of the parliament was legitimately expressed through public opinion had after all been promoted ever since the '60s in newspapers such as «The Craftsman» and by the Tory opposition led by major figures of the political arena such as Bolingbroke[46]. But the very notion itself, when viewed in a different context, produces different results. The «French style» of public opinion, the public opinion seen as a an auditing court, set itself apart from the «English style» of public opinion, which was an expression of the country, of the virtuous country compared to a corrupt court, a traditional theme of *Whig* propaganda[47]. These are different political rhetorics which take hold in particular circumstances and then remain in the system and are transformed, altered, influenced, and modified. And this very juxtaposition of 'court' and 'country', for example, is what after all leads to the idea of the separation between the state and civil society. An idea that is not surprising was developed by the Scottish Enlightenment on the basis of the Ciceronian concept of *societas civilis* and then reviewed in a different light by Hegel: an idea that gained new terrain in the wake of World War II and has subsequently become, since 1989, a kind of mantra of contemporary politology. The concept itself of «civil society», much in the way of that of public opinion, contains an intrinsic contesting force, which questions the representational value or even the legitimacy of existing powers by referring, either implicitly or explicitly, to an alternative source of sovereignty, the sovereignty of the people. This is after all the same appeal to the people that during the French Revolution would brand the tormented life of the legislative assemblies, who were constantly under the threat of the Damoclean sword represented by the mob; but perhaps even more so in the France of the Restoration where the appeal to public opinion was, more or less covertly, clearly an appeal to the people, at

[46] G. SANNA, *Il «Craftsman». Giornalismo e cultura politica nell'Inghilterra del Settecento*, Milano 2006.

[47] E. TORTAROLO, *'Opinion publique' tra antico regime e rivoluzione francese. Contributo a un vocabolario storico della politica settecentesca*, in «Rivista Storica Italiana», 102, 1990, pp. 5-23.

a time when the revolution of the popular *journées* was reiterated and seemed to be proven true time and again, prefiguring the ghost of an ongoing revolution.

Reference to public opinion is therefore equivalent to appealing to the people, contesting the very basis of the constituent authority, outlining another possible sovereignty. Today we no longer believe in an idealized image of the public sphere where what is private by becoming public justifies, in an ideal arena, the democratic system, but we prefer to think of a parallel arena to the political and institutional one, linked to and interrelated with it, where economic, social, and political forces «play politics by other means». Consequently, we can also look back on the history of the formation of the public sphere, including the rhetorical description of public opinion, as a matter that encompasses and does not eradicate the major instances of collective debate on the management of all things public. For this reason its origins should not be sought in private, esoteric, and academic discussions, or in scientific or literary disputes, but rather in the debates, confrontations, and clashes on the nature and actions of government[48]; and less in the privacy of bourgeois intimacy, Masonic secrecy, the Republics of letters, a privacy conceived as juxtaposed to the absolutism of politics, and more on the eminently political ground of discussions over sovereignty, its rights and its limitations.

[48] J.A. GUIDRY - M.Q. SAWYER, *Contentious Pluralism. The Public Sphere and Democracy*, in «Perspectives on Politics», 1, 2003, pp. 189-273.

The Richness of History and the Multiplicity of Experiences in Early Modern Societies

The Self-Description of «Alteuropa» by Luhmann

by *Angela De Benedictis*

1. *Introduction*

The conference's convener Massimo Rospocher invited all participants to follow a working hypothesis, which gives rise to the following question: do theoretical models exist as an alternative to the Habermasian paradigm of the «bourgeois public sphere»?

From my point of view, the answer is that Niklas Luhmann has certainly developed a theoretical model that serves as an alternative to Habermas. His theory evolved in a constant and sometimes direct confrontation with Habermas, as is well known[1]. But what makes up this theoretical, alternative model?

Translation by Joy Avery

It was as a result of my specific research experience that I, as a historian and not a theoretician, was forced to investigate Niklas Luhmann. And by research experience, I mean the research institutes that I visited personally, including the Max-Planck-Institut for European Legal History in Frankfurt on the Main, which looked to Luhmann as a theoretical reference point between the late 1980s and a few years ago. Niklas Luhmann is then, in a certain way, the «absent guest» whose presence is still felt in a research project in which I have been involved for approximately ten years. This project is the basis of the international doctorate of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft «Politische Kommunikation von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert», in collaboration with the universities of Frankfurt, Innsbruck, Bologna, Pavia, and Trento.

[1]   J. HABERMAS - N. LUHMANN, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie. Was leistet die Systemforschung?*, Frankfurt a.M. 1971, was considered an epochal debate and immediately gave rise to a series of interpretative discussions, of which the first are to be found in F. MACIEJEWSK (ed.), *Beiträge zur Habermas-Luhmann-Diskussion*, vols 1-2, Frankfurt a.M. 1973-1974. In particular, on 'public opinion' and 'public space', N. LUHMANN, *Die Politik der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002, pp. 274-318. A recent work by Pierre Guibentif is a contribution of enormous interest, also for historians,

Simplifying it to the extreme, Luhmann disagrees with the «grand Habermasian narrative» and with his construction of the «public sphere»[2]. In substance, the problems are similar, but the method used to tackle them is different.

Although Habermas has been a point of reference in historiographical discussions even of the early modern era in Italy, the same cannot be said of Luhmann, despite the fact that a number of his books have been translated, some dating back to the early 1970s. Awareness of Luhmann has always been limited to the fields of sociology (in broad terms), law, history of political doctrines, and political philosophy[3], perhaps as a result of the fact that none of his titles, in contrast to Habermas's, could immediately be identified as being on a historiographical topic[4].

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on the debate between Habermas and Luhmann, but also about other great contemporaneous intellectuals, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieau: P. GUIBENTIF, *Foucault, Luhmann, Habermas, Bourdieau. Une génération repense le droit*, Paris 2010.

[2] The papers by both Andreas Gestrich and Franco Benigno in this volume emphasize the «great Habermasian narrative».

[3] Here I only quote J. HABERMAS - N. LUHMANN, *Teoria della società o tecnologia sociale. Che cosa offre la ricerca del sistema sociale?*, Milano 1973; D. ZOLO, *Introduzione. Complessità, potere, democrazia*, in N. LUHMANN, *Potere e complessità sociale*, Milano 1979, pp. IX-XXX; D. ZOLO, *Introduzione. Funzione, senso, complessità. I presupposti epistemologici del funzionalismo sistemico*, in N. LUHMANN, *Illuminismo sociologico*, Milano 1983, pp. XIII-XXXV; G. MARRAMAO, *Introduzione*, in N. LUHMANN, *Come è possibile l'ordine sociale*, Roma - Bari 1985, pp. VII-XXVII, further developed in *La sovranità dissolta. A confronto con N. Luhmann*, in G. MARRAMAO, *Dopo il Leviatano. Individuo e comunità*, Torino 2000, pp. 351-366; B. GIACOMINI, *La prospettiva funzionalistica: potere e sistema politico in Niklas Luhmann*, in G. DUSO (ed.), *Il potere. Per la storia della filosofia politica moderna*, Roma 1999, pp. 453-468; G. PALOMBELLA - L. PANNARALE, *Introduzione all'edizione italiana*, in N. LUHMANN, *I diritti fondamentali come istituzione*, Bari 2002, pp. 5-35; R. DE GIORGI, *Il mondo come sistema complesso*, in P. BARCELLONA - R. DE GIORGI - S. NATOLI (eds), *Fine della storia e mondo come sistema. Tesi sulla post-modernità*, Bari 2003, pp. 37-69; P. BARCELLONA, *La teoria dei sistemi e il paradigma della modernità*, in P. BARCELLONA - R. DE GIORGI - S. NATOLI, *Fine della storia e mondo come sistema. Tesi sulla post-modernità*, Bari 2003, pp. 71-119; M. RICCIARDI, *La dissolvenza dell'individuale. Luhmann e la semantica storico-sociale*, in «Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine», 41, 2009, pp. 49-65; M. RICCIARDI, *La società come ordine. Storia e teoria dei concetti politici e sociali*, Macerata 2010, pp. 223-246.

[4] The paper by Andreas Gestrich was concerned with the use of Luhmann in German historiography that is cross-referenced. Here I only quote the miscellaneous volume F. BECKER (ed.), *Geschichte und Systemtheorie. Exemplarische Fallstudien*, Frankfurt a.M. et al. 2004 (most importantly F. BECKER, *Einleitung: Geschichte und Systemtheorie – ein*

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For this reason, in the course of this essay, I often refer directly to Luhmann's own words (especially given the notable complexity of his arguments and the consequent difficulty in synthesizing them).

The aim is, at least at an introductory level, to demonstrate what is not commonly known to early modern historians: how the reflections of one of the twentieth century's greatest thinkers on theories of society consistently tackled both the problem of the relevance of history for his own theories (2), and, more importantly, the history that is of interest to us here, namely, that of the early modern period[5] (3). In my role as early modern historian, I will indicate briefly how Luhmann's reflections both indirectly (through the work of other historians) and directly stimulated my recent research (4).

2. Evolution and History

As far back as *Soziologische Aufklärung*[6] Luhmann discusses the problem of how history as a «topic in the history of western thought has had to assert itself against the rationalism of that Enlightenment which we have called 'rationalistic'»[7]. His assessment of this is very clear.

«The epoch to which we owe the notion of Enlightenment and its program had consciously burnt its bridges with history. It wanted to leave things to the past and consider the question closed. The explicit rejection of history and the intention to try to begin again, ex novo, together with the other theoretical assumptions of the commitment to Enlightenment, expresses a rationalism which has freed itself from history. Freedom is understood as a freedom from the constraints of the past, from the cramped spaces and alleyways and their thousand irrationally complex particularities. Equality means the leveling out of differences which are rooted 'only' in history and not in nature or reason»[8].

Annäherungsversuch, pp. 7-28, and R. SCHLÖGL, *Der frühneuzeitliche Hof als Kommunikationsraum. Interaktionstheoretische Perspektiven der Forschung*, pp. 185-225), cross-referenced with the critical review by M.T. FÖGEN, *Mit den Vokabeln der Systemtheorie*, in «Rechtsgeschichte. Zeitschrift des Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte», 7, 2005, pp. 209-211.

[5]   This is a question which, as far as obviously available to Italian readers of Luhmann (see above, no. 3), did not interest them in particular, perhaps because of the different branch of sciences.

[6]   N. LUHMANN, *Soziologische Aufklärung*, vol. 1, Opladen 1970, pp. 96 ff.

[7]   *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[8]   *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

If this is the position of rationalist Enlightenment, Luhmann however, underlines that

«no systemic thought can ignore the fact that the construction of systems requires time and that history is present within systemic structures and is always reactivated as a basis for action»[9].

The theoretical approach equipped to include history is, in truth, that which «allows sociological Enlightenment to go further than rationalistic Enlightenment»[10]. Rationalistic Enlightenment had neither resolved the problem of how to develop sets of information together, nor the problem of social complexity. Sociological Enlightenment has as its objective the rationalization of the problems that increasing social complexity poses to contemporary society. History serves this objective:

«History's function does not derive ... from placing greater value on tradition, or from the particularly binding character of that which makes up history, but only from the fact that a simple action contains a long-term potential too low to be absorbed in the complexity, and because of which the action cannot reject what remains of the sense of the accumulated past ... History lived in common, in the operative web of systematic biographies, reduces complexity more than common rationality»[11].

And it is possible to reduce this complexity through the revival of an evolutionary theory,

«which does not assume any development necessary in a historical or causal sense, but which operates on the concept of advantageous solutions to problems which, once established, alleviate and facilitate human existence to the point of it becoming difficult to reverse»[12].

These assessments of history are from 1970, the year *Soziologische Aufklärung* was published. In the immediately following years, the encounter with the historical semantics of Reinhard Koselleck and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*[13] leads Luhmann to observe and analyze the different

[9]   *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] It is not possible to examine historical semantics and *Begriffsgeschichte* more closely here for reasons of space. However, I would like to remind the reader that the physical and cultural location of the meeting (the Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento/ Italienisch-deutsches historisches Institut in Trient), where the proceedings will be published, was, at least in the last two decades of the 20th century, a public scientific

roles which history plays for historians and sociologists and therefore
also their different working methods. From this point of view, the essay
Evolution und Geschichte (1976) constitutes a very significant stage[14].

«The ways in which historians work are characterized by the fact that they are searching
for new knowledge in the past ... They connect narrative and causal explanation under
the condition of doing justice to the sources. A theory of social evolution cannot and
does not want in any way to compete with these working methods. For the methods of
observation in sociology, and most importantly for the analyses of systems theory, the
causal explanations are so difficult as to make them inadvisable on the level of general
theoretical affirmations. On the other hand, it must be said that sociologists lack the
talent of improvising a narrative ... In the same way, the theory of social evolution
cannot in any way deal with the causal explanation of the course of history, nor with
determined events. Its purpose can only be to provide a theoretical framework for
historical research which, given the right conditions, is capable of narrowing down
the causally relevant reasons»[15].

Luhmann illustrates the problem with an example:

«In historiographical literature and the social sciences, which deal with the peculiarities
[*Sonderwege*] of European history starting with the Middle Ages, i.e. the formation of
modern society, factors have been identified, which concentrate on the distinction of
religion or economy, or construction of the state or law ... When one of these factors
is deemed to prevail over the others, the relevance of the others is recognized and
deemed to be subordinate ... As long as these theories of primacy of the one or other
factor are developed, there will always continue to be ongoing controversies. However,
in terms of methodology, it must be said that if the sources can safely offer numerous
good arguments for such theories, they do not however in any way permit the formula-
tion of the hypothesis of the prevalence of one factor over another»[16].

Just as a theory of social evolution does not operate using causal explana-
tions, neither is it interested in establishing primacy. The causal scheme

is replaced by the hypothesis of circularity and therefore underlines the possibility and probability in the structural tendencies and shifts.

«History exists when socially-relevant events [*Ereignisse*] are observed in consideration of the difference between before and after (meaning these events as interruptions) ... The events which make history can increasingly constitute structural shifts in the system—such as the great political-economic reforms in ancient Greece and Rome, or the announcement of a religious reform which then becomes, retrospectively considered, the revelation of a new religion itself. In every situation, the difference between before and after makes it possible to keep the unity of the differences in mind. These same 'revolutions' in the modern period can thus become history, and be seen as success for man and also as success for ideas»[17].

Maintaining the singularity of the difference between before and after in the horizon of time itself had for a long time been possible, due to the distinction between time (which passes) and eternity. This possibility, which was already in crisis in the seventeenth century, definitively disappeared in the eighteenth. «A new concept of historical time and history»[18] was affirmed. Basing his theory on the chapter «Geschichte» edited by Reinhard Koselleck for the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*[19], Luhmann sees this concept as history which «enters history itself and in every period must be re-written over and over again. The space of history is now too small for what it would like and should do in the present to guarantee its future existence»[20].

3. The learned semantics of «Alteuropa»

Luhmann's evolutionary theory does not hypothesize any necessary development in the historical or causal sense. The history that interests Luhmann therefore cannot be that which explains the development towards the modern world with the ascent of the bourgeoisie. The debate with Jürgen Habermas revolves around this point, which was theorized in the latter's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 573.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 574.

[19] R. KOSELLECK, *Geschichte*, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1975, pp. 593-717.

[20] N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, p. 574-575.

In *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*[21] Luhmann analyzes «the shifts which took place in the conceptual and ideal world which accompany and signal the passage to a modern society»[22] as crucial points of a new sociology of knowledge. The fundamental theory has changed in comparison to the classical sociology of knowledge.

«The imputation of ideas to groups or classes who carry them is substituted by assumptions about systems theory and a much more complicated evolution. In correspondence with this, the assumption that the development towards the modern is connected with the «ascension of the bourgeoisie» is substituted by the theory according to which the question is the passage from a stratified to a functional social differentiation»[23].

And this new thesis requires a «new type of semantics»[24].

By «semantics» Luhmann means «the historical-cultural material» of a given society that

«is given as an extremely complex discovery—with a wider differentiation of fact, with historical superimpositions, with a constant retroaction, with a higher sensibility for nuances, with guiding thoughts and with a repetitive handed-down heritage and with an incalculable potential for innovations, which are introduced individually and which either find an echo or are otherwise ignored»[25].

A sociological theory which could adequately render the complexity must be re-structured: no longer «assertions on a group or supporting strata», but «assertions on the differentiation and evolution of the system»[26].

The concept of history as a linear process comes under fire; according to Luhmann, «... how much violence would one have to do to detail if one wanted to return to the concept of history as a linear process»[27]. This linear process has been conceptualized by historiography with constructs such as «modern nation states» or «bourgeois society»; that is to say with those concepts thanks to which this landmark period on

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[21] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissensoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, 3 vols, Frankfurt a.M 1980 (I use the 1993 edition here).

[22] See *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 7.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the way towards the modern era «created the access to the facts for itself»[28]. The semantic analysis of *Alteuropa*[29] does not allow history to be conceived as a unilinear process, because together with «cultivated» semantics it also restores the semantics of a society on the level of everyday usage. This level is fragmented and «the fragments intersect and are at everyone's disposal»[30]. And in everyday usage «every curse of the galley slaves»[31] counts as well.

The learned semantics of *Alteuropa* are the basis of Luhmann's reflections in all of his *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, be it concerned with «social structure and semantic tradition»[32] or «interaction in the upper classes: transformation of their semantics in the 17th and 18th centuries»[33], «anthropology in the early modern period: technical-theoretical solutions of the problem of the evolution of society»[34], or with «temporalisation of complexity: the semantics of temporal concepts in the modern period»[35]. With Luhmann, it is not a question of second-hand reflections. The «theoretician» uses a substantial variety of sources from the vast range of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century literature on the problems dealt with each time. Luhmann himself explains the reason for this in the preface to his third volume of *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*[36].

[28] *Ibid*, p. 14.

[29] A periodising concept which Luhmann evidently re-examines from *Begriffsgeschichte*.

[30] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 1, p. 19.

[31] *Ibid*. For this reference to Luhmann, M. RICCIARDI, *La dissolvenza dell'individuale*, p. 60, and M. RICCIARDI, *La società come ordine*, pp. 239-240. On Luhmann's semantics see also *ibid.*, pp. 265 ff.

[32] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftliche Struktur und semantische Tradition*, in N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 1, pp. 9-71.

[33] N. LUHMANN, *Interaktion in Oberschichten: Zur Transformation ihrer Semantik im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, in N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 1, pp. 72-161.

[34] N. LUHMANN, *Frühneuzeitliche Anthropologie: Theorietechnische Lösungen für ein Evolutionsproblem der Gesellschaft*, in N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 1, pp. 162-234.

[35] N. LUHMANN, *Temporalisierung von Komplexität: Zur Semantik neuzeitlicher Zeitbegriffe*, in N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 1, pp. 235-300.

[36] *Ibid*.

«The empirical material for this research comes from the printing press, and it could not be otherwise. Without the press, the structural and semantic shift which led from the stratified late mediaeval society to modern society would not have been possible. I have tried to concern myself with a multiplicity of mostly second-rank texts, precisely with the aim of encountering a semantics that is widespread in media terms. Concentrating on top level authors, I would not have been able to see how society communicates on certain topics»[37].

Luhmann was at that time (the preface was written in December 1988) aware that by favoring «second-rank texts» «one departs from what is normally found in secondary literature»[38]. He knows that this could lead him to be criticized by historians in the field of the history of ideas or specific areas «who know the relative periods much better than I do»[39]; nevertheless, it is the theory on which he bases his argument that imposes this type of procedure: «a theory, which explains that it is possible to communicate only within a society and that the figure of the 'author' is nothing other than an artifact of this communication»[40].

Luhmann's theory is therefore not easily compatible with a traditional history of ideas, or better said, with the history of ideas *tout court*. When Luhmann is interested in comprehending «what is modified in the ambit of the availability of political power, in the course of the transformation of a stratified society to a differentiated society»[41], the field of investigation becomes that of the 'reason of State'[42].

There are numerous authors of the 'reason of State' whom Luhmann studies in order to verify how they contribute to shifting the conception of the practices of power (*Macht*) from domination (*Herrschaft*) to politics in the modern sense; and in order to register how the concept of the «State»—which only at a later point will be established as the bearer of a specific function—should only be formulated in that context[43].

[37] N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 3, p. 9.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[42] N. LUHMANN, *Staat und Staatsräson im Übergang von traditionaler Herrschaft zu moderner Politik*, in N. LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, vol. 3, pp. 65-148.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

In order to tackle the problem, Luhmann reviews and carefully ana-
lyzes the vast range of literature on 'reason of State' (and its immediate
predecessors), using more original editions (Italian, French, Spanish,
and Latin) than those from the 1900s and demonstrating an in-depth
knowledge of the secondary literature (including Italian) on the subject.

Finally, Luhmann dedicated a significant part of his magnum opus,
Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft, published in 1997 (a year before his
death)[44] to the analysis of stratified society, i.e. *Alteuropa*. Europe of
late medieval times and the early modern period is a society where
stratification, as a kind of system of social differentiation, is particularly
evident[45]. On the basis of direct knowledge of an enormous range of
treatises[46], but also due to the up-to-date, and often Italian, second-
ary literature, Luhmann had access to the aristocracy of those times,
and therefore to the tripartition of society. Luhmann makes repeated
reference to the classic study by Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà in
Italia*[47], as well as the other equally classic study by Ottavia Niccoli, *I
sacerdoti, i guerrieri, i contadini*[48].

The wealth of sources and secondary literature is also a distinguishing
aspect of the analysis of the self-descriptions (*Selbstbeschreibungen*) of
the social system «society». Thanks to this, the semantics of *Alteuropa*
is analyzed in its ontological dimension, in terms of the distinction
and relationship between «whole» and «part», between «politics» and

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[44]   N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2.

[45]   *Ibid.*, pp. 678-706.

[46]   To mention only a few examples: BARTOLO DA SASSOFERRATO, *De dignitatibus*, quoted
from the edition *Opera omnia*, Venetiis 1602; CRISTOFORO LANDINO, *De vera nobilitate*
(1440), quoted from the edition Firenze 1970; POGGIUS FLORENTINUS (Giovanni Fran-
cesco Poggio Bracciolini), *De nobilitate* (1440), quoted from *Opera*, Basilea 1538; LEON
BATTISTA ALBERTI, *De re aedificatoria* (1485), quoted from the Latin and Italian edition
Milano 1966; HENRY PECHAM, *The Compleat Gentleman*, Cambridge 1627; NICOLAS
FARET, *L'honeste homme, ou l'art de plaire à la Cour* (1630), quoted from the edition
Paris 1925.

[47]   C. DONATI, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia: Secoli XIV-XVII*, Roma - Bari 1988, in N.
LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 684 fn. (first quotation).

[48]   O. NICCOLI, *I sacerdoti, i guerrieri, i contadini. Storia de un'immagine della società*,
Torino 1979, as above N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 703
fn. (first quotation).

«ethics»; the transmission of knowledge and its organization in schools; and the formation of the concept of culture in relationship with the self-criticism of society[49].

Luhmann evaluates the whole of Greco-Roman-Christian thought as the substance of this semantics, of the «tradition, which has accompanied modern society during its formation»[50]. Inasmuch as this tradition was formed in a society that no longer exists (regarding the means of communication of that society, as well as its forms of differentiation), Luhmann believes that it is a historical-cultural asset that is still able to guide the present era. It is a tradition that cannot die and must always remain accessible[51].

The self-observations and self-descriptions of society (as the semantics of *Alteuropa*) are for Luhmann «always operations of communication, which exist only in the connection between events within the system»[52].

The Luhmannian concept of «communication» is different from Habermas's «communicative action». Luhmann offers an effective presentation and explanation in his well-known essay *What Is Communication?*[53], which is so much more effective as a result of its almost «catechetical» form[54]. Let us look at the most significant passages.

«Communication comes about through a synthesis of three different selections. Like life and consciousness, communication is also an emergent reality, a self-generated state of affairs. It comes about through a synthesis of three different selections, namely the selection of information, the selection of the utterance [*Mitteilung*] of this information, and selective understanding or misunderstanding of this utterance and its information.

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[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 866-957.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 893. But Luhmann is fully aware of the fundamental role of the Jewish tradition, even if he does not take it specifically into consideration: *ibid.*, no. 47.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 894.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 883. On *Selbstbeschreibungen*, see N. Luhmann, *Die Politik der Gesellschaft*, pp. 319-371.

[53] N. LUHMANN, *What Is Communication?*, in N. LUHMANN, *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*, Stanford CA 2002, pp. 155-168.

[54] W. RASCH, *Introduction: The Self-Positing Society*, in N. LUHMANN, *Theories of Distinction*, pp. 1-30, here 30: «a topic conveniently glossed in catechistic fashion ... Here, the basic elements of Luhmann's theory of communication (and therefore of society) are laid out clearly and unambiguously».

None of these components can appear on its own. Only together do they generate communication»[55].

What is new about this concept of communication?

«First of all, the distinction among the three components—informa-tion, utterance, and understanding—is new»[56]. It is not the theory of types of acts or speech acts (Austin, Searle), to which Habermas has annexed a typology of validity claims implicit in communication. «All of this, however, still proceeds from an action-theoretical understanding of communication and therefore sees the procedure of communication as a successful or unsuccessful transference of news, information, or suppositions of agreement»[57].

In light of this, a system-theoretical approach emphasizes the «emergence of communication» itself.

«Nothing is transferred. Redundancy is produced in the sense that communication generates a memory to which many people can lay claim in many different ways ... The system pulsates, so to speak, with the constant generation of excess and selection. With the discovery of writing and printing, this process of system formation is once more immensely heightened, with consequences for social structure, semantics, indeed for language itself»[58].

Communication has no goal.

«Communication has no goal, no imminent entelechy. It happens or not, and that is all that one can say on that point. In this regard, this theory follows no Aristotelian style, but rather, follows the theoretical style of Spinoza. Obviously, goal oriented episodes can be formed inside of systems of communication»[59].

The theory of the rationality of communicative action is simply false on empirical grounds alone.

[55] N. LUHMANN, *What Is Communication?*, p. 157.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 161. Regarding the reference to the theoretical style of Baruch Spinoza, it is important to note that some scholars have revealed how the Luhmann's socio-logical concept of right is perfectly compatible, in its content, with the concept of Spinoza: M. SENN, *Spinoza und die deutsche Rechtswissenschaft. Eine historische Studie zum Rezeptionsdefizit des Spinozismus in der Rechtswissenschaft des deutschsprachigen Kulturraumes*, Zürich 1991, pp. 152-154.

«Often, it is more or less implicitly supposed that communication aims at consensus, that it seeks agreement. The theory of the rationality of communicative action developed by Habermas is built upon these premises. One can also communicate in order to mark dissent, one can desire to argue; and there is no compelling reason to hold the search for consensus to be more rational than the search for dissent. That depends entirely on themes and partners. Communication is obvious impossible without any consensus, but it is also impossible without any dissent. What it necessarily requires is one's being able to leave aside the question of consensus or dissent in relation to themes that are not present at the moment»[60].

All communication is risky.

«In place of a consensus-oriented entelechy, systems theory posits another thesis: Communication leads to the precise formulation of the question of whether the uttered and understood information should be accepted or rejected. One believes a piece of news or not. Communication creates at first only this alternative and thereby creates the risk of rejection. It forces a situation of decision that would not exist at all without communication. To this extent, all communication is risky. This risk is one of the most morphogenic factors. It leads to the building of institutions that secure a disposition of acceptance even toward improbable communications»[61].

4. *A semantics of disobedience*

Exactly because it is extraneous to any type of «great narrative» and exactley due to its concept of «communication» that Luhmann's theory could contribute towards orienting early modern historians' research much more efficiently than Habermas's theory has done.

German historiography has discussed at a general level, as well as in case studies[62], the efficacy of the theory of systems and of Luhmann's method. One of the more successful and brilliant results, in my opinion, is a book that does not deal with the early modern period, but with Roman law: Marie Theres Fögen's *Römische Rechtsgeschichten* (2002). Fögen, a historian of law, chose texts that are not of a legal nature, such as stories, myths, and factual anecdotes, in order to analyze the evolution of the social system of «Roman law»[63].

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[60] N. LUHMANN, *What Is Communication?*, p. 162.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] In this respect, see in general the essay by Andreas Gestrich.

[63] M.T. FÖGEN, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten. Über Ursprung und Evolution eines sozialen Systems*, Göttingen 2002. The book has been translated into Italian and French:

The first story (and this is the only one I will briefly refer to here) takes place at the origins of the Roman republic. It is the story of Lucretia and Brutus[64].

Lucretia prefers the violence of Sextus Tarquinius to an ignominious death, threatened by the very same Sextus if she does not give herself to him. Sextus would not only kill Lucretia, but also one of her slaves. He would place the slave naked beside Lucretia and then tell Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, who is also Sextus's cousin, that he surprised them together and immediately killed them to punish them for their infidelity to Collatinus. Lucretia cannot bear the idea of being considered an adulteress. She therefore subjects herself to the violence of Sextus Tarquinius, but does not wish to live any longer. The next day, she goes to Rome to her father, Lucretius. She is dressed in black and carries a dagger underneath her tunic. She begs her father to call a crowd together so that she can recount «before a large audience»[65] Sextus's infamy. After having told her story, she stabs herself in the breast.

«Lucretia's dishonor and suicide provoke an uproar and turmoil. The women scream with horror, the men proclaim as one that this should be the last crime of the tyrant. Collatinus, the husband, who has now become a widower, appears in the company of a friend, a certain Lucius Junius, also known as 'Brutus'»[66].

Brutus and all of those present swear on the dagger, covered with Lucretia's blood, to put an end to the tyranny of King Tarquinius the Superb, father of Sextus. After many discussions, the Romans decide to

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M.T. FÖGEN, *Storie di diritto romano. Origine ed evoluzione di un sistema sociale*, Italian transl. by A. MAZZACANE, Bologna 2005; M.T. FÖGEN, *Histoires du droit romain. De l'origine et de l'évolution d'un système social*, French transl. by D. Trierweiler, Paris 2007. If she had not died early, Marie Theres Fögen would have produced another very provocative book (as many people judged *Römische Rechtsgeschichten* to be) on mediaeval law and the Bologna School of Law. Some previews in M.T. FÖGEN, *Learned Law and the Desire of Politics. Barbarossa meets Bulgarus and Martinus*, in H. VOGT - M. MÜNSTER-SWENDSEN (eds), *Law and Learning in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Second Carlsberg Academy Conference on Medieval Legal History 2005*, Copenhagen 2006, pp. 29-39; M.T. FÖGEN, *Römisches Recht und Rombilder im östlichen und westlichen Mittelalter*, in B. SCHNEIDMÜLLER - St. WEINFURTER (eds), *Heilig – Römisch – Deutsch. Das Reich im mittelalterlichen Europa*. Tagungsakten, Dresden 2006, pp. 57-83.

[64] M.T. FÖGEN, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten*, pp. 21-59.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

reorder the state: they oust the king and his family and elect the first consuls of Rome, Brutus and Collatinus. Thus, they lay the foundations for the republic[67].

Looking at the sources used, i.e. the observations made most importantly by the observer Dionysius of Halicarnassus[68], Fögen reconstructs the pieces of the puzzle that nineteenth-century historiography (Mommsen and Niehbur leading the way) had branded as fantastic, a fairy tale[69]. It is one story that owes its significance to the public space that makes it possible: a story inexplicable unless considered «communication»[70].

«Lucretia appears before her father and begs him 'not to avert his gaze from her'[71]. She expressly begs him to call together friends and family, a crowd of people to whom she presents herself whilst explaining the outrage she has suffered. Then she commits suicide, but not in the privacy of her own room, but in public, in front of a multitude

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[67] *Ibid.*

[68] «It is not possible to write history without «sources», or without using the observations of previous observers»; M.T. FÖGEN, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten*, p. 18.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[70] With the Luhmannian concept M.T. FÖGEN, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten*, explicitly points to no. 23, p. 24. Adhering to Luhmann is for Fögen a theoretical and methodological option which is much more rooted and well-argued than I can repeat here. Upon this, Fögen constructed the research project *Rechtsgeschichte – Geschichte der Evolution eines sozialen Systems. Ein Vorschlag*, in «Rechtsgeschichte. Zeitschrift des Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte», 1, 2002, pp. 14-20. The English version *Legal History – History of the Evolution of a Social System. A proposal* can be read at http://www.rg.mpg.de/en/forschung/foegen-legal-history/. The last of the seventeen points of the project insists on the problems specifically dealt with by the author in *Römische Rechtsgeschichten* in relation to her sources: the distinction/opposition of the texts based on 'facts' and stories, legends, myths. «Texts instead of facts. One particular obstacle to reading should be dismantled, namely, the habit dear to many historians of differentiating between texts on the basis of 'facts' on the one hand as opposed to stories, legends and myths on the other. If we want to find out whether and how (self-)descriptions explain the existence and respective state of a system, whether they distinguish between evolutionary mechanisms, whether they construct causalities or permit coincidences, then we cannot simply dismiss a large proportion of the texts. If we do so, irrespective of whether we are researching antiquity or own era, all that is left is a new and slender myth of facts. 'Reality is not concrete reality, but what lies between things' is the first lesson in quantum mechanics. 'Between things' lies communication».

[71] DIONIGI DI ALICARNASSO, *Storia di Roma arcaica (Le antichità romane)*, ed. by F. CANTARELLI, Milano 1984, 4, 66, 2.

who 'utter a collective cry'[72]. What scandal could be worse than an aggression against the supreme good, a woman's virtue? And what is more moving than the suicide of a woman who stabs herself? This consolidates the participation of the Romans, it interrupts the inertia of normality, it focuses the interests of everyone, and generates unusual reactions. Later, when Lucretia's corpse is exhibited in the forum, in front of the senate, 'placed on high and visible from all sides'[73], the Romans cannot avert their gaze, they cannot return to normality with a shrug of the shoulders, not in the face of what they have just witnessed. They spur on communications almost to the point of a tumult. Such active and concentrated attention is usually called 'excitation'. The rise in the level of communications leads to a situation that does not compel them to take decisions, but rather incites them to»[74].

Paraphrasing Marie Theres Fögen, I could define the object of some of my more recent studies as communications in the public space of tumult.

Luhmann's concept of «communication»—not oriented solely towards consensus—allows me to identify a semantics of «disobedience»: both a «learned» semantics as well as an everyday semantics.

In conclusion, I would briefly like to present two different examples, although connected by a common leitmotif: the problem of violence in law and therefore of violence as a means of political communication. They are in two short essays, which—although finished and already published—form intermediate stages in a larger book project that I hope to finish in the near future. One of them looks at papal interdicts during the Renaissance[75].

Violence with spiritual weapons, violence with temporal weapons: as contemporaries well knew, the Renaissance pope's exercise of political power was characterized by double violence. The overthrow of tyrants and the punishment of rebels were the chief aims of excommunication and interdict. Those weapons were actually first steps towards a declaration of a «just war». The essay analyses how those arguments were developed, concentrating in particular on the censures of Sixtus IV against Florence (1478) and Venice (1483) and on the excommunica-

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[72]   *Ibid.*, 4, 67, 2.

[73]   *Ibid.*, 4, 76, 3.

[74]   M.T. FÖGEN, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten*, p. 26.

[75]   A. DE BENEDICTIS, *Abbattere i tiranni, punire i ribelli. Diritto e violenza negli interdetti del Rinascimento*, in «Rechtsgeschichte. Zeitschrift des Max-Planck-Instituts für europäische Rechtsgeschichte», 11, 2007, pp. 76-93.

tions and interdicts levied by Julius II on Bologna (1506) and Venice (1509). In addition, the article expands on the defenses that some lawyers constructed against those arguments, positing a different truth against the truth of the papal laws. By this means they emphasized their dissent from the papal laws while themselves making use of the law. The «war of writings» caused by Paul V's interdict against Venice (1606) produced a history of interdicts as a necessary tool for defense purposes, making explicit the opposition of *ius* and *vis*, that is to say, a critique of the violence of law.

The other article to which I refer deals with the forms of resistance that historiography generally defines as revolts[76].

The history of late mediaeval and early modern Europe (and the historiography of Europe) abounds with images of rebellion and profiles of rebels. These images gradually acquired importance, starting at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when an imperial law by Henry VII of Luxembourg defined *crimen rebellionis* in new and broader terms for the centuries to come. The long process in whose course the state (the prince, its officials, and its governing agencies) was to acquire the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force began then, and it was evident both in the power of government institutions and in juridical and political knowledge. Those images—of criminal acts and of disobedient subjects—have prevailed over and eclipsed other images, which presented the very same actions as legitimate and just, by aiming to protect subjects from the violence committed against them by the princely state.

Many images both of rural and urban revolts show groups of people who intervene in defense of those who refuse to obey the injunction of the prince's officials. In all cases the group action begins or is sustained by voices calling for collective defense: human voices («run, men, run», «acuromo, acuromo») and voices associated with the life of the people in their respective communities (hammering of the bells). In real life, the actions and voices appear as moments that were inseparable from a political routine. What is particularly interesting is that those actions and those voices can be «seen» and «heard» not only in criminal ac-

[76] A. DE BENEDICTIS, *Resisting Public Violence: Actions, Law, and Emotions*, in A. MOLHO - D. RAMADA CURTO (eds), *Finding Europe. Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images ca. 13th - ca. 18th centuries*, Oxford 2007, pp. 273-290.

tions, but also in some texts, which were fundamental for the juridical culture (and, consequently, the political jargon) of the late middle ages and the early modern period. This dual presence suggests that, inevitably, one must address the problem of the relationship between historical «reality», political-juridical discourse, and language.

The texts (sources) to which I refer in this study are in reality the same texts, or rather analogous texts in their genre, on which the refusal and the disobedience towards papal interdicts were founded during the Renaissance. They are texts where the conceptions and images of just and unjust law, obedience and disobedience, loyalty and rebellion confront each other and clash. Learned semantics and everyday semantics do not move along different lines. The political «space» in both cases is always a public space, simply because in neither case is it a question of the private individual, but of a multitude of subjects and/ or citizens united by the means of communication of friendship and reciprocal defense. Those who participate in a popular revolt against a notorious injustice (the injustice of Giuliano de Medici's assassination or the injustice of a community oppressed by new taxes) can legitimately call upon friends and others to quash such injustice. It is juridical *communis opinio* (learned semantics), and an image of daily life (everyday semantics): according to Luhmann, both characterize the multiplicity and wealth of experience in *Alteuropa*[77].

[77] The components of which are summarised by N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 893-895. It is worth reminding the reader here, *a propos* revolts and resistance, that amongst the texts read by Luhmann, there is also the famous essay by E.P. THOMPSON, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century*, in «Past and Present», 50, 1971, pp. 76-136 (E.P. THOMPSON, *L'economia morale delle classi popolari inglesi nel secolo XVIII*, Prefazione di F. DE VIVO, Milano 2009), as well as the similarly famous J.C. SCOTT, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven CT 1976. In reference to disorder and rebellions in stratified societies and in reference to protest movements (or: literature of the moral economy as the source of the problem of «differentiation»), N. LUHMANN mentions this in *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 695 fn. 191 and p. 849 fn. 449.

Spaces, Voices, Humors

An Evanescent Public Sphere
Voices, Spaces, and Publics in Venice during the Italian Wars

by *Massimo Rospocher* and *Rosa Salzberg*

> «It was almost impossible to restrain the tongue of anyone from saying and speaking whatever they liked, as this is a free city»[1].

1. *Introduction*

At the end of May 1509, the shadow of war fell across the waters of the Venetian lagoon. The forces of the League of Cambrai had defeated Venice's army at Agnadello and thousands of corpses still lay on the battlefield at Ghiaradadda. The cities of the Venetian *terraferma* rebelled against the authority of the Serenissima, and its mainland state seemed to dissolve in a matter of weeks. Venice remained under papal interdict, clergy prohibited to administer the sacraments in Venetian territories. Imperial troops were encamped a short distance from the city and the Emperor Maximilian was encouraging the population of Venice to rise up against their oligarchic government.

«So many words, so many opinions, so many different languages, so many discussions and wishes and arguments were expressed in these days in the city of Venice», recorded the Venetian patrician Girolamo

[1] «Hera quasi impossibile retinere la lengua ad chadauno che non parlasse e dicesse quello li piacesse per essere citade liberra»; G. PRIULI, *I Diarii*, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia, ms Prov. Div. 252-c (hereafter *Diarii* ms), vol. 6, c. 211r (May 1511).

Priuli in his diary, at the height of the crisis. Debates were occurring in all the public spaces of the city—«through the piazzas, through the loggias, around Rialto, through the banks, churches, streets, barbershops and taverns»—and they involved all three classes of Venetian society: nobles, citizens, and *popolani*. In this torrent of voices and judgments inundating the streets and squares of Venice, «everyone wanted to say their own opinion»[2].

Renaissance Venice, with its vibrant publishing industry, cosmopolitan population, and intense commercial and diplomatic activity, was undoubtedly one of Europe's major centers of communication, and a focal point for the production and diffusion of political information[3]. The city represents an exceptional field of observation for the forms of political communication, in particular in the uncertain climate of the Italian Wars when the circulation of news and political opinions became an increasingly urgent matter[4]. Contemporary observers like Priuli, who paid attention to the word on the street, provide a unique source for reconstructing the actors and voices populating the Venetian public arena.

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[2]   «Tante parole, tante opinione, tante diversse lingue, tanti parlari et tante voluntade et tanti ragionamenti se facevanno in questi giorni in la citade veneta ... sì per li nobelli, come per li citadini, et per li populari, per tute le piaze, per le logie, per il Rivoalto, per li banchi, per le chiexie, per le strade, per le barbarie e per le bettole et chadauno infine voleva dire la opinione sua»; G. PRIULI, *I Diarii*, ed. R. CESSI, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 24/3, Bologna 1938-1941, vol. 4, p. 246.

[3]   P. BURKE, *Early Modern Venice as a Center of Information and Communication*, in J. MARTIN - D. ROMANO (eds), *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State (1297-1797)*, Baltimore MD - London 2000, pp. 389-419; C. NEERFELD, *«Historia per forma di diaria». La cronachistica veneziana contemporanea a cavallo tra il Quattro e il Cinquecento*, Venezia 2006; F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford 2007; C. JUDDE DE LARIVIÈRE, *Du Broglio à Rialto: cris et chuchotements dans l'espace public à Venise, au XVIe siècle*, in P. BOUCHERON - N. OFFENSTADT (eds), *L'espace public au moyen age*, Paris 2011, pp. 119-130.

[4]   The classic subject of the Italian Wars is enjoying renewed interest: see M. MALLETT - C. SHAW, *The Italian Wars, 1494-1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, Harlow 2012; M. PELLEGRINI, *Le guerre d'Italia (1494-1530)*, Bologna 2009; A. DE BENEDICTIS - G.M. ANSELMI (eds), *Città in guerra. Esperienze e riflessioni nel primo '500. Bologna nelle «guerre d'Italia»*, Bologna 2008; J.L. FOURNEL - J.-C. ZANCARINI, *Les guerres d'Italie – Des batailles pour l'Europe (1494-1559)*, Paris 2006; C. SHAW, *Italy and the European Powers: The Impact of War (1500-1530)*, Leiden – Boston MA 2006.

The dramatic period of the War of the League of Cambrai (1509-1517) has particularly strong heuristic value, since it provoked extraordinary vitality in the spaces of public debate. Much of the population was eager to discuss the war and variegated political publics came together to debate and exchange opinions in public spaces outside the halls of the patrician assemblies. The voices of these numerous and plural publics expressed themselves through various channels: public and private conversations, gossip and whispers, poems and songs. Together these voices, spaces, and publics constituted a public sphere, which—even if its participants did not recognize it—played an important political role[5]. All of this undermines the traditional view of the political and social structure of Venice as one in which only patricians were allowed to be «political». Since the *Serrata* of the late thirteenth century, the restricted noble class had held a monopoly on the government of the state and official politics; the *popolani* (a category which in fact encompassed around ninety per cent of the population) were denied any political role, while the *cittadini*, the small «middle class» below the patriciate, were allowed only auxiliary functions in the state bureaucracy[6].

This essay proposes the need to rethink the definition of public space in the light of a conception of political communication that includes discursive practices, places, and subjects previously considered as extraneous to the political arena[7]. We suggest that crucial in determining the proliferation of publics interested in politics was the interaction of different languages, media, and communicative practices: spoken, handwritten and printed words. Although printers and hack writers played important roles in this process of «intermediality», we place particular emphasis on the mediatory figure of the street singer (vari-

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[5] There is no space here to discuss the extensive historiographical debate provoked by J. HABERMAS's seminal *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1962 (translated into English as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge MA 1989). For discussion of this historiography, see M. ROSPOCHER, *Beyond the Public Sphere: A Historiographical Transition*, in this volume.

[6] On the Venetian political and social structure, see R. FINLAY, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, New Brunswick NJ 1980, ch. 2.

[7] C. ORILLARD, *Repenser «l'espace public» à travers l'histoire*, in «Labyrinthe, Actualité de la recherche», 22, 2005; online at http://labyrinthe.revues.org/index1049.html (consulted 18 August 2011).

ously called *cantimbanco, cantastorie*, or *ciarlatano* in the period). These performers, although often itinerant and socially marginal, were nonetheless central within the urban public spaces of Renaissance cities for their role in the transmission of information about politics, war, and other subjects[8].

As discussed in the introduction to this volume, Habermas conceived of the public sphere as an ideal, discursive space[9]. Building on other recent critiques of the Habermasian model, here we propose instead a definition which brings together the spatial and physical and the discursive and ideal dimensions of the public sphere. Our formulation of an «evanescent public sphere» hopefully goes some way towards representing the complex nature of public debate in early modern Europe, emphasizing its dynamism, plurality, ephemerality, and contingency. Indeed, we argue that it was precisely these characteristics that in many instances gave this public debate its potency[10].

2. *Spaces*

In Venice, in the critical years of the war of Cambrai, interest in the evolving political and military events was particularly intense. For the first time in a long time, war presented itself at the «gates» of the city and the threat weighed upon the daily life of Venetians. Refugees streamed in from the mainland and in the heart of the city, in Piazza San Marco, people could hear the sound of enemy artillery from across

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[8] See R. SALZBERG - M. ROSPOCHER, *Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication*, in «Cultural and Social History», 9, 2012, 1, pp. 9-26; R. SALZBERG, *In the Mouths of Charlatans. Street Performers and the Dissemination of Pamphlets in Renaissance Italy*, in «Renaissance Studies», 24, 2010, 5, pp. 638-653. For examples of the kinds of texts produced by *cantimbanchi* during the Italian Wars, see the collection A. QUONDAM et al. (eds), *Guerre in ottava rima* (hereafter *GOR*), 4 vols, Ferrara - Modena 1989.

[9] See H. MAH, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians*, in «Journal of Modern History», 72, 2000, pp. 153-182, here pp. 156-168.

[10] Here we also draw on the idea of «temporary or contingent» public spheres suggested by A. BRIGGS - P. BURKE,*The Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge 2001; and also the reference to «episodic» public spheres in P. LAKE - S. PINCUS, *Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, in «Journal of British Studies», 45, 2006, 2, pp. 270-292, here p. 285.

the lagoon[11]. At this dramatic historical juncture, anxiety about imminent danger fomented intense public discussion about the destiny of the Serenissima and an avid desire for news. At the apex of this conflict, an anonymous singer registered the proliferation of discussions about the war in various public spaces:

«Now all the world is talking about war,
and singing, writing, and speaking about Venice,
debating only this in the churches and the piazzas»[12].

The war provoked the emergence of what might be described as an «evanescent public sphere», which encompassed not only official spaces of political debate but also unofficial ones. While the debates on how to confront the political and military crisis raged in the closed chambers of the aristocratic councils, their echoes reverberated beyond the walls into a variety of public or semi-public urban spaces: piazzas, streets, churches, barbershops, and markets. These were important places for Venetians to gather and exchange information, situated right in the heart of the city and fundamental to political communication because of their capacity to collect people belonging to different social strata[13].

The Rialto area—the bridge, loggias and market—was the place designated for commerce, but other activities occurring there included the exchange of all kinds of information and the sale of prognostications and poems about current events. Traditionally, gentlemen and merchants met at Rialto to trade in the morning and the evening, but around them a multitude of other people—from prostitutes to charlatans—frequented this crucial place of passage in the economic and

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[11] G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, p. 325 [September 1509]. On this period, see also F. GILBERT, *Venice in the Crisis of the League of Cambrai*, in J.R. HALE (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, London 1973, pp. 274-292; E. CROUZET-PAVAN, *Les mots de Venise: Sur le contrôle du langage dans une Cité-Etat italienne*, in *La circulation des nouvelles au moyen age*, Paris - Roma, 1993, pp. 205-218; C. JUDDE DE LARIVIERE, *La frontière rapprochée: conflits au sein de la société vénitienne au temps de la ligue de Cambrai (1508-1516)*, in *Las sociedades fronterizas del Mediterráneo al Atlántico (ss. XVI-XVII)*, Madrid, forthcoming.

[12] «Hor tuto 'l mondo di guerra ragiona / & di Venetia canta scriue & parla / per chiese & piaze sol questo tenzona»; *Laus Venetorum*, Venezia 1509, c. 28v.

[13] See F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 89-119, for an exploration of Venice's «information centres» in this period. Cf. also C. JUDDE DE LARIVIÈRE, *Du Broglio à Rialto*.

social life of the city[14]. Precisely for this reason, Rialto was also the space habitually used for defamatory graffiti or for affixing slanderous writings, on the *pietra delle bande* in the piazza of San Giacomo di Rialto, the column used for official announcements, and later in the century on the hunchbacked statue of the Gobbo[15].

During the Cambrai conflict, Rialto was one of the places where the recitation and sale of political print took place, particularly popular poems and songs about the ongoing war. At the end of 1509, Priuli noted the fact that small works jeering at the enemies of the Serenissima and celebrating its temporary successes were being sold in Venice «through the piazzas and on the Rialto Bridge»[16]. In the following months, another patrician diarist, Marin Sanudo, recorded that the printed text of Pope Julius II's bull of excommunication against the French, «latina et vulgar» («in Latin and in vernacular»), could be bought for the small sum of one *soldo* on the Rialto[17].

Besides Rialto, Piazza San Marco was the other pole of this publishing market, where bookshops, stalls, and ambulant vendors worked around the square. The piazza was also becoming the place where *cantimbanchi* and charlatans prepared their improvised sites of performance and sold small consumer goods such as perfumes, soaps, unguents and haberdashery, as well as pamphlets on various subjects, from recipes for miraculous remedies, to romantic songs, to news of the latest wars in verse. It is not hard to guess why this space was chosen by performers and peddlers. According to the words of an English observer of the early seventeenth century, the flux of people through the piazza in the morning and evening was so impressive that the space was better

[14] D. CALABI - P. MORACHIELLO, *Rialto: le fabbriche e il Ponte (1514-1591)*, Torino 1987.

[15] Cf. A. MARZO, *Pasquino e il Gobbo di Rialto*, in C. DAMIANAKI - P. PROCACCIOLI - A. ROMANO (eds), *Ex marmore. Pasquini, pasquinisti, pasquinate nell'Europa moderna*, Roma 2006, pp. 121-134, here p. 123; A. MOSCHETTI, *Il Gobbo di Rialto e le sue relazioni con Pasquino*, in «Nuovo archivio veneto», 5, 1893, 1, pp. 5-93.

[16] G. PRIULI, *Diarii* ms, vol. 5, cc. 55r-v [end of December 1509]. Cf. R. SALZBERG, *«Per le piaze & sopra il ponte»: Reconstructing the Geography of Popular Print in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice*, in C. WITHERS - M. OGBORN (eds), *Geographies of the Book*, Aldershot 2010, pp. 111-131.

[17] M. SANUDO, *I Diarii (1496-1533)*, ed. R. FULIN et al., 58 vols, Venezia 1879-1903 (reprint Bologna 1970), vol. 11, col. 615 (19 November 1510).

described as «Orbis rather than Urbis forum»[18]. The piazza exerted a gravitational pull on the people of Venice. Spontaneous gatherings tended to occur there, whether of small groups of people who came together for various reasons—such as commerce or amusement—and fell into discussion, or of more numerous crowds united by a common interest to hear the news just arrived from the *terraferma*, celebrate a military success, or collectively commiserate over a defeat[19].

As the political and religious heart of the city, the piazza was of immense symbolic importance to the state. It was the key site for rituals and festivities overseen—indeed, minutely choreographed—by the Venetian government[20]. The government was always particularly sensitive to the threat of disruptions and disorder in this space, but it became even more so in the turbulent period of the Cambrai War. In 1509, the patrician rulers deliberated at length about whether to hold the annual Corpus Domini celebrations, in case they provided an opportunity for violent reaction by the people against the government. In the end, they decided to proceed with the celebrations, but prohibited the carrying of weapons and placed armed guards around the piazza[21]. As the public space *par excellence* of Renaissance cities, the piazza was where different groups strove to have their voices heard; as much as local powers tried to control this space, it was used in all kinds of unexpected ways[22].

[18] T. CORYATE - G. CORYATE, *Coryate's Crudities* ..., 2 vols, Glasgow 1905 (reprint of the 1611 edition), vol. 1, p. 314, see also p. 318. On the various uses of the piazza, where entertainment, politics, consumption, and information-seeking came together, see also T. GARZONI, *La Piazza Universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, ed. P. CHERCHI - B. COLLINA, 2 vols, Torino 1996, vol. 2, p. 987.

[19] See, for example, M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 6, col. 442 (7 May 1508); C. NEERFELD, *Historia per forma di diaria*, pp. 167-169. On *bozzoli*, or clusters of people engaged in discussion in public spaces, see F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 91-94.

[20] M. MORRESI, *Piazza San Marco. Istituzioni, poteri e architettura a Venezia nel primo Cinquecento*, Milano 1999.

[21] P. ASSONICA, *Fragmentum chronicæ ab anno circiter 1509 usque ad 1512*, in *Miscellanea di Storia italiana*, vol. 5, Torino 1868, pp. 279-355.

[22] Cf. S.J. MILNER, *The Florentine Piazza della Signoria as Practiced Place*, in R.J. CRUM - J.T. PAOLETTI (eds), *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 83-103. For a stimulating discussion of how sounds (bells, trumpets, voices, etc.) were used in attempts to control public spaces such as the piazza, see N.S. ATKINSON, *Architecture, Anxiety, and the Fluid Topographies of Renaissance Florence*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2009.

Finally, we should turn our attention to sacred spaces, which represented other important public sites for political debate and expression. The Vincentine writer Luigi Da Porto reported that the great churches of Venice such as San Giovanni e Paolo and the Frari were used by Venetian nobles as places for gathering and political discussion, above all during the summer, when they offered respite during the hottest hours of the day. However, sometimes they could serve as political arenas for the confrontation of diverse social groups. This happened towards the end of September 1509, in one of the moments of greatest tension of the war because of the proximity of imperial troops. Da Porto described how a group of non-nobles (described as *popolani* but probably mostly *cittadini originarii*), were called by some nobles to a public discussion in one of these churches. The aim was to clarify the nature of a polemical rumor («mormorio»), which was running through the city and which suggested that the *popolani* were discontented with the running of the war, and even ready to rebel against the state[23]. Following this first encounter in an informal public space, a great number of non-nobles were called into the official space of the Great Council chamber and publicly reprimanded for their agitations, which undermined the government[24].

For their recognized capacity to aggregate and spread political opinions, churches were habitually a place for the publication of official documents of public importance, such as excommunications or declarations of war. They were also key sites of news dissemination; Sanudo described the circulation, one morning in the Basilica of San Marco, of a piece of news concerning the war in Padua[25]. Sacred spaces were also

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[23]   L. DA PORTO, *Lettere storiche di Luigi da Porto vicentino dall'anno 1509 al 1528*, ed. B. BRESSAN, Firenze 1857, pp. 128-129 (letter of 5 October 1509). That Da Porto was referring primarily to *cittadini originarii* rather than ordinary *popolani* can be deduced from the references to their offices in the chancellery and their participation in the election of the Grand Chancellor (pp. 130-131). On the class of *cittadini originarii*, see A. ZANNINI, *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: i cittadini originari (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, Venezia 1993; J. GRUBB, *Elite Citizens*, in J. MARTIN - D. ROMANO, *Venice Reconsidered*, pp. 339-364; A. BELLAVITIS, *Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale. Citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVIe siècle*, Roma 2001.

[24]   L. DA PORTO, *Lettere storiche*, p. 129. For more on this episode, see below.

[25]   «Fu divulgato questa matina in chiesia di San Marco una nova, *incerto auctore*, che Bernardin di Parma conestabele è in Padoa, et è padoan, qual, insieme con so fradelli have intelligentia di dar una porta a la Signoria quando nostri intrò in Padoa et è sta ben provisionato lui e soi ...»; M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 9, col. 183 (September 1509).

used for propaganda by adversaries of the Republic, with the posting of polemical texts on the doors or inside the church. In the years between 1509 and 1511, for example, at least three different printed fliers were diffused in Venice, copies of letters by the Emperor Maximilian I addressed to the people of Venice, exhorting them to rebel against the «tyrannical» aristocratic Venetian government. In July 1511, while many prints were disseminated through the streets by imperial agents, one flier was found affixed to the altar of the church of Sant'Agostino, the sacred space thus transformed into a political space[26]. In the urban geography of Venice in the early sixteenth century, the presence of a multitude of «open» public spaces of discussion meant that political debate was not circumscribed to the patrician class and its exclusive spaces but extended also to the plural public of subjects excluded from political activity. Furthermore, these public spaces were linked in to wider networks of information connecting the same kinds of spaces in other Italian cities. In the weeks after Agnadello, Priuli noted how Venice's political adversaries launched a polemical offensive against the Republic, targeting exactly the places (piazzas, barbershops, brothels) where people gathered to update themselves on the latest political news[27]. In the piazza of Ferrara, for example, one could witness the performance by the local *cantastorie* Bighignol of a «wonderful new story» rejoicing in the ill fortune of Venice, or listen to a philo-Ferrarese preacher's *Sermon on the Ire of God against the Venetians*[28]. News of such humiliating developments made its way back to Venice, where it was discussed and debated in turn.

[26] The episode is reported in *ibid.*, vol. 12, col 291. For the other fliers diffused, see C. LUTTER, *«An das Volk von Venedig». Propaganda Maximilians I. in Venedig*, in K. HRUZA (ed.), *Propaganda, Kommunikation und Öffentlichkeit (11.-16. Jahrhundert)*, Wien 2002, pp. 235-253; M. ROSPOCHER, *«Non vedete la libertà di voi stessi essere posta nelle proprie mani vostre?»: Guerre d'inchiostro e di parole al tempo di Cambrai*, in M. BONAZZA - S. SEIDEL MENCHI (eds), *Dal leone all'aquila. Comunità, territori e cambi di regime nell'età di Massimiliano I*, forthcoming.

[27] «Ogni injuria et vilania et contumelia, che per li loro inimici et contrarij hera stata sublevata et seminata per tuta la Italia et in ogni piaza et bordello et barbarie, dove sempre atrovanno le nove per la conchorentia dele persone»; G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, pp. 56-57.

[28] BIGHIGNOL, *Una belissima istorieta noua facta contra Venetia de la mossa facta contra al illustrisimo ducha Alphoso [sic] terzo de Ferara*, Ferrara ca. 1509; *Sermone de lira de dio contra venetiani nel quale se contene parte de loro costumi stato e geneologia e la cagione perquale [sic] debeno ruinare*, Ferrara ca. 1510.

3. Publics

The tightly woven fabric of the city of Venice had always favored the rapid circulation of information among a wide public, via oral and written channels of communication. From the late fifteenth century, print entered this mix, as Venice became the capital of European publishing. As well as pursuing an international market for their products, printers in the city aggressively sought to expand their business by creating a much wider reading public than had existed in the era of manuscripts. They produced reams of cheap prints, pamphlets, and broadsheets in the vernacular on subjects guaranteed to appeal to a broad and diverse audience[29]. The Cambrai war proved a galvanizing moment as it provided a topic which almost everyone wanted to hear, read, and talk about. While the conflict forced some of the major Venetian printing shops to close, at least temporarily, others carried on the production and dissemination of print throughout the worst years of the war. Printers, along with hack writers, performers, and sellers of popular print, recognized in the war a potentially profitable opportunity to feed the desire for information about the evolving political and military events on the mainland.

A new synergy between the press and more traditional forms of oral communication was developing in this period. Ephemeral printed products were disseminated in the streets by peddlers and performers, who often recited or sang the texts in order to attract an audience of potential customers. Via these two intersecting channels of orality and print, news, commentary, and political reports were disseminated beyond the restricted minority of the literate public, reaching the wider circle of the illiterate and semi-literate. In October 1509, for example, Imperial troops gave up the siege of Padua, leaving the city as one of the few surviving possessions of the *terraferma* dominion but signaling the beginning of the Venetian recovery. Very quickly, printed songs appeared which commemorated the event, and these were sold around Venice for the small sum of a *bezzo*, or half a *soldo*, each. The printed publication reflected (and indeed, probably contributed to) the popularity of the verses, which until then had circulated orally. Priuli recorded

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[29] See R. SALZBERG, *Printshop to Piazza: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice*, Manchester, forthcoming.

that «throughout Padua and Venice this song was sung day and night by children and others in contempt of our enemies»[30].

Street singers played an active and important role in feeding the flood of words and prints through the streets and piazzas of Italian cities. In doing so, they were continuing the medieval tradition of transmitting information to varied publics in public spaces. Already in the fourteenth century, documents record the presence of singers in the streets of Venice performing songs about the ongoing conflict between the Republic and Padua[31]. This tradition was still going strong at the turn of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries. In 1499, for example, Sanudo described a blind singer in San Marco recounting the fall of Lodovico Sforza as Duke of Milan as he accompanied himself on a stringed instrument[32].

In the same period, the communicative capacity of these figures was being amplified by the advent and the employment of typographic technology[33]. Moving around from one place to another, *cantastorie* were in a position to gather news from various sources and to disseminate it effectively, uniting an extemporaneous public around their benches and selling pamphlets of a few pages. Their own compositions sometimes evoked these gatherings and the ephemeral nature of the economic and textual transactions that took place. The Ferrarese *cantastorie* Bighignol concluded his verse report on the battle between Venice and Ferrara by inciting the public gathered around his bench to buy copies of the text from him for «only three *quattrini*» or one third of a *soldo*[34]. Teodoro

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[30] «Per tuta Padoa et Venetia il giorno et nocte dali putti et altri hera cantata questa canzone per disprectio deli inimici». G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, p. 359 (25 September 1509); cf. also M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 9, col. 335 (22 November 1509). On the song, see V. ROSSI, *Su, su, su chi vuol la gatta*, in «Giornale storico della letteratura italiana», 5, 1885, pp. 504-507.

[31] P. MOLMENTI, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica*, Bergamo 1906[4], vol. 1, p. 415.

[32] M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 2, col. 1,198 (3 September 1499): «in questa sera sopra la piaza di San Marcho, per uno orbo con la lira, a l'improvisa fu cantato verso la loza di le cosse di Milan e dil parti dil signor Lodovico».

[33] Cf. R. SALZBERG - M. ROSPOCHER, *Street Singers*.

[34] «Chi vol l'historia la qual canto in banco ... / mentro che Bighignol vi è apreso al fianco / ve ne darà a tuti ... / ... porta soldi chi la vol auere / E per che vgnun ne posi comperare / Sol tre quatrini vi auera costare»; BIGHIGNOL, *Li horrendi e magnanimi fatti de l'illustrissimo Alfonso duca di Ferrara contra l'armata de Venetiani ...*, Ferrara

Barbieri closed his account of the Battle of Marignano by referring to the sale of the printed text to his socially diverse audience: «So to the poor man as to the *cittadino* / you can have the story and I will keep the *quattrino*»[35].

To attract the curiosity of the public, ambulant vendors and singers employed crying techniques, singing the title and first lines of the texts. They highlighted the «novità» but above all the «verità» of the narration as, for example, in *The True News about Brescia, Point by Point as it Happened* (*La vera nova de Bressa de punto in punto com'è andata*), or the *Very True Story of the Memorable War of Pavia* (*Historia verissima dela memorabile guerra de Pavia*)[36]. Some also emphasized the speed with which the account of events had been recorded and printed[37]. While some performers admitted that they had not actually been first-hand observers of the deeds they related, they claimed to have gathered their information from trustworthy sources, as did Paolo Danza at the end of his song about the siege of Brescia (1512): «And I, Danza di Danza, wrote this / just as it was narrated and told to me»[38]. This clearly illustrates the circular relationship between orality and writing: oral information was written down and given to the press, to then return to oral form via a public recitation.

1510, c. 2v; the text is reprinted in *GOR*, vol. 2, pp. 343-348. Cf. V. ROSSI, *La guerra dei Veneziani contro Ferrara nel 1509. Poemetto storico contemporaneo*, in «Nuovo Archivio Veneto», 3, 1892, pp. 47-75.

[35] «Ma se fallato hauesse nel mio dire / nobilissimi miei saui e discreto / cussi al pouero come al cittadino / voi hauete la storia e mi tiro il q[uat]rino»; T. BARBIERI, *El fatto darme del christianissimo re di Franza contra Sguizari. Fatto a Meregnano appresso a Milano del MDXV adi XIII de septembre* [Venice ca. 1515], c. 4v.

[36] The first text is reprinted in *GOR*, vol. 2, pp. 403-8; the second in A. MEDIN, *Profeti e poeti italiani alla battaglia di Pavia*, in «Archivio Storico Lombardo», 42, 1925, pp. 252-290.

[37] See, for example, *La miseranda rotta de venetiani a quelli data da lo invictissimo et christianissimo Ludovico re de Franza et triumphante duca de Milano A dì XIII de maggio. MDIX*, Milano 1509, whose author claimed to have composed it and given it to the press only two days after the event.

[38] «E mi Danza de Danza questa scrisse /sì come molti mi narrò et disse»; P. DANZA, *La nova de Bressa con una Barzelletta in laude del re de Franza e de San Marco stampata nuovamente*, Venice n.d. On this author, printer, and performer, active in San Salvador near Rialto in the first half of the century, see F. ASCARELLI - M. MENATO, *La tipografia del '500 in Italia*, Firenze 1989, p. 353.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, with the establishment of more standardized forms of printed and manuscript information, it is probable that the public for the verse reports of *cantastorie* sought less a minute reconstruction of the event and increasingly a sort of commentary *a posteriori*, a dramatization or satire, a moralizing account of things that happened presented within a familiar narrative *topos*[39]. At the time of the Cambrai war, however, the productions of the singers seem still to have played a significant informative function. These itinerant figures did not represent only sources of distraction and entertainment, but were important voices feeding the public debate about contemporary events.

Using the combination of oral performance and print, these performers could reach large publics quickly, and increasingly it was recognized that this could have significant political consequences. After the Serenissima's defeat at Agnadello became a principal topic of conversation in the public spaces of Italian cities, for example, verse accounts of the rout were not only circulating in print but also «being sung and recited on the piazzas throughout Italy by charlatans, who were making a living from this»[40]. The Venetian government was greatly disturbed by this, and took these works seriously, as reflections of public opinion inside and outside the city. In 1509, Sanudo recorded how an emissary from Bergamo brought to the city, for the information of the government, «some songs, printed in Milan, in contempt of us» and a copy of the popular verse *Lament of the Venetians*[41].

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[39] This explains why the same «news» compositions were sometimes reprinted years after the events narrated; cf. A. MCSHANE-JONES, *The Gazet in Metre; or The Rhiming Newsmonger: The Broadside Ballad as Intelligencer. A New Narrative*, in J.W. KOOPMANS (ed.), *News and Politics in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800)*, Leuven 2005, pp. 131-150, here p. 146. On the development of news media from the sixteenth century, see M. INFELISE, *Prima dei giornali: alla origine della publica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)*, Roma - Bari 2002.

[40] «Tante frotole, tanti sonetti, tanti canti, tante ruine, tanti verssi, posti in stampa, in vergogna et disprecio del nome veneto, che tuta la Ittallia ne era piena, et per ogni citade et chastelle et locho della Ittalia se ne vendevanno publicamente ... [L]i Padri et Senatori Veneti ... se dolevanno de questa loro tanta ruina et de queste exclamatione et querelle, che per tutta la Italia se cantavano et recitavano sopra le piazze per li zarlatani, che vivevano cum questo»; G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, p. 56-57 (June 1509).

[41] M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 8, col. 544-45 (23 July 1509): «*Item*, portoe alcune canzone, stampade a Milano in disprecio nostro, chome fu la cota e presa dil signor Bortolo,

Increasingly aware of the power of political songs and verses to reach wide publics via print and performance, the Venetian government may have become less tolerant of these activities in the city in this period. However, they were not averse to using the power of popular song for their own political ends. Hearing that Pope Julius II was offended by the quantity of anti-papal chatter occurring in Venice, the Venetian authorities seem to have commissioned from the singer Francesco Maria Sacchino of Modigliana, as a possible remedy, a poem in octaves which admitted past trespasses, invoked the pardon of the pontiff, and called for a new alliance between Venice and the papacy[42]. Likewise, they promoted the publication and circulation of verses against the enemy of the moment, the duchy of Ferrara, while suppressing another song which, it was feared, would offend their new ally Emperor Maximilian, as it satirized his recent loss of Padua and the flight of his mercenary *Landsknechte*[43]. Still, Priuli thought that the government should be keeping a closer eye on pro-Venetian songs and verses printed and disseminated within the city. With the constant seesawing of Venetian fortunes in the war, these simple but powerful verses could have a deleterious effect on public morale[44].

e poi uno lamento di venitiani, composto per uno Symone di Bitti *etc.*». The second text referred to is a version of the *Lamento de' Venetiani nouamente composto. Per domino Simeone el quale se contiene el paexe che ano perso in Italia he fora de Italia* (Monteregali [1509]).

[42] F.M. SACCHINO DA MODIGLIANA, *Historia dela horrenda guerra de francesi e del glorioso evangelista Marco*, in his *Spavento d'Italia*, s.n.t., c. 5r; A. MEDIN - L. FRATI (eds), *Lamenti storici dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, Bologna 1887-1894, vol. 3, p. 182.

[43] M. SANUTO, *Diarii*, vol. 9, col. 335: «Era stampado una canzon si chiama: *La Gata di Padoa*, con una altra in vilanescho di Tonin: *E l'è partì quei lanziman*, qual, per non offender il re di romani, cussi chome si vendevano un bezo l'una, fo mandato a tuorle per li capi di X, adeo piu non si vendeteno. Tamen, vene fuora altre canzon fate contra Ferara numero tre, et sono lassate vender». Cf. also M. ROSPOCHER, *Versi pericolosi? Controllo delle opinioni e ricerca del consenso durante le guerre d'Italia*, in D.R. CURTO et al. (eds), *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, Florence 2009, pp. 381-407, here pp. 394-402. For more on the control of print and performance, see below.

[44] «Hera grande manch[ansto] per la citade veneta di lassare vendere simel verssi in rima et frotoli inpreguditio di alchuno dovendo molto bene considerare ch'el possia venire in contrario e quanto sia mutabile la fortuna»; G. PRIULI, *Diarii* ms, vol. 5, cc. 55r-v (end of December 1509).

4. *Voices*

Promoted by the activity of street singers, public discussion manifested itself via ephemeral forms of communication—orality and popular print—which have left only fragmentary traces of their existence. At the end of a performance we might suppose that the relevant issues continued to reverberate through the conversations of the assembled crowd; evanescent publics which, before they dissolved, continued to comment on the events related, sharing fears and predictions, singing the song among themselves or adapting it later with new words[45]. While it is difficult to reconstruct in any concrete way the tenor of such oral discussions, they evidently played a significant role in urban political culture.

In 1507, Sanudo recorded the circulation of an anonymous sonnet, which narrated the Emperor Maximilian's recent descent into Italy. In the form of a dialogue, the poem parodied the urgent speculations that took place among the lower classes, *il vulgo*, concerning the events of international politics unfolding in Italy. One of the interlocutors commented: «The common people are chattering [*el vulgo zanza*], I don't know if they speak the truth, / but I think more than likely maybe they do». The other disagreed: «The common people chatter so much and rarely do they speak the truth; / Today they'll say they don't want [something] and tomorrow they do, / following their whims like you»[46]. This representation of the ordinary people as ill informed, mutable, and capricious was a commonplace of this period, and while denigratory, at the same time it recognized their involvement and interest in the debate about contemporary events. Indeed, it was precisely at this moment that political theorists like Machiavelli and Guicciardini were recognizing the *voce popolare* as an important factor in contemporary politics, even as they represented it negatively[47]. Political elites had

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[45] Cf. De Vivo's analysis of the circulation of a popular parody of the *Pater Noster*, relaborated in various contexts and for various political ends, and transmitted, among others, by a street singer: F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 142-156.

[46] «El vulgo zanza, non so se 'l dicha el vero, / ma credo ben più presto forsi sì /... Zanza assa' il vulgo e raro dice il vero; / ozi dirà non voglio e doman sì, / sequendo l'apetito come ti»; M. SANUDO, *Diarii*, vol. 7, col. 173-174 (31 October 1507).

[47] S. LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du peuple et savoir de gouvernement de Machiavel aux Lumières*, Rennes 2006, pp. 22-24. Cf.

to take account of this «chattering», above all in critical moments of war, and it could influence the decisions of governing bodies like the Venetian Great Council as they struggled to maintain concord and prevent the spread of dissent[48].

Whether consciously or not, the elite and powerful could not but be aware of the *vox populi*. This emerges clearly from contemporary political vocabulary and from the language of Venetian diarists, where we find references to the «opinione vulgare et del vulgo», the «dire e parlare sopra le piaze publice», the «parole deli populli et ettiam deli nobeli», the «mormoratione di la terra» as well as recurrent expressions such as «se diceva sopra le piaze», «fu voce che», «a bocha se intendeva», «è fama che», «comunalmente se intendeva», all of which evoke the power of opinions and extend at least a limited political competence beyond the aristocracy to include the majority of the people[49]. Collectively, these voices amounted to much more than mere chatter, which had negative associations with vanity and falsehood and was easier to ignore.

Contemporary observers recorded the intense discussion of the war in progress within the Venetian population, and its consequences for the political climate. Straight after the disaster at Agnadello, when public discussion proliferated accusing the governing oligarchy of greed, corruption, and incompetence, Priuli lamented that this free speech had not been contained. In past times, any word uttered against the Senate or the Republic would have been strongly and swiftly repressed, while now «anyone, of whatever status and condition, was permitted to say whatever he liked and whatever came to his lips, in

J. DUMOLYN, «*Le povre peuple estoit moult opprimé*»: *Elite Discourses on «The People» in the Burgundian Netherlands (Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, in «French History», 23, 2009, 2, pp. 171-192.

[48] C. NEERFELD, «*Historia per forma di diaria*», p. 168; R. FINLAY, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 53-55; E. CROUZET-PAVAN, *Les mots de Venise*; on the function of gossip in Venetian politics and society, see E. HORODOWICH, *The Gossiping Tongue: Oral Networks, Public Life and Political Culture in Early Modern Venice*, in «Renaissance Studies», 19, 2005, 1, pp. 22-45.

[49] Cf. DUMOLYN, «*Le povre peuple*», p. 184: «The inferior groups in the population were ... considered the voiceless: they were incapable of formulating their own political or socioeconomic desires independently. All they could do was mutter. This was indeed the keyword in the discourse on popular discontent: the concept of *murmurer* (to mutter or grumble)»; see also C. JUDDE DE LARIVIÈRE, *Du Broglio à Rialto*.

the piazza and loggias and in every place», while the government failed to act[50].

Priuli expressed the belief many times that this uncontrolled circulation of opinions in the informal public spaces of the city had been a cause of Venice's troubles. In particular, he opined that «these common *parlamenti* on the Venetian piazzas» had negatively influenced military decisions at the time of Agnadello, spurring the Venetians to battle in pursuit of a victory, which appeared just within reach and instead resulted in a ruinous defeat[51]. Furthermore, this chatter could have serious consequences abroad. In a city crowded with foreigners, and threaded with spies and observers ready to report back to their masters whatever was said publicly on the Venetian piazzas[52], the uncontrolled circulation through the *calli* of opinions hostile to the Republic's enemies could reverberate widely. «Injurious and ignominious words spoken by the Venetian nobles and citizens» against Pope Julius II, for example, supposedly elicited the pontiff's violent reaction and his refusal to annul the excommunication of the Serenissima[53].

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[50] «Hera licito a chadauno, de ogni grado et condictione se fusse, dire quanto li piaceva et che li fusse venuto in bocha et in piaza et in le logiette et per ogni locho, che non hera vergogna, *nec ettiam* hera patritio nè Padre alchuno Veneto, che li bastasse fare provixione in questa materia». In the past, however, «quando uno publicava una nova, over parlava dela gubernatione del Stato, over diceva qualche parola non conveniente deli Padri Veneti over dela Republica, subito per li Capi del Conseglio di Dieci heranno mandati a chiamare ... et examinati volevanno intendere la veritade, et *postea* chastigati de parole acerbe, imponendoli silentio ... et per simel chastigatione cadauno retiniva la lengua dentro li denti per paura»; G. PRIULI, *I Diarii*, vol. 4, p. 108.

[51] «Questi parlamenti vulgari sopra le piaze venete ... he stato grande chagione dela loro ruina veneta, perché, quando li exerciti francexe et veneto in Hieradada heranno aprosimati insieme ... sopra le piaze et logiete et Rialto et barbarie se sbagiaffava et se diceva da molti nobelli et citadini et populari ... che 'l se dovesse investire lo exercito inimico, perché zertissimo se obteniva victoria»; *ibid.*, p. 108; see also *ibid.*, p. 246. For other complaints about the influence of public opinion on the decisions of the Senate, see C. NEERFELD, «*Historia per forma di diaria*», p. 168; cf. also C. PALAZZO, *I Diarii di Girolamo Priuli: Contraddizioni di una cronaca privata*, tesi di laurea, Venezia, 2004-2005, pp. 88-92.

[52] See G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, pp. 72, 237.

[53] «Per vendicharssi de molte parole injuriosse et ignominiose dicte per li nobelli et citadini veneti *contra* l'honore di questo Pontefice»; *ibid.* On the power of opinions in another sixteenth-century context, see R. VILLARD, *Incarnare una voce: Il caso della sede vacante (Roma, XVI secolo)*, in «Quaderni Storici», 121, 2006, 1, pp. 39-68.

At the end of September 1509, Luigi Da Porto also reported the recent and intense «murmuring of the *popolani* against the nobles». As mentioned, the *popolani* to whom Da Porto generically referred seem to have been above all members of the *cittadini originarii*, thus with a higher political and legal status than the vast majority of *popolani*. The *cittadini* lamented particularly the taxes and loans they would be forced to pay in order to finance the war, even if they were not participants «in any part of the government of the State». They thought that the nobles, «taking all of the honor and profit from it, should still sustain all of the expenses of the war»[54]. Agents of Emperor Maximilian were conscious of this diffuse discontent among the Venetian citizenry, since the same anti-aristocratic arguments were used in the printed fliers addressed to the Venetian *cittadini* and *popolani* to incite them to rebel[55].

In the end, though, the revolt did not occur. According to Da Porto, this was because a large part of the Venetian population remained loyal to the aristocracy. Additionally, many of them were foreign-born and concerned only to secure a living for themselves rather than to fight for representation in the government[56]. While this may be true, it did not mean that they did not have grievances and that their voices, especially those of the *cittadini*, remained unheard. Da Porto himself believed that the patriciate undoubtedly feared the possibility of an uprising and discussed potential measures to ward it off. Furthermore, in many territories and cities of the Venetian mainland dominion popular uprisings were occurring against the local nobilities. While most of the *terraferma* peasants and artisans were pro-Venetian, it was not inconceivable at the time that their example could be followed in the capital[57].

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[54] «Dolendosi ... che fra poco per cagion della guerra sarebbe abbisognato di pagar loro molte tasse, decime, ed altre angarie, senza partecipare in parte alcuna al governo dello Stato; onde dicevano ch' essi nobili, ricavandone tutto l'onore e tutto l'utile, dovrebbero ancora sostenere tutte le spese della guerra»; L. DA PORTO, *Lettere storiche*, p. 128.

[55] See above.

[56] L. DA PORTO, *Lettere storiche*, p. 128.

[57] A. VENTURA, *Nobiltà e popolo nella società veneta del '400 e '500*, Bari 1964, ch. 4; for more recent reflection on the historiography of Venice and the *terraferma*, see M. KNAPTON, *«Nobiltà e popolo» e un trentennio di storiografia veneta*, in «Nuova Rivista Storica», 82, 1998, 1, pp. 167-192.

In the autumn of 1509, comforted by the successful defense of Padua, Priuli contradicted his earlier comments about the discontent among the people, now declaring instead that during the recent tribulations there had not been heard «neither from the citizens, nor from the *popolani*, not even the smallest sign, nor word against the nobles». The city had remained «in the greatest silence, so that it seemed a holy sacristy»[58]. The episodes recounted above confirm that Venice was anything but that: the murmuring and chattering of the city were intense and government authorities could not ignore them, however they might wish to forget about them once they died down and Venice's fortunes in the war recovered.

In the years that followed the Cambrai War, the Venetian government strove to keep a tighter rein on public political space in all its physical, verbal, and textual manifestations. The *renovatio urbis* that followed the war included the transformation of Piazza San Marco into a more solemn and imposing site for the political and religious heart of the Republic and attempts to eradicate indecorous activities and petty commerce from the space[59]. Government offices such as the new anti-blasphemy magistracy (the *Esecutori contro la bestemmia*) kept an increasingly watchful eye over other important spaces of gathering, such as *osterie* and the areas around churches, identified as potential sites for subversive discussions and behavior[60].

Regulations were also progressively imposed on performances in public spaces, with charlatans and street singers confined to particular areas of the piazza and times that did not infringe on religious solemnities.

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[58] «*Nec ettiam* ahora in queste tribulentie et ruine venete he stato sentito né audicto, né de citadini, né de populari *contra* nobelli, né pur uno minimo zigno, né parola, *ymmo* in la citade veneta sempre *cum* grandissimo sylentio, che apareva una sacrestia *de sanctimonia*»; G. PRIULI, *Diarii*, vol. 4, p. 384 (4 October 1509).

[59] M. TAFURI (ed.), «*Renovatio Urbis*». *Venezia nell'età di Andrea Gritti (1523-1538)* (Collana di Architettura, 25), Rome 1984; D. CALABI, *Il rinnovamento urbano del primo Cinquecento*, in A. TENENTI - U. TUCCI (eds), *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 4: *Il rinascimento: società ed economia*, Roma 1996, pp. 101-163.

[60] R. DEROSAS, *Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel '500-'600: gli esecutori contro la bestemmia*, in G. COZZI (ed.), *Stato, società e giustizia nella repubblica veneta (sec. XV-XVIII)*, Roma 1980, pp. 431-528; G. COZZI, *Religione, moralità e giustizia a Venezia: vicende della magistratura degli Esecutori contro la bestemmia (xvi-xvii)*, in «Ateneo Veneto» 29, 1991, pp. 7-96.

Public performers had to choose their words with increasing care[61]. Meanwhile, ever greater surveillance was extended over the printed word. While this was prompted in particular by the dissemination of reformist religious ideas towards the middle of the century, it was the critical period of the Cambrai War that saw the first sporadic attempts to control print publication, in order to prevent the spread of dissent[62]. Having been made aware of the potentially subversive power of poetry and songs, in 1519 the Council of Ten prohibited the publication and sale of such works without permission. The edict made explicit reference to the types of poetic works customarily sold in the streets or on benches in the piazza[63].

Even as the Venetian authorities sought to tame the flood of words which coursed through the city, and to promote their own views, voices and opinions emerged, grew, and spread in ways that they could not always control. The songs and pamphlets, which circulated among the population, might present contemporary events in the familiar form of a moralizing tale and often in a positive, pro-Venetian light. Nonetheless, they contributed to fueling an intense and resounding public debate; more cacophony than murmur.

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[61] See R. SALZBERG - M. ROSPOCHER, *Street Singers*. More broadly, the increasing control exercised over oral communication in this period is analyzed in E. CROUZET-PAVAN, *Les mots de Venise*; E. HORODOWICH, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice*, Cambridge 2008.

[62] For an overview of print censorship in Venice, see P.F. GRENDLER, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press (1540-1605)*, Princeton NJ 1977.

[63] «[Nessuno] ardisca, né presuma de stampar *aut* far stampar opera alchuna, né grande né picola, né soneto ne verso, né stantie ... né quelli vender, né far vender, né in botege, né sule piaze, né sopra el ponte de Rialto»; Venezia, Archivio di Stato, Consiglio dei dieci, Minuti dei proclami, filza 2, no. 33 (3 July 1519). We would like to thank Claire Judde de Larivière for pointing us to this important document, not cited in the classic studies on print censorship in Venice. For other examples of the censorship of cheap print, see R. SALZBERG, *Printshop to Piazza*.

5. Conclusions

Influenced by the ideas of Michel De Certeau[64], Stephen Milner has described the Renaissance piazza as a «practiced place». Conceived almost as a personification of the social body, this was where «communality could be imagined, celebrated, and acknowledged»[65]; the public space in which authority manifested itself[66]. Nevertheless, the piazza was also lived and experienced by ordinary people in ways not necessarily approved of by the civic authorities, ways that could undermine or subvert official conceptions of order and power[67]. Similarly, we have seen how the public political space of Venice was more open, variegated, and plural than the governing authorities would concede, shaped both from above and from below. A «democratizing» view of public space in this period would undoubtedly be anachronistic, nevertheless during moments of political, economic and social crisis such as the Cambrai War, an evanescent public sphere could appear—not an homogeneous and abstract space, but a concatenation of concrete and heterogeneous public places.

The performances of street singers were small instances of this ephemeral public sphere. Occasional publics gathered physically around the bench of the singer, or around a shared reading of one of his printed texts. Taken together, these gatherings constituted a wider space of communication and debate about the way to conduct war and govern the state. Moreover, they were connected by the travelling of people, words, and printed texts into larger webs of communication, which spread through the other cities of the Italian peninsula and beyond.

This evanescent and plural form of public political debate, constantly forming and dissolving, is difficult to capture because of its fleeting nature. Its only «structures»—the improvised stages, clusters of people, ephemeral prints, words, voices, and gestures—are nearly invisible in

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[64] M. DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley CA 1984 (orig. published in Fr. ed., 1974).

[65] S. MILNER, *The Florentine Piazza*, p. 83.

[66] What Habermas defines the «representative publicness» of authority, J. HABERMAS, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 5-12.

[67] S. MILNER, *The Florentine Piazza*, pp. 84-85.

historical sources. It could be dissolved by political authorities seeking to prevent the expression of critique and dissent by prohibiting performances or gatherings in particular places or censoring and banning particular types of texts. But precisely by virtue of their evanescent nature, these publics were irrepressible, able to reconstitute themselves in other times and places.

Public Sphere or Communication Triangle?
Information and Politics in Early Modern Europe

by *Filippo De Vivo*

AGL' APPASIONATI PER LE GVERRE

MIEI NOVELLISTI, IO VI DARO VNA NVOVA,
DI QVEL VOSTRO GRIDAR PER FRANCIA E SPAGNA
VNA PAZZIA MAGGIOR NON SI RITROVA.

1. *Introduction*

In this 1690 print by the Bolognese artist Giovanni Maria Mitelli, a man reads out a sheet of periodical news (*Avvisi*) surrounded by a group of people[1]. He wears spectacles, as does another in the group, suggesting

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[1]   GIOVANNI MARIA MITELLI, *Agl'appasionati per le guerre*, 1690, in P. BELLETTINI - R. CAMPIONI - Z. ZANARDI (eds), *Una città in piazza. Comunicazione e vita quotidiana a Bologna tra Cinque e Seicento*, Bologna 2000, no. 34 (Bologna, Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Gabinetto disegni e stampe, Cartella Gozzadini 1/III, no. 107).

a certain diffusion of literacy: someone else, quite absent-mindedly, also holds a written sheet. Reading prompts oral discussion which, as in a modern comic strip, Mitelli graphically rendered in captions coming out of the mouths of participants and suggesting disagreement and disbelief. Such feelings heat up easily and, on the right-hand side of the picture, two men fight: the one with long hair dressed *alla francese*, the other with a long mustache, *alla spagnola*. Their clothes and hairstyles convey their contrasting opinions, just as their words do: the two men side with the two major players in continental politics at the time of the war of the league of Augsburg (1688-1697).

There is no doubt that this is an alluring image for early modern historians. At first sight, it perfectly illustrates a development which, following Jürgen Habermas's book on the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, we have learned to view as central to this period[2]. In this account, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, politics in Britain and France (and to a lesser extent in Germany) became increasingly public as it stopped being confined to merely representative rituals celebrating sovereigns and turned instead into the subject of discussion of an increasingly critical bourgeoisie. If anything, Mitelli's image suggests that we should expand that model to include other areas, such as Bologna whose porticoes are sketched in the background, and other social groups, including the humble porters depicted here with their wares on their back.

However, on closer examination it is clear that Mitelli's stereotyped realism serves a primarily satirical intention. Far from extolling rational public discussion, the point is to condemn curiosity as a «passion» (as in the picture's title) and a «folly» (as one bystander says turning away from the discussion). In this view, people who talk about news cannot agree because they do not really understand what they are talking about; they begin with words but, like animals, invariably end up with blows: like the dog that barks near the center of the image. Rather than as evidence of communicative self-empowerment from below, then, Mitelli's print may be seen as a denial, from above, of ordinary people's capacities to express serious political judgment. In this sense, another of his prints, entitled *Politica vera*, would more accurately describe

[2]   J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge MA 1989.

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the artist's view of early modern political communication. There, he describes «true politics» with a series of verbs indicating speech, but speech only employed to express subjection: to praise the great, to fear the strong, to appreciate the rich, and to applaud the winners («Dir ben di chi è grande, temer di chi è forte, stimar chi è più ricco, lodar quel che vince»)[3]. This reminds us that Habermas's is, of course, only one possible conceptualization of the relations between power and communication. To simplify, we can summarize the other approach by referring to Michel Foucault's view of language as invariably expressing and creating power relations[4].

The study of political communication poses difficult historical questions, largely because we have to rely on third-hand accounts of exchanges that were mostly oral. This is not just a problem of historiographical interpretation; it has serious moral and political implications. On the one hand, taking those sources at face value means mistaking the condemnation of the elite for the voice of the ruled, the thought of the few for the opinions of many. On the other, in the absence of other sources, dismissing them as having no relations with social reality means renouncing the possibility of studying the dissonant voices that developed outside the world of high politics. As Sandro Landi has argued recently, early modern representations of public opinion served the interests of rulers more than they represented those of the people[5]. Does this mean that we cannot account for opinions, and voices, outside those representations? Of course, authors and authorities misconstrued the opinions of their contemporaries, but does this mean that people who did not leave behind sources really had no opinions about their governments? In fact, we should probably reverse the question, and ask why authorities chose to care about popular communication at all: had it not mattered, why did they misrepresent it? To answer such questions we have to situate our analysis at the crossroads between political history and the history of communication.

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[3] The print is reproduced in *Proverbj figurati di G.M. Mitelli*, s.i., 1967, no 181. On urban communication in Bologna at this time, see P. BELLETTINI - R. CAMPIONI - Z. ZANARDI (eds), *Una città in piazza*.

[4] For example M. FOUCAULT, *L'ordre du discours*, Paris 1971.

[5] S. LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du peuple et savoir de gouvernement de Machiavel aux Lumières*, Rennes 2006.

2. The history of communication and the public sphere model

The history of communication derives from the history of information, but differs from it, in so far as it is concerned with the 'ways' in which a particular content is exchanged: the human and social activity arising from the exchange, and the material setting, which made it possible. As a line of research, it draws from different fields. First, the history of the book showed the importance of the printing press in transforming the transmission and availability of texts[6]. More recently historians have moved away from the sole insistence on print as the agent of change to show the importance of manuscripts as means of information well into the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even the eighteenth centuries, in particular in connection with the production and distribution of political news[7]. In Italy, we have numerous studies about such different, but all politically relevant genres as astrological prognostications, almanacs of large circulation, epigraphy, posters, and graffiti[8]. Nearly twenty years ago, Robert Darnton exhorted historians to view books as elements of a larger «media system»[9]. Another element in this shift is the great interest for the history of reading, the extent of literacy, and the impact of reception on the meaning of texts[10]. While the classic history of the

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[6] L. FEBVRE - H.-J. MARTIN, *L'apparition du livre*, Paris 1958; E.L. EISENSTEIN, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Communications and Cultural Transformation in Early-modern Europe*, 2 vols, Cambridge 1979; for Italy see B. RICHARDSON, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 1999.

[7] H. LOVE, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford 1993; M. INFELISE, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)*, Bari 2002; B. RICHARDSON, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 2009; F. DE VIVO - B. RICHARDSON (eds), *Scribal Culture in Italy, 1450-1700*, in «Italian Studies», 66, 2011, 2.

[8] L. BRAIDA, *Le guide del tempo. Produzione, contenuti e forme degli almanacchi piemontesi nel Settecento*, Torino 1989; F. BARBIERATO, *Politici e ateisti. Percorsi della miscredenza a Venezia fra Sei e Settecento*, Milano 2006; B. DOOLEY, *Morandi's Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics*, Princeton NJ 2002; A. PETRUCCI, *La scrittura. Ideologia e rappresentazione*, Torino 1986.

[9] R. DARNTON, *'La France, ton café fout le camp!' De l'histoire du livre à l'histoire de la communication*, in «Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales», 100, 1993, pp. 16-26, also in R. DARNTON, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, London 1996, pp. 169-180.

[10] C. GINZBURG, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, Torino 1976; R. DARNTON, *History of Reading*, in P. BURKE (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writ-*

book was concerned with production, the research pioneered in the field of early modern Italy by such works as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* has emphasized consumption and the creative interaction between readers and their texts. Separately, but concurrently, literary criticism emphasized the importance of reception in the creation of meaning—and I am thinking here of both the School of Constance and of Umberto Eco's work[11]. Finally, historians such as Bob Scribner (for Germany), Arlette Farge and Robert Darnton (for France), and Adam Fox (for England) have increasingly recognized that political communication was dominated by orality and that the oral exchange of news and ideas was itself part of the media system[12].

The history of the book long had an interest for connections between publishing and politics. As is known, in 1910 Daniel Mornet was already trying to respond to the old question about the relations between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution by establishing what French people read in the eighteenth century[13]. Two later, quite different, intellectual developments renewed and refined this enquiry. One, which I will not explore in this article, was the so-called «linguistic turn», especially as it developed in the revisionist historiography of eighteenth-century France in the 1980s. This emphasized language as a prime determinant of historical events, an element that shaped the ways in which political actors conceived of their action and, therefore, the ways in which they could act[14]. The other was the influence of Habermas's public sphere

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ing, Cambridge 1991, pp. 140-167; G. CAVALLO - R. CHARTIER (eds), *Storia della lettura nel mondo occidentale*, Roma - Bari 1995.

[11] On Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, see R.C. HOLUB (ed.), *Teoria della ricezione*, Torino 1989; U. ECO, *Lector in fabula*, Milano 1979.

[12] R.W. SCRIBNER, *Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts*, in H. KÜHNEL (ed.), *Kommunikation und Alltag im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, Wien 1992, pp. 183-197; A. FARGE, *Dire et mal dire. L'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1992, and R. DARNTON, *An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, in «American Historical Review», 105, 2000, pp. 1-35; A. FOX, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700*, Oxford 2000.

[13] D. MORNET, *Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées au XVIIIe siècle*, in «Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France», 21, 1910, pp. 449-495.

[14] F. FURET, *Penser la Révolution française*, Paris 1979, and K.M. BAKER, *Inventing the French Revolution. Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge 1990.

model, in particular in English-speaking countries, especially in the 1990s[15]. With few exceptions, historians of pre-eighteenth-century Europe have embraced Habermas's model, which they have wished to pre-date and to enlarge both socially and geographically[16].

There are several and somewhat paradoxical reasons for the success of Habermas's model amongst historians of communication. One is that it corresponded to a view of the development of modernity as a process of political enfranchisement, a view that gained renewed strength at the time of the «velvet» (communicative rather than violent) revolutions of Eastern Europe. This coincidence, as Habermas himself acknowledged, explained the second life of his book (first published as a doctoral thesis in 1962, yet especially influential outside Germany in the 1990s)[17]. For the same reason, however, early modern historians have curiously tended to ignore the second and arguably most important part of his work: a critique of the modern system of political communication, dominated by mass media essentially depriving individuals of the possibility for expressing their critical reason. Secondly, the success of the public sphere model has been proportional to its ambiguity—as witnessed by the different translations of Habermas's «Öffentlichkeit» as «opinione pubblica», «vida pública», «espace public», «public sphere». This shift in vocabulary reveals the risks of reifying what we know about physical spaces (in the plural) into something much grander about opinions or, worse, public opinion (in the singular). Finally, in the more specific terms of early modern historiography, I would emphasize above all that Habermas's model emphasized media, like newspapers and books, and spaces, like salons and coffeehouses, and so enabled early modern historians to speak about «the public» and «public opinion» while studying objects which were easier to trace than either of those concepts[18]. In

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[15]   C. CALHOUN (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge MA 1992.

[16]   See respectively, O. NICCOLI, *Rinascimento anticlericale. Infamia, propaganda e satira in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, Roma - Bari 2005; A. FARGE, *Dire et mal dire*; M. WARNER, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, Cambridge MA 1990.

[17]   See the *Prefazione alla nuova edizione*, in *Storia e critica dell'opinione pubblica*, Roma - Bari 2002, pp. VII-XLIII.

[18]   J. VAN HORN MELTON, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, Cambridge 2001.

this sense, his model did not only appeal to historians of the book; it also drew from two further historiographical developments: the study of sociability and notably of political sociability as first put forward by Maurice Agulhon in the 1960s; and the more recent and growing awareness of the importance of space and spatiality in early modern history[19].

We are familiar with some of the criticisms of Habermas's model too, especially his choice of geographical and chronological boundaries, his insistence on the bourgeois nature of the public sphere and his neglect of its gendered dimension. Here, I would like to suggest three other and more essential weaknesses. First, despite its reference to spaces and media, the notion of the public sphere remains essentially abstract and Habermas had little to say about the practical ways in which either functioned. Historians of political communication need to bear in mind the insights of the history of the book, which thrived on the original study of texts as material objects, whose production was regulated by economic forces and whose understanding was mediated by the physical and typographical features of books. The physicality of space also has a huge importance—how intimate or distant was the conversation in coffee-houses? Did some people sit and others stand in salons? As Richard Sennett has argued, the materiality of communication has important implications also for its politics[20]. While Habermas imagined an egalitarian discourse, the social life of salons has been recently shown to have been framed and regulated by precise notions of etiquette and social hierarchy[21].

From this comes a second point. Habermas's model rests on the separation of private and public and so gives no sense of the personal, economic, or social motives of communication, other than a disinterested intellectual concern for public affairs. Once again, this is appropriate to an idealized notion of communication as driven by reason alone,

[19] M. AGULHON, *La sociabilité méridionale. Confréries et associations dans la vie collective en Provence orientale à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols, Aix-en-Provence 1966; A. TORRE, *Un 'tournant spatial' en histoire ? Paysages, regards, ressources*, in «Annales HSS», 63, 2008, pp. 1127-1144 and more generally B. WARF - S. ARIAS (eds), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London 2008.

[20] R. SENNETT, *Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, London - Boston MA 1994.

[21] A. LILTI, *Le monde des salons. Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 2005.

and unsurprisingly Habermas's public, the educated bourgeoisie, is defined precisely by its lack of material preoccupations. We must ask how realistic an assessment this is even in the case of the rich and for the overwhelming majority of society we need to understand how communication interacted with people's other social, professional, and economic preoccupations. Only in this way can we understand how people who had precious little leisure time and overwhelming material concerns could find the time for worrying about political events distant from their lives and, in this way, for grasping the implications those events had for them.

Finally, as has been recently noted, Habermas described the public sphere as essentially separate from, and critical of, the state—a distinction drawn from the sociological opposition of state and civil society. To Habermas, the golden age of the public sphere, unlike the preceding or following periods of representative publicness and mass culture, saw communication invariably leading to liberation[22]. This is a classic line already powerfully voiced during the Enlightenment. Habermas's debt to Kant is well known and it may be added that David Hume already wrote that the liberty of the press and that of the people «must stand or fall together»[23]. In this rose-tinted view, it is as if all means of information could really serve to enfranchise their users—forgetting that the media have always been operated by elites who had precise political, social, and economic interests. We need to build politics back into the study of communication, to see how the power-games of government authorities and faction-leaders manifested themselves by disseminating and manipulating information.

Behind these problems lies the most essential problem in history: source criticism. I have shown this with Mitelli's image, but recent works have pointed out the interpretive shortcomings on Habermas's own territory of English coffeehouses and French salons, as the sources on both are often partisan satires or fictions drawn by authors for their own agenda and meant either to dismiss political communication or to steer it in

[22] P. LAKE - S. PINCUS, *Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, in «The Journal of British Studies», 45, 2006, pp. 270-292.

[23] Cf. A. ANDREWS, *The History of British Journalism, from the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England, to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855*, 2 vols, London 1859, vol. 1, p. 4.

particular directions[24]. This is a well-known problem in the history of political communication, as is clear in the example of pamphleteering, one of the main channels for the wide circulation of political and religious ideas in early modern Europe. The traditional interpretation is to regard pamphlets as resulting from the public interest in those ideas; but, as Christian Jouhaud has argued, this is a circular argument whereby public opinion is taken to explain the publication of pamphlets, which are then used to demonstrate the existence of public opinion. As he demonstrated, the pamphlets of the long period of crisis in seventeenth-century France culminating in the Fronde originated more often than not in patron-client relations between authors and the protagonists of the political struggle[25]. Even in the case of manuscript pasquinades, historians are not sure whether they originated in elite controversies inside the court or embodied a popular and critical perception of the court from outside[26].

3. The triangle of communication: an alternative model

Rather than as a mono-directional movement, from the top down (as propaganda), or from the bottom up (as public opinion), we should think of political communication in early modern European cities as a tense, at times creative, interaction between multiple actors loosely organized around three poles, which can be identified with three levels of the political and social system and with three sites in the urban space: the authorities, the political arena, and the rest of the city. In the remainder of this essay, I would like to put forward this simple—and in my experience helpful—model. I developed it while studying Venice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries[27], but it can usefully be applied to the movement of information in other cities. In a book

[24] M. ELLIS, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History*, London 2004, B.W. COWAN, *The Social Life of Coffee: the Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*, New Haven CT - London 2005; A. LILTI, *Le monde des salons*.

[25] C. JOUHAUD, *Mazarinades: la Fronde des mots*, Paris 1985.

[26] M. FIRPO, *Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento*, in «Rivista Storica Italiana», 96, 1984, pp. 600-621.

[27] F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford 2007.

published in 1994, Andreas Gestrich similarly argued for a three-tiered model for the analysis of public communication in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Germany[28].

4. *The authorities*

First, communication played a substantial role inside the government structure at the level of so-called high politics. Historians of early modern information generally neglect this, but in the 1960s Karl Deutsch already described communication as the «nerves of government»[29]. On the one hand, the decision-making process involved a high degree of deliberation in both republican assemblies and princely councils, some of which were also quite large: in France the *Conseil du Roi* could count as many as a hundred members, the English Privy Council, forty, and the various Spanish *Consejos* had an average of fifty[30]. In sixteenth-century Rome, the Sacred College gathered between forty and seventy cardinals[31]. Debating was the arena for showing off rhetorical prowess and the vocabulary defining government assemblies shows that decision-making was an essentially communicative, and distinctively oral, activity: *colloqui* and *consulte*, in Italian city-states, *civiloquia* and *Bürgergespräche* in German cities, and «parliaments» in both cities and monarchical nations[32]. In republican Venice since the fourteenth cen-

[28] A. GESTRICH, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit: politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1994. I was regretfully unaware of this book until I prepared the present paper for the conference where it was originally presented.

[29] K.W. DEUTSCH, *The Nerves of Government. Models of Political Communication and Control*, New York - London 1963.

[30] V.R. MOUSNIER, *Le conseil du roi, de la mort de Henri IV au gouvernement personnel de Louis XIV*, in «Études d'histoire moderne et contemporaine», 1, 1947-1948, pp. 29-67; G. ELTON, *The Tudor Constitution*, Cambridge 1982, pp. 87-115; F. BARRIOS, *El Consejo de Estado de la monarquía española*, Madrid 1984, pp. 29-172.

[31] A. PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, *Il senato della Chiesa*, in *Il senato nella storia*, vol. 2, Roma 1997, pp. 173-216.

[32] S. BERTELLI, *Il potere nascosto: i «consilia sapientium»*, in *Forme e tecniche del potere nella città (secoli XIV-XVII)*, Perugia 1979-1980, p. 21, and M. BERENGO, *L'Europa delle città. Il volto della società urbana europea tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Torino 1999, p. 177; cf. A.R. MYERS, *Parliaments and Estates in Europe to 1789*, London 1975.

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tury, an increasingly complex series of laws regulated the proceedings, length, and subject matter of debates inside the ducal palace so as to make debates effective in spite of the size of the assemblies. Similar regulations applied elsewhere, as in Florence's *consulte*, and occasionally betray the distrust of the unfettered use of communication—like the Venetian senate, the French *parlements* also had a strong preference for the unflourished, restrained Atticist style of rhetoric[33].

On the other hand, policies were elaborated on the basis of information that was retrieved, collected, and processed inside the government structure. Again, in Venice, the control of information inside the government made for a careful process through which some councils like the *Collegio* and the Council of Ten received all news, censored it, and passed only some onto the larger assemblies. Interestingly, in the Venetian constitutional machinery, this mechanism was known as *comunicazione*, and from 1582 onwards, it gave origin to specially transcribed and bound series of records entitled *Comunicate*. The collection, elaboration, and management of information resulted in large masses of paperwork and required the attention of growing bodies of officially employed secretaries[34]. Growing military commitments and fiscal pressure in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries meant that bureaucratic apparatuses for retrieving information on a state's subjects or neighbors also had to grow[35].

The guiding principle of communication at this level was secrecy. Governing institutions throughout Europe claimed a monopoly over political communication (which is not to say that they had one, as we shall see in a moment). Secrecy had both practical and symbolic functions—indeed, it might be said that the modern attention to propaganda ignores the early modern ruler's cult of mystery. In a revealing twist in

[33] M. FUMAROLI, *L'âge de l'éloquence. Rhétorique et «res literaria» de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique*, Paris 1980, pp. 427-475.

[34] Cfr. J.V. JENSEN, *The Staff of the Jacobean Privy Council*, in «Huntington Library Quarterly», 40, 1976, pp. 11-44; F. LEVEROTTI (ed.), *Cancelleria e amministrazione negli stati italiani del Rinascimento*, in «Ricerche storiche», 24, 1994, 2, and F. DE VIVO, *Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice (1400-1650)*, in «Archival Science», 10, 2010, pp. 231-248.

[35] Cfr. R.H. BAUTIER, *La Phase cruciale de l'histoire des archives: la constitution des dépôts d'archives et la naissance de l'archivistique (XVIe-début du XIXe siècle)*, in «Archivum», 18, 1968, pp. 139-149, and E. HIGGS, *The Information State in England: the Central Collection of Information on Citizens, 1500-2000*, Basingstoke 2004.

the chapter on maintaining the «reputation» of the prince, Giovanni Botero's founding *Della ragion di stato* (1589) affirmed that it was better to dissimulate weaknesses than to celebrate strength[36]. He added that «Secrecy is also of great importance to a prince; not only does it make him like God, but men, ignorant of his intentions, are kept in suspense about his schemes»[37]. However, such a stance was not unique to princely or monarchical governments: in republican Venice, secrecy was elevated to one of the constituent elements of the Republic's cherished image. Governing systems marked by the plurality of decision-making bodies needed secrecy to maintain the fiction that decisions were taken unanimously and/or in adherence with the single will of the sovereign. In this sense, secrecy was at the heart both of pre-modern political practices and of the pre-modern idea of sovereignty itself. For this reason too, perhaps, many pre-modern governing councils refused to record discussions. But the restricted councils of kings were also often called «secret» or «privy», and strict rules required their members to maintain secrecy on the business they dealt with. Secrecy also had important symbolic functions, as reason of state theorists knew well[38]. Neither the Venetian assemblies nor the parliaments in Paris and London nor the English Privy Council kept minutes of the debates: instead, they all explicitly prohibited members from making their own notes[39].

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[36]   G. BOTERO, *The Reason of State and the Greatness of Cities*, ed. D.P. Waley, London 1956, p. 54 [Ital. *Della ragion di stato libri dieci. Revisti dall'autore, e arricchiti in più luoghi di discorsi, e di cose memorabili*, Venezia 1606, p. 73].

[37]   *Ibid.*, p. 56 [«è anche di grande importanza la secretezza; perche oltre che lo rende simile à Dio fa che gli huomini, ignorando i pensieri del Prencipe stiano sospesi, & in aspettatione grande de' suoi dissegni», p. 77].

[38]   M. STOLLEIS, *Arcana imperii und Ratio status: Bemerkungen zur politischen Theorie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1980 and R. VILLARI, *Elogio della dissimulazione. La lotta politica nel Seicento*, Roma - Bari 1987; see also M. GAUCHET, *L'Etat au miroir de la raison d'Etat: La France et la chrétienté*, in Ch.Y. ZARKA (ed.), *Raison et déraison d'Etat. Théoriciens et théories de la raison d'Etat aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Paris 1993, pp. 193-244.

[39]   J. LE BOINDRE, *Débats du Parlement de Paris pendant la minorité de Louis XIV*, ed. by R. DESCIMON - O. RANUM - P.M. RANUM, Paris 1997; W. NOTESTEIN - F.H. RELF, *Introduction*, in *Commons Debates for 1629*, Minneapolis MN 1921, p. XXIII, and G. ELTON, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 102 and 253.

5. The political arena

Despite the official insistence on secrecy, in Venice (as in London or Paris) we have long and detailed accounts of the debates held inside governing assemblies, written by participants from memory or on the basis of notes unlawfully scribbled during proceedings, then transcribed in diaries or private archives, circulated amongst associates, and occasionally sold to strangers[40]. Reserved knowledge leaked continually, as is shown by one of the most important sources in early modern history, the *relazioni* of Venetian ambassadors. Produced by diplomats to inform their peers in the Senate and stored in an archive known as *la Segreta*, they were read and collected in well-informed circles everywhere in Europe. Leopold von Ranke too, who claimed to have «discovered» the *relazioni*, started off by inspecting collections in German and Austrian libraries: had secrecy worked, those collections ought not to have been there at all[41]. Such cases are not unique to Venice; for example, the minutes of papal conclaves also enjoyed diffusion and shed light—often in contrast with one another—on the internal miseries and factional alliances of the most secretive of assemblies, where cardinals gathered to draw the Holy Spirit's inspiration in choosing Peter's successor[42].

The people behind the production and circulation of these documents did not belong to an undefined public sphere of political debate outside the authorities, but to a second level of political communication that we can usefully imagine as a political arena: not a homogeneous class but a series of groups locked in competition for power and information, separated between feudal and robe nobilities, older and newer families, richer and poorer. Together, they constituted an elite that was politically, not socially, defined, distinguished not by birth but by access to

[40] Cf. H. Love, *Scribal Publication*, pp. 9-22, and F. De Vivo, *Information and Communication*, pp. 48-70.

[41] U. Tucci, *Ranke and the Venetian Document Market*, in G.G. Iggers - J.M. Powell (eds), *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, Syracuse NY 1990, pp. 99-107; A. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History*, London 1997.

[42] M.A. Visceglia, *Fazioni e lotta politica nel Sacro Collegio nella prima metà del Seicento*, in G. Signorotto - M.A. Visceglia (eds), *La corte di Roma tra Cinque e Seicento 'teatro' della politica europea*, Roma 1998, pp. 37-91, and S. Tabacchi, *Cardinali zelanti e fazioni cardinalizie tra fine Seicento e inizio Settecento*, *ibid.*, pp. 139-165.

information, not by formal membership but by informal personal and social contacts. They transcended the ruling groups who had access to the institutions. Unlike governmental assemblies, the political arena also made space for women, in important if gender-specific roles as mothers, wives and sisters, fostering alliances between different families, or as hostesses, opening their houses to politically significant gatherings of men[43]. Moreover, foreign ambassadors—whose missions abroad became permanent in the sixteenth century—knew their job included investigating and reporting information, which their hosts would have wanted to keep secret[44]. Finally, political leaders had continuous recourse to secretaries, men of letters, jurists, and news-writers: people who were excluded by birth from politics but made political information into their profession. Cultural historians have studied the role of such «intelligencers» in retrieving and elaborating knowledge, from current affairs to classical culture[45]. The sociology of literature and science has shown the importance of networks of patron-client relations in shaping the work of authors and scholars throughout Europe[46]. What we do know suggests that it would be worthwhile to study their political work, too[47].

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[43] R. AGO, *Giochi di squadra: uomini e donne nelle famiglie nobili del XVII secolo*, in M.A. VISCEGLIA (ed.), *Signori, patrizi, cavalieri in Italia centro-meridionale nell'età moderna*, Bari 1992, pp. 256-264, and A. BELLAVITIS - I. CHABOT (eds), *Famiglie e poteri in Italia tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Roma 2009.

[44] D. FRIGO, *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*, Cambridge 1999, and M.J. LEVIN, *Agents of Empire: Spanish Ambassadors in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, Ithaca NY 2005.

[45] L. JARDINE - W. SHERMAN, *Pragmatic Readers: Knowledge Transactions and Scholarly Services in Late Elizabethan England*, in A. FLETCHER - P. ROBERTS (eds), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 102-124, and J. RAYMOND (ed.), *News Networks in Seventeenth-Century Britain and Europe*, London 2006.

[46] Cf. P. BURKE, *A Social History of Knowledge From Gutenberg to Diderot*, Cambridge 2000; A. VIALA, *Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique*, Paris 1985, and C. JOUHAUD, *Les Pouvoirs de la littérature. Histoire d'un paradoxe*, Paris 2000.

[47] Cf. A.E. BALDINI, *Puntigli spagnoleschi e intrighi politici nella Roma di Clemente VIII: Girolamo Frachetta e la sua relazione del 1603 sui cardinali*, Milano 1981; G. FRAGNITO, *La trattatistica cinque e seicentesca sulla corte cardinalizia. «Il vero ritratto d'una bellissima e ben governata corte»*, in «Annali dell'istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento», 17, 1991, pp. 135-185, and E. FASANO GUARINI - M. ROSA (eds), *Informazione politica in Italia*, Pisa 2001.

Information was central to the political struggle, as insiders who had access to reserved information circulated it against the law for political motives among networks of temporary or permanent outsiders with whom they had personal, social, or political connections. In 1619, the Venetian Ottaviano Bon got his family and associates to transcribe and circulate copies of his *relazione* in order to vindicate his conduct while ambassador and to raise support for a particular line in Venice's foreign policy. The report circulated in private homes and was discussed at dinner parties, during pauses from Great Council proceedings by commoners as well as patricians[48]. The communication of the political arena took place not inside governing councils but just outside, in antechambers, corridors, and in the homes and salons of the powerful and the well-connected, where the exchange of political information informed conversation and sociability. Greater study is needed before we can find out more about these circles, their meeting places, and habits. In Venice, patricians met in the *broglio*, a word still resonating with political maneuvering, and in the early modern age indicating the smaller square between San Marco and the Ducal Palace. They recognized the importance of this practice, as recommended in an education manual authored by a typical member of the political arena, Aldo Manuzio il Giovane, man of letters, publisher, secretary, and lecturer, first in Venice then in Rome. A patrician neglecting the *piazze*, he said, «would give the impression of being a man who does not take public affairs seriously»[49]. Although no institution, the *broglio* was fully part of the political system because it led to the creation of useful networks of supporters. And what was true of Venice, a state that famously repressed factionalism in the name of *unanimitas*, was even truer of republics like Genoa or of royal courts like Whitehall or Versailles[50].

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[48] F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 63-70.

[49] «Non parlo del sollecitare le Piazze publiche di S. Marco et di Rialto, che questo è necessario a chi è nato qui nobile: perche, altrimenti facendo, dà a credere di esser'uomo, che si prenda le cose publiche per ischerzo»; A. MANUZIO, *Il perfetto gentil'huomo*, Venice 1584, pp. 48-49.

[50] E. GRENDI, *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi. Politica, carità e commercio fra Cinque e Seicento*, Bologna 1987, pp. 49-102.

6. The city

In principle, all this information was barred to the majority of the population; the socially and culturally dishomogenous groups of ordinary people defined by the double fact that they were all excluded from the institutions and had to work for a living. Their exclusion was particularly marked in Venice, where the government recognized no political role to trade guilds[51]. But even corporative republics which did, such as Renaissance Florence or the German city-states, only admitted the richest and least numerous ones, and the same is true of local government bodies in monarchies, such as the City of London, which was in the hands of a small circle of aldermen[52]. In terms of political communication, the populace was regarded as incapable of expressing reasonable opinions, and the only function of its representatives was to be one of acclamation, for example during the participation in civic rituals. In practice, however, the possibilities for exposure to, acquisition and re-elaboration of political information were manifold. Even the most reserved documents travelled in the bag of humble couriers, exposed to the difficulties of the journey, the risk of robbing, or the betrayal of the couriers themselves[53].

Of course, it is difficult to trace communication at this level because it took place mostly in the oral mode. Some sources do help us, however. Some originate in the authorities' surveillance over the political arena, be it counter-intelligence in seventeenth-century Venice, or policing of the literary milieu in eighteenth-century Paris[54]. Government informers were not particularly interested in popular opinion, but their reports help reconstruct the means and places for communication throughout the city. Here, for example, is a typical report concerning one of the

[51] R. MACKENNEY, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c.1250-c.1650*, London - Sidney 1987.

[52] C.R. FRIEDRICHS, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, London - New York 2000, pp. 11-24, and F.F. FOSTER, *The Politics of Stability: A Portrait of the Rulers of Elizabethan London*, London 1977.

[53] Cf. on England, A. FOX, *Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 343, 373-374, and F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, p. 52 on Italy.

[54] Cf. F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, ch. 3, and R. DARNTON, *Early Information Society*.

chief spies of the Spanish ambassador in Venice in the 1610s, Antonio Meschita:

«In the morning, he came late to San Marco, because he first went to the ambassador's house. He then went to the Court [of the Ducal Palace], where he spent a good deal of time talking to the Florentine secretary and to Verdelli [another agent observed by the Inquisitors at the time]. He then left and went to Rialto on his own, and there he remained in the *Calle della Sicurtà*, talking to newswriters whom I don't know. And when he left, he went to the stall of Signor Francesco Zordan, the notary, and there wrote a letter; and then he left, and went to San Cassian, to a barbershop where he stayed a good deal; and then he went home and after dinner returned to the ambassador»[55].

As this and other documents show, Meschita divided his day between the centers of the political arena and the crossroads of urban trade; he and other information professionals met in public or semipublic places around the market area to exchange information with people who had no professional or social ties to the world of politics. As the name suggests, for example, the *Calle della Sicurtà* hosted the stalls of brokers who specialized in maritime insurance and no doubt had precious news about Venice's naval operations and the movement of foreign fleets.

Another example, which I found particularly striking for Venice, are the apothecary shops (*spezierie*)[56]. They constantly welcomed the minor agents of foreign ambassadors as well as ordinary people, and they customarily hosted the collective reading of *avvisi* and printed material relating to current affairs both in the city and outside. It is likely that, in a fiercely competitive market, apothecaries tried to attract customers not only by beautifying their shops but also by inviting useful or interesting information. Visitors included not just prominent members of the patriciate and the Spanish embassy, but also apprentices, shop boys and female servants sent from patrician households—in other words, representatives of all three levels of political communication.

Another set of sources is that of chronicles, diaries, and letters written by merchants and traders. They are often full of political information[57].

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[55] Report dated 4 November 1614, in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 606, fasc. 10, cc. nn.

[56] F. DE VIVO, *Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern Venice*, in «Renaissance Studies», 21, 2007, pp. 505-521.

[57] Cf. G. DORIA, *Conoscenza del mercato e sistema informativo: il know-how dei mercanti-finanzieri genovesi nei secoli XVI e XVII*, in A. DE MADDALENA - H. KELLENBENZ (eds),

What to some was primarily political news, to others had an economic rationale. In a pioneering study written on the basis of Marin Sanudo's diaries, Pierre Sardella showed that the arrival of news in Venice influenced the price of commodities. In real life, as in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice,* the «news of the Rialto» could spell fortune or disaster[58]. We have long known about the Fuggers' great information network; but their less famous colleagues also shared a professional interest for military and other news, from alliances and wars to epidemics. As has been noted recently, these economic actors' combination of personal, commercial, and political information makes it difficult to embrace the classic public sphere's separation between private and public[59].

Economic and cultural historians can fruitfully co-operate in studying the exchange of information in early modern cities. For example, some studies have begun to shed light on marketplaces and fairs, but we still need to establish the impact of the information exchange on trading habits and more generally on the experience of the marketplace[60]. Credit, for example, was a crucial instrument of both long-distance trade and face-to-face retail: yet to give credit one needed information on the people one traded with, on their backgrounds and connections, and on the events back in their homes; and, vice versa, being well informed gave one credit[61]. Such insights make for a fundamental departure from

La repubblica internazionale del denaro tra XV e XVII secolo (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Quaderni, 20), Bologna 1986, pp. 57-121.

[58] P. SARDELLA, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au débuts du XVIe siècle*, Paris 1947.

[59] For a recent discussion, see F. TRIVELLATO, *Merchants' Letters Across Geographical and Social Boundaries*, in F. BETHENCOURT - F. EGMOND (eds), *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400-1700*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 80-103.

[60] P. JEANNIN, *La diffusion de l'information*, in S. CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *Fiere e mercati nell'integrazione europea, secc. XIII-XVIII*, Firenze 2001, pp. 231-262; E. WELCH, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy, 1400-1600*, New Haven CT - London 2005, and A. GROHMANN, *Fairs as Sites of Economic and Cultural Exchange*, in D. CALABI - S.T. CHRISTENSEN (eds), *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 207-226.

[61] See respectively F. TRIVELLATO, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, New Haven CT - London 2009; C. MULDREW, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*, London 1998, and L. FONTAINE, *L'économie morale, pauvreté, crédit et confiance dans l'Europe préindustrielle*, Paris 2008.

Habermas, because they show both that wide social groups participated in political communication without the invitation necessary for salons or the money required in coffeehouses, and that information had a precise material and professional value for those who exchanged it. Information had a use not just for the authorities and the members of the political arena, but for scores of people outside both. And even when it did not have a direct professional value, political information could be loaded with an economic one, as in the case of the bets (yes, bets) that were commonly placed on both Venetian patrician elections and papal conclaves[62].

7. Interactions and conclusions

The people grouped around these three poles of communication clearly had different degrees of access to information, just as they had different aims in using that information. On the whole, while it was the government's business to control information, information was the business of professionals in the political arena; meanwhile, both operated in a context full of people who were supposed to have no interest in politics and yet discovered that information was their business too, because they found the news to be relevant to their economic activities and social life. Understanding political communication in this way forces us to see the connections between private and public affairs, personal and collective interest for news on all the three levels just discussed. On the whole, this account seems to me significantly more realistic than the public sphere model. It also helps us account for the relations between different poles of communication in more convincing ways than the opposition state-civil society.

Differentiating between three levels of communication does not mean positing watertight separations. Urban spaces and social groups largely overlapped. In Venice, patricians sat in the Ducal Palace yet also frequented salons and regularly visited apothecary shops; news-writers collected information in patrician households, foreign embassies, and at Rialto. The same was true elsewhere. For example, countless people had

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[62] J. WALKER, *Gambling and Venetian Noblemen, c.1500-1700*, in «Past and Present», 162, 1999, pp. 28-69, and A. PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, *Il Senato*, p. 187.

regular contacts with the court for personal or professional reasons, as servants, providers of manufacts or other services[63]. Contacts had, above all, to do with the physical density of the population in early modern cities, especially where the court was not separate from the urban fabric. But everywhere information found its way to the squares and into the shops: at Rialto as in Rome's Banchi quarter, in Paris' Palais Royal or London's St Paul's Yard[64]. Contrary to Habermas's insistence on egalitarianism, what made these places into centers of communication was precisely their social and political heterogeneity.

The triangular model put forward here, therefore, accounts for both differentiation and connection. To divide political communication into three levels allows us to see the different uses of the means of information and so to overcome some of the problems of interpretation with which I began. Take the example of *avvisi*, which are featured at the center of Mitelli's print. There is no doubt that they were the first form of periodical information circulating amongst networks of subscribers. But were they instruments of the public sphere? So far as we know, their authors (like Antonio Meschita, the Spanish ambassador's agent we encountered earlier) were well connected with prominent members of the political arena. They sold their newsletters for a fee, true, but only rich subscribers could afford to pay it; above all, the little we know about the economics of the business shows that it was unsustainable without the help of a patron[65]. *Avvisi* abound with references to popular rumors (*voci di piazza*), but brief enquiries show that those accounts were invariably instrumental to the interests of the newswriters' patrons. Unless we recognize this, we will fail to distinguish between information and manipulation, between the disclosure and the planting of information. Rather than viewing *avvisi* as simple means of

[63] See the comparative quantitative data in D. ROMANO, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600*, Baltimore MD - London, 1996, pp. 233-234, and cf. S.C. MAZA, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty*, Princeton NJ 1983; on courts as employers see M. AYMARD - M.A. ROMANI (eds), *La cour comme institution économique*, Paris 1998.

[64] L. NUSSDORFER, *The Politics of Space in Early Modern Rome*, in «Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome», 42, 1997, pp. 161-186; R. DARNTON, *Early Information Society*, and D. HARKNESS - J.E. HOWARD (eds), *The Places and Spaces of Early Modern London*, in «Huntington Library Quarterly», 71, 2008.

[65] F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 82-83.

propaganda, it is important to stress how they interacted with different forms of communication, as they were read by people beyond their immediate addressees[66].

A similar point can be made about pamphlets. By analyzing their uses for the three poles of communication, we can understand their political function. First, we need to discover the attitude of the authorities towards their publication, the regulations concerning censorship, or—alternatively—the positive use of the printing presses. In early seventeenth-century Venice, for example, the authorities hesitated at length before allowing the publication of pamphlets even at the height of a very serious conflict with the papacy[67]. Secondly, we need to draw from the sociology of literature to pinpoint the social profile and connections of authors of pamphlets. In most cases, they were members of the political arena and wrote out of allegiance to patrons who were active protagonists in the political struggle[68]. Finally, we need to reconstruct the pamphlets' engagement with readers beyond both the authorities and the political arena: a difficult, but not an impossible task.

By comparing pamphlets with other means of communication of the time and reconstructing the precise chronology of each publication, we can appreciate the echoes of pamphlets and vice versa the echoes of other forms of communication in the pamphlets. In the case of early seventeenth-century Venice, it is clear that the Republic only consented to the printed polemic when the multiplication of newsletters, graffiti, and rumors in the city became unbearable[69]. Furthermore, we can draw from the history of the book, paying close attention to the mechanisms of the book industry. The multiplication of some pamphlets' editions (which can be reconstructed through material bibliography) shows that they were directed at a public that went beyond the political arena. In these cases, unless we find some evidence that those patrons also commissioned the printing of pamphlets, we must imagine that they were printed by businessmen interested in the opportunities for profit

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[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125; cf. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 375-382.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 160-176.

[68] C. JOUHAUD, *Pouvoirs de la littérature*.

[69] F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 176-199.

enshrined in the pamphlets' sale[70]. Finally, we can draw from reception theory to study the language of pamphlets. Their authors utilized images and expressions which they thought would make sense to their readers. When they aimed at a wide public, it is likely that those images involved a degree of circularity between the written and the oral word as spoken in the cities' streets. Of course, circularity does not imply the absence of conflict. On the contrary, as I have shown in the case of Venice's pamphlets of 1606/7, authors fashioned their criticism of the adversary with themes drawn from a widespread culture of derision of the authorities[71].

The model offered in this essay makes it possible to understand communication in terms of both circularity and conflict. It allows for resistance in a way, which is inconceivable in Foucault's power-dominated view of communication yet underproblematized in Habermas's idealized public sphere approach. Both interpretations exaggerate the extent to which communication could be manoeuvred by a single agent, be it the authorities or the public. As we have seen, even at the level of the authorities, communication may well have constituted the nerves of government, but it made for raw nerves indeed, as shown by the tension at the heart of its regulation inside debating assemblies, and by the contrast between the preservation and the diffusion of documentary information. Communication, in other words, was itself part of the political system, it was an instrument of both power 'and' criticism. The means and spaces of communication were the object of opposite claims by different social and political agents. When I suggest substituting a sphere with a triangle I do not wish to force a model onto a reality that was extremely complex, but I do hope to offer a useful tool of analysis. Much better than a monolithic sphere, the spikiness of a triangle's three points does suggest the idea of conflict, competition and exclusion: the idea that communication really was part of politics. I also think that it affected the realm of politics, but that will be the subject for another paper.

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[70]   *Ibid.*, pp. 215-227; cf. J. RAYMOND, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge 2003, and J. PEACEY, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum*, Aldershot 2004.

[71]   F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication*, pp. 227-246.

«Fama», Humors, and Conflicts

A Re-reading of Machiavelli's «Florentine Histories»

by *Sandro Landi*

1. *Introduction*

Between 1520 and 1524, in the last years of his life, Machiavelli wrote the *Florentine Histories* (*Istorie fiorentine*)[1]. Commissioned by the officers of the University (*Studio*) of Florence, this work was an expression of the desire of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (who was to become Pope Clement VII) to fill a historiographical gap by offering to civic memory a history covering the Medici period[2]. This project remained incomplete, either by deliberate choice or due to lack of time. The manuscript, which was published by the editors Blado and Giunta in 1532, consisted of eight books and ended with the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492. The following period, in which Machiavelli played a spectator role, and only sometimes that of an actor, was not dealt with. In recent years the *Histories*, an incomplete work with a complex structure, have been the subject of a number of studies, which—without fully treating the question of the sources[3]—have clarified the different stages in the shaping of the manuscript as well as the extent of its direct and indirect textual authorities. The *Histories* constitute an essential work for understanding the political development of the late Machiavelli, and

[1]   On the complex question of dating the *Istorie fiorentine*, see F. GILBERT, *Machiavelli's «Istorie fiorentine»: An Essay in Interpretation*, in M.P. GILMORE (ed.), *Studies on Machiavelli*, Florence 1972; G.M. ANSELMI, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico*, Pisa 1979; M. MARTELLI, *Machiavelli e la storiografia umanistica*, in M. MARTELLI, *Tra filologia e storia. Otto studi machiavelliani*, ed. by F. BAUSI, Roma 2009, pp. 171-202.

[2]   On Machiavelli, the *Histories* and the Medici, see J.M. NAJEMY, *Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», 35, 1982, pp. 551-576.

[3]   See especially A.M. CABRINI, *Interpretazione e stile in Machiavelli. Il terzo libro delle Istorie*, Roma 1990, and M.C. FRIGORILLI, *Machiavelli moralista. Ricerche su fonti, lessico e fortuna*, Napoli 2006, pp. 89-111.

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also an important item in modern historiography because for the first time the issue of conflict, and more precisely of urban conflict, finds itself at the heart of historical narrative[4].

This unusual choice derives from a double distancing that Machiavelli explains in the preamble to his work. First of all, it is a matter of applying a change of perspective in relation to humanist historiography of Florence, which for ideological reasons has always concealed this aspect of civic memory, considering it insufficiently glorious[5]; second, Machiavelli here rethinks his own understanding of conflict. In fact, in the *Discourse on the First Decade of Titus Livius* Machiavelli identifies the true driving force that enabled the Roman republic to remain free and to expand in the bloodless conflicts, which set the plebeians and the patricians against each other. Florence however cannot be reduced to this classical paradigm. Here, urban conflict only ends with the elimination of the enemy. The peace that results from this bloody victory is nothing but a respite, which eventually sees the conflict reincarnated in new social or political antagonists. But, in spite of this, Florence did not implode because of its divisions «which would have had the force to annihilate any great and powerful city ...», as Machiavelli writes, but rather «became ever greater from them»[6]. How is it possible to explain this paradox that envisages civil war as part of the normal working of a community? Should we detect the unacknowledged influence of Thucydides, according to whom most, if not all, *poleis* were afflicted by *stasis* (civil war[7])? In any case, this typically Florentine paradox, which makes us speak properly of Florence as a modern town, one that

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[4] Among recent studies, see G. BOCK, *Civil Discords in Machiavelli's Istorie fiorentine*, in G. BOCK - Q. SKINNER - M. VIROLI (eds), *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 181-201, and F. DEL LUCCHESE, *Disputare e 'combattere'. Modi del conflitto nel pensiero politico di Niccolò Machiavelli*, in «Filosofia politica», 15, 2001, pp. 71-95.

[5] On this point, see F. RAIMONDI, *La cagione della prima divisione di Firenze. Per un'indagine sul materialismo di Machiavelli*, in F. DEL LUCCHESE - L. SARTORELLO - S. VISENTINI (eds), *Machiavelli: immaginazione e contingenza*, Pisa 2006, pp. 111-150.

[6] N. MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, trans. by L.B. Banfield and H.C. Mansfield jr, Princeton NJ 1988 (hereafter *Florentine Histories*), p. 7, and N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, ed. by P. CARLI, vol. 1, Firenze 1927, p. 8.

[7] On Machiavelli reader of Thucydides, see L. CANFORA, *Tucidide e Machiavelli*, in «Rinascimento», 37, 1997, pp. 29-44. Canfora however does not analyze the possible influence of Thucydides on the *Istorie fiorentine*.

cannot be reduced to a model based on Roman precedent, necessitates the re-conceptualization of the town as well as more sophisticated tools for analyzing this political and social reality[8].

While establishing a distance between himself and his humanist predecessors (Poggio, Bracciolini, and Leonardo Bruni) Machiavelli emphasizes the diversity of his approach:

«but as regards civil discords and internal enmities, and effects arising from them, they were altogether silent about the one and so brief about the other as to be of no use to readers or pleasure to anyone. I believe they did this either because these actions seemed to them so feeble that they judged them unworthy of being committed to memory by written word, or because they feared that they might offend the descendant of those they might have to slander in their narrations. These two causes (may it be said by their leave) appear to me altogether unworthy of great men, for if nothing else delights or instructs in history, it is that which is described in detail [*particularmente si descrive*]»[9].

Changing the subject of investigation, with the aim of bringing back into view the gaps and omissions in official historiography, thus goes hand-in-hand with a modification in the scale of observing historical phenomena. In resolving to distance himself from these interpretations and in making himself the historian of the hidden causes of his town's greatness, Machiavelli commits himself to a close analysis of the forces that shaped that greatness and continually threatened it.

Machiavelli is certainly a careless historian, especially with respect to philological competence[10], but it is difficult to deny that it is because of this «modification of scale» that he is able to see things that his predecessors could not[11]. That is why the *Histories* represent something new, and more complex than a simple work of municipal history. In fact, the *Histories* constitute the first attempt in modern historiography to analyze the totality of individual and collective agents and factors that allow a community to sustain itself or to founder. This analytical quality was certainly at the basis of the interest in the work outside

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[8]   F. RAIMONDI, *La cagione della prima divisione*, p. 124.

[9]   *Florentine Histories*, p. 6.

[10]   M. MARTELLI, *Machiavelli e la storiografia umanistica*, p. 196.

[11]   On the «variation of scale» in history, see J. REVEL, *Micro-analyse et construction du social*, in J. REVEL (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, Paris 1996, pp. 14-36.

Florence and the fact of its being translated. As Yves de Brinon explains in dedicating his *Histoire florentine* (1577) to Catherine de Medici, the case of Florence is a model for the dangers that threaten the integrity of every state and the Kingdom of France in particular[12]. Moreover, this analytical quality questions our historical sensibility, because the *Florentine Histories* give rise to a number of topics, which are absent from the humanist historiography of the town and were, therefore, destined to remain unmentioned.

Among these topics is the matter of individual and collective speech and opinion. It may be an anachronism to assert that Machiavelli acts like an urban sociologist in concerning himself with issues having to do with public opinion. Even so, it is undeniable that in different kinds of writing Machiavelli demonstrated an interest that was very specific to that reality[13]. In diplomatic or chancery writing, analysis of opinion (rumor, prediction, or guesswork) constitutes one of the normal techniques for establishing and transmitting political reality[14]. In the *Discourses* (I, 58) Machiavelli allots a political role not so much to the people as to what the people as a whole think («opinione universale»)[15]. In *The Prince* (ch. 18) in a way that is paradoxical, but crucial, Machiavelli brings together the «majesty of the State» and the opinion of the multitude («opinione di molti»); they support one another and their collaboration creates the necessary conditions for the stability of power[16].

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[12] *Histoire florentine de Nicolas Machiavel*, nouvellement traduicte d'italien en françois, par le seigneur de Brinon, gentil-homme ordinaire de la chambre du roi, Paris, Guillaume de la Noüe, 1577, pp. VIII-IX.

[13] According to Alison Brown, Machiavelli was «one of the earliest writers to discuss the political power of popular opinion or imagination»: A. BROWN, *Savonarola, Machiavelli and Moses: A Changing Model*, in P. DENLEY - C. ELAM (eds), *Florence and Italy. Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein*, London 1988, pp. 57-72, here p. 65.

[14] See S. LANDI, *Décrire et gouverner l'opinion. Pour une phénoménologie de la correspondance publique de Machiavel*, in «Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme», 32, 2009, pp. 3-27.

[15] N. MACHIAVELLI, *The Discourses*, ed. by B. CRICK - L. J. WALKER, London 2003, p. 255; on this passage see S. LANDI, *Penser l'opinion publique à la Renaissance. Machiavel, le peuple, la doxa*, in «Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée», 118, 2006, pp. 121-140.

[16] N. MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince*, ed. by Q. SKINNER - R. PRICE, Cambridge 1988 (hereafter *The Prince*), p. 63.

By contrast, in the *Florentine Histories,* Machiavelli devotes no general reflection to public opinion. However, interested as he is in conflict and its causes and language, public opinion indirectly but prominently re-enters the field of his analysis. The choice of sources is crucial in this respect. In fact, Machiavelli follows and continues the tradition of civic writing that, between the family journal and the chronicle, had been concerned from the Middle Ages onwards with internal disputes and simultaneously with the opinions of a town about its own divisions[17]. The *Florentine Histories* are the product of an acute ability to penetrate the hidden causes of conflict and of a communal 'public' culture; it is attentive to the opinions of the town, as well as to the places and circumstances in which opinions are born, circulate and interact with political decisions and divisions.

The following pages focus on this common but neglected aspect of Machiavelli's historical discourse. From this point of view, I propose to interrogate the text on the matter of the correlation between conflict and public opinion, and the notion of political opinion more generally. In recent years, the tendency to wish to democratize, and to project the public sphere model proposed by Habermas[18] onto the past, has given rise to a multiplicity of popular actors endowed with political consciousness and language. In a highly literate and politicized urban context, Machiavelli's historical discourse rewrites practices associated with different levels of rationality and political competence[19]. At times, these practices refer to implicit value systems, such as the «humors» (*umori*), which would be difficult to rank, strictly speaking, among political opinions. And thus, what is their status? What do they tell us about the deep causes of conflict? However, this refocused reading of the *Florentine Histories* has another objective as well: my interest in this issue, disregarded by Machiavellian criticism, seeks to give promi-

[17] See F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli*, Roma 2005, p. 259; in particular on the attention that chroniclers pay to the importance of city dwellers' opinions, cf. F. SZNURA - A. MOLHO (eds), *Alle bocche della piazza. Diario di anonimo fiorentino (1382-1401)*, Firenze 1986, pp. XXIX-XXXI.

[18] J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge MA 1989 (1962[1]).

[19] On the notion of political opinion and the ability of agents to shape political opinion, see P. BOURDIEU, *L'opinion publique n'existe pas*, in P. BOURDIEU, *Questions de sociologie*, Paris 1982, especially pp. 222 and 226.

nence to some unexplored possibilities in the text, and to consider it in relation to sources that have been hitherto neglected.

2. *Fama: spaces, practices, strategies*

Among these sources are in all likelihood the *Annals* of Tacitus, a classical historian, with whom Machiavelli shows at least an indirect acquaintance, doubtless through his reading in anthologies[20]. For instance, it is interesting to note that expressions such as «in urbe sermonum avida», used by Tacitus in the *Annals* (XIII, 6) on the subject of the judgment of the city on the young Nero when faced with the war against the Parthians[21], appears virtually *verbatim* («in Florence, a city eager to speak»/«in Firenze, città di parlare avida») in the *Florentine Histories* (VIII, 22) concerning the war waged by Lorenzo de Medici against Sixtus IV and King Ferdinand I of Naples[22].

Setting aside the major, but for our purposes secondary, issue of the parallel which the *Histories* seems to wish to draw between Nero and Lorenzo by way of this source, what Machiavelli retains above all from Tacitus is one particular and specific similarity between Rome and Florence: both cities are «hungry» for the kind of discussion that can make or break an individual's reputation. The use of this quotation helps illustrate the categories by which Machiavelli understood the political

[20]   This hypothesis is formulated by M. MARTELLI, *Machiavelli e la storiografia umanistica*, p. 113, on the basis of a passage in the *Annales*, III, 55, 4, quoted in a very inexact manner by Machiavelli in the *Discourses*, III, ch. 19. The first six books of the *Annales* were printed in Rome in 1515 by Filippo Beroaldo. The only manuscript of the *Annales* currently in the Medicea-Laurenziana Library in Florence (*Mediceo Laur.* 68) was sent from Germany to cardinal Francesco Soderini, the brother of Piero Soderini, friend and correspondent of Machiavelli, cf. K.J.P. LOWE, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy. The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, 1453-1524*, Cambridge 1993, p. 259.

[21]   TACITUS, *Annals. The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*, trans. by J.C. Yardley, Oxford 2008, p. 272: «As a result, in a city avid for gossip [*Igitur in urbe sermonum avida*], questions were being asked. How could an emperor scarcely past seventeen shoulder this burden or stave off the crisis»; this passage is ignored by the Machiavellian critics. On the political dimension of rumor in Tacitus, see M.A. GIUA, *Sul significato dei 'rumores' nella storiografia di Tacito*, in «Rivista Storica Italiana», 110, 1998, 1, pp. 38-59.

[22]   *Florentine Histories*, pp. 343-344.

strength of opinion in the city. In all likelihood, Machiavelli perceived the outline of a very diffuse discursive phenomenon; that is to say, the evaluation that the town made of an individual. This phenomenon—very familiar and apparent from ancient times—is nothing other than *fama*[23]. Recent historical writing has emphasized the importance, from the twelfth century on, of this voicing of a collective assessment within the heart of the city-state, where it takes on a juridical status[24]. Moreover, it should be stressed that *fama* is a frequent topic in Florentine family books[25] and that it is central to presentations and compositions in both Latin and the vernacular in the intellectual circles around Machiavelli[26]. As the example cited shows, Machiavelli sees *fama* as a two-sided phenomenon: on the one hand it indicates renown (*reputazione*), on the other hand it also signifies the voices that convey news more generally. In this second sense, *fama* is a synonym of *publica voce* (the voice of the public) and rumor (*rumore*). In both cases, *fama* is characterized by versatility and by the unreliability of the events it refers to. In his other writings, Machiavelli shows a profound familiarity with this phenomenon. For instance, in private correspondence he shows himself able to exploit the voices that run through the town and herald unprecedented changes[27]. In his Chancery letters Machiavelli pays constant attention to *fama*, often accompanied by anthropological observations and always focused on recognizing its potential for being true[28]. In the *Histories* he restricts himself to noting its presence and its effects. On the one hand, insofar as it is a widely shared opinion among the

[23] See J.P. NÉRAUDAU, *La Fama dans la Rome antique*, in «Médiévales», 24, 1993, pp. 27-34, and K. WETTERS, *The Opinion System. Impasses of the Public Sphere from Hobbes to Habermas*, New York 2008, pp. 16-23.

[24] See C. WIKHAM, *Fama and Law in Twelfth Century Tuscany*, in T. FENSTER - D.L. SMAIL (eds), *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, Ithaca NY 2003, pp. 15-26.

[25] See T. KUHEN, *Fama as a legal status in Renaissance Florence*, in T. FENSTER - D.L. SMAIL, *Fama*, pp. 27-46, especially p. 32.

[26] See F. BAUSI, *Politica e cultura nel Commento al «Trionfo della Fama» di Jacopo Bracciolini*, in «Interpres», 9, 1989, pp. 64-149.

[27] N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, ed. by F. GAETA, Milano 1981, p. 409, Carpi, May 18, 1521; also note a passage in *Mandragola* (1518), N. MACHIAVELLI, *Opere letterarie*, ed. by L. BLASUCCI, Milano 1964, p. 24.

[28] See S. LANDI, *Décrire et gouverner l'opinion*, p. 6.

population, *fama* undoubtedly constitutes a sort of social and political bond, albeit of a verbal kind, in a town that is constantly divided. On the other hand, *fama* plays a part in the logic of civic divisions in ways that Machiavelli's writing brings to light.

In the *Histories* everything relating to *fama* is part of the public aspect of the town. The public status of *fama* is a landmark in the political culture of the city-state. In Thommaso da Piperata's late thirteenth-century juridical treatise dedicated to it, *fama* is by its very nature public and promulgated by a large number of individuals («communis viciniae proclamatio»)[29]. The adverbs «publicamente» or «apertamente» (publicly, openly) are, in fact, always used by Machiavelli to designate a discussion aimed at establishing a good or bad reputation[30]. In contrast, «privatamente» or «per modi privati» (by private means) can indicate either the words and deeds of an individual who is critical of the government and who wants to rally support among his friends and family, or the tactics used by a private person looking to build an extensive reputation[31]. Although it is overwhelmingly a public phenomenon, *fama* also reveals solid roots in the private sphere. In other words, if the borders of *fama* are those of the public space of the city, it includes only one part of the phenomena of opinion, since even though they emerge in the private sphere some opinions also tend to have political impact. Therefore, the *Histories* reveal the invalidity of the distinction between 'private' and 'public' opinion in a context in which the private is strictly an integral part of the political sphere[32].

Machiavelli thinks of this as bipolar: on the one hand, the Signoria palace (*palazzo*), and on the other the city square (*piazza*), and these correspond to the parallel locations (institutional and non-institutional)

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[29] C. WIKHAM, *Fama and Law*, p. 16.

[30] Apart from the example of Laurent already given, see also *Florentine Histories*, II, 33, p. 89, relating to an unhappy episode in the war against Pisa in 1342.

[31] See for example *Florentine Histories*, III, 22, pp. 135-136.

[32] For the public/private dynamic in Italian city-states, see G. CHITTOLINI, *Il privato, il pubblico, lo Stato*, in G. CHITTOLINI - A. MOLHO - P. SCHIERA (eds), *Origini dello Stato. Processi di formazione statale in Italia fra medioevo ed età moderna* (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germani in Trento. Quaderni, 39), Bologna 1994; for a historicisation of the private/public distinction in the field of opinion, see K. WETTERS, *The Opinion System*, pp. 3-4.

in which public discourse is shaped. The pairing *piazza-palazzo* has a special place in the republican imagination as signifying the direct and open character of communication established between the people and their representatives[33]. However, at the beginning of the sixteenth century this ideal image became markedly blurred. Francesco Guicciardini, in an aphorism (*ricordo*) dating from 1528-1530, thinks of this double term as an opposition: the distance between these twin places is greater than that which separates the Old and the New World. That is the reason, he states, why «the world is easily filled with erroneous and idle opinions»[34]. An analogous metaphor appears in a passage in *Discourses on the First Decade* (I, 47), written around 1515/16. Machiavelli uses the image of the public square and the palace with the aim of demonstrating that people err in judgment because they always judge from a distance: when members of the public come to power and see things more closely, their thinking suddenly becomes accurate[35]. In the *Discourses* as *in The Prince* Machiavelli seems to think that opinion constitutes the mode of knowledge appropriate to those who form judgments solely from what they see and hear, while a small number of oligarchs have a true and inherited understanding of things.

This dichotomy is also present in the *Histories*, although political rationality plays a lesser role there, even in the consultative or deliberative affairs of the State, where it should however be sheltered from the vicissitudes of opinion, thanks to the wisdom of the political class and the impartiality of the decision-making mechanism[36]. Reason

[33] See A. BROWN, *Smascherare il repubblicanesimo rinascimentale*, in S. ADORNI BRACCESI - M. ASCHERI (eds), *Politica e cultura nelle repubbliche italiane dal medioevo all'età moderna*, Roma 2001, and I. TADDEI, *Du secret à la place publique. L'entrée en charge de la Seigneurie à Florence (XIVe-XVe siècles)*, in G. BERTRAND - I. TADDEI (eds), *Le destin des rituels. Faire corps dans l'espace urbain, Italie-France-Allemagne. Il destino dei rituali. «Faire corps» nello spazio urbano, Italia-Francia-Germania*, Roma 2008, pp. 116-141.

[34] F. GUICCIARDINI, *Maxims and Reflections (Ricordi)*, ed. by N. RUBINSTEIN, Philadelphia PA 1972, series C, *ricordo* 141, pp. 76-77.

[35] N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, I, 47, pp. 227-228: «Though men make mistakes about things in general, they do not make mistakes about particulars»; for a reading of this passage S. LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du peuple et savoir de gouvernement de Machiavel aux lumières*, Rennes 2006, pp. 35-37.

[36] See I. TADDEI, *Du secret à la place publique*, pp. 118-124.

is confined to certain rare individuals, such as Niccolò da Uzzano, one of the most influential members of the elite, which governed Florence after the upheaval of the *Ciompi* in 1378[37]. In book IV of the *Histories*, Machiavelli pays particular attention to this distinguished citizen, who was Gonfalonier of Justice three times, and acknowledges his influence and eloquence in the republic's councils[38]. In particular, the *Histories* take note of da Uzzano's observations in the context of Florence's military campaign against Lucca in 1429, which constituted—as Machiavelli clearly stresses—the beginning of the crisis for the oligarchic party[39]. The *Histories* deal with the mechanisms for the forming of discourse on war in the various public spaces in the city. First, the public square, where, on the news of the unexpected conquest of two of Lucca's strongholds, «all sort of men gathered in groups» («circuli di ogni sorte uomini») and called for a war to be started against Lucca[40]. Machiavelli identifies a natural cause for the origins of this opinion, which establishes itself easily among the greater part of the population, and that lies in knowing the tendency of «the multitude to seize what belongs to others [more] than to watch out for its own». Machiavelli then turns his attention to the palace, where the same news excites a disagreement among the ruling class. Rinaldo degli Albizzi favors the undertaking, «moved to do so either because he judged his campaign useful to the republic or because of his own ambitions». When they are summoned to consider the issue of war, there is a succession of contradictory speeches in the republic's councils. Niccolò da Uzzano speaks against the opinion of Rinaldo degli Albizzi. His speech is a rhetorical masterpiece, appealing to the honor of Florence (a Guelf city preparing to attack another Guelf city) as well as to its citizens' reason and to political foresight:

«but he saw that their humors were excited (*umori mossi*) and that his words were not being heard. Even so, he wished to predict this to them: that they would wage

[37] See A. DAINELLI, *Niccolò da Uzzano nella vita politica dei suoi tempi*, in «Archivio storico italiano», 90, 1932, pp. 35-86, 185-216; G.A. BRUCKER, *Renaissance Florence*, New York 1969, pp. 95-96, and E. FERRETTI, *La Sapienza di Niccolò da Uzzano: l'istituzione e le sue tracce architettoniche nella Firenze rinascimentale*, in «Annali di Storia di Firenze», 4, 2009, pp. 89-149.

[38] J.M. NAJEMY, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, Oxford 2006, p. 185.

[39] On the Lucca war, see G.A. BRUCKER, *Renaissance Florence*, p. 169.

[40] *Florentine Histories*, IV, 18, p. 163; on this episode see also J.M. NAJEMY, *Machiavelli and the Medici*, pp. 568-569.

a war for which they would spend very much, would run into very many dangers, and, instead of seizing Lucca, they would free it from a tyrant; and out of a friendly city, subdued and weak, they would make a free city, hostile to them and in time an obstruction to the greatness of their republic»[41].

The deliberation, based on a ballot, only confirms Da Uzzano's isolation, and reveals the tacit understanding between the official position of the palace and the opinion of the public gathered in the square: «when they had spoken for and against the campaign, it was time, as was the custom, to find out secretly the will of the men; and of the whole number, only ninety-eight were against it».

This episode is significant in several respects. Just as it illustrates the porousness between these two arenas in public discussion, it also underlines the subordination of the opinion of a limited number of citizens, endowed with public responsibilities, regarding a non-institutional opinion, grounded in a hasty and emotional grasp of people and facts. We can, therefore, see that there are two levels of thought at work in the *Histories*: one is anthropological and almost proverbially-based on the strength and inconstancy of public opinion (we read in book II, 5, for example, «now it is seen through experience how mistaken the opinion of men is and how false their judgment»[42]); the other is historical, on the role which «the opinion of men», or *fama*, has played and continues to play in the institutional and partisan dynamics of the republic. Although it has been disregarded in criticism, this aspect nevertheless lets one better understand the pessimistic judgment which the later Machiavelli made on the development and future of the Florentine Republic[43].

It is in fact possible to read the *Histories* in the light of the progressive extension of the power of *fama* in the Republic's political space. On this topic, Machiavelli registers a turning point in the town's history: it concerned the Ordinances of Justice, a series of measures discriminating against the old feudal aristocracy (magnates or *grandi*)[44], which

[41] *Florentine Histories*, p. 166.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[43] On Machiavelli's republicanism in the *Florentine Histories*, see G. BOCK, *Civil Discords*, p. 201.

[44] On this category, see C. KLAPISCH-ZUBER, *Retour à la cité: Les magnats de Florence, 1340-1440*, Paris 2006; on the Ordinances of Justice, see A. ZORZI, *Politica e giustizia*

were promulgated in 1293 by the 'popular' government of Arts. One of the essential elements in this judicial reform was to give *fama* priority as a witness in the trials against these violent nobles[45]. The literally 'extraordinary' character of this procedure did not escape Machiavelli, who writes, «they made public voice (*publica fama*) sufficient for passing judgment. By these laws, which were called «Ordinances of Justice», the people acquired much reputation»[46]. The ordinances, an institutional *coup d'état*, politicize *fama* and at the same time establish the 'absolute' sovereignty of the people. Consequently, from this time on, the anonymous voice of the people acquires an almost autonomous political status and becomes the judge of individuals and parties who aim to exercise absolute power over the Republic. The *Histories* enable one to trace the different moments in this tyrannical tendency, which—far from being an accident—is inscribed in the very heart of the town's popular constitution.

The interplay between public voice and individual reputation is conspicuously at work in the case of Corso Donati, head of the Black Guelfs, one of the two factions (*umori, parti*) which divided the city and its territory in 1298 just after the strengthening of the popular regime. Corso, of aristocratic origins and harmed by the new legislation, sought to challenge the existing power with his own charisma («so great was the authority he carried in his person that everyone feared him»)[47]. Machiavelli shows how his personal strategy, founded on a talented fluency of speech, aimed to insinuate that the ruling class was corrupt, so that he could command extra-institutional public opinion on a very wide scale:

a Firenze al tempo degli ordinamenti antimagnatizi, in V. ARRIGHI (ed.), *Ordinamenti di Giustizia fiorentini. Studi in occasione del VII centenario*, Firenze 1995; the text of the Ordinances was published by F. BONAINI, *Gli Ordinamenti di Giustizia del Comune e Popolo di Firenze compilati nel 1293*, in «Archivio Storico Italiano», 1, 1855, pp. 37-71.

[45] «Et sufficiat probatio in predictis omnibus ... contra ipsos magnates facientes ... maleficia ... per testes probantes de publica fama»; F. BONAINI, *Ordinamenti di Giustizia*, p. 51. On the legal dimensions of *fama* cf. C. WIKHAM, *Fama and Law*, p. 17, and J. THÉRY, *Fama: l'opinion publique comme preuve judiciaire. Aperçu sur la révolution médiévale de l'inquisitoire*, in B. LEMESLE (ed.), *La preuve en justice de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Rennes 2003, pp. 119-147.

[46] *Florentine Histories*, II, 13, p. 65.

[47] *Ibid.*, II, 22, p. 76.

«moved by these passions ... he slandered many citizens who had administrated public money, saying that they used it for private comforts and that it would be well to find them out and punish them. This opinion of his was taken up by many who had the same desire as he, to which was added the ignorance of many others who believed Messer Corso to be moved by love for his fatherland»[48].

Thus, it was a current of diverse opinions which brought together the frustrations and desire for revenge held by the nobles, and which equally constituted an arena which was ideal for 'populist' declarations of a patriotic kind aimed especially at the mass of people excluded from power (*plebe, moltitudine*):

«to get reputation for himself, he always held opinions contrary to the most powerful men; and whichever way he saw the people inclined, he too turned so that his authority would be more welcome to them. So he was at the head of all the disputes and novelties, and all those who desired to obtain the extraordinary thing resorted to him»[49].

However, this strategy of gathering *fama* had its weakness in the very nature of the multitude, whose attachment to a congeries of ancestral patriotic values made them receptive to all sorts of opinions about prominent citizens. Machiavelli notes about the rapid deterioration in Corso's *fama*, provoked by a rumor about his intentions and hidden political convictions that in all likelihood originated in the government itself:

«to take from him the popular favor that can easily be eliminated in this way, they spread it about that he wished to establish a tyranny. It was easy to persuade the people of this because his mode of living overstepped all civil bounds. This opinion grew greatly after he had taken as a wife the daughter of Uguccione della Faggiuola, head of Ghibelline party and a White and a man very powerful in Tuscany»[50].

This mechanism recurs in other cases related in the *Histories*. One relevant example is the attempted *coup d'état* by Gautier VI of Brienne, Duke of Athens, commander of the Florentine army at the time of the disastrous war against Pisa in 1341[51]. Machiavelli shows that the attempt at tyranny was again the result of an alliance between the plebeians and the *grandi*, that it was grounded in discontent and a shared discourse hostile to the government («in all places and through all the piazzas

[48] *Ibid.*, II, 21, p. 73.

[49] *Ibid.*, II, 22, p. 76.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] On Gautier de Brienne, see J.M. NAJEMY, *A History of Florence*, pp. 135-137.

they defamed them publicly, accusing them of avarice and wicked counsel»[52]), and that the duke studiously built his reputation on an image of severity, justice, and religiosity, as well as on a rhetoric of liberty aimed particularly at mobilizing the lower strata of the population[53]. In this way, against the opinion of the Signoria but «with the consent of the people» gathered in the public square, on 8 September 1342, the duke was elected ruler of Florence for life[54]. Machiavelli attributes his downfall, which was equally rapid, not only to his openly tyrannical manner, but also to the arrival of a number of Frenchmen in the city, who had been drawn there by the «fame of his new lordship». The unexpected advent of «manners and dress» that were unfamiliar and in appearance contrary to the republican ethos («vivere civile») may have excited popular distaste and hastened the fall of his regime[55].

The prime example of this strategy of uniting individual and public *fama* in the quest for power nonetheless remains that of Cosimo de Medici. In book IV chapter 27 of the *Histories* Machiavelli states that Niccolò da Uzzano was aware of «extraordinary modes of proceeding» («modi estraordinari») that were characteristic of Cosimo[56]. Among other things, these *modi*, illustrated at the end of chapter 26, consisted of creating with his supporters in public places a climate of opinion hostile to the oligarchs responsible for the unfortunate war against Lucca. Machiavelli states that these accusations normally mixed the true and the false, with a corresponding result: «because the true ones were enlarged, the untrue were made up, and both the true and the untrue were believed by the people, who ordinarily hated them»[57]. This fundamentally popular collective disposition to hate and to believe constitutes the ground on which it was possible for the 'extraordinary' regime of Cosimo to be founded.

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[52]   *Florentine Histories*, II, 33, p. 89.

[53]   *Ibid.*, II, 33-34, pp. 90-92.

[54]   *Ibid.*, II, 35, p. 93.

[55]   *Ibid.*, II, 36, p. 95.

[56]   *Ibid.*, IV, 27, p. 173. For an analysis of this expression see J.M. NAJEMY, *Machiavelli and the Medici*, pp. 569-570, which does not take into account the dimension of *fama*.

[57]   *Florentine Histories*, IV, 27, p. 173.

At the beginning of book VII, Machiavelli states that Cosimo opened up his route to power through both public and private means («la publica e la privata via»)[58]. The 'private', in addition to the permanent mobilization of the population through spectacle, consists in setting in motion a network of clients and supporters («partigiani») whose chief role is sustaining his public reputation[59]. The regime of Cosimo and his successors is thus, above all, a regime of *fama*, which—beyond and despite institutional mechanisms of the Republic—strives to create lasting conditions both for 'consensus' for his actions and enduring hatred of his opponents. Machiavelli details how the regime deployed public discourse towards this end, with a series of particular consequences. For example, defamation becomes a weapon commonly used against Cosimo's adversaries, in both the institutional and non-institutional political arena of the Republic. Thus, in March 1485 the gonfalonier Matteo Bartoli literally goes mad, as the victim of slander by a Signoria consisting of Cosimo's partisans[60]. The *fama* regime also involves a constant mastery of external signs, which could modify the image of the dominant family or cause it to be delegitimized in the eyes of the people. For instance, after Cosimo's death in 1464, voices were raised denouncing the tyrannical tendencies of his son Piero and his grandson Lorenzo, whose marriage to Clarissa Orsini presaged an overt break with republican practices. A flaw suddenly appears in the consensus linking the family and the city and «seditious» discourses, based on arguments for republican liberty, circulate and «deceive» many citizens[61]. The only way to avoid ancient divisions opening up again («humors were boiling again in the city») was to organize public festivals[62], which worked by inhibiting the discussion of state affairs («to give men something to think about that would lift their thoughts about the state»[63]).

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[58] *Ibid.*, VII, 2, p. 277.

[59] *Ibid.*, VII, 1, p. 95.

[60] As Franco Gaeta reveals in his commentary to the editions of the *Istorie fiorentine*, Milano 1962, p. 455, Machiavelli is mistaken when he attributes this episode to Donato Cocchi: *Florentine Histories*, VII, 3, p. 279.

[61] *Ibid.*, VII, 11, p. 289.

[62] *Ibid.*, VII, 12, p. 289; for a political analysis of these celebrations, see A. ROCHON, *La jeunesse de Laurent de Médicis 1449-1478*, Paris 1963, pp. 97-99.

[63] *Ibid.*

While being solidly embedded in republican culture, which bestowsed a social and juridical form to collective discourse, the Medici's *fama* regime finally resulted in the diminution and even the obliteration of political discourse. The specific attention paid to any opinion expressed in the political arena does not only aim to counter any discordant opinion by the use of opposing statements, but it also seeks to defuse the causes of discord between citizens. This was basically aiming for «the united consent of the whole city» («unito consenso di tutta la città»), which Lorenzo evokes in his address to the Signoria following the conspiracy of April 1478[64]. However, it is also at this point that the Medici regime reveals its weakness; for if the discourses that are voiced in the public arena promote the hatching of conflicts, aggravate, and perpetuate them, they are still not their real cause. That cause is located at a deeper, non-discursive level in the town's body politic, and it is linked in Machiavelli's vision to the notion of public opinion: humor.

3. *Humor as natural opinion*

In the vision outlined by Habermas, public sphere is a space for discussion[65]. Following this idea, which is unanimously accepted, it does not seem anachronistic to use this expression for historical contexts preceding the invention of printing. At its core, the public sphere is a place where different actors verbally exchange political opinions. The diffuse nature of political discourse in some pre-modern societies has even allowed thinking of the city «as a vast resonating box, attracting news and multiplying it in thousand rumors. Distant events rebounded in discussion at all social levels»[66]. The representation of the city given to us in the *Florentine Histories* may apparently recall this image: a

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[64] The word *consenso* is used four times in the speech made by Laurent de Medici: *Florentine histories*, VIII, 10, p. 328; on the meaning of this word see J.M. NAJEMY, *Machiavelli and the Medici*, p. 572.

[65] J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 37; on recent developments of the discursive dimension of the public sphere, see M. ROSPOCHER - R. SALZBERG, *'El vulgo zanza': Voci, Spazi, Pubblici a Venezia durante le guerre d'Italia*, in «Storica», 48, 2010, pp. 83-120.

[66] F. DE VIVO, *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford 2007, p. 6.

vast protean orality facilitates bridging the gap between the city and worlds outside it, and establishes a relation between institutional and non-institutional sites in the shaping of political discourse. However, this image is only in partial accord with reality as Machiavelli sees it. If the aim is to understand how the public sphere is really thought of by a sixteenth-century actor[67], it is necessary to assert that that the verbal aspect of public opinion (which we have identified here under the title of *fama*) does not exhaust this domain. There is, in fact, a non-discursive public opinion—beyond *fama* one might say—whose logic can help to enlighten us simultaneously on the nature of conflicts and of the public sphere in the pre-modern city.

From this point of view, it seems important to focus on the category of humor, frequently used in the *Florentine Histories*[68]. For some years, this category has been the subject of studies aimed at clarifying its lexical field (medical in origin)[69] as well as its philosophical and political significance. In Antony Parel's analysis, «humor» in Machiavelli is an elastic concept featuring a wide variety of meanings[70]. The *Florentine Histories* confirm this range of usage. «Humor» here indicates a faction («umori delle parti»), or the different social groups playing a part in the body politic of the city (*grandi*, the people, the plebeians, or the multitude). «Humor» can also define the outcome of their interaction, that is to say conflict[71]. However, the word is also deployed in more multivalent usages. In fact, humor is not restricted to designating one

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[67]   On the necessity for «historicizing modes of thinking» against «the illusion of evidence» which «separates us from ourselves, from our historic unconscious», see P. BOURDIEU, *L'inconscient d'école*, in «Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales», 135, 2000, pp. 3-5.

[68]   There are forty occurrences of this word.

[69]   See L. GERBIER, *La composition de la langue civile, enjeux and construction de l'écriture politique machiavélienne*, in T. MÉNISSIER - M. GAILLE NIKODIMOV (eds), *Lectures de Machiavel*, Paris 2006, pp. 51-91, and M. GAILLE NIKODIMOV, *A la recherche d'une définition des institutions de la liberté*, in «Astérion», 1, 2003, http://asterion.revues. org/document14.html

[70]   A. PAREL, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, New Haven CT - London 1992, p. 105 and M. FISCHER, *Machiavelli's Political Psychology*, in «The Review of Politics», 59, 1997, pp. 189-829; on the use of this notion in the *Florentine Histories*, see H.C. MANSFIELD, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, Chicago - London 1998, pp. 127-175.

[71]   *Florentine Histories*, II, 12.

single thing: it also indicates its inherent tendency, which character-izes it and makes it different from something else. For instance, at the beginning of the third book, «the grave and natural enmities» between the people and the nobles is attributed to an irreducible «diversity of humors»[72]. Philosophical criticism in particular has emphasized that Machiavelli uses this category of humor in connection with the classical debate concerning institutional forms[73]. However, in most cases where «humor» occurs in the *Histories* it exhibits no evident relation with this intellectual context. On the contrary, Machiavelli often uses the word as a synonym for the permanent disposition of individuals, of they group he belong to, or of any human group. For example, in book VII chapter 25, describing the seditious attitude of Bernardo Nardi who, having been exiled by the Medici government in 1466, tried to mobilize certain towns that were ruled by Florence, Machiavelli remarks that «he was acquainted with the humors of the people of Prato, and how it appeared to them that they had been proudly and greedily governed; and he knew of the ill intent of some against the state»[74].

All the evidence suggests that this usage of the word «humor» comes from something that is not the consideration of institutions: «humor» here relates to the inclination or character of certain people. This spe-cific sense of «humor» is commonly used in the government of subject towns. Reading Machiavelli's correspondence when he was secretary to the second chancellery (1498-1512) proves useful in this respect. For instance, a letter from Machiavelli addressed to Giovanni Battista Ridolfi, captain and *commissario* of Arezzo in 1503, shows that knowledge of the «humors» of a town is viewed as an essential requisite for government: «it is a rule that he who governs and would preserve his state should do all he can not to awaken either any humor liable to harm him nor to awaken any movement that, once it was in operation, he would no longer be able to master for his own purposes»[75]. It must be stressed

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[72] *Ibid.*, III, 1, p. 105, on this passage see H.C. MANSFIELD, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp. 150-151.

[73] See especially M. GAILLE NIKODIMOV, *A la recherche d'une définition des institutions*.

[74] *Florentine Histories*, p. 304.

[75] «La regola di chi tiene stato e di chi lo vuole mantenere è fare ogni cosa per non destare alcuno umore che lo potessi offendere, né muovere alcuna cosa che mossa, non la possa più correggere a sua posta»; N. MACHIAVELLI, *Legazioni, commissarie, scritti di*

that in this practical sense the idea of humor is closely related to that of public opinion. In fact, insofar as «humor» not only describes a social group or a faction, but its actual character, it is a synonym of public opinion, or more exactly of a certain type of public opinion: a public opinion that implies a constant way of acting. This is public opinion rooted in the body politic, and it is what the Florentine captains and commissaries, after daily and prolonged experience, have to know. This meaning of public opinion is, in fact, a common element in the culture of governing a region. Thus, Luigi Guicciardini, commissary of Pistoia, who was «an adept of astrology and versed in the character-study of different peoples», similarly used an interpretation based on the lasting nature of humors to explain to his superiors, in 1537, that «the people of the place are cruel by nature and carry within themselves the fatal fury», which it is impossible to repress[76].

It is interesting to read the *Florentine Histories* in the light of the governmental notion of humor. Each social or political group is characterized by a specific humor, which determines its actions within the civic space. Sometimes this disposition is congenital, as in the case of the *grandi* and the people; and sometimes—as with the conflict between the Cerchi and the Donati at the start of the schism in the Guelf party—humor is a disposition acquired by a process of contagion that reanimates an underlying ancestral and clannish violence («This humor having come from Pistoia, increased the old hatred between the Cerchi and the Donati»)[77]. Whatever its origin may be, Machiavelli's conceives humor, both in the Chancellery writings and in the *Florentine Histories*, as a natural, crystallized public opinion, which is open to neither negotiation nor discussion and which operates with the force of a norm.

Thinking of «humor» as a category of public opinion refreshes a forgotten sense of this notion. While we have a tendency to think of public opinion as a mental category and as the result of the circulation of ideas

governo, III (1503-1504), ed. by J.J. MARCHAND and M. MELERA MORETTINI, Roma 2005, p. 24.

[76] O. ROUCHON, *Correspondance and crise territoriale. Les lettres d'un commissaire dans la Toscane des Médicis*, in J. BOUTIER - S. LANDI - O. ROUCHON, *La politique par correspondance. Les usages politiques de la lettre en Italie XIVe-XVIIIe siècles*, Rennes 2009, pp. 109-129, here p. 128.

[77] *Florentine Histories*, II, 17, p. 69.

or of debate, for a sixteenth-century individual political actor, opinions in the public sphere were also a natural occurrence, belonging to each element constituting the body politic. Identifying this pre-discursive form of public opinion necessitates a reconsideration of the relation, in conflict situations, between the latent and verbalized public opinion: in other words, the question of the relation between civic conflict and public opinion needs to be reformulated. To what extent is public opinion—and what kind of public opinion is—a determinant in conflicts?

4. *The humor of the multitude*

From this point of view, it is interesting to trace Machiavelli's analysis of the multitude («moltitudine») in the *Histories*. The meaning that Machiavelli gives to the word varies. In a strict sense, «multitude» serves to identify the lower strata of the urban population, namely the plebeians, the common people (*vulgo*), or the *popolo minuto*: for example, used like this, the term «multitude» identifies the insurgent section of the urban population in 1378[78]. However, the use of the term «multitude» also tends to be more general, as a synonym for «the people of Florence», the whole population of the town, or even for humanity at large[79]. It is in exactly this sense that Machiavelli states in chapter 18 of *The Prince* that «there are in the world only common people [*vulgo*]»[80].

Is the multitude characterized by a particular humor? If, as we read at the beginning of the third book, the humor of the *grandi* consists of a desire to dominate and that of the people to avoid domination[81], then the humor of the multitude becomes more difficult to define. On the one hand, as being a plebeian meant exclusion from political rights, the multitude positioned itself on the side of those discontented with the

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[78] On the lexis of the people in Machiavelli see R. ZANON, *Parole del Machiavelli: Populo*, in «Lingua nostra», 30, 1969, pp. 101-105, and S. LANDI, *Popolo, voce del popolo, opinione universale in Machiavelli*, in «Ricerche storiche», 32, 2002, pp. 359-376.

[79] See for example, *Florentine Histories*, IV, 18, p. 164.

[80] *The Prince*, p. 63.

[81] *Florentine Histories*, p. 105 and *The Prince*, ch. 9, p. 34.

oligarchic regime[82]. This is why the multitude constituted, as we know, the foundation on which all crypto-tyrannical regimes in Florence (the Duke of Athens, the Medici) sought to base themselves. But its political identity is complex for, as we have seen, it is also the repository of certain typically communal and Florentine values: hatred of neighboring towns, detestation of the Ghibellines, hostility to everything that runs counter to republican forms and customs. The multitude thus becomes the trustee of an ancient, communal notion of justice.

This conclusion is reinforced by a passage in the *Discourses* (I, 58) that focuses on the multitude: «the masses are more knowing and more constant than is a prince»[83]. By «some hidden power [*virtue*]», writes Machiavelli, the multitude can always make out and anticipate «the evil and the good that was to befall it». This ability is by and large due to the steadiness of their opinions: «one finds that when the populace begins to have a horror something it remains of the same mind for many centuries; a thing that is never observed in the case of a prince». It is this stability of public opinion, operating like a norm for public conduct, which Machiavelli considers when he asserts that «not without good reason is the voice of the people likened to that of God»[84]. It may not be articulate discourse, but the voice of the multitude is an oracle enshrining communal truths and all those in power have to listen to it.

On the other hand, as being a synthesis of human nature, the multitude is marked by particular impulses, above all by a desire for other people's property[85]. This explains both its predatory instinct in respect of free towns and rich citizens and its inconstancy and infidelity, for the multitude is ready at any one moment to follow those who seem able to satisfy their desires in some measure. However, the multitude is also fundamentally violent. The conflicts in which it engages always end in the physical, and sometimes ritual, obliteration of the enemy. The murder of Guglielmo d'Assisi, Podestà of Florence at the time of the Duke of Athens, is emblematic in this respect:

[82] *Florentine Histories*, III, 8, p. 114: «the rest of the multitude, as almost always happens, adhered to the side of malcontents».

[83] N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, pp. 252-256.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 255; on the ancestral wisdom of the multitude see L. STRAUSS, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Chicago IL 1958, pp. 127-128.

[85] See above n. 78.

«Messer Guglielmo and his son were placed among thousands of their enemies, and the son was not even eighteen years old; nonetheless, his age, his form and his innocence could not save him from the fury of the multitude. Those whom they could not wound living, they wounded when dead, and not satisfied with cutting them to pieces with their swords, they tore them apart with their hands and their teeth. And so that all their senses might be satisfied in revenge, having first heard their wails; seen their wounds, and handed their torn flesh, they still wanted their taste to relish them; so as all the parts outside were sated with them, they also sated the part within»[86].

In these conflicts—and other examples confirm it—the multitude shows its bloody and cannibalistic instincts[87]. This theme of cannibalism merits further reflection. In book III chapter 13 of the *Histories*, the unnamed leader of the 1378 uprising, exhorting his men to violence against the rich, considers cannibalism a norm deeply rooted in social and political behavior: «for God and nature have put all the fortunes of men in their midst, where they are exposed more to rapine than to industry and more to wicked than to good arts, from which it arises that men devour one another and that those who can do less are always the worst off»[88]. This famous page has been widely debated[89], but cannibalism as a normal way to success in a conflict has no equivalent in earlier or contemporary literature[90], with one exception, hitherto disregarded. In fact, Machiavelli was possibly able to think of cannibalism within the urban space in the light of the cannibalistic habits of the peoples of the New World. Put otherwise, one of the sources for the *Florentine Histories* could be the published letters of Amerigo Vespucci: the *Mundus Novus* (1502-1503) and the *Lettera delle isole nuovamente trovate* (1504) (generally known as the *Lettera al Soderini*) addressed to Machiavelli's superior, the Gonfalier Piero Soderini[91]. It should be noted that in

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[86] *Florentine Histories*, II, 37, pp. 98-99.

[87] *Ibid.*, III, 16, p. 128.

[88] *Ibid.*, III, 13, p. 123.

[89] Recently G. PEDULLÀ, *Il divieto di Platone. Machiavelli e il discorso dell'anonimo plebeo (Ist. fior. III, 13)*, in J.J. MACHAND - J.C. ZANCARINI (eds), *Storiografia Repubblicana fiorentina (1494-1570)*, Firenze 2003, pp. 209-266.

[90] This, at least, is what is revealed by a preliminary analysis carried out on a corpus of texts of the *Letteratura italiana Zanichelli 4.0*, Bologna 2001. New research is being carried out, notably on a corpus of contemporary manuscripts.

[91] A. VESPUCCI, *Mundus Novus*, in *Il Mondo nuovo di Amerigo Vespucci*, ed. by M. POZZI, Torino 1993, pp. 101-133, and the *Lettera di Amerigo Vespucci delle isole nuovamente trovate in quattro suoi viaggi*, in *Il Mondo*, pp. 137-175.

these writings Vespucci does not confine himself, like other voyagers, to describing cannibalism: he considers it on the one hand as inherent to the logic of the endless and apparently causeless conflicts between different tribes; on the other hand he believes that this practice is seen by the natives as a kind of obligation that the young owe to their elders and ancestors, that is as a naturalized public opinion[92]. That Machiavelli was a reader of Vespucci is only a hypothesis and needs to be confirmed, but nothing stops one from thinking that knowledge of the violent customs of the tribes of the New World could have shed an unfamiliar light on a familiar reality—the fierce nature of the humor dwelling within the urban multitude—and helped understand the violence arising from the opposition in one city of rival social and political «humors» as normal.

The humor that characterizes the multitude is thus an ineradicable mixture of received ideas and of primordial instincts: this all constitutes a public opinion that is deep, non-negotiable, and pre-discursive, for it shows itself principally in voices and actions.

5. *Humor, rumor, and conflicts*

«The whole multitude is slow enough to turn to evil, but when so inclined, every little accident moves it»[93]. In the *Histories*, such an incident is often verbal. This is why we shall try, in conclusion, to analyze the multitude's relationship with language during conflict. On the one hand, it is evident that the multitude does not, strictly speaking, have a

[92]   A. VESPUCCI, *Mundus Novus*, pp. 115-116. In an unpublished letter found by Roberto Ridolfi, Vespucci questions the savages about this «opinion»: «et volli sapere da lloro la cauxa delle lor guerre and mi rispoxono non sapere altro salvo che abb-antico e' loro padri così facevono et per ricordanza da quello a lloro lasciata; né altra ragione mi dettono and io credo che lo facciano per mangiarsi l'un altro come fanno, sendo il lor comune mangiare carne umana, modo crudele et inrazionabile»; R. RIDOLFI, *Una lettera inedita di Amerigo Vespucci sopra il suo terzo viaggio*, in «Archivio storico italiano», 95, 1937, pp. 3-20, here p. 13. On the cultural impact of Vespucci's cannibalistic images in the first half of sixteenth century Europe, see W. NEUBER, *Mnemonic Imagery in the Early Modern Period: Visibility and Collective Memory*, in D. BEECHER - G. WILLIAMS (eds), *Ars reminiscendi. Mind and Memory in Renaissance Culture*, Toronto 2009, pp. 69-81, here pp. 70-75.

[93]   *Florentine Histories*, VI, 24, p. 257.

discourse but a voice, that is, a biological ability to speak which comes before discriminating and significant discourse. This distinction is very clear in Machiavelli, who knows how to recognize the different forms orality takes within the urban space[94]. Not only does the multitude not speak (it shouts or mutters), but in most cases it shows itself insensible to discourse, as if discourse could not reach it, or rather, reach its humor. After Florence's defeat at Zagognara by the army of Filippo Visconti in 1424, Machiavelli writes «the whole city of Florence» was affected by this news and he also remarks that it seemed opportune to the priors to counteract its effects by assembling «many citizens who would quiet the excited humors in the multitude with good words»[95]. Machiavelli does not say what the outcome was, but he is sure that discourse has very little hold over the multitude, not only when it is a matter of making rational discourse prevail over widespread feeling in an argument, but also in a context of open conflict or disturbance. An episode from August 1397 is significant in this respect. A group of young aristocrats exiled by the oligarchic regime decides to return to the town, to assassinate the head of government Maso degli Albizzi and to mobilize the multitude, who was always dissatisfied with its condition. The plan failed: the plotters randomly killed two enemies in the street, and tried to rouse the multitude by shouting «people, arms, liberty and death to the tyrants!». They then installed themselves on a balcony from which they directed a discourse to the crowd, seeking to awaken its patriotic and republican sentiments:

«with loud voices they urged the men to take up arms, and escape the servitude they hated so much ... And they marveled that those who were used to taking up arms for the least injury were not moved for so many, and that they should want to tolerate the banishment of so many of their citizens and so many admonished; but now the choice was theirs to restore to the exiles their fatherland and the state to the admonished».

«These words, even though true», remarks Machiavelli, «did not move the multitude in any way, either because of fear or because the killing of those two might have made the murderers hateful»[96]. The anti-Medici conspiracy of 1478 shows a similar process: after the assassination of Giuliano de' Medici, Jacopo de' Pazzi organizes a desperate attempt

[94] See S. LANDI, *Popolo, voce del popolo*, p. 363.

[95] *Florentine Histories*, IV, 7, pp. 151-152.

[96] *Ibid.*, III, 27, pp. 142-143.

to rush the Palace of the Signoria, «calling to his aid the people and liberty»; but, notes Machiavelli, «because the one had been made deaf by the fortune and liberality of the Medici, and the other was not known in Florence, he had no response from anyone»[97].

If these episodes are evidence of the distance existing between republican discourse and the political expectations of the majority of the population, they also highlight a problem in political communication. In fact, these slogans and this discourse are alien to the humor of the multitude, be ist because it is accustomed to servitude, or because opinions based on rational arguments are inaudible and unsuited to move (*muovere*) it. Therefore, in the face of humanist rhetoric, the humor of the multitude keeps its distance, and it is as if Machiavelli had discovered different political idioms within one town incapable of communicating with one another. Humor does not respond to discourse, but in contrast it proves highly receptive to another form of scarcely rational public opinion, rumor. The rumor/humor pairing plays an important part in the dynamics of conflict. From this point of view, once again the writing in the *Histories* cannot be distinguished from the practical and governmental knowledge evinced in Machiavelli's Chancery correspondence. The unauthorized circulation of public opinions under the form of unverifiable news is in fact considered a potential cause of 'scandal', a degrading of humors and a harbinger of unrest[98]. The letters, which he addresses to outside officials often testify to the fundamental need to monitor information arriving in cities, especially when it is a question of «ominous warnings» and «distressing news», because this kind of «disproportionate» or false news can be sustained by «bad humors» or in its turn can sustain them[99].

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[97] *Ibid.*, VIII, 8, p. 325.

[98] See the letter of instruction addressed on June 13, 1502 by the Ten to Francesco Benvenuti and Agnolo Pandolfini in Arezzo, who noted the state of opinion: «sapete quello che tali relationi diverse abbiano partorito nel popolo persuadendosi di essere al tucto ingannato e adgirato, prestando più fede a chi fa le cose facili che ad chi le fa difficili. e perché queste opinioni quando le multiplicassero genererebbono schandolo e fanno difficile ogni provvedimento necessario per la salute della libertà ci è parso necessario chiarire così le menti nostre come di qualcun altro, acciò che le cose si risolvino in bene»; N. MACHIAVELLI, *Legazioni. Commissarie. Scritti di governo*, ed. by F. CHIAPPELLI and J.J. MARCHAND, vol. 2: *1501-1503*, Bari 1973, p. 111.

[99] Particularly worthy of attention, on this topic, is a letter dated 7 August 1503 to the Captain of Cortona: «sopr'a che non ci occorre che scriverti se non che tu abbi cura

Machiavelli's analysis in book VI of the *Histories* of a disturbance that took place in Milan in February 1450 prompts an analogous reading of the phenomenon of communication. Machiavelli briefly abandons the history of Florence to describe the crisis of the Ambrosian Republic, a short-lived oligarchic regime that came into being with Francesco Sforza's seizuring of power. For Machiavelli it was doubtlessly a significant instance to examine the behavior of the mass of the population and its attachment to republican values in a comparative way. In the context of a long-lasting war, Machiavelli describes a political, moral, and alimentary emergency propitious for public resentment: «the magistrates», he notes, «were greatly afraid of this and made every effort to keep people from gathering together». He then cites an apparently insignificant episode which nonetheless caused the fall of the republican regime:

«two men of not much consequence were discussing near the Porta Nuova the calamity of the city and their own misery and what modes there might be for safety, others began to join them, so that they became a goodly number—whence rumors spread throughout Milan that those at the Porta Nuova were in arms against the magistrates. Because of this, the whole multitude, which only waiting to be moved, took up arms; they made Gaspare da Vimercate their head and went to the place the place where the magistrates were assembled»[100].

Machiavelli is certainly a historian *sui generis* with respect to the authenticity of his sources, and this page, based on doubtful facts, seems to confirm this. However, undeniably among modern historians it is he who accords a decisive role to rumor in determining political affairs. As the last example shows, Machiavelli knew that uncontrolled information has the power to draw people together, to destabilize authority, or to establish a new one rapidly. We can state, in terms that are familiar to us, that Machiavelli knew—on the basis of solid experience in the field—the machinery and the power of political communication. This way of stating the question is correct, but it is unsatisfactory as it conceals a more complex reality. Actually, Machiavelli thinks that news can play a major

in su li avvisi sinistri e triste novelle non nasca per troppo sospetto qualche tumulto, perché molto bene o per umori cattivi o per qualche altra cagione non buona occorre spesse volte che simili avvisi sono fatti nascere, e però provedrai che chi arriva costì venga a te, e quando alcun porta certe novelle sproporzionate e che ci tornino contro, li proibirai el ragionarne in pubblico, e dall'altra parte cautamente terrai conto d'ogni cosa e ad ogni cosa provedrai iuxta posse, ma tutto con prudentia»; N. MACHIAVELLI, *Legazioni, commissarie*, III, p. 209.

[100] *Florentine Histories*, VI, 24, p. 257.

role in triggering conflict, not so much because it excites the discursive and critical faculties of political actors but because it sometimes chimes with their «humors». In other words, the only effective information is that, which manages to create a short-circuit between unverified events and the substratum of expectation and fears, of instincts and of beliefs harbored by the majority of the population. Rumor is thus a necessary but not a sufficient cause of conflict. Its deep rationale always lies in humor, which in its unchanging but easily altered character only wants an excuse to be «moved», and that excuse is often verbal in nature.

6. *Conclusions*

Humor is an obscure subject, and difficult to translate into modern historiographical terms. It is, however, seen as a vital element in the public sphere by a political actor of the sixteenth century. The attention given to humors in the political discourse of that time is proof of the difficulty of applying our idea of the public sphere, which was shaped in the eighteenth century, to earlier periods. The tendency, which has prevailed since the Enlightenment, to associate the public sphere with the existence of opinions that express intention in the form of coherent linguistic acts has steadily occluded the existence of a category of public opinion, which, in contrast, implicitly manifests its intentionality in collective acts and voices. Our lexicon has become too impoverished to be able to speak of this other public opinion, this fixed opinion, a stranger to *logos,* to which the Greeks justly applied the term *nomos,* the implicit norm of behavior, predating discourse and constituting the political culture of each people or tribe[101]. Besides, modern historians are seldom interested in the public opinions of multitudes. A remarkable exception was E.P. Thompson who devoted an article to the «moral economy» of English crowds in 1971[102]. In an ethnographic reading of the hunger riots, which shook the English countryside in the eighteenth century, Thompson conceived of «moral economy» as «a system of norms and obligations» which «orients judgment and action and distinguishes what is from what is

[101] On this category of opinion, see K. WETTERS, *The Opinion System*, pp. 61-69.

[102] E.P. THOMPSON, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century*, in «Past and Present», 50, 1971, pp. 76-136.

not»[103]. In brief, the «moral economy» is an unconscious heritage of feelings and values, ready to react to crises and to reveal itself in acts of violence. It would not be too much to say that one could use the notion of «moral economy» to translate what Machiavelli meant by the «humor» of the multitude, and vice versa.

To bring together the view of a sixteenth-century historian and that of a modern historian through these two terms seems anachronistic without a doubt. However, nothing stops one from thinking that Machiavelli and E.P. Thompson, both starting out from familiar realities observed from a distance[104], were trying to denominate something analogous: the deep public opinion, which shapes, legitimizes and moves a particular human group. No one has hitherto thought of «humor» or «moral economy» as possible forms of public opinion. Nevertheless, to recover subjects from obscurity, that have been made opaque by historiographical consensus—and public opinion, is an example—is one of the great opportunities presented by reading political texts from the past.

[103] See the recent reading of this category by D. FASSIN, *Les économies morales revisitées*, in «Annales HSS», 64, 2009, pp. 1237-1266, here pp. 1243-1245.

[104] On the cognitive paradigm of distance see C. GINZBURG, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, New York 2001, and also the observations of P. BOURDIEU, *L'inconscient d'école*, p. 4.

Publics

Constructing Selves, Making Publics: Geometry and Poetry in Descartes and Sidney

by *Shankar Raman*

1. *Introduction*

This essay explores the preconditions for the making of a Habermasian public sphere, understood as a domain in which private people can share information, debate opinions, work out political interests, articulate social needs, and so on, with other participants. No doubt, social reality was more diverse than can be captured by Habermas's postulate that the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, entry into which required that individuals take the form of rational—and thereby equal—subjects[1]. Nonetheless, a central implication of this argument remains worth taking seriously: that early modern Europe produced a new, if idealized, understanding of rationality and, concomitantly, of publics that sought to reflect this understanding. Such an ideal would constitute one of the very conditions of possibility of a public sphere in Habermas's sense.

However, in exploring this condition, we need also to look beyond the physical and mediated spaces that have generally pre-occupied public sphere theorists (for instance, those areas of social life sustaining the «traffic in commodities and news»)[2]. Consequently, I attend here to what initially appear more removed and specialized sectors of public exchange: the burgeoning mathematical sciences, whose connections to the broader cultural life of Europe remained vital, after all, throughout the early modern period. For it was in how the interaction between mathematics and

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[1] See the range of critiques in C. CALHOUN (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambrige MA 1992.

[2] J. HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambrige MA 1989, p. 15.

early modern culture reinvented rationality that the ideals of a shared social sphere often found their fullest expression[3].

The very opening of Descartes' 1637 *Discourse on Method* offers an influential version of this emerging conception of what it means to be rational:

«Common sense [*le bons sens*] is the most equitably divided thing [*la mieux partagée*] in the world, for everyone believes he is so well provided with it that even those who are the hardest to please in everything else usually do not want more of it than they have. It is not likely that everyone is mistaken in this matter; rather, this shows that the power to judge correctly and to distinguish the true from the false—which is, strictly speaking, what we mean by common sense or reason [*la raison*]—is naturally equal [*égale*] in all men. Hence the diversity of our opinions arises, not because some of us are more reasonable [*raisonnables*] than others, but only because we direct our thoughts along different paths, and consider different things. For it is not enough to have a good mind [*l'esprit bon*]; the principal thing is to apply it correctly [*bien*]»[4].

A few features evident in these remarks are worth noting: first, the identification of reason with common sense and reasonableness; second, the postulate of a rational capacity presumed to be equally distributed, differences among individuals being ascribed on the basis of how this capacity is applied; and, finally, the characterization of rational capacity as power of good judgment, one able to distinguish the true from the false—indeed, as we shall see, Descartes will seek to re-articulate the very criteria for truth and intelligibility.

We should recall, too, that the *Discourse* was originally a prefatory text to three scientific treatises. While usually published (and discussed) today as a free-standing work, it first appeared together with the *Optics* [*La Dioptrique*], the *Metereology* [*Les Météores*], and, last but not least, the *Geometry* [*La Géométrie*]. Its overarching claims about the right way to use one's reason thus envelop these more specific studies. In Descartes' mathematical exposition, the making of geometrical space is closely allied with producing the modes of public rationality implied by the passage cited above. Moreover, this coupling in turn demands reforming selves in ways that make them adequate to these new demands. Thus, as I

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[3] On the need to counter Habermas's overemphasis on economic factors, see D. ZARET, *Religion, Science, and Printing in Seventeenth-Century England*, in C. CALHOUN (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 211-233.

[4] R. DESCARTES, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. and ed. by E.S. HALDANE and G.R.T. ROSS, Cambridge 1955, vol. 1, p. 82 f. Translation modified. Subsequent citations indicated by page number in body of chapter.

shall suggest, the emerging spaces of publicity indirectly depended upon changing configurations of the premier science of space itself.

Matthew Jones' erudite book on *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution* usefully stresses the deep connection between scientific writing and public making in the age of Descartes, Pascal, and Leibniz. To quote from his introduction:

«[S]eventeenth-century Europe witnessed a blossoming of spiritual, philosophical and scientific writing aimed at an elite reading public wider than learned readers of Latin and technically proficient philosophers and mathematicians. Descartes, Pascal, and Leibniz sought to perfect means for speaking and writing aptly to this public, a fickle one prone to fashion. All three philosophers sought to *publicize* as much as to popularize: they sought not only to spread a set of doctrines but also to create a public that was physically, emotionally and intellectually competent to understand and judge such doctrines. Their relatively elite audiences were widely believed to possess good taste and good judgment, uncontaminated by the 'artificial' methods and teachings of scholastic education. All three authors sought to draw on these putative cognitive competencies; they sought to heighten and perfect them»[5].

Taking us beyond the more narrowly technical achievements of early modern mathematics, Jones' suggestive remarks underline the extent to which a now recognizably modern scientific thinking was bound up from the very outset with ethical considerations in Aristotle's sense of the word, that is, with the settled or characteristic ways human beings act in the world or behave towards others and themselves. Descartes' *Geometry* was never only a signal achievement in the history of mathematics—though it was this too. Its specifically mathematical dimensions are intertwined with the ethical questions of how a geometer ought to 'do' geometry, how he should comport himself as a mathematician and toward the nature of the mathematical objects that are his concern.

The wider cultural connections between how one does mathematics and the making of selves through mathematics emerge most fully when we

[5] M.L. JONES, *The Good Life in the Seventeenth Century: Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz, and the Cultivation of Virtue*, Chicago IL 2006, p. 7. Both Aristotle and the scholastic tradition are far from absent in the works of these writers. Indeed, the complex relationship to Aristotelian and Ramist precepts shapes Descartes' thinking from within. As Emily Grosholz argues, even Descartes' classification of curves according to genre «covers over his debt to the classical tradition. Thus, he often does not see how conservative his allegedly novel reconstructions are ...». See *Descartes' Geometry and the Classical Tradition*, in P. BARKER - R. ARIEW (eds), *Revolution and Continuity: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Early Modern Science*, Washington D.C. 1991, p. 183. Her own argument is, however, less than generous in turn to Descartes' innovations.

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consider the extent to which such reformation was understood through the (renovated) Aristotelian lens of *poesis* or making, a term that took on renewed significance in a range of early modern intellectual domains, and not least literature. An apt literary analogue may be found in an earlier, seminal (for the English context at least) work of literary criticism, in which the assertion of the poet as maker takes center stage: Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* [or *An Apology for Poetry*]. In a moment that has not drawn much commentary[6], Sidney defends comedy's predilection to imitate «the common errors of our life» by drawing a parallel with mathematics:

«Now, as in geometry, the oblique must be known as well as the right, and in arithmetic, the odd as well as the even: so in the actions of our life, who seeth not the filthiness of evil, wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue. This doth comedy handle so in our private and domestical matters, as with hearing it, we get, as it were, an experience [of] what is to be looked for ...»[7].

Sidney posits a curious equivalence between knowing obliqueness or oddness in mathematics and the poetic creation of images of evil: just as we need to understand the odd to perceive the even, the oblique to see the straight (or, as his resonant pun has it, «the right»), so too do the «actions of our life» demand poetic images of evil if virtue is to be visible.

However, these images do not simply reflect the external world, for the *Defence* amplifies throughout what is already an undercurrent in the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis*: that imitation is itself a generative process, a making. When Sidney defines Aristotelian *mimesis* as «a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture» (p. 217), each additional term in this concatenation of definitions enlarges the ambit: from re-presenting of what is already there, to making something 'against' what is there, to drawing out a new figural reality.

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[6] To the best of my knowledge, H.S. TURNER, *The English Stage: Geometry, Poetry and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580-1630*, Oxford 2006, is the only book explicitly to draw the connection between geometry and poetry in Sidney's *Defence*. My discussion here converges at times with Turner's, generally with respect to positions already well-established by the history of Sidney criticism—for instance, the importance of 'invention' or the question of poetry's epistemological and ethical value. However, Turner largely ignores the actual technical content of early modern geometry, focusing instead on reconstructing geometry's status through title pages, prefaces and selective evidence of reading practices.

[7] Sir Ph. SIDNEY, *The Defence of Poesy*, in K. DUNCAN-JONES (ed.), *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, Oxford 1989, p. 230. Subsequent citations indicated by page number.

The two senses of mimetic production remain in tension in the *Defence*: on the one hand, the poet as a «maker», as in the famous early assertion that the poet «disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifteth up with vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature in making things better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature» (p. 216); and, on the other hand, the poet as mere «imitator» who «counterfeit[s] only such faces as are set before» him (p. 218), and «deliver[s] to mankind» only that which has «the works of nature for his principal object» (pp. 215-216)[8].

That Sidney should evoke mathematical analogies in discussing how comedy functions to produce both knowledge and experience of the ethical and the moral is by no means accidental. Indeed, the poet's correspondence with his friend and preceptor Hubert Languet as well as his brother Robert Sidney documents a sustained interest in the study of geometry[9]. In turn, the implications of «making» or *poesis* teased out by Sidney spill over in the early modern period to the kind of knowledge that comes to characterize mathematics, whereby knowing its «truths» becomes not simply a matter of discovering or imitating what is already there but increasingly that of 'producing' those truths. David Lachterman's assertion about modernity in his *The Ethics of Geometry* is worth stressing here: modernity's «thinly-disguised 'secret'», he says, is «the willed or willful

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[8]   From different perspectives, critics have remarked upon this tension in Sidney's *oeuvre*. S. COOPER, *The Sonnets of 'Astrophil and Stella'*, Den Haag 1968, for instance, sees poet swinging between the claim that art is a means to the end of «representing nature accurately» (p. 14) and the countervailing position in which inspiration seems all: «[o]bviously,» writes Cooper, «the practitioner and the theorist seem at odds with another» (p. 17). Kathy Eden's rich discussion emphasises instead the duality in the poet's deployment of key Aristotelian texts: «When Sidney defines poetry not only as an art of imitation but also as an instrument of knowledge, he does so in view of the *Poetics* and its tradition. When, on the other hand, he claims for poetry the special task of feigning images designed to inspire the will to virtuous action, he echoes the *De Anima* and its tradition»; see K. EDEN, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition*, Princeton NJ 1986, p. 158.

[9]   In a 1574 reply to Languet, for instance, Sidney resists the Frenchman's advice that he give up studying geometry, promising to «only look through the lattice (so to say) at the first principles of it»; see A. FEUILLERAT (ed.), *The Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, Cambridge 1965, vol. 3, p. 84. In a 1580 letter, Sidney further advises his brother to «take delight ... in the mathematicals», and especially in arithmetic and geometry «so as both in number and measure you might have a feeling and active judgement», in W.A. BRADLEY (ed.), *The Correspondence of Philip Sidney and Hubert Languet*, Boston MA 1912, p. 223.

coincidence of human making with truth or intelligibility»[10]. Such an attitude is central to Cartesian geometry, and signally alters how mathematics would be practiced and understood in the early modern period. Conversely, the emerging mathematical attitude to which Descartes gives especially clear expression is already visible in the theory and practice of poetry that Sidney espouses.

2. *Two ways of completing the square: Al-Khwarizmi and Descartes*

To flesh out the renewed importance of *poesis* or making to the geometrical project, I would like to compare two approaches to what is essentially the same mathematical problem: that of solving a quadratic equation by «completing the square» (described below). The first derives from a foundational Arabic treatise on algebra that preserves and builds on Euclidean principles, *The Algebra of Al-Khowarizmi*. Written by the great ninth-century Arab mathematician Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khowarizmi, the work became available in the European world through its twelfth-century Latin translation by Robert of Chester. (Complicating this chain of transmission further, I will cite the twentieth-century translation of the Latin text[11].) Descartes' 1637 *Géométrie* adopts a very different approach, one that has been credited with inspiring the modern mathematical domain of analytic geometry[12]. Both works proffer an

[10] D.R. LACHTERMAN, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, London 1989, p. IX.

[11] *Robert of Chester's Latin Translation of the Algebra of Al-Khowarizmi*, trans. and ed. by L.C. KARPINSKI, New York 1915. Further citations indicated by page number in body of essay. Karpinski's prefatory material shows how widely disseminated knowledge of Al-Khwarizmi's work was from the late fifteenth century onwards—either directly, as in the case of Regiomontanus and Luca Pacioli, or through Robert of Chester's translation, as with Johann Scheybl, a professor of mathematics at Tübingen who in 1550 transcribed and prepared that translation for publication.

[12] The question of whether Descartes did or did not invent analytical geometry has been much debated by historians of mathematics. There seems little doubt that analytical geometry shares a number of the mathematical techniques developed in the *Géométrie*, but, as Carl Boyer first argued, it remains unclear whether Descartes' mathematical thought was fully compatible with the basic notion undergirding analytical geometry: that algebraic equations define curves in space. See C. BOYER, *History of Analytic Geometry* (The Scripta mathematica studies), New York 1956, pp. 102 ff. «The analytical geometer», according to Timothy Lenoir, «begins with an equation in two or three variables and, by a

algebraic problem set alongside its geometrical rendition, and I will be considering here the manner in which each text achieves its solution as well as the relationship it posits between algebra and geometry. I pick these two examples precisely because what we might call their truth value is the same. Descartes' discussion of quadratic equations is not distinguished from al-Khwarizmi's Euclid-oriented algebra by the nature of the problem and nor does his solution really mark a technical advance over what his ancient and medieval predecessors had achieved. Rather, what is new in the *Géométrie*'s approach is how it represents the problem. In Lachterman's words, at issue is «the source of the intelligibility of the figure (or statement)» as such. Thus, the crucial distinction concerns the mode of knowing, which in turn «entails a difference in the mode of being» of what may otherwise seem to be identical mathematical insights[13].

In the fourth chapter of his treatise, al-Khwarizmi proposes finding the numerical value of a «root», that is, of an unknown quantity, when «squares [of that root] and roots are equal to numbers». The general case is represented through a specific instance. «The question therefore in this type of equation», he says, «is as follows: what is the square which combined with ten of its roots will give a sum total of 39» (p. 71). It is easier for us to understand al-Khwarizmi's *modus operandi* if we translate his verbal description into modern algebraic notation. However, I should emphasize that to do so is already to distort the text, since one of its distinctive features is precisely that the problem is stated in prose, eschewing mathematical formalization. Throughout, problems and solutions are posed in everyday language and use determinate numbers rather than algebraic symbols. These features reflect al-Khwarizmi's ontological presuppositions: mathematical objects, such as numbers or geometrical shapes, are in an important sense real objects; their existence is of the

suitable choice of a coordinate frame, produces a geometric *interpretation* of that equation in two- or three-[dimensional] space»; in *Descartes and the Geometrization of Thought: The Methodological Background of Descartes' 'Géométrie'*, in «Historia Mathematica», 6, 1979, pp. 355-379, here p. 356. While Descartes admits the necessity of algebra, he refuses to prioritise equations in this way. In fact, as H.J.M. Bos persuasively shows, how curves ought to be understood remained an open question for most seventeenth-century mathematicians. Descartes intervenes here by introducing «a sharp distinction between admissible and inadmissible curves precisely on the grounds of their constructibility; see H.J.M. Bos, *On the Representation of Curves in Descartes' 'Géométrie'*, in «Archive for History of Exact Sciences», 24, 1981, pp. 295-338.

[13]   D.R. LACHTERMAN, *Ethics of Geometry*, pp. IX and XI.

same order as ours. Thus, for example, numbers are always positive. There is no conception here of such a thing as a negative number—to be a thing is, after all, to have a positive existence.

At any rate, with this caveat in mind, let us nonetheless translate al-Khwarizmi's narrative into symbolic notation. If we represent our «root» or unknown by z, we are being asked to uncover its numerical value, given the following equation:

$$z^2+10z = 39 \tag{1}$$

In order to do so, Al-Khwarizmi tells the reader how to complete the square. And this is one way we might do it today. Consider the square of $(z+5)$, which we arrive at by multiplying the expression by itself:

$$(z+5)^2 = (z+5) * (z+5) = z^2 + 5z + 5z + 25 = z^2 + 10z + 25 \tag{2}$$

Now, from the original equation (1), we know that $z^2+10z = 39$. Consequently, $z^2+10z+25$ must equal $39 + 25$, that is, 64. In short, by adding 25 to each side of the original equation we can «complete the square» to get a numerical value for the expression $(z+5)^2$ in (2) above. So, if $z^2+10z = 39$, then

$$(z+5)^2 = 64 \tag{3}$$

If we now take the square root of each side of this equation, we get

$$z+5 = \sqrt{64} = 8 \tag{4}$$

and subtracting five from each side of this equation yields $z = 3$, producing a determinate value for the «root» z.

As we shall shortly see, this logic can be applied in virtually the same manner to the problem that Descartes' *Geometry* will pose. But for the moment, let us linger with al-Khwarizmi. Notably, our Arab mathematician does not seek to explain algebraically—as I have sought to do above—why completing the square yields the correct result. Instead, the statement of the problem is followed immediately by a description of procedure.

«The manner of solving this type of equation is to take one-half of the roots just mentioned. Now the roots in the problem before us are 10. Therefore, take 5, which multiplied by itself gives 25, an amount which you add to 30, giving 64. Having then taken the square root of this, which is 8, subtract from it half of the roots, leaving 3. The number three therefore represents one root of this square, which itself, of course, is 9» (p. 73).

What Al-Khwarizmi provides is a step-by-step route to the desired solution—it is fitting, then, that the word algorithm derives from his name. As his many examples later in the book suggest, such instructions make the mathematical «truth» operational by allowing them to be applied to mercantile transactions, the dividing of estates, and so on. However, explanatory force does not lie in algebra itself. The truly mathematical domain is not that of application but of demonstration.

That privilege belongs to geometry alone. Corresponding to each of Al-Khwarizmi's algorithms is a set of geometrical diagrams aimed at proving the validity of the algebraic procedure—and once legitimated thus, the method is freed as a practical technique useful for everyday transactions. Thus it is that the treatise soon recognizes that it has «said enough, ... so far as numbers are concerned» about different types of quadratic equations, and, in the interests of verification, signals the turn to geometry: «Now, however, it is necessary that we should demonstrate geometrically the truth of the same problems which we have explained in numbers» (p. 77).

The «proof» of the equation discussed above is ingenious, and testifies to the authoritative power of Euclidean geometry as an enduring model for establishing mathematical truth[14]. To this end, Al-Khwarizmi first seeks to represent the terms on the left-hand side of original equation—that is, $z^2 + 10z$—spatially. The term z^2 can simply be visualized as the area of square with side z, as in fig. 1.
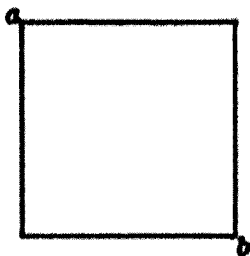
Figure 1. Square of side z, with area z^2. From the Columbia ms. of Johann Scheybl's 1550 transcription of Robert of Chester's *Algebra*.

[14] As Karpinski points out, the «Greek influence on Arabic geometry is revealed by the order of the letters employed on the geometrical figures». These letters follow the natural Greek order rather than the Arabic, and «the same is true ... [for] the letters in the geometrical figures used by Al-Khowarizmi for verification of his solutions of quadratic equations ... The Arabs were much more familiar with and grounded in Euclid than are mathematicians today, and it was entirely natural in constructing new figures that they should follow the order of lettering to which they had become accustomed in their study of Euclid» (p. 21).

To add to this square an area corresponding to $10z$, Al-Khwarizmi attaches four rectangles, each of which takes one side of the square as its longer side and one-fourth of ten as its shorter (see fig. 2). That is, each constructed rectangle has an area of $2.5*z$, and the four taken together yield the requisite term $10z$ of the original equation.
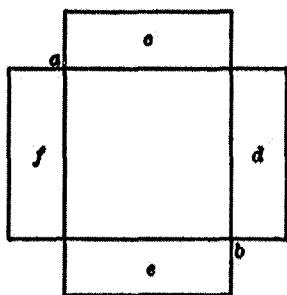
Figure 2. Constructed figure representing z^2+10z. From the Columbia ms.

The resulting fig. 2 thus represents z^2+10z geometrically, and its total area is 39, in accordance with the original equation.

Finally, we simply complete the square of fig. 2, by filling in the four small squares at each corner (see fig. 3).
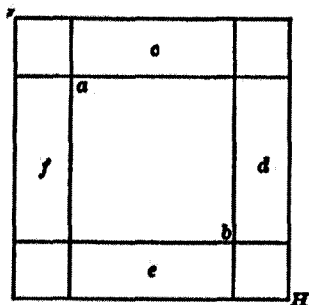
Figure 3. The Completed Square with side $z+5$. From the Columbia ms.

The side of each of these squares is the same as that of the rectangle to which it is adjoined, namely, 2.5. Consequently, the area of each small square is 6.25, and the combined area of all four is 25. Recalling that the area corresponding to z^2+10z—represented by the diagram in fig. 2—is 39, the area of the completed square in fig. 3 must be 39 + 25, that is 64, which means in turn that the completed square has a side of 8. A quick look at fig. 3 shows that this side comprises the side of the original square

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of fig. 1 plus two of the sides of the small squares used to complete fig. 2, that is to say, the completed square has a side whose length $z + 5$. Therefore we can see that $z + 5 = 8$, and it follows that $z = 3$.

Now, let us turn to Descartes' *Géométrie*, which also begins with a simple quadratic equation. Unlike Al-Khowarizmi however, Descartes employs algebraic symbols from the outset, and is in theory indifferent to whether a number is positive or negative. Thus his ontological assumptions, be they in respect to algebra or to geometry, are different from his Arabic predecessor's. For instance, whereas the latter's Euclidean geometry is tied to the ontology of three-dimensional space, Cartesian geometry does not specify the nature of the being of its mathematical objects[15]. The same holds true for numbers as well—the symbolic language re-presents the numbers but without specifying any further thein nature.

Descartes uses z to symbolize what Al-Khwarizmi calls the «root» of the quadratic equation—that is, the unknown whose value is to be determined. However, rather than using numbers for the known quantities in an equation, Descartes represents these symbolically as well, using a and b^2 to designate the quantities corresponding to 10 and 39 in Al-Khwarizmi's case. These may be thought of, to use a felicitous distinction, as the «known unknowns» in the equation. In other words, while a and b^2 are also represent variable quantities, their values can be decided upon by the mathematician, and thus they can be treated as if they are numbers whose values are already known. The task at hand, then, is determine the value of z—the true unknown—in terms of what are taken to be given: a, b^2, and ordinary numbers.

Descartes proposes to solve

$$z^2 = az + b^2. \qquad (5)$$

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[15]   Michael Mahoney insists that Descartes' essential contribution to algebra was that of abstracting mathematical operations from visual or physical space. Descartes' mathematics, he claims, is a science of «pure structure», without any ontological foundation, see *Die Anfänge der algebraischen Denkweise im 17. Jahrhundert*, in «Rete» 1, 1971, pp. 15-31, here p. 29. This is perhaps too strongly put, but there is no denying that Descartes seeks to separate his mathematics from the reference to physical space that underlies Euclidean geometry. Thus, for example, the multiplication of two lines in the *Géométrie* yields not a square (as in Al-Khwarizmi's algebra) but another line.

By subtracting az from each side, we can rewrite the equation in a form comparable to Al-Khwarizmi's $z^2+10z = 39$:

$$z^2 - az = b^2. \tag{6}$$

Now, we simply proceed in the manner already described earlier. Consider first the square of $(z - \frac{a}{2})$, that is $(z - \frac{a}{2})$, multiplied by itself:

$$(z - \frac{a}{2})^2 = z^2 - \frac{az}{2} - \frac{az}{2} + (\frac{a}{2})^2 = z^2 - az + (\frac{a}{2})^2. \tag{7}$$

But we know from equation 6 that $z^2 - az = b^2$. Therefore, completing the square by adding $(\frac{a}{2})^2$ to both sides of equation 6, we get an expression for square of $(z - \frac{a}{2})$ in terms of the given quantities a, b^2, and ordinary numbers:

$$(z - \frac{a}{2})^2 = b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2. \tag{8}$$

Finally, taking the square root of each side, we get:

$$(z - \frac{a}{2}) = \sqrt{b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2}. \tag{9}$$

And this result allows us to express z in terms of the known quantities, yielding:

$$z = \frac{a}{2} + \sqrt{b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2}. \tag{10}$$

While I have spelt out the algebraic logic of Descartes' solution in some detail, he himself skips over entirely this exercise of completing the square, not even deigning to provide the kind of algorithm that Al-Khwarizmi had offered. He will not «pause here», he tells us, «to explain this in greater detail, because I should be depriving you of the pleasure of learning it for yourself, as well as the advantage of cultivating your mind by training yourself in it, which is, in my opinion, the principal advantage we can derive from this science [of algebra]» (p. 18). This refusal is significant, for it brings into view a qualitative difference fundamental to Descartes' way of thinking: between such «arithmeticians» who emphasize only formal procedures, focusing on narrowly directed mechanical processes of calculation and proof, and those who employ mathematics properly, doing it the right way. Briefly put, he draws a crucial distinction between merely performing mathematical acts and acting mathemati-

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cally[16]. The value of algebraic symbolization lies in its allowing us to see parts of the problem that would disappear were we to rely only on actual numbers. The representational language enables us to follow the connection from one step in a solution process to another, by showing us how something develops and how it depends on what has been given or already established. Without care, however, algebraic manipulation becomes a mere craft, simply a mode of calculation. Thus, even though symbolization is certainly an important step because it frees calculation from an attachment to specific numbers, it is not enough on its own. For Descartes, algebra's importance is as much social as it is conceptual: «cultivating [the] mind» by «training» it properly, it helps us act mathematically, and this potentially differentiates us from those who simply perform mathematical acts. But ultimately algebra remains too close to the idea of an algorithmic or technical procedure in al-Khwarizmi's sense to be able to sustain the philosophical, social and ethical distinction so important to Descartes.

Consequently—and in contrast to al-Khwarizmi's celebration of algebra's power to solve a variety of practical problems—Descartes suppresses the algebraic process entirely. Instead, he immediately seeks to give his original equation 5 a geometrical interpretation and 'solve' the problem through an appropriate geometrical construction. But the use and implications of geometry here are very different from what obtains in Al-Khwarizmi's example, where, as we saw, geometry was the locus of verification, and the geometrical completion of the square the means whereby to prove the truth of the algebraic procedure.

Unlike Al-Khwarizmi, who uses the areas of squares and rectangles, Descartes relies on straight lines, circles and triangles (see fig. 4).
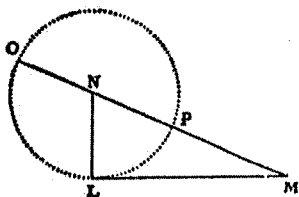

Figure 4. Descartes' Construction, from his *Géométrie*

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[16] For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see M.L. JONES, *The Good Life*, pp. 32-38.

This is how he describes his geometrical approach to the equation:

«I construct a right[-angled] triangle NLM in which the side LM is equal to b, the square root of the known quantity b^2, and the other side LN is [equal to] , [that is,] half the other known quantity which was multiplied by z. Then, prolonging MN, the hypotenuse of this triangle, to O, such that NO may be equal to NL, [then] the whole [line] OM is the searched-for line z. And it is expressed in this manner:

$$z = \frac{a}{2} + \sqrt{b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2} \text{ »}^{17}.$$

Since $LM = b$ and $NL = \frac{1}{2}a$, Pythagoras' theorem tells us that the side

$$NM = \sqrt{b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2}.$$

Thus NM represents the second term in the algebraic solution—see (10)—to the given equation. To represent the unknown z as a line, we have to add to NM a geometrical equivalent to the first term in the algebraic formula for z, that is, $\frac{a}{2}$.

Since we have constructed the line NL with the length $\frac{a}{2}$, we need only construct a circle centered on N, with radius NL (see fig. 4). This construction ensures that the extension of the NM to touch that circle will be a line whose length corresponds to z in the algebraic solution. In other words, OM represents z and has the desired length of

$$\frac{a}{2} + \sqrt{b^2 + (\frac{a}{2})^2} \quad \text{as in (10)}.$$

For Al-Khwarizmi, the geometrical construction demonstrated the truth of the algebraic procedure; it showed *why* that procedure worked. By contrast, Descartes' constructions do not seek to prove the validity of the algebraic formula. Instead, they show that, given a type of quadratic equation, we can 'produce' its solution geometrically by constructing a right-angled triangle out of the known coefficients and extending the hypotenuse of that triangle appropriately. The resultant line OM is the geometrical result that corresponds to the algebraic solution, and the construction reveals how that result can be generated through geometry.

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[17] R. DESCARTES, *The Geometry of René Descartes*, trans. by D.E. SMITH and M.L. LATHAM, London 1925, p. 13. Translation modified. Further citations indicated by page number in body of essay.

As Lenoir puts it,

«[t]he only object of concern [for Descartes] was the geometric construction, and equations were employed simply as a shorthand way of performing time-consuming geometrical operations. Equations themselves had no ontological significance. They were only a useful symbolic language in which one could store geometrical constructions»[18].

The primary focus of Descartes' *Geometry* is his solution to the so-called Pappus problem, which he claimed had hitherto not been properly solved using the appropriate geometrical means. However, in this preliminary discussion of quadratic equations, the mathematical attitude underlying Descartes' mathematical approach to that complex locus problem is already visible. There, as here, «the justification for his solution [lies] in the fact that each algebraic manipulation he made ... corresponded to a definite geometrical operation»[19].

In other words, for Descartes too the domain where truth resides is geometry. However, the diagram does not *prove* the validity of the algebraic formula (or, as in Khwarizmi's case, of the algebraic process) in an Euclidean manner. Rather, the appropriate geometrical constructions— of drawing a triangle, extending the hypotenuse and so on—makes real or actualizes a knowledge of the unknown. The otherwise opaque algebraic formula is thereby externalized, and the act of construction produces truth as intelligibility by making evident to the geometrician what the solution is. In this sense, construction transposes

«mathematical intelligibility and certainty from the algebraic to the geometric domain, from the interior forum of the mind [namely, the purely mental sets assumptions that assign unity to a line, or associate line lengths with algebraic variables, and so on] to the external forum of space and body»[20],

that is, to the evidentiary clarity of the geometrical diagram.

Thus, while the association of algebra with *techne* evident in Al-Khwarizmi's treatise holds in large measure for Descartes as well, he conceives the primacy of geometry very differently. Rather than elaborating on procedure of completing the square, he simply supplies the outcome of the algebraic manipulation: the formula of equation 10. However, this formula has no significance in and of itself. As Jones notes, Descartes links

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18   T. LENOIR, *Descartes and the Geometrization of Thought*, p. 356.

19   *Ibid.*, p. 358.

20   D.R. LACHTERMAN, *Ethics of Geometry*, p. VIII.

his formulas to a mechanical compass that he himself has invented, and whose task it is turn a particular formula into geometrical reality[21]. Given an algebraic formula, the compass allows one to construct the solution, producing a curve that translates the abstract result into a concrete, immediately graspable image. The compass thus serves as an emblem for a fundamental aspect of Cartesian epistemology: its insistence upon such geometric visualization as the model for the clarity and distinctness that are the primary characteristics of true knowing.

The knowledge produced by geometry is not as in al-Khwarizmi limited to a single concrete example which we then generalize by analogy to similar cases, but underpins the exuberant claim which comes at the end of Descartes' treatise: of being able to generate (as the formula already implicitly does) the solutions to an infinite number of related problems:

«But it is not my intention to write a thick book. Instead, I am trying rather to include much in a few words, as perhaps you will judge that I have done, if you consider that having reduced all the problems of a single class [*d'un mesme genre*] to a single construction [*une mesme construction*], I have at the same time given the method of reducing them to an infinity of other different problems, and thus solving each of them in an infinity of ways ... We have only to follow the same method in order to construct all problems to an infinite degree of complexity. For in terms of mathematical progressions, once we have the first two terms, it is not difficult to find the others» (p. 240).

In a sense, without deciding upon the numerical values for the «known unknowns» a and b, we cannot actually carry out the required construction. But the imagined geometrical operations produce for Descartes an intuitive grasp of the general solution represented by the algebraic formula, and bring with it a mastery over the entire class of particular solutions generated by the infinite set of numerical values which can be ascribed to a and b. Central to Descartes' endeavor here is the notion that geometrical construction functions as a creative or generative source, infinitely capable of producing truth.

In this approach to the quadratic equation, we begin to see a close link between constructability—the geometrical equivalent of *poesis*—and the existence or objective reality of mathematical concepts. The construction Descartes asks us to perform is a deliberate instrumental or mental operation aimed at producing an individual figure that is accessible to the intuition. This intuition bestows objectivity on the mathematical

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[21] See M.L. JONES, *The Good Life*, pp. 34 ff.

concept, bringing it in a manner of speaking into existence in a way that would not be possible without the construction. The distinction between the evidence of a proof and its formal certainty that Jones underscores in his reading of Descartes speaks centrally to this issue. As Jones puts it, «formal demonstrations, like syllogisms or other logical forms of proof, could, in [Descartes'] eyes, produce a kind of certainty. They did not, however, make 'evident' the connections on was proving»[22]. And for Descartes, all knowledge has to have the clarity and intuitive obviousness that our knowledge of the simplest truths possesses—and such knowledge is not simply there, in the nature of the object, but has to be constructed; it demands the operation of the mind, its inventiveness, to make the mathematical concept real, and indeed bring it into being. It does not suffice to assent to the truth of something; it is necessary above all for that truth to be grasped with an intuitive immediacy.

Thus, Descartes' geometry shifts the very status of mathematical objects in ways that reflect the tension I have pointed out to above in discussing Sidney's use of mimesis—briefly, the question of whether poetry (or in this case, geometrical construction) re-presents or re-makes the natures to which it relates. This tension can be traced back to the foundational text of Western geometry, Euclid's *Elements*. One indication of an ultimately unresolved double perspective emerges in the two ways in which Euclidean propositions conclude: usually, QED [*Quod erat demonstrandum* or, in the original Greek, *hoper edei deixal*], but sometimes QEF [*Quod erat faciendum* or *hoper edei poesai*]. While Euclid himself does not explicitly comment on this distinction, it nonetheless implicitly raises two important questions that are still alive for Descartes: (1) what share should fall to making or *poesis* in the progressive unfolding of mathematical theorems or problems, and (2) how does the temporality of making bear upon the being of mathematical concepts themselves?[23].

An indication that construction plays a different role in Euclidean geometry is suggested by the fact that the *Elements* almost invariably uses the present perfect imperative to describe the constructive operation, so that bisecting a line segment is expressed as «let it have been cut in two» and so on. In other words, rather than giving the reader instructions (as

[22]   *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[23]   I draw here on the detailed analysis of Euclid in D.R. LACHTERMAN, *The Ethics of Geometry*, pp. 25-123.

Descartes does above) in how to carry out the operation, the text insists on the impersonality of what is being done. Moreover, the perfect tense marks the relevant construction as already having been executed prior to the reader's encounter with the proof. As Lachterman puts it,

«In a Euclidean proposition nothing moves or is moved save our eyes and, perhaps, minds as we follow the transition from step to step ... The diagram we see exhibits the antecedently executed operations the outcome of which is now confronting us ... The temporality figured in the student's coming to know the truth of a proposition by moving through its parts is not, or so it seems, inherited from a temporality intrinsic to the [mathematical] 'beings' on which Euclidean *mathesis* is focused»[24].

While Euclid is notoriously reticent in terms of providing philosophical interpretations or details that would allow us to pin him down, the implication of these aspects of his *Elements* is that the movements of graphic constructions do not «'create' or 'realize'» the nature of the geometrical objects they deal with, but rather they «evoke or allow it to make its intelligible presence 'felt'»[25]. In Descartes' *Géométrie*, by contrast, despite wariness with regard to technical procedure, the constructions nonetheless partake of the making, endowing technical operations with poetic force, and are thus closely allied to the creation or realization of the mathematical concepts.

The idea that public spaces we inhabit and share depend upon the right way—whether through geometry or literature—of making objects, and thereby ourselves, leads us back to Sidney. The English poet consistently sees the arts and the sciences as fundamentally 'human' endeavors, and therefore necessarily directed towards the same ends:

«Some an admirable delight drew to music, and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics; but all, one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence» (p. 219).

However, knowledge is not valuable for its own sake. Rather, what is important is that knowledge be directed towards virtuous action. In noting that the «mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart» (p. 219), Sidney distinguishes between the local ends of a particular knowing and the final cause it serves: as with other modes of knowing,

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[24]   *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

[25]   *Ibid.*, p. 121.

mathematics is directed to the «highest end of mistress knowledge, ... which stands ... in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing, and not of well-knowing only» (p. 219). What he voices, then, is an understanding of mathematics as a profoundly ethical and moral domain—and it is in on this basis that Sidney asserts poetry's superiority, as the art most apt to combine theory and practice, and by so doing shape human nature—thereby producing judgment not simply as a formal knowing but as «lively knowledge»:

«A perfect picture, I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description which doth never strike, pierce nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth ... Or of a gorgeous palace, an architector ... might well make the hearer to repeat, as it were, by rote all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceit with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge. But the same man, as soon as he might see ... the house well in model, should straightaways grow without need of any description to a judicial comprehending of [it]» (pp. 221-222).

Geometry too is poetic in that it makes just such an image, and it is the ethical force of such making that connects Descartes and Sidney, linking mathematics and poetry as productive of an ethos that will ultimately demarcate of the boundaries and conditions of entry of a public space. As human beings, we are subject of course to inevitable limitations: «the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodging, can be capable of» (p. 219). Nevertheless, mathematics and literature, in their Cartesian and Sidneyan guises respectively, not only posit the shared capacity as human beings to reach toward knowledge, but also instantiate poetic modes through which we re-form ourselves so as to be capable of creating and entering the spaces of public life.

3. *Fables to live by*

Jean-Luc Nancy's rich if elusive essay on Descartes takes its title from Jan Weenix's 1647 portrait of the philosopher, which shows him holding an open book on whose left page is inscribed *mundus est fabula*, the world is a fable. The phrase ought not to be taken, Nancy argues, as repeating the Baroque commonplace that the world around us is illusory, no more real than fable. Rather, it points to the constitutive place of the fable in the Cartesian invention of the thinking subject, upon whose certitude all

knowledge of the world is built[26]. The opening chapter of the *Discourse on the Method* makes this fabulatory motive explicit:

«Thus my design is not to teach here the method which everyone ought to follow in order to direct his reason well, but only to show how I have tried to direct my own ... But, putting forward this work as a history [*histoire*], or, if you prefer, as a fable [*fable*] in which, among a few examples one may imitate, one will perhaps find many others that one will be right not to follow, I hope that it will be useful to some without being harmful to any, and that all will be grateful to me for my frankness [*franchise*] (83; translation modified)»[27].

As Nancy perceptively notes, Descartes' text does not itself «imitatively borrow the traits of a literary genre ... If fable here ... is to introduce *fiction*, it will do so through a completely different procedure. It will not introduce fiction 'upon' truth or beside it, but 'within' it»[28]. This distinction, wherein fiction-making enters into the very interior of truth, ought to be recognizable to us in Sidney's own justification for poetry's aptitude for (truthful) feigning—which is not, he emphasizes, tantamount to lying because it never purported to be literally true to begin with. Or, as Descartes defends his invention of the world in *Le Monde*, it is not that one seeks to present «the things that are actually in the true world», but of «feigning one at random ... that nevertheless could be created just as I will have feigned it»[29].

The motif of the fable also opens a more unexpected connection between Sidney and Descartes. As is well known, in 1595 Sidney's *Defence* also appeared in a different edition and was called instead *An Apology for Poetry*. The implications of this alternate title are rich. Margaret Ferguson points out that the word apology derives from *apo*, meaning away and *logia* or speaking, and thus came to signify «a speech in defense». How-

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[26] J.-L. NANCY, *Mundus est Fabula*, in «MLN», 93, 1978, 4, pp. 635-653, here pp. 635-637.

[27] The motif of the fable recurs in the *Discourse*—for example, in the ensuing discussion of the learning of the Schools—as well as in *The World* [*Le Monde*], which was suppressed from publication by the author upon hearing of the condemnation of Galileo in 1632. In that earlier text, Descartes solicitously tells the reader that he wishes «to envelop a part of it with the invention of a fable» so that «you will find the length of this discourse less tedious». Through this fable, he hopes «that truth will always be sufficiently visible, and that it will be no less pleasant to behold than if I exposed it in all its nakedness», cited in J.-L. NANCY, *Mundus est Fabula*, p. 639.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 638.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 639.

ever, the Renaissance conflated this with the Greek word *apologos*, which meant story or fable, generalizing this term to apply to didactic allegories such as Aesop's fables.

«[F]or Renaissance defenders of poetry, there was a special link between *apologos* and *apologia*, a link suggested not only by the fact that both terms were sometimes translated as 'apologie' in sixteenth-century England, but also by a Platonic text that was crucial to Renaissance justifications of poetry, Plato's *Republic*»[30].

References to Plato's banishing of poets from the ideal republic abound in Sidney's *Apology*. And the very first mention of Plato emphasizes the fabulous dimensions of his thought:

«And truly even Plato whoever well considereth shall find in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most on poetry: for all standeth upon dialogues, wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters, that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them ...» (p. 213).

Not only does Sidney see the very dialogic form as inherently poetic, but he recognizes clearly the extent to which Platonic truth is communicated through invention: feigning their words extracts the «honesty» of the Athenians beyond anything that torture can achieve. Plato's own recourse to fables and myths at key junctures in his dialogues—Sidney notes the strategic «interlacing» of what might seem «mere tales, as Gyges' ring and others» (p. 213)—is echoed in the framing fable with which the *Apology* opens. In a gesture that anticipates the ostensible humility of Descartes' presenting his life as a fable, Sidney self-deprecatingly prefaces his own—unavoidably solipsistic—defense of poetry with the diverting story of John Pietro Pugliano, whose equestrian responsibilities lead him excessively «to exercise ... his speech in praise of his faculty». «Had I not been a piece of a logician before I came to him», Sidney muses, «I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse. But thus much at least his no few words drave into me, that self-love is better than any gilding to make us seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties» (p. 212).

It is likewise through the fable of Descartes' own intellectual autobiography that the Cartesian thinking subject shows itself. Descartes refuses the position of authority from which his method can be taught, and even

[30] M.W. FERGUSON, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry*, New Haven CT 1983, pp. 2-3.

suggests that this frank display of himself may have only a very limited exemplary function as model to be fruitfully imitated. Indeed, a little later the *Discourse* distances itself even further from its potential use as imitative model:

«If my work has pleased me enough that I show you its model [*modèle*] here, it is not because I wish to advise anybody to imitate it. Those upon whom God has bestowed more of his graces will perhaps form designs more elevated; but I do fear that for many this [work itself] may already be too audacious. The sole resolve of undoing all the opinions that one has formerly received [*auparavant en sa créance*] is not an example that each man should follow. And the world may be said to be mainly composed of two sorts of minds to which it is not in the least suited (p. 90; translation modified)».

Descartes' notion of the private and particular self is itself a product of an awareness of a collective, a «public» for whom the author cannot in any direct sense serve as a model to be copied. Put another way, (auto) biography is itself created in the gesture that posits the subject's life as heuristic fiction.

The Cartesian fable thus appears a paradoxical beast, both exemplary and, in a fundamental sense, inimitable. In addition, this double articulation is, I wish to suggest, distinctive of Sidney as well. To sharpen the paradox, we might say that both writers show themselves as imitable precisely in their inimitability. In other words, simply to copy what they do would be the equivalent of merely performing geometrical or poetical acts—the failure of which, for instance, the opening poem of Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* stages[31]. Truly to imitate them, by contrast, would be to take their very inimitability as model, that is to say, to inhabit (as they do) a process of invention whose characteristic is a distinctive internal swerve within inherited traditions, a repetition that produces difference in the form of singularity[32]. As Nancy writes apropos Descartes (in words that we could easily apply to Sidney's poetical prac-

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[31] For a fuller discussion of this sonnet, see my forthcoming essay, *How to Construct a Poem*, in A. Kisery - A. Deutermann (eds), *Forms of Writing*.

[32] Gilles Deleuze's distinction between generality and repetition is apposite here: «[I]t is not Federation day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the Federation days; or Monet's first water lily which repeats all the others. Generality, as generality of the particular, thus stands opposed to repetition as universality of the singular. The repetition of a work of art is like a singularity without a concept, and it is not by accident that a poem must be learned by heart», in G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, London 1994, p. 1.

tice as well), «if the worlds of fiction and reality are not identical, what instead is identical—yielding Descartes' very identity—is the activity of invention and creation. ... The subject of true knowledge must be the inventor of his own fable»[33].

Consequently, to put the case in Sidney's terms, what one is enjoined to imitate is less either the «matter» or the «manner» (see p. 248) of their geometrical and/or poetical creations than something more like their attitude with respect to the very relationship between matter and manner. Richard Young aptly describes the poet-lover of Sidney's sonnet sequence as a «Janus-figure ... looking in both directions: within the dramatic context toward the lady and beyond it toward a reader»[34]. While the dramatic fiction is lent solidity by Sidney's evocation of his own biography throughout his sonnet sequence, it is equally the sequence itself, which invents the life, by creating and re-creating, for instance, the figure of Stella (and, concomitantly, the figure of Astrophel) from sonnet to sonnet. In turn, showing the self through the shapes it creates constitutes the mode of address outward: the singular and virtuoso display of literary imitation turned inside out calls for an audience whose 'imitation' of the poet would ideally take the poet's singularity as model, reading it—to borrow again Nancy's description of Descartes' *Discourse*—as the «fable of the generality of a singular and authentic action»[35]. What *poesis* brings into being for Sidney, as geometrical construction does for Descartes, is the degree to which the making of the verbal (or visual) image produces an exemplarity that is generalizable not via direct likeness but in the very mode of relating to the world that it exemplifies.

«But if the question be for your own use and learning, whether it be better to have it set down as it should be, or as it was, then certainly is more doctrinable the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon than the true Cyrus in Justin, and the feigned Aeneas in Virgil than the right Aeneas in Dares Phrygius» (p. 224).

It is worth noting that the Oxford English Dictionary traces the first use of the word individual to signify «a single human being, as opposed to

[33]   J.-L. NANCY, *Mundus est Fabula*, pp. 639-640.

[34]   R.B. YOUNG, *English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella*, in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton* (Yale Studies in English, 138), Hamden CT 1958, p. 9.

[35]   J.-L. NANCY, *Mundus est Fabula*, p. 641.

Society, the Family, etc.» to the early seventeenth century[36]. One might say that Sidney and Descartes envisage the creation of this individual precisely through individual creation. In addition, it is on the shifting sands of such a fabulous foundation that their publics would be built.

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[36] The OED cites J. Yates' 1626 *Ibis ad Caesarem*: «The Prophet saith not, God saw every particular man in his blood, or had compassion to say to every individual, *Thou shalt live*». Entry under 3a, spelling modernised. My thanks to Diana Henderson for bringing this point to my attention.

1514, 1516, 1517:
The Public Space and its Limits

by *Silvana Seidel Menchi*

1. *Introduction*

This essay seeks to delimit and explore the question of the existence of a public space in the years around 1515. It will examine the problem in the light of a concrete example: a man, Erasmus of Rotterdam, *maître à penser* of Europe in those years (c.1466-1536). The question I mean to address is the extent to which communication theory can help us to interpret a crucial turning point in his life.

I begin with a few preliminary observations.

Erasmus was an impassioned observer of the political life of his time, an avid collector of news, a tireless explorer of all possible sources of information, a man who lived in the present, who keenly took sides, who did not hesitate to adopt extremely unpopular positions, yet always remained attentive to the effect that such positions had on the public space, and to the extent that they influenced his relations with the sources of power.

In the last century, Erasmus was one of the favorite subjects of cultural historians. The predominant position of that phase of scholarship could be defined as a tendency to hagiography. Erasmus was eminently suited as a candidate for sanctity, in as much as he was the first theorist of pacifism, an eloquent prophet of ecumenism, a precursor of the idea that conflicts between states ought to be resolved by an organ of international mediation invested with moral authority (Erasmus was thinking of the pope). The Erasmian hagiography of the last century has not favored the perception of Erasmus as *homo politicus*. Often this

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homo politicus surprises us by the breadth of his knowledge; sometimes he surprises us by his ignorance. The first part of my paper will give concrete examples of this double-sided phenomenon.

How do we explain this combination of knowledge and ignorance? To identify the logic that determines the alternation in Erasmus of knowing and not knowing is to identify the public space that is accessible to him and the use that he makes of it. What is the extent of this space, and what are its limits? The second part of this paper is my attempt to answer these questions.

A word of caution: my analysis relates to Erasmus's years in Italy (1506-1509) during the pontificate of Julius II, to his stay in England during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1514) and to the three years that saw his settling in Basel and his collaboration with the publisher Johannes Froben (1514-1517). These years mark the crucial turning point in his life. In 1514, Erasmus left England as a man with a great reputation in the literary world, but with neither financial means nor influential patrons on the Continent: he was a private scholar, rich only in knowledge. By 1517, thanks to the period's means of communication—the printing press—and thanks to his mastery of the word, he had become the foremost intellectual of Europe. In this phase, his relationship with the public space had changed: no longer merely a particularly avid and diligent user of it, he had become one who conditioned it and to a large extent dominated it.

2. *An impassioned political observer*

To demonstrate that Erasmus was an impassioned political observer, I have to prove that his argumentation is permeated with references to events of the day: not only to the so-called historical events about which a contemporary was necessarily informed, but also to items of everyday news. It is precisely these items that lend power and bite to Erasmus's argumentation. I have selected three examples of this impassioned attention to concrete data.

This example comes from the adage *Sileni Alcibiadis* (circa 1514). In this adage, Erasmus censures a powerful person who «for the sake of a tax on salt unleashes the cyclone of war and makes the earth

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tremble»[1]. A tax on salt: this is a very precise reference to contemporary history. Indeed Erasmus here alludes to a war that broke out as a result of a tax imposed on salt. The powerful person at whom Erasmus takes aim is Pope Julius II. In 1510, Julius promulgated a «very terrible» bull against the duchy of Ferrara: he excommunicated the duke and placed the entire duchy under an interdict, absolved the subjects of their oath of loyalty to their lord, declared war against the duke, and personally went into the field of battle in order to supervise the bombardment. Why? Because the duke of Ferrara had infringed the papal monopoly on the production of salt: he had activated the saltworks at Comacchio, had exported the salt to the duchy of Milan, and had omitted to pay duty on it to the apostolic camera. This was one of the reasons adduced in the bull against Ferrara to justify the war against Alfonso d'Este[2]. As a footnote to this example I should mention that an interdict, such as the one Julius imposed on the duchy of Ferrara, was regarded by the faithful as a very terrible punishment: by it the clergy were ordered to suspend celebration of Mass and all other religious services (the single exception allowed by canon law was the administration of the last sacraments to the dying).

The second example comes from the adage *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (*War is sweet to those who have never tried it*, circa 1514). Erasmus censures a prince who «in order to destroy a city puts a whole host of men into the field», although «with the labour of these men he could have built a much more beautiful city»[3]. In the *scoli* to the letters of St Jerome, which Erasmus wrote around 1514, this reference becomes more explicit:

«Would to heaven that Christian princes ... invested in the defence of peace ... the tenth part of the money ... the labours, and the risks that they now invest in a de-

[1]   DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami recognita et adnotatione critica instructa notisque illustrata* (hereafter *ASD*), II, vol. 5, Amsterdam - Oxford 1981, p. 184, ll. 517-521: «Qua fronte docebit ... non esse resistendum malo ... qui ... propter salinarum vectigal orbem bellorum tempestatibus commouet?».

[2]   *Bulla Julii. II. Pont. Max. super priuatione ducis Ferrariae* (G. Mazzocchi, Roma 1510), Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, R. I. IV, 1681 (int. 7); M. SANUTO, *I diarii*, 58 vols, Venezia 1879-1903, vol. 8, coll. 651-653; vol. 9, coll. 49-51, 80-82, 108, 143-144, 177-178, 721 ff., 738 ff., 743 ff.

[3]   *ASD*, II, vol. 7, pp. 25-26, ll. 409-411: «Tantam hominum turbam educis in periculum, ut oppidum aliquod evertas; at horum opera, vel citra periculum, aliud extrui poterat multo praeclarius oppidum».

structive war ... Everyone knows that to build another Thérouanne would have cost less [to Henry VIII] than was spent on the siege of Thérouanne»[4].

This is a thrust at the king of England and at his foreign-policy advisors, the bishops Fisher, Foxe, etc.: in the summer of 1513 Henry VIII invaded Picardy with an army, which some sources put at sixty thousand men, others one hundred thousand. He besieged, conquered, and destroyed the small city of Thérouanne, spending on the expedition—so it was said—the enormous sum of three million crowns[5].

In this adage, and in the notes to St. Jerome, Erasmus explains to the king of England that with such a sum of money and such an army Henry could have built a far more splendid city than Thérouanne, if only he had chosen to practice the arts of peace rather than those of war.

However, there is a third, more conclusive document that illuminates the information space accessible to an alert political observer in these years. In 1517, an anonymous pamphlet was published, which in most later printings bore the title *Iulius*. It was a virulent attack on Pope Julius II (1503-1513) who had died four years previously. The pamphlet takes the form of a dialogue between the recently dead pope, who arrives at the gates of heaven armed with his keys (the keys of Matthew 16:19), and St. Peter who adopts the role of public prosecutor. It not only deconstructs the figure of Julius II as a person—accusing him of dishonorable (real or presumed) personal habits, such as drunkenness and sodomy—but it attacks papal authority itself. The papacy of the early sixteenth century is here arraigned as

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[4] DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Omnium Operum Diui Eusebii Hieronymi Stridoniensis ... Tomus Primus*, Basileae, apud Jo. Frobenium, MDXVI, fol. 40D: «Extat, imo extabat, hoc nomine [sc. Morinum] in Picardia ciuitas episcopalis, quam vulgus Terrouanam vocat. Ea cum haec scriberemus magna vi oppugnabatur a duobus regibus, Henrico octauo, Britanniae principe, et Maximiliano imperatore ... Deditio facta est, dimissi milites incolumes; postea ... oppidum indigne deletum est ... Vtinam Christiani principes ... vel decimam partem earum pecuniarum, sollicitudinum, laborum, periculorum insumerent ad pacem tuendam ... quae nunc in teterrimum bellum insumunt ... Nemo nescit Morinum alterum minoris extrui potuisse quam obsessum fuit».

[5] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, arranged and catalogued by J.S. BREWER, vol. 1, London 1862, doc. 3884. M. SANUTO, *Diarii*, vol. 14, col. 524; vol. 15, col. 577; vol. 16, coll. 449, 456 f.; vol. 17, coll. 8 ff., 232 ff. Sanuto estimated in 3 millions ducats the cost of Henry VIII's military expedition in Picardy, *ibid.*, vol. 15, col. 529 ff.; vol. 16, col. 322 ff.

an anti-apostolic institution. The pope is the opposite of Christ: he is the Antichrist[6].

The dialogue *Iulius* is an impressive political document. In every line, references to diplomatic maneuvring and military activities, or to ideological motivations and theories of power (secular and ecclesiastical), induce the reader to consider the problem of evaluating this mass of information. Is it an invention, or is it true? The drastic and indeed categorical tone with which the information is communicated only intensifies the problem. It is not only the question of the author that is involved, but that of political communication, of the circulation of information, of the manipulation of consensus, of the spaces of dissent.

In this case, too, I restrict myself to three examples.

a.

The central portion of the dialogue *Iulius* deals with two councils that took place during the pontificate of Julius II, the Council of Pisa—a «Gallican» council convoked by a minority of dissident Cardinals in order to depose Julius (1511)—and the Fifth Lateran Council, convoked by Julius in order to delegitimize the Council of Pisa (1512). One of the reasons why the dissident «Pisan» Cardinals convoked their council was that Julius II had perjured himself: at the time of his election (1503), they said, Julius swore a solemn oath to summon a council to reform the church. He promised to do this within two years of his election, but failed to do so. In the dialogue *Iulius*, the pope acknowledges that during the first eight years of his pontificate, he had not the slightest intention of summoning a council; but he adds that he has not broken his promise, because «I myself absolved myself of the oath that I had taken»[7]. And he adds: «Who would hesitate to swear anything at all, when power is at stake?»[8]. The information contained in this passage is strictly accurate. The arguments adduced by the «Pisan» Cardinals

[6] Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmi Opuscula. A Supplement to the Opera omnia*, ed. by W.K. Ferguson, Den Haag 1933, pp. 65-125.

[7] Desiderius Erasmus, *Dialogus, Iulius Exclusus*, in *Erasmi Opuscola*, pp. 65-124, here p. 90, ll. 421-422: «Ipse me ... ab eo iureiurando absolvi».

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 90, ll. 422-423: «Quis autem dubitet vel quidvis deierare, cum de regno agitur?».

to justify the convoking of the council, Julius II's electoral capitulation, the two-year limit: all this can be precisely documented[9]. However, it is not this factual accuracy that I wish to emphasize. Rather, what I want to stress is Julius's statement that he has absolved himself from his own oath. Canon law acknowledged the pope's right to release anyone from an oath: this right was part of the *plenitudo potestatis* attributed to the Roman pontiff. But that Julius II could have availed himself of the *plenitudo potestatis* in order to release himself from his own oath, well, I always regarded this insinuation as an exaggeration on the part of Erasmus—a document of his *vis polemica*.

It is not. What we have here is a precise reference to an ongoing debate. Whether or not Julius made use of his own power to release himself from his oath, is obviously something we cannot know: we do however know that the electoral capitulation sworn by Julius II on 1 November 1503 contains these words: «I promise and ... swear to observe all the individual points of this agreement»—among others, the undertaking to convoke a council—«under pain of perjury and of anathema, from which I shall not absolve myself, nor depute another to absolve me: so help me God and these holy Gospels»[10]. As a result of this capitulation, during the publicity campaign that accompanied the two councils of 1511 and 1512, the question of whether a pope could absolve himself of his own oath was vigorously debated (we know of a *consilium* by the celebrated canonist Filippo Decio dealing, among other matters, with this subject)[11].

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[9] The *Acta Concilii Pisani* were reprinted in *Acta Primi Concilii Pisani celebrati ad tollendum Schisma Anno D.M.CCCC.IX. et Concilii Senensis M.CCCC.XXIII. Ex codice m.s. Item Constitutiones factae in diversis Sessionibus Sacri generalis Concilij Pisani II. M.D.XI.* Ex Bibliotheca Regia ... Lutetiae Parisiorum. Ann. Do. M. DC. XII., pp. 14-16, especially p. 16. An eye-witness at the conclave has left us an account of the electoral capitulation sworn by Julius II: JOHANNES BURCKARDUS, *Liber notarum*, 2 vols, ed. by E. CELANI, Città di Castello 1907, vol. 2, pp. 399 f., 410 f.

[10] The pith of the capitulation sworn by Julius is as follows: «Omnia singula promitto, voveo et iuro observare, adimplere ... cum effectu periurii et anathematis, a quibus nec meipsum absolvam, nec alicui absolutionem committam, et ita me Deus adiuvet et haec sancta Dei Evangelia»; *Acta primi Concilii pisani*, pp. 17-19, quotation p. 19.

[11] *Consilium cli. Philippi Decii iurisconsulti clarissimi, habitum pro Ecclesiae auctoritate*, Anno M.D.XI., in *Acta primi Concilii Pisani*, pp. 69-107, particularly pp. 88-93 («Iuri repugnat naturali ut quis seipsum absolvere possit», pp. 92 f.).

b.

Speaking of those soldiers who lost their lives in his wars, Julius II, in the dialogue that bears his name, states that «for all of them heaven was due by agreement, since I [Julius] have promised, with solemn bulls, that all those who fight under the banner of Julius will fly directly to heaven»[12]. This is completely accurate: in March 1512—during his war against France—Julius issued a bull of excommunication against all who fought for the king of France or gave him assistance; the same bull guaranteed a plenary indulgence for those who took up arms against France in the service of the church, in particular for Henry VIII and his army[13]. A similar bull was promulgated on 20 December 1512, granting a plenary indulgence to all who served for six months under Henry VIII—Julius II's military and political ally—or under his captains, against Louis XII of France[14].

c.

In the dialogue *Iulius*, there is an exchange between Pope Julius and St. Peter on the possibility of deposing a reigning pope.

«*Julius*. The pope ... cannot be deposed for any crime whatsoever.
Peter. Not even for murder?
Julius. Not even for parricide!
Peter. For fornication?
Julius. ... Not even for incest.
Peter. For simony?
Julius. Not even if he commits 600 acts of simony.
...
Peter. And for blasphemy? ...
Julius. You may list if you want 600 crimes even more opprobrious than these: even if they were all committed at once, there would be no good reason to depose the Roman Pontiff»[15].

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[12] DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Iulius exclusus*, p. 78, ll. 255-257: «Quibus omnibus» [cf. ll. 252-253: «milites ac duces, qui mea et ecclesiae causa fortiter in bello mortem oppetierunt»] «ex pacto debetur coelum, siquidem iampridem magnis bullis sum pollicitus recta in coelum evolaturos quicunque Iulii pugnarent auspiciis».

[13] M. SANUTO, *Diarii*, XIV, col. 48 f.

[14] *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, vol. 1, doc. 3602.

[15] DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Iulius exclusus*, pp. 92-93, ll. 470-485.

I always regarded this passage as a polemical exaggeration on the part of Erasmus. I was wrong. The passage is an efficacious paraphrase—somewhat amplified, but not distorted—of the discussions that preceded and accompanied the councils of Pisa and the Lateran on the possibility of deposing a delinquent pope. The «Pisan» Cardinals and their jurists maintained that a pope who was guilty of a notorious crime, and who remained incorrigible and was therefore a scandal to the church, should be deposed[16]. It was a matter of public knowledge that Julius II had been simoniacally elected: the «Pisan» Cardinals meant to depose Julius for simony[17].

The pamphlet propaganda in defense of Julius II replied to this argument, citing Boniface VIII. The thesis of these apologists was that the pope «could not be judged by any mortal except in the case of heresy», and consequently could not be judged «even by the council, even if his crime were notorious and manifest and a source of scandal for the whole Church». Among the crimes for which a pope could not be deposed—mentioned as examples by the apologists of Julius—, we find, in addition to simony, blasphemy, hatred of God, adultery, incest, murder[18], and «other crimes of this type». For none of these crimes—concluded the apologists for Julius—«even if they were very grave and such as to cause scandal for the Church», could the pope be deposed; and «even if incorrigible, he could not be condemned»[19]. Once again, Erasmus was not making it up. He was just very well informed.

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[16] *Consilium … Philippi Decii*, pp. 72-87.

[17] *Acta primi concilii Pisani*, p. 36: the council should be convoked «pro reformatione morum universalis ecclesiae in capite et in membris plurimum collapsorum, ac emendatione criminum gravissimorum, notoriorum, continuorum ac incorrigibilium universalem Ecclesiam scandalizantium»; the cardinals were refering merely to simony: *Consilium … Philippi Decii*, pp. 69-71, 72, 87.

[18] The last three crimes were listed in reference to the position of St Thomas Aquinas (who agreed in principle to the deposition of a pope stained by such crimes).

[19] *Io. Poggii florentini Ad S.D.N. Iulium Papam II. de officio principis liber* (full bibliographical details below, fn. 28), fol. O1r-O2v: «Unde sive ex facto sive ex negligentia sua papa universalem ecclesiam scandalizet, trahendo populos innumerabiles in interitum, quod scandalum apparet esse gravissimum, a nullo mortalium iudicari poterit, nisi a fide devius deprehendatur … ob defectum iurisdictionis vel potestatis contra ipsum [papam] … Praeterea si notorium crimen simoniae vel alterius criminis cuiuscumque praeter heresim non potest in viam exceptionis oppositum pontifici promotionem a duobus partibus Cardinalium factam ullatenus impedire … multo minus contra pon-

Up to now, I have focused on the information, which the pamphlet's author had at his disposal. However, I have said that he was surprising both for what he knew and for what he did not know. I should like to conclude with one example of what Erasmus did not know.

A central theme of the dialogue *Iulius* is the war of annihilation that Julius II unleashed against Louis XII of France. The battle of Ravenna was a crucial moment in this war. On 11 April 1512, a French army beneath the walls of Ravenna routed out the troops of the pope and of his ally the king of Spain[20]. There were 10,000 casualties (perhaps 14,000 or 15,000), the French took the Cardinal legate Giovanni dei Medici (the future Pope Leo X) prisoner, together with many papal captains; they captured the baggage train, the artillery, and the banners of Julius II and of his ally Fernando de Aragón. Within a few days, all of papal Romagna had fallen into the hands of the French. The whole of Italy was filled with dismay. When the news of the disaster reached Rome (14 April), a terrible fear gripped the population: it was expected that the French would march on Rome, sack the city, put all the prelates to death, and elect a new pope. In reality, the victors had lost their general, the brilliant Gaston de Foix, and this had stopped them in their tracks; but the fleeing papal forces were unaware of his death[21].

Well, regarding the battle of Ravenna the author of the *Iulius* commits an egregious historical error. The battle of Ravenna figures in the dialogue *Iulius* as a resounding victory for Julius II[22]. The author of

tificem iam factum et pro tali habitum et veneratum poterit in viam actionis deduci ... Quare autem in causa heresis possit condemnari, non in aliis criminibus, cum nonnulla sint crimina heresi graviora, ut odium Dei, blasfemia, et alia id generis per beatum Thomam enumerata» (Aquinas includes among these crimes, which he considers more grave than heresy, those of a prince who exercises a cruel tyranny over his subjects, and who proves to be «adultero, incestuoso, omicida, *et alia id genus facinora patrans*»). [Concluditur] «pro nullo crimine quamvis gravissimo et notorio praeter heresim posse summum pontificem condemnari». *Ibid.*, fol. T5r-T7r: *Conclusiones*; esp. 37: «Papa pro crimine notorio et manifesto etiam gravissimo et ecclesiam scandalizante deponi non potest»; 38: «Papa quamvis incorrigibilis damnari non potest».

[20] M. SANUTO, *Diarii*, XIV, coll. 126 f., 132, 145, 148, 151, 154 f., 170 f., 176 f.

[21] L. VON PASTOR, *History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, 40 vols, London 1891-1953, vol. 6, pp. 399-401.

[22] DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Iulius exclusus*, pp. 74-75, ll. 207-208.

the dialogue is so profoundly ignorant of the facts that he attributes to Julius II the organization of a triumphal procession, headed by the pope, to celebrate the fact that «the French were defeated at Ravenna»[23]. In reality, when Julius received news of the defeat of his forces, he took refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo and on 20 April signed the draft of a truce with Louis XII. Evidently, the author of the *Iulius* did not have the slightest idea of what had really occurred at Ravenna.

3. *Political communication and its channels*

The circulation and nature of this information attest to the existence of a public space in which it was available, the limits of which it determined. Two kinds of documents acted as channels of communication.

The most fruitful sources were official documents, those that were displayed in public places (such as city squares or bridges, the porticoes of churches, etc.), or were read to the faithful from pulpits after the sermon. The bulls of Julius II, in particular, when part of a political or military campaign, were printed in 600 copies in Latin and in the vernacular languages, and were systematically distributed in the Papal States and in allied countries. Evidently, the author of the *Iulius* read these documents with the greatest attention, just as Erasmus did.

The information about the salt tax came to him by this route. The reasons for the conflict were exhaustively explained in the bull of excommunication against the Duke of Ferrara and in the interdict against the duchy[24].

The information on the «Gallican» Council of Pisa also came to the author of the dialogue via official documents. The council was known to have been convoked at the wishes of the king of France, who thus sought to combat his adversary Julius II by spiritual means: the edicts convoking the council, issued at Milan on 16 and 19 May 1511, subscribed by the king of France, by the emperor Maximilian and by the pro-French cardinals, set out the reasons for the council and cited the electoral capitulation sworn by Julius, and his promise not to absolve

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 118, ll. 1049-1050.

[24] *Bulla Julij. II. Pont. Max. super privatione ducis Ferrariae*, see fn. 2.

himself of the oaths taken before and after his election[25]. In late May and in June 1511, these edicts were assiduously distributed throughout Europe and set up in public places, even in the Papal States, because the king of France and especially the dissident cardinals needed agreement and support[26]. The concrete information on the council of Pisa that was used by the author of the *Iulius* came from these edicts.

Another source of information was the published occasional commentary on the events of this period, whether military events (such as Henry VIII's war against the king of France and his invasion of Picardy, 1513) or politico-religious ones (the two opposed Councils of 1511 and 1512). I believe that I have identified four of these occasional writings—one from Ferrara, three from Rome—or five if we add the English apologetical treatise, written on the occasion of Henry VIII's war against France[27]. Five examples of court literature composed to legitimize ideologically, *a posteriori*, political decisions taken above, by those in power. The author of the dialogue *Iulius* knew these texts and made use of them. Regarding the question of whether a criminal pope

[25] *Acta Primi Concilii Pisani*, pp. 10-16: «Publica capitula, vota, et iuramenta sanctissimi domini nostri Julii Papae II. et Reverendissimorum Dominorum S.R.E. Cardinalium, in eiusdem Pontificis creatione, de generali Concilio, infra tunc immediate sequens biennium indicendo et inchoando, et aliis pro libertate et Reformatione Ecclesiae ... institutis, in conclavi communiter per viam contractus edita, emissa, et praestita»; *ibid.*, pp. 19-20: «Subscriptio, votum, et iuramentum domini Julii Papae II. circa praemissa».

[26] The information about the circulation in printed form is given by Sanuto, in Venice, on 30 May 1511, *Diarii*, XII, col. 218 s. Sanuto himself was able to copy the text of the convocation, in its Italian version, on 21 June (*Diarii*, XII, coll. 250-254). The edict of convocation *ex parte cardinalium* that was transcribed by Sanuto was dated 16 May 1511. That the edict of convocation *ex parte cardinalium* was set up in the cities of the Papal States is attested by M. SANUTO, *Diarii*, XII, coll. 198, 203, 218 s., 223. See also A. RENAUDET, *Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie*, Paris 1924, pp. 533-535.

[27] My attention was drawn to this treatise by Massimo Rospocher. JACOBUS WHYTSTONS, *De iusticia et sanctitate belli per Iulium pontificem secundum in scismaticos et tirannos patrimonium Petri inuadentes indicti allegationes.* [Colophon:] Impressum est Londini, opera et impensis preclari viri Richardi Pynson regii impressoris. Anno domini M.ccccc. xii. Et invictissimi Henrici regis Angliae octaui. Anno quarto (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. A e. 48). On Whytsons and his treatise see M. ROSPOCHER, *Propaganda e opinione pubblica: Giulio II nella comunicazione politica europea*, in «Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico», 33, 2007, pp. 59-99, especially pp. 93-99; M. ROSPOCHER, *Genesi di un discorso politico: un interlocutore sconosciuto di Erasmo*, in E. BALDINI - M. FIRPO (eds), *Religione e politica in Erasmo da Rotterdam* (forthcoming).

could be deposed or not, he found details in one of these occasional writings, the work of a Roman humanist, Giovanni Francesco Poggio, which was obviously inspired by and dedicated to Julius II (1512)[28].

I should like to end this part of my paper by emphasizing the value, which the political and politico-religious information contained in the dialogue *Iulius* possesses with regard to the everlasting controversy over the authorship of the little work.

Since Erasmus denied having written it, historians have embarked with alacrity on the search for a likely author. The most plausible candidate is Fausto Andrelini, court poet to the king of France. The strongest argument of those who attributed (and attribute) the paternity of the dialogue to Andrelini is that the information concerning the «Gallican» Council of Pisa contained in the dialogue did not belong to the public space: it was—so the supporters of this thesis maintain—information from the reserved circuit, difficult of access to anyone not in a privileged position, a position close to the French court. The existence of a public space in which such information did in fact circulate both in printed and in oral form (sermons) has not been taken into account in the centuries-long debate over the authorship of the *Iulius*. As the examples above show, such information might supply an independent spirit with the materials necessary for a critical discourse attaching the very centers of power from which the information came.

However, the error concerning the battle of Ravenna reminds us that these centers of power had an interest in controlling the public space and frequently possessed the means to do so. In 1513/14, transforming the battle of Ravenna into a defeat for the French king and his armies suited the political interests of Henry VIII and his court. Thus, in the English public space the battle of Ravenna was in effect presented, in those years, as a major French defeat[29]. Information control made it possible to manipulate the news, even at the level of important international events. The author of the *Iulius*, so clever at turning against

[28] *Io. Poggii florentini Ad S.D.N. Iulium Papam II. de officio principis liber.* Impressum Romae per Iohannem de Besicken Anno domini M.ccccc.iiii. die xxix. Decembris. Sedente Iulio ii. Pont. Max. Anno eius primo. For a biographical sketch of Giovanni Francesco Poggio, see A. FERRAJOLI, *Il ruolo della corte di Leone X*, Roma 1984, pp. 495-503.

[29] For a more detailed demonstration I refer the reader to my forthcoming critical edition of the dialogue *Iulius exclusus e coelis*, in *ASD*, III, 2.

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the powerful the information supplied by the powerful themselves, at turning glorification into infamy and pretended justice into injustice, was himself the victim of the manipulation of facts when the information available to him was unilateral.

The pieces of information or disinformation I have recorded constitute, together with many other similar ones, a system of coordinates that identify the geographical location of the author. From this point of view, disinformation is as valuable a coordinate as information. An egregious error such as the one about the battle of Ravenna reveals that the dialogue *Iulius* was written neither in France—where the victory of Ravenna was considered a great national achievement, albeit marred by the death of Gaston de Foix—, nor in Italy, terrorized by the French military triumph. The non-Erasmian candidatures for the authorship so insistently proposed are not compatible with a close reading of the text and of its precise political and military references (Fausto Andrelini was in Paris, Richard Pace was in Rome[30], etc.) The coordinates that emerge from these references converge to indicate that the dialogue was, in fact, composed in England. It was there, shortly before leaving the country that Erasmus wrote it.

4. *Conclusions*

The dialogue *Iulius* is a sounding-device for the usable public space in the years between 1514 and 1517. The revelation it allows us has an annalistic precision[31].

In 1514, Erasmus conceived and composed the dialogue *Iulius* within the reserved circuit of humanist friendship. Both conception and composition were safeguarded by the complicity that obtained in that restricted world. In the public space, with its marked ideological and political connotations, a work such as the *Iulius* had no right to exist: it emerged from no center of power, nor was it protected by any au-

[30] C. CURTIS, *Richard Pace on Pedagogy, Counsel and Satire*, unpublished PhD Diss., University of Cambridge, 1996.

[31] This conclusion expresses in summary form some of the results of my research on the genesis and early circulation of the dialogue *Iulius exclusus e coelis*; see above, fn. 29.

thority. Yet it came into being and was not to be annihilated. We may ask ourselves about the significance of this survival. Was the space of critical judgment and of independent dissent about to open?

In 1516, Erasmus circulated the dialogue in manuscript form. He probably composed a new version—more complete, more elaborate—for the benefit of some powerful person; he allowed it to be transcribed by his most trusted friends in Basel; he allowed his most devoted disciples and admirers to read it. In other words, the dialogue was no longer a secret document. However, it remained in manuscript, and its circulation was restricted.

In 1517, one of these trusted readers had the dialogue printed. Within very few months editions multiplied, flooding the market. The dialogue entered the public space. This entrance did not occur unbeknownst to Erasmus, or against his wishes. While on the one hand, he vilified the pamphlet and solemnly denied its authorship (universally attributed to him), on the other hand he permitted and perhaps encouraged the reprintings.

The contradictions that characterize the history of the dialogue *Iulius* in the first phase of its circulation can be resolved if we posit more than one level of communication. In the light of the history of the dialogue, Erasmus emerges as the focus of two circuits of communication, an open circuit and a closed circuit, which worked like gears and meshed (not without friction) one into the other. Erasmus disacknowledged the paternity of *IE* at the level of open communication; at the level of closed communication, he acknowledged it. I consider it likely that for several years he was even proud of his production; and I regard it as certainly the case that he exploited the blasphemous libel for purposes of self-promotion.

Social Networking
The «Album amicorum» and Early Modern Public Making

by *Bronwen Wilson*

The *album amicorum* was one expression of increasing travel and evolving intellectual interests in early modern Europe. Small and portable, and often oblong in format, friendship albums enabled university students, merchants, humanists and others from north of the Alps to collect signatures, mottos, coats-of-arms and visual imagery as they moved between universities and other centers. Consisting of blank leaves, sometimes formatted with printed frames or interleaved with inspirational proverbs, *alba amicorum* are repositories for an extraordinarily wide range of amateur and professional images, from regional costumes and foreign sites, to portraits and allegorical figures[1]. These are typically accompanied by an inscription made by a contact or friend, as seen in Paul Dale's album (fig. 1). Beneath two figures, one bearing a mace and the other identified as the rector at Leuven, a friend inscribed the album in Antwerp in 1578. A young man, depicted with a sword in a three quarter-length portrait, appears three times on the first three recto pages. The third portrait includes a coat of arms, the date 1569, and his age: «aetatis suae 19» (fig. 2). A striking example of the range of professions and languages brought together in a single album is Janus Dousa's (Jan van der Does 1545-1604), now in the Leiden library where he was curator and librarian. It contains 134 entries by medical students, professors, humanists, administrators, politicians and other notable individuals in Greek, Hebrew, French, German, Italian and Polish, as 29 coats of arms, and three engravings[2].

[1] The use of the word «album» to designate a list of autographs first appeared in a French dictionary in 1714, but its origins appear to have been the Roman word «album», which signified the blank wall on which messages like those for announcing public games were posted. H. BOTS - G. VAN GEMERT - P. RIETBERGEN (eds), *L'album amicorum de Cornelis de Glarges 1599-1683*, Amsterdam 1975, pp. VII, IX.

[2] Leiden University Library, Topstuk BPL 1406.

The Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) may be the most well known owner of an album (fig. 3). A poem and dedication by Christophe Plantin, dated 8th September 1574, succinctly summarizes the function of the genre.

«Abraham Ortelius, geographer to the king, embellished with loyalty and knowledge
And all the other virtues, committed to sincere and eternal friendship
Christophe Plantin, typographer to the king, has written here on the consecrated day
On the nativity of the Virgin in the year of our Lord 1574»[3].

Penned in Latin in a hand that loosely mimics print fonts, Plantin's celebration of rank and friendship is inserted into a printed version of his trademark calipers and motto, «Labore et Costantia» [with toil and perseverance]. The verse and emblem is framed by another inscription, this time in French, in which Plantin conveys being long bound to his virtuous friend.

Another contributor, Nicolaus Fabri Vilvordiensis, expresses the pleasure of being asked to contribute in a letter to Ortelius in 1582:

«This little [album], which contains the names of your friends, shows how much you favour the arts and those who cultivate them. Would that by these verses I might earn imperishable glory and your friendship; there is no one in your Album who has a greater regard for you than I, though I am unworthy of being in the company of such learned men, whom all posterity will praise. But though I am unworthy of you, still my verses will I hope evince my grateful disposition towards you who are so kind and free from pride. With these verses, which will be to you a pledge of my affection, I pray you to count me among your friends»[4].

The letter underscores the association—«the company of such learned men»—of which a signatory becomes a part. Moreover as June Schlueter has pointed out, such references indicate «that the contributor may also have realized that readership for his entry would reach beyond the owner»[5]. Albums were forms of social media that connected individuals to a network, sometimes of strangers, and that network consisted not only of those already inscribed, but also future friends and readers.

[3]   *Amicorum Abraham Ortelius*, ed. by J. PURAYE, Amsterdam 1969.

[4]   *Abrahami Ortelii (geographi Antverpiensis) et virorvm ervditorvm ad evndem et ad Jacobvm Colivm Ortelianvm (Abrahami Ortelii sororis filivm) epistvlae: cvm aliqvot aliis epistvlis et tractatibvs qvibvsdam ab utroqve collectis (1524-1628)*, vol. 4, ed. by J.H. HESSELS, Cambridge 1887, pp. 120, 169, 770.

[5]   J. SCHLUETER, *Michael van Meer's «Album Amicorum», with Illustrations of London, 1614-15*, in «Huntington Library Quarterly», 69, 2006, 2, pp. 301-313, here p. 304.

The album is thus both a virtual collection of individuals and a real one, a space in which a public is assembled and imagined. If current social-networking media have been seen to erode the boundaries between public and private, then how were these boundaries transformed in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries by friendship albums?

Since Max Rosenheim's important essay on the genre appeared in 1910, numerous studies and facsimiles have been published, particularly recently[6]. The volume of scholarship is appropriate to the thousands of examples deposited in libraries, particularly in Europe. Consider, for example, an analysis by Werner Wilhelm Schnabel of the collection in the Stadtbibliothek in Nuremberg, which lists 129 *Stammbücher* from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and 178 from the following two centuries[7]. The emphasis in the literature, not surprisingly given the personal character of the genre, is often biographical with a description of an individual album. This essay shifts the focus from the life of the owner to the ways in which these artifacts fostered new forms of association.

As I propose in this essay, *alba amicorum* were public-making media: mixed forms of manuscript, printed, and pictorial texts and images that invited encounters with friends and strangers. Like other emerging social, intellectual, pictorial, theatrical, musical, scientific, and literary practices and media, albums brought people into groups that can be understood as publics—as congeries of people with shared interests who may not be known to each other—before the normalization of the public sphere in the eighteenth century[8]. Identifying this process is important for understanding some of the mechanisms through which forms of culture opened up spaces for action and public life. Friendship albums are exemplary of public making and the characteristics

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[6] M. ROSENHEIM, *The Album Amicorum*, in «Archeologia», 62, 1910, pp. 251-308; P. AMELUNG, *Die Stammbücher des 16./17. Jhs. als Quelle der Kultur- und Kunstgeschichte*, in *Zeichnung in Deutschland, deutsche Zeichner 1540-1640*. Ausstellungskatalog, Stuttgart 1979-1980. For a study of the genre, in particular, see E.K. THOMASSEN, *Alba amicorum*, Den Haag 1990. For a recent study, see J. SCHLUETER, *The Album Amicorum & the London of Shakespeare's Time*, London 2011.

[7] W.W. SCHNABEL, *Die Stammbücher und Stammbuchfragmente der Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg*, Wiesbaden 1995.

[8] See B. WILSON - P. YACHNIN (eds), *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, and Forms of Knowledge*, New York 2010.

that encourage it: a new genre that looks back to earlier practices and forms of knowledge, and a concept that was open to—indeed would have solicited—encounters with individuals who would have expanded the owner's world. Thus, I begin by reviewing the cluster of practices out of which *alba amicorum* emerged in the sixteenth century. As we have argued elsewhere, public making is enabled by the movement of people, ideas, things and media, which are all characteristics of albums as well as the people and things—signatures, fragments of text, mottos, emblems, images—contained therein. Albums are metatopical: artifacts into which diverse pictorial and textual forms migrate, thereby activating uptake by petitioning the interests of others and by opening up the possibilities for unexpected encounters. Publics are always in flux, and that open-endedness is at the heart of the album enterprise. I also consider how albums condense time; instead of being ordered chronologically, according to an itinerary of the owner's experiences, it is the status of the signatory during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that determines the sequence of names. The albums are therefore heterochronous configurations: compilations of encounters that originate or are formed at different moments. Two further points—regarding how the private and public are constituted in relation to each other, and concerning Hannah Arendt's investment in the thing that endures—will also be considered at the end of the essay.

My first point, then, is the formation of a new genre. Early albums bring together costume figures with framing escutcheons seen in *Wappenbücher* (books of coats-of-arms), illustrated here in a painted example of women in noble attire and an inscription dated 1574 (fig. 4). Other examples are typically small printed religious or emblem books in which blank sheets were provided for the owner to collect signatures and illustrations[9]. Editions of Andrea Alciati's *Emblemata* and Philipp Melanchthon's *Loci communes theologici* were the most popular choices; the latter was used in 1542 by the owner of the earliest known album. The market for albums was first targeted directly by Jean de Tournes' *Thesaurus amicorum*, published before 1558 in

[9] A. Alciati's collection of emblems grew from 104 when first published in Augsburg in 1531 to 211 emblems by its 130th edition at the end of the century. The *Emblemata* was especially popular from 1557-1635 and the emblems were sometimes used by signatories to embellish their comments. M.A.E. NICKSON, *Early Autograph Albums in the British Museum*, London 1970, p. 9, no. 1, 12, 13. Also see M. ROSENHEIM, *Album Amicorum*, p. 259.

Lyon[10]. By the 1570's publishers were responding to the demand for albums, with volumes of printed images bound together with blank leaves, or with decorative frames and escutcheons, as seen, for example, in Kunera van Douma's album, which contains inscriptions from 1605-1611 (figs 5-6).

In 1571, Sigmund Feyerabend published his *Bibliorum*, an album with printed models of coats-of-arms that could be personalized by the owner and his friends. These were interleaved with illustrations of biblical stories identified by Latin captions intended to advance morals and self-reflection. In prefatory comments of his *Stamm- oder Gesellenbuch*, published in 1579, Feyerbend notes that *Schädtbücher* (books causing mischief) might be a more accurate description for these books than *Stammbücher* (friendship albums). However, he assures his audience that «Many an honest man considers making use of such a *Stammbuch*». His will even benefit the reader, he continues, «indeed, he will see himself in it as in the Socratic mirror, and will find what defects in himself he must improve»[11]. By reflecting upon the motivational ideas conveyed in the pictures and texts, and by collecting the signatures of their professors, students were offered moral guidance while being incited to intellectual vigor as directed by humanists[12]. To paraphrase Melanchthon, the books encouraged industriousness through their combination of inscriptions, which furnished wise teaching on one side, and knowledge of the character and biographical details of the contributor on the other[13].

A printed *album amicorum,* first published in Leuven in 1599 by Jan Baptist Zangrius, a Flemish engraver, demonstrates how heraldry and penmanship overlapped[14]. The function of the album has been translated

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[10] *Ibid.,* p. 253; I. O'DELL, *Jost Amman and the Album Amicorum. Drawings after Prints in Autograph Albums,* in «Print Quarterly», 9, 1992, pp. 31-36, here p. 31.

[11] Cited *ibid.,* p. 31.

[12] H. BOTS - G. VAN GEMERT - P. RIETBERGEN, *L'Album amicorum,* p. XI.

[13] M.A.E. NICKSON, *Autograph Albums,* pp. 9-10.

[14] J.B. ZANGRIUS, *Album amicorum habitibus mulierum omnium nationum Europae,* Leuven 1599. For his interest in heraldry, see his armorial chart of Brabant, *Representation de l'Ancienne et Souveraine Duche de Brabant, ses Villes, Dignitez et Dependences Comme Lothier, Limborghe et Pays de Outre Meuse,* Louvain 1600.

from the Latin text on the frontispiece by an owner: «Blanks, or Void Spaces for our friends, Adorn'd with the habit or dress of the Women of all the Country's in Europe, together with Blank Scutcheans Engrav'd in Copper, wherein may one very Conveniently paint their Cyphers or Coat of Arms». The name of an owner, Jacobus Zuirque, appears above the city of publication with the date 1688 and a doodle of a dragon made in the same hand to the right. Two manuscript additions on the page, perhaps the name of an earlier owner, have been overwritten, and two further dates, 1695 and 1740, suggest the album may have had multiple owners. This may explain the practice of overwriting seen on other pages where the text is sometimes an illegible palimpsest. For example, to the right of the page engraved with a Florentine costume are lines of text that have been rendered illegible with the exception of the closing salutation: «All stuff». Among the legible manuscript additions is a comic note—«Madam your traine»—penned below the long skirt worn by the woman[15]. Three instances in which a previous inscription is overwritten appear on the page illustrating the Venetian Virgin (fig. 7). The letters of the alphabet are handwritten above the imprint of the copperplate with the name Eneas Lowe, and the phrase: «Yours Receaved by your Friend __ together with a Bill». To the right of the engraved figure are three manuscript versions of the caption, «Virgo Veneta», in different fonts and languages. The English translation, «a Venetian Virgin Veil'd», is penned in the same hand as the signature of Peter Thomsin, or Thomlin, that appears above it[16]. As if spurred on by the calligraphic character of the engraved escutcheon, the sheet is covered with experiments in penmanship, such as the interlacing in the right margin.

Inscription is at the heart of the album enterprise, with signatures of acquaintances or colleagues marking an encounter at a specific place and time. This is underscored by the scribbles often appended to names. Examining these sometimes wild displays of penmanship, Rosenheim deciphered the words «manu propria (in one's own hand)»[17]. Inscriptions were initially in Latin and Ciceronian in tenor, thereby marking the owner's humanist aspirations, but by the seventeenth century, the

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[17] M. ROSENHEIM, *Album Amicorum.*

vernacular became common in response to increasing awareness of national differences. Where Plantin's mimicry of Roman and italic fonts used by printers was a mark of his profession, the play with penmanship in the Zangrius album reminds us of the new alliance between fonts and geography in which vernacular languages could be identified by the style of writing. The publication of writing books in the sixteenth century focused on italics, which were believed to have originated in Italy[18]. By the seventeenth century, however, printmakers were providing instructions for writing in the vernacular, as seen, for example, in Jan van den Velde's *Spieghel der Schrijfkonste* [Mirror of the Art of Writing], first published in Rotterdam in 1605 (fig. 8)[19]. Comprised of 55 engraved sheets to copy, the French example reads «voicy la forme methodique. Pour escrire lettre Italique». A calligraphic interlace flows from the I of Italique, while the hand holding the quill has just terminated the lavish signature, Frysius, the name of the engraver. Visualizing the trace of the writer's hand points to the embodied nature of the signature as a mark of his or her place in the world, which overlaps with the emphasis on geography conveyed by the costume figures and foreign sites, to which I turn later.

With its engraved figures of women, the Zangrius example brings forward another practice that flourished in albums, the geographical compass of the owner. Women had appeared alongside coats of arms in *Wappenbücher* in the first half of the sixteenth century, which may explain why costume figures appear slightly earlier in albums than those in printed costume books. In the latter, which became a widespread phenomenon in the last three decades of the sixteenth century, costume became a way of classifying geographical differences. However, in the albums, the figures are multivalent, signifying in complex ways that can be attributed to the diverse forms and practices that come up against each other in the albums: costumes as geographical markers and as registers of noble status, allegories, and emblem books. As I have argued elsewhere, costumes would have been perceived through

[18] A.S. OSLEY, *Mercator: A Monograph on the Lettering of Maps, etc. in the 16th Century Netherlands with a Facsimile and Translation of His Treatise on the Italic Hand and a Translation of Ghim's Vita Mercatoris*, New York 1969.

[19] J. VAN DEN VELDE, *Spieghel der Schrijfkonste in den welcken ghesien worden veelderhande gheschriften met hare Fondementen ende onderrichtinghe Wtghegeven*, Amsterdam 1609.

the lens of emblem books, as urban icons[20]. Emblem books translated political, moral, and communal concepts into allegorical figures. Like the allegorical figures that appear frequently in albums, the turn toward abstraction necessitated that viewers learn meanings rather than recognizing them from the image. Venetian figures of the Doge, Courtesan, *dogaressa,* and *rettore* appear with surprising frequency in the pages of students' albums even though there was no university in the city (figs 9-10). These images were valued as souvenirs of a famous city because they have an allegorical function as moral types, as emblems of how the city was perceived by foreigners: modest, veiled, concupiscent, exotic, sober, and austere. Friendship albums became repositories of moral imperatives that had been condensed into costumes, not unlike the phrases taken from religious and humanist texts.

Depictions of urban spaces were also urban icons, such as London Bridge, which appears, for instance, in the album of Emmanuel van Meteren, the postmaster for the Dutch community in London (fig. 11)[21]. Van Meteren was an uncle of James Cole (Jacobus Colius Ortelianus) who worked with Ortelius, also his uncle, as agents between the artists and naturalists who lived and worked around Lime Street in London[22]. As a result, Van Meteren's album contains inscriptions by Cole, Ortelius, and the naturalist Carolus Clusius as well as paintings by Joris Hoefnagel, Marcus Gheerhaerts, and Lucas de Heere[23]. In front of the Tower of London and the Bridge is pole from which a sheaf of corn is suspended, an allegorical reference to the bonds of friendship.

The professional quality of many of the manuscript illustrations indicates they were produced by document illuminators and printmakers for whom the use of pattern books was a familiar workshop practice[24].

[20] B. WILSON, *Venice, Print, and the Early Modern Icon*, in «Urban History», 33, 2006, 1, pp. 39-64.

[21] Van Meteren collected entries from 1575-1609. The manuscript is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 68. For another example of the London Bridge, see Michael van Meer's album in the Edinburgh University Library, MS, La.III.283, fol. 408v.

[22] D. HARKNESS, *Elizabethan London's Naturalists and the Work of John White*, in K. SLOAN (ed.), *European Visions: American Voices*, London 2009, pp. 44-50.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

[24] T. HAMPE in C. WEIDITZ, *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the 'Trachtenbuch'*, New York 1994, pp. 10, 22-23. On the uses of models

In some cases, the contributor commissioned the image, while in other cases, the owner purchased paintings in advance, sometimes even collecting images of foreign costumes in his own city before a journey. Van Meteren's miniatures attest to the stature of artists who contributed. Another example is the famous album of Jacob Heyblocq (1623-1690) who collected entries from 1645-1678, first as a student in Leiden, and then mainly in Amsterdam where he became headmaster at the Latin school. In a poem, at the beginning of the album, he describes his goal of obtaining signatures of famous individuals who would be encouraged by the promise of posterity. Among the 41 drawings, two engravings, and three cutouts is *Simeon's Ode*, a drawing by Rembrandt (fig. 12)[25]. Jan de Bray was another artist who accompanied his entry with drawing a self-portrait, in pen, in which he looks across a chessboard toward the beholder who is imagined as his absent friend (fig. 13). The fragment of text reiterates the theme: «What use a single man, he can't play chess alone, so if I find no friend, alas, my game, begone»[26]. Heyblocq's album, with its impressive collection of artists, scholars and poets, such as Jacob Cats, can be attributed to his involvement in literary circles[27]. With its fragments of text, engravings, drawings and names, the album illustrates how things and parts of things collected in albums stood in for the signatories, not unlike portraits, even in their absence. This association with time in relation to posterity, and also the fleeting nature of the encounter implied by de Bray, is also brought forward in another example by a well-known artist, David Bailly, who signed the *Vanitas* he drew for the diplomat Cornelis de Glarges (1599-1683) in 1624 (fig. 14)[28]. Each object—pipe, skull, and hourglass—is hatched

see R.W. SCHELLER, *A Survey of Medieval Model Books*, Haarlem 1963; I. O'DELL, *Jost Amman*.

[25] K. THOMASSEN - J.A. GRUYS (eds), *The Album amicorum of Jacob Heyblocq*, 2 vols, Zwolle 1998.

[26] J. de Bray, signature and self-portrait. *Jacobus Heyblocq*, pp. 248-249, signed in Haarlem in 1661.

[27] The public character of literary circles can be compared with French salons, studied by F. ROUGET, *Academies, Circles, 'Salons' and the Emergence of the Pre-Modern 'Literary Public Sphere' in Sixteenth-Century France*, in B. WILSON - P. YACHNIN (eds), *Making Publics*, pp. 53-67.

[28] H. BOTS - G. VAN GEMERT - P. RIETBERGEN (eds), *L'Album amicorum de Cornelis Glarges*; [Amsterdam], 1661, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - National Library of The Netherlands, shelf number 131 H 26, fol. 61.

with pen and ink, their iconic status as signs of death underlined by the inscription «quis evadet» [who escapes] on the sheet of paper rolled up to the left. The drawing contributes to an understanding of the volumes as monuments, as collections of epigraphs that endure beyond the life of the individual, as places in which time is suspended.

As we have seen, albums were *loci* in which things and people who were moving could be collected, and the volumes were themselves things that moved. The use of albums surged in the second half of the sixteenth century among students, many from Wittenberg, embarking on academic peregrinations to universities in Bourges, Orléans, Besançon, Paris, Leuven, Leiden, Padua, Bologna, and Siena. The majority of sixteenth-century books come from Germany on account of the vibrant education system that included travel to foreign universities. In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands succeeded Germany in this regard and thus generated more albums including some that were owned by women; one of the earliest dates from 1595-1598[29]. The concept expanded to a variety of professionals including humanists, professors, librarians, merchants, artists, and artisans. Both the visual images and the inscriptions could serve as memories of one's home, while a network of sites and signatures recording a traveler's encounters enabled him to shape his or her experiences of the world into a moral cosmography. The English traveler Fynes Morryson (1566-1630) reports such an encounter in his *Itinerary*:

«Let it not trouble you, that I tell you another merry accident I had in the same City of Breme. Disguised as I was, I went to the house of Doctor Peuzelius, desiring to have the name of so famous a Divine, written in my stemme-booke, with his Mott, after the Dutch fashion. Hee seeing my poore habite, and a booke under my arme, tooke me for some begging Scholler, and spake sharpely unto me. But when in my masters name I had respectively saluted him, and told him my request, he excused his mistaking, and with all curtesie performed my desire»[30].

Like a passport, the inscriptions provided visual evidence of the traveler's contacts, and an illustrious signature or famous associate could open doors.

[29] M.A.E., NICKSON, *Autograph Albums*, pp. 20-21.

[30] F. MORYSON, *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turky, France, England, Scotland & Ireland*, Glasgow 1907, p. 80.

In spite of the apparent randomness with which pictures, dates, and signatures were entered, there were always some organizational criteria, usually reflecting the status of the signatory. Autographs of wealthy Fuggers and patricians, for example, are typically found toward the beginning of the books[31]. An intriguing example of the complexity of this process is the album of William Bedwell (1563-1632), mathematician, antiquarian, Arabist and rector at St. Ethelburgha's Bishopsgate in the City of London from 1601. «Notoriously kind to foreign visitors», as Alistair Hamilton puts it, «[Bedwell] could be an influential friend»[32]. He collected forty-eight inscriptions in his album, now in Leiden, which is made up of two printed volumes, *Emblemata physico-ethica, hoc est, Naturae morum moderatricis picta praecepta* (Nuremberg, 1595) and *Carmina Funebria, quae magnorum aliquot* (Nuremberg, 1592). On the flyleaf he penned a motto with his name in Arabic—«The will of God is my will»—and he signed and dated the volume in 1596 on the title page.

The first two inscriptions were made the following year by Lauge Christensen, in Arabic, Syriac, Danish, and Latin (78v), and by Matthias Hirzgarter, in Greek, Latin and German (95v). Christensen, a Dane, would later recommend Bedwell to the classical scholar Isaac Casaubon. With the publication in 1601 of his *Prophetia Hhobadyag,* Bedwell's reputation grew, prompting further contacts, such as Peter Kirsten in 1602, a doctor from Beslau, who was interested in learning Arabic[33]. Meanwhile Christensen, after meeting Bedwell, toured universities from 1599-1601 in Rostock, Marburg, and Leiden where he matriculated in theology. He became a tutor to two young Danish men, Mickel Hvas, and Erik Krabbe, with whom he traveled to Leiden and then to Paris in 1603. The three men subsequently went to Cambridge where the two youths, along with a third, Gotfred Lindenow, signed Bedwell's album[34]. All signed in Latin, with Lindenow's signature preceding the one penned by Christensen six years earlier, in 1597.

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[31] H. BOTS - G. VAN GEMERT - P. RIETBERGEN, *L'Album amicorum*, p. XIII.

[32] A. HAMILTON, *An Egyptian Traveller in the Republic of Letters: Josephus Barbatus or Abudacnus the Copt*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 57, 1994, pp. 123-150, here p. 128.

[33] A. HAMILTON, *William Bedwell the Arabist, 1563-1632*, Leiden 1985, pp. 19-20.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The first signature after Christensen—chronologically speaking—was made in 1600 by Ahmad ibn Ahmad Maimūn, an ambassador from the Moroccan embassy for whom Bedwell likely served as a translator. Maimūn inscribed a fragment from the Quran stating «Proclaim He is Allah, the Single, the Everlasting; He begets not nor is begotten, and there is none like unto Him», to which he added: «This is the truth» (fig. 15). The provocative inscription gestures to the possibilities for debate opened up by the albums, which is another dimension of public making. Described by a contemporary as «a verie ritchman of this countrey»[35], the ambassador's status warranted a place closer to the front of the album. It appears on 22v, where it remained the first in the volume indicating no more prestigious contact was to follow. The last entry was made in 1629 by the scholar Edward Pococke in Arabic, Syriac and Latin on 84v. The last signature to appear in the book, and thus the least noteworthy contact for Bedwell is that of Anna Bastinguis, the only woman, who signed in Latin in 1612[36].

Women are more noteworthy in Michael van Meer's album, now in Edinburgh, that records encounters during his travels from Antwerp to Hamburg, London, and Leiden among other centers (figs 16-18)[37]. Begun in 1613, van Meer collected signatures for 35 years, with one added posthumously by the chancellor of Hamburg, Christopher Deichman, in 1657. The album consists of 527 leaves and 774 entries of individuals who are identified on two lists in German: «Register of the persons who themselves wrote their names in this album» and «Women who themselves wrote their names herein»[38]. There is also a list of illustrations in Dutch that Schlueter, who has studied the manuscript, suggests may have been drawn up by Jehan van Meer, Michael's brother. The earliest inscriptions were made by his mother and father, and by Adriana Montens, whom he married. However the first and second entries to appear in the volume are those of King James (1566-1625) and his wife Anna of Denmark (1574-1619). The King's entry states «Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos» [To spare the humble and subdue the haughty], while the queen's is in Italian: «La mia grandezza

[35] G. TOMSON, cited *ibid.*, p. 17.

[36] *Ibid.*, Appendix III, pp. 121-123.

[37] *Michael van Meer*, Edinburgh University Library, MS, La.III.283.

[38] J. SCHLUETER, *van Meer's «Album Amicorum»*, p. 301.

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dall'eccelso» [My greatness comes from the Lord] (fig. 16)[39]. Her coat of arms, flanked by two bearded wild men, crowned and girdled with wreaths and bearing clubs, was painted before the queen addressed it, since the dramatic flourish with which she initiates and terminates her signature overlap the figures. To the left of the painted motif is a description in another hand of lands over which she is queen and an account of her European lineage. Van Meer therefore commissioned the painting, as was more typical, before receiving the inscription. Adding to the list of prestigious entries are the names collected from 1633 to 1648 when van Meer was stationed at the Hague: Maurice, Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau in 1620; the Palatine elector Frederick V and his brother Louis Philippe, both in 1621; Amalia of Solms, Princess of Orange, in 1628, who appears ahead of Ernst Casimir, Count of Nassau, but after Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, who signed in 1614[40].

Van Meer's album, with its variety of paintings of Jacobean London, collected from 1614-15, exemplifies the growing interest among collectors in depictions of spaces. The choice and style of the watercolors are typical of the genre, since owners of albums would commission illustrators who specialized in views. Illuminators and limners working in picture shops, responding to the demand for «painting in little», produced the same views repeatedly: the Tower of London, London Bridge, Windsor Castle, and also processions, allegories and costumes[41]. Thus, the presence of the picture in the album doesn't mean the owner saw the site or event himself, although it makes a claim to his having been there. Two sites may be unique, however, as Schlueter has pointed out: the House of Lords and a cockfight. The caption for the House of Lords reads: «Alsoo hout de Koning In Englant Raet in de vorgadering van het opper Parlem» [The King in England holds counsel in the gathering of the upper Parliament] (fig. 17). King James, seated on the throne, is accompanied by Prince Charles to his left, the Sword Bearer, the Lord Treasurer, the Lord Chamberlain, and the Garter King of Arms. To the right, the artist depicted a peer with the Cap of Maintenance, the Lord

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 307-308.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[41] See L. CUST, *The Fine Arts: I. Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving*, in *Shakespeare's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of His Age*, vol. 2, 1916, Oxford 1950, pp. 1-14. Cited in J. SCHLUETER, *van Meer's «Album Amicorum»*, p. 303, no. 10.

Chancellor, the Earl Marshall, and the sergeant at arms holds the mace. The Lord Chancellor is seated in front, with judges, lawyers, bishops, earls and barons[42]. In the painting described as «Het Haene gefecht In Engelandt» [a cockfight in England] (fig. 18), spectators with gold coins, dressed as nobles, are seated around a circular stage on which the two cocks stand[43]. The figure singled out in the chair is presumably King James, as Schlueter observes. Perhaps the illustrations of the cockfight and the House of Lords were mere novelties. However, in the company of a remarkable list of earls, peers, officials and knights who signed van Meer's album, one can imagine the scenes spawning discussions on the spaces and rituals of government and sport. The calm and ordered spectacles of collective participation in both scenes might be considered as evidence of the broader «civilizing process» identified by Norbert Elias through which violence became subordinated to reason and bodily control that he traced in courtesy books[44]. *Alba amicorum,* by promoting friendship, would also have participated in this process.

The politics of friendship is after all the focus of Stefano Guazzo's *Civil conversatione,* first published in 1574, and its influence was widespread. There Guazzo describes citizenship as a form of association (*conversatione*) enabled by a change in the mind[45]. Peter Miller has called attention to the importance of the text in redefining citizenship and early modern public life. Focusing on seventeenth-century Venice, he argues that the concept of «citizen» evolved in response to ideas about friendship that were being discussed in political circles. The term had been used loosely earlier, following antique usage, to describe those who were subject to princes[46]. The publication of Guazzo's widely translated text, however, contributed to a new understanding of the citizen and public life through the author's effort to describe, in Miller's words, «the complex network of ties between the unrelated, unconstrained,

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[42] *Ibid.,* p. 311.

[43] *Michael van Meer,* fol. 378v. On early modern cockfighting, see T.A. HAMILL, *Cockfighting as Cultural Allegory in Early Modern England,* in «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 39, 2009, 2, pp. 375-406.

[44] N. ELIAS, *The Civilizing Process,* Oxford 1996.

[45] See P. BURKE, *The Art of Conversation,* Cambridge 1993, pp. 89-122.

[46] P. MILLER, *Friendship and Conversation in Seventeenth-Century Venice,* in «The Journal of Modern History», 73, 2001, 1, pp. 1-31.

unequal members of modern society»[47]. Guazzo was concerned, like Erasmus and others, with social behavior, but he was also attentive to the demands of one's performance with strangers and in diverse contexts in which status, education, or gender were mixed. Instead of being related to the city or the prince, citizenship, for Guazzo, is an attribute of the individual, «of the qualities of the minde», the «manners and conditions which make [association] *civile*»[48].

Alba amicorum attest to ways in which new forms of culture could emerge from existing social and political hierarchies to establish new connections and associations. They were objects that opened up possibilities for sometimes unpredictable encounters with previously unknown individuals. Looking back on one's encounters, or forward to new contacts, albums fostered an understanding of the self in relation to friends and strangers through exchanges that were repeated, sometimes, over decades. This turn toward civil association is also manifested in one of the basic changes remarked upon regularly in the literature: an initial quest for «nobility of blood» in the albums shifted toward an emphasis on «nobility of spirit» thereby merging patrician values with humanist ideals in what one scholar has called «the noble cult of friendship»[49]. Civil association emerges as an outcome and an expectation of the albums; it is activated by the social types depicted in costume figures; through the exchange between portraits and beholders, in relation to depicted sites and rituals and of course in the encounter with the friend or contact invited to make an entry. Although associated with circles of nobles and intellectual elites, moreover, the range of professions of owners, the mixture of rank and even gender, and the anticipatory character of the signature—the awareness that others will read it—are evidence of the genre's capacity to activate forms of association. That open-ended character of the genre is crucial to its ability to generate networks that stand apart from familiar forms of patronage.

Active-uptake is another characteristic of the albums, and a crucial factor in public making. We saw at the beginning of this essay how Vilvordiensis imagined strangers reading his entry in Ortelius's album.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[49] H. BOTS - G. VAN GEMERT - P. RIETBERGEN, *L'Album amicorum*, pp. VIII, IX, XIX.

Morrison's request for the signature of Doctor Peuzelius underscores how associations created by albums overlapped with existing networks thereby bringing strangers together and expanding connections through the medium. The plethora of extant volumes attests to the potency of the concept, which continued to thrive into the nineteenth century[50]. The discursive nature of the practice—the variety of texts, images and ideas that go into the albums and how the idea is taken up elsewhere—is another characteristic of the process of public making. For example, the practice is discussed in the play, Sir Politick Would-be, written between 1662 ad 1665 by Charles de Saint-Évremond along with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham, and the Sieur d'Aubigny[51]. In a conversation with a lady, a German gentleman describes the traveler equipped with guidebook and album in the pursuit of specimens of writing by learned individuals. When asked by the lady about their function, he explains that the list of names is «of the utmost use to us in our drinking bouts»[52]. The play is cited in the nineteenth century by Eliakim Littell and Robert S. Littell as evidence of the evolving status of the practice: «from an evidence of the esprit du corps of the wise, the practice of keeping Albums became the amusement of the great, and finally the fashion of the foolish»[53]. If the popularity of the practice contributed to its derision by the Littells, it is important to note that the emphasis on noble status that characterized the early history of the genre evolved by the eighteenth century, when, as Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi explain, «famous authors and poets were regarded as peers within a network of Enlightenment men of letters». Through a «belief in universal friendship» cultural heroes were brought into the company

[50] For example see, A. LOOYENGA, Neerlandia Catholica: A Nineteenth-Century Miniature Work, in T. COOMAR - J. DE MAEYER (eds), The Revival of Medieval Illumination: Nineteenth-Century Belgium Manuscripts, Leuven 2007, pp. 173-196.

[51] Q.M. HOPE, Saint-Evremond and His Friends, Genève 1999. Saint Evremond died in 1703 and the play was published in 1705. The title was based on Ben Jonson's character of the same name in Volpone, who may have been based in part on Sir Henry Wooten. Hope cites Izaak Walton's biography of Wooten, whose signature in Christopher Flecamore's album, «an ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country», caused him problems eight years later when he was implicated in an attack against James I; p. 129.

[52] Cited in «Littell's Living Age», 1855, vol. 47, p. 130. Mrs. Beeton also references Saint-Évremond's play in The Young Englishwoman, 1875, p. 73.

[53] «Littell's Living Age», p. 129.

of «personal friends and family»[54]. The play, subsequent commentary, and the increasingly public character of the practice attest to how the genre had enabled new forms of association.

This brings me back to the question of what the albums tell us about the relation between public and private life that I proposed early in this essay. I have been positing that the albums participated in a broader change from the identification of the self as a subject 'to' an individual, (such as a lord or monarch) to an understanding of the self 'through' one's associations with others, and the networks and the negotiations that entailed. Second, that process is bound up with an understanding of a self increasingly distinguished by profession. An important example is the position of the Moroccan ambassador, Maimūn, at the beginning of the names collected by Bedwell, which suggests a turn away from hierarchy based on lineage toward the cultural capital of friendship and eventually its universal status as valued by the Enlightenment. For three decades, scholars have been attending to subjectivity and interiority in terms such as self-fashioning, self-representation, and authorship—as ways in which individuals shaped themselves through their writing. The albums provide a slightly different perspective on this understanding by reminding us of the crucial ways in which private selves were forged in response to public life. While owners invite their contacts to make an entry, it is the albums that make the interaction possible, that provide a space in which the public can be assembled. The large number of blank pages remaining in albums is further evidence, since this allowed owners to be open to an unexpected meeting that might require a space between existing entries. The volumes therefore require the kind of prudent private judgment increasingly demanded by encounters, while the form of the book parallels the fluctuating constituencies of publics. Public life and private life were mutually constituted because the private life of an individual was authenticated by the public of friends and strangers that attested to the individual's presence.

This brings me to the final point I raised at the outset of the essay concerning Arendt. In our introduction to *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, and Forms of Knowledge*, Paul Yachnin and I argue that one of the defining features of early modern things

[54] E. BERENSON - E. GILOI, *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, New York 2010, p. 45.

is that they move[55]. In contrast to Arendt's investment in public art as something that endures, that is cultivated, we stressed the discursive character of cultural formations that brought people together: the migration of a line from Hamlet into a commonplace book, or the translation of a motet into print in Italy and then back into manuscript in Germany. These are characteristics amply demonstrated by the albums. However, the latter also draw attention to the fact that the albums, like the portraits sometimes painted within them, endure beyond the life of the individual. Thus inherent in *alba amicorum* is the dialectic between something in motion—either the owner or the contact—and the album as a monument, as an assembly of epigraphs. However, this is not like Arendt's monument that gathers us together as a public because it endures and because we tend to it collectively. Instead, the album turns a living public into a private monument, a collection of epigraphs turned into an epitaph.

I have been proposing that the friendship album is a theoretical object for thinking about early modern public formation. In part, this is because they established alternative modes of bringing people together to those of established systems of patronage, thereby creating networks that crossed historical and geographical boundaries, as well as professional ones. The form emerges from diverse genres and although it becomes conventional, and recognizable as a genre, none is the same. Their fragmentary character—recall the citation from the Quran—is altered by earlier and subsequent additions, and thus the address— the intentions of the signatory—that went into the volume is different from what the reader took out of it. Like the forms of association they fostered, albums are compendia made up of the unpredictable but interested flows of friends and strangers. More than a material collection of names, the volumes recorded earlier encounters and their attendant negotiations as they solicited new ones. *Alba amicorum* attest, in short, to the potential of the material world to assemble the social[56]. They matter today because as spaces of sociability they encouraged friendship, discourse, exchange, and debate between people known well, and those never encountered before.

[55] Many of the ides in this essay have been generated through collaboration with the Making Publics research group. B. WILSON - P. YACHNIN (eds), *Making Publics*.

[56] The concept is indebted to Bruno Latour. See for example, B. LATOUR, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005.

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That the albums facilitated social networking may be an obvious point, but the resonances with modern social media warrant consideration. Like hypertext, in which one's progress through media is open to myriad choices, the albums are heterochronous assemblies since the order of encounters is different from the order of the book. In part because the signatures, images, emblems, and fragments of texts originated at different moments, the albums generated unpredictable connections between the individuals already inscribed and those to come. Being invited to write an entry looks forward to future readers and signatories, while reading inscriptions enabled a new contact to reflect on his or her position within the world assembled there, bringing the present, past and future into consideration together.

Figure 1. Two Leuven scholars in black robes, with scepter. Inscription dated 1578, in the *album amicorum* of Paul van Dale, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce d. 11, fol. 17r.
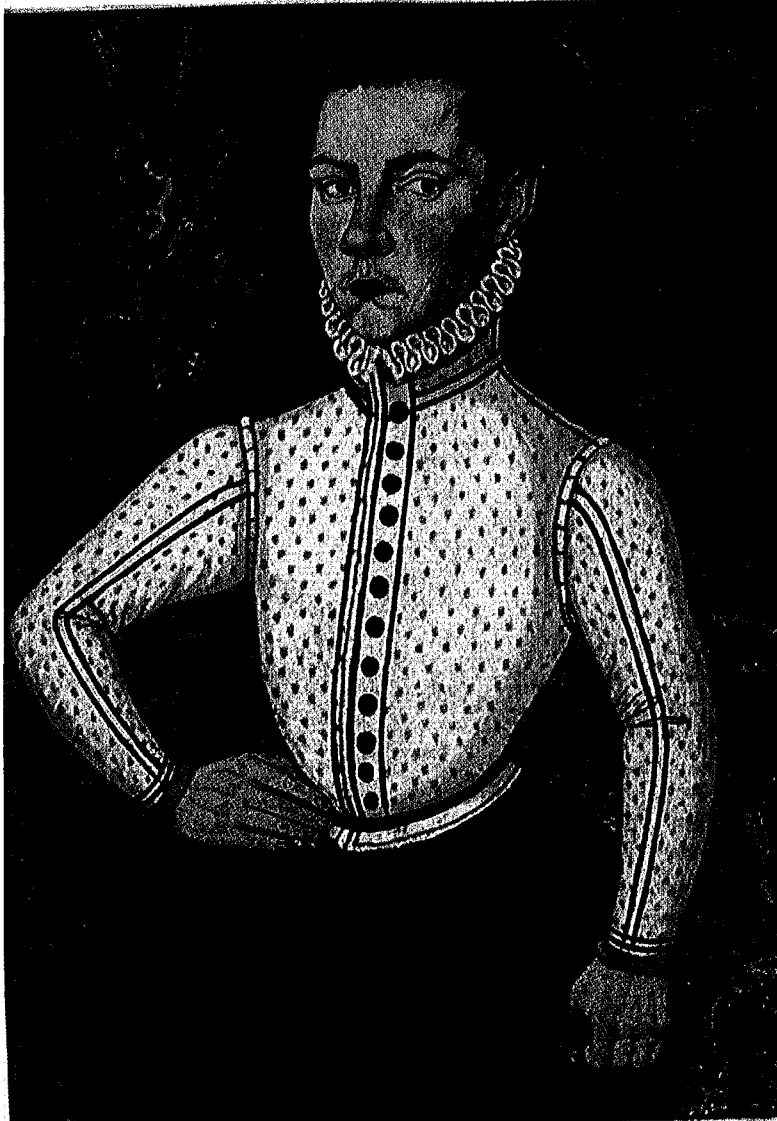
Figure 2. Portrait of a young man holding a sword with coat of arms and inscription: 'aetatis suae 19'. Dated 1569, in the *album amicorum* of Paul van Dale, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce d. 11, fol. 003r.

De bien long temps ie me sens obligé
    A tes vertus et Graces desirables:
Pource mõ cueur cest a toy engagé
    Dun gage libre, et liens amiables;
Qui a t'aimer en CHRIST serõt durables
— veu que tu as, mõ ABRAHAM ORTEL,
ı Prins pour ton but ses vertus admirables;
Et que, par grace, en mõy iay desir tel.
Sus donc, aptz. quictoÿ tout corps mortel.
    Pour estre serfs à la diuine grace
De JESVSCHRIST lequel rend immortel.
    Quiconque en luy se fie, et suit sa trace.

LABORE ET CONSTANTIA

Le sainct LABEVR constant, ouuraÿ en PACIENCE
D'enuie et d'enuieux surpasse la science.

Figure 3. Poem and dedication by Christophe Plantin, dated 1574, in the *album amicorum* of Abraham Ortelius, Cambridge, Pembroke College, fol. 73.

Figure 4. Two female costumes with escutcheon from an *album amicorum*, dated 1574, London, British Library, MS Egerton 1191, fol. 31.

Figure 5. Unused page from the *album amicorum* of Kunera van Douma, with inscriptions from 1605-1611, Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - National Library of The Netherlands.

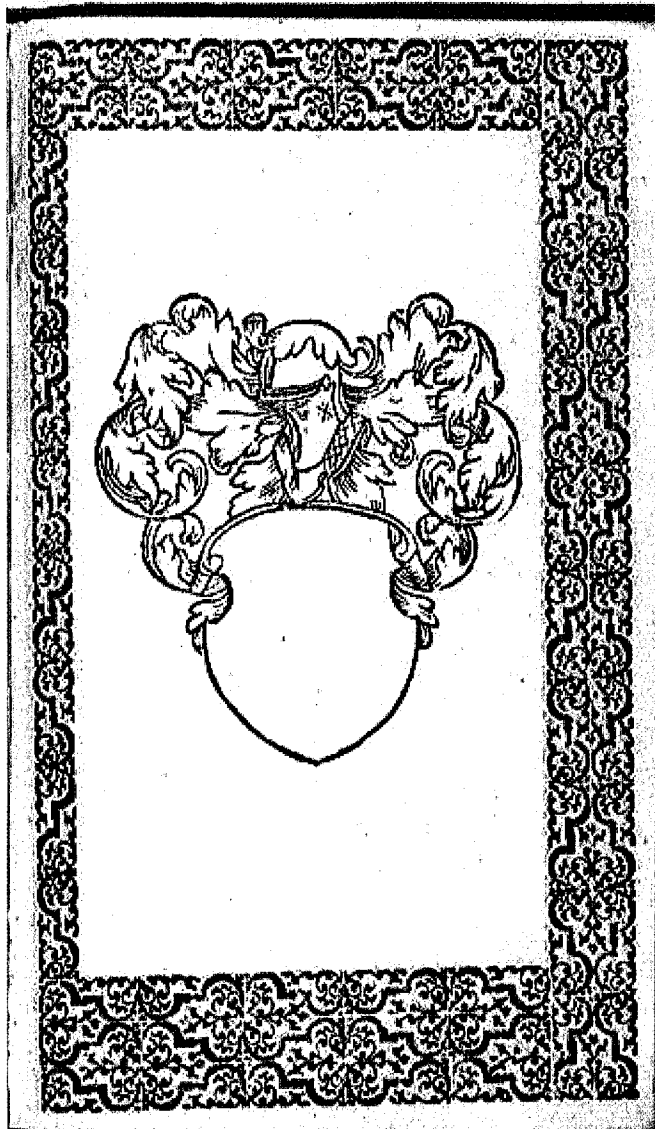Figure 6. Inscription of Chatalyna van Raephorst in the *album amicorum* of Kunera van Douma, with inscriptions from 1605-1611, Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - National Library of The Netherlands.

Figure 7. *Virgo Veneta*, in J.B. ZANGRIUS, *Album amicorum habitibus mulierum omnium nationum Europae*, Leuven 1599.
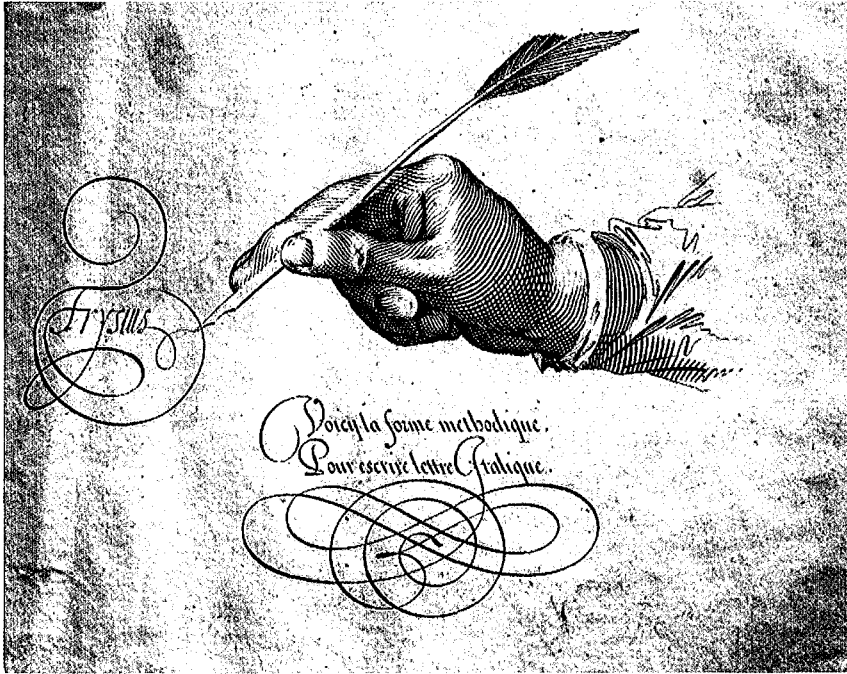
Figure 8. J. VAN DEN VELDE, *Spieghel der Schrijfkonste in den welcken ghesien worden veelderhande Gheschriften met hare Fondementen ende onderrichtinghe wtghegeven*, Amsterdam 1609, 25 x 34 cm (oblong folio).

Figure 9. *Duca di Venetia*, dated 1576, in the *album amicorum* of P. Behaim from Nuremberg, London, British Library, MS Egerton 1191, fol. 3.

Figure 10. *Cortegiana Venetiana*, from a stundent's album, London, British Library, MS Egerton 1191, fol. 62.
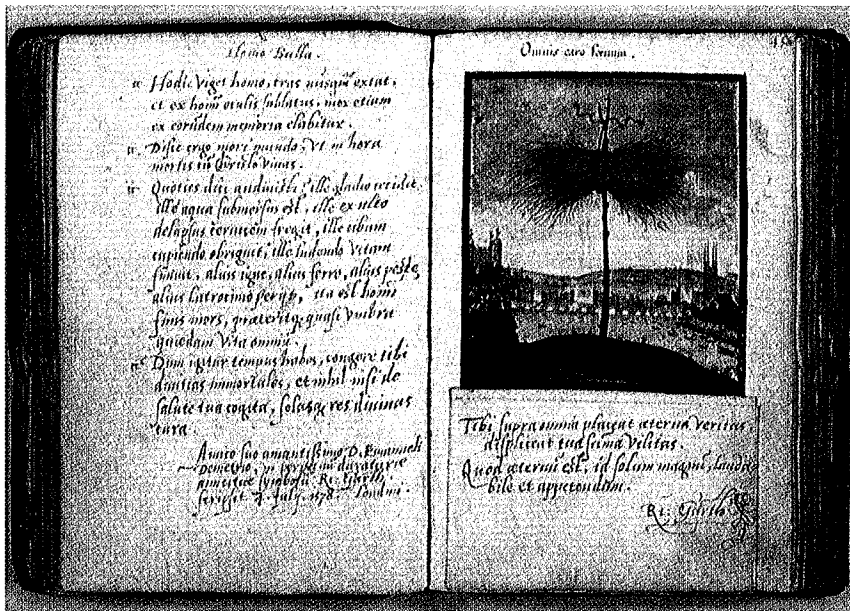
Figure 11. Inscription of Ri. Garth, dated 1578, with sheaf of corn on a pole before a view of the London Bridge and Tower of London, in the *album amicorum* of Emanuel van Meteren of Antwerp, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS, Douce 68, fol. 046v-047r.

Figure 12. REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, *Simeon's Ode*, drawing, in the *album amicorum* of Jacob Heyblocq, Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - National Library of The Netherlands, shelf number: 131 H 26, fol. 61.

Figure 13. JAN DE BRAY, inscription and self-portrait dated 1661 in Haarlem, in the *album amicorum* of Jacobus Heyblocq, Koninklijke Bibliotheek - National Library of The Netherlands, shelf number: 131 H 26, pp. 248-249.

Figure 14. DAVID BAILLY, *Vanitas*, in the *Album amicorum* of Cornelis de Montigny de Glarges, 1624, Koninklijke Biblioteek - National Library of The Netherlands, shelf number 75 J 48, fol. 131.
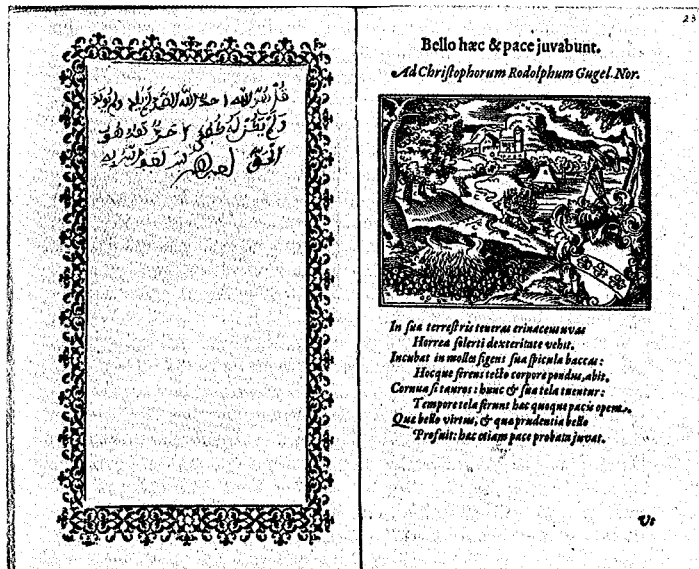
Figure 15. Inscription of Ahmad ibn Ahmad Maimūn, dated 1600, in the *album amicorum* of William Bedwell in *Emblemata physico-ethica, hoc est. Naturae morum moderatricis picta praecepta*, Nürnberg 1595, and *Carmina Funebria, quae magnorum aliquot*, Nürnberg 1592.

Figure 16. Signature of Anna of Denmark, in the *Album amicorum* of Michael van Meer, Edinburgh University Library, MS, La.III.283, fol. 4.
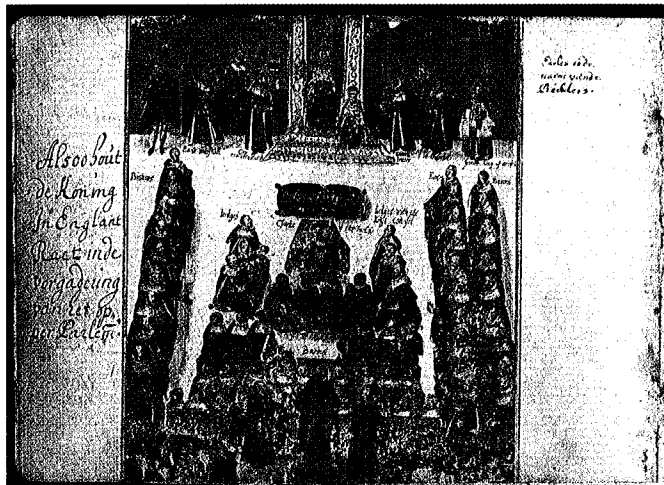
Figure 17. *Alsoo hout de Koning In Englant Raet in de vorgadering van het opper Parlem* [Thus the King in England holds counsel in the gathering of the upper Parliament], in the *album amicorum* of Michael van Meer, Edinburgh University Library, MS, La.III.283, fol. 154v.
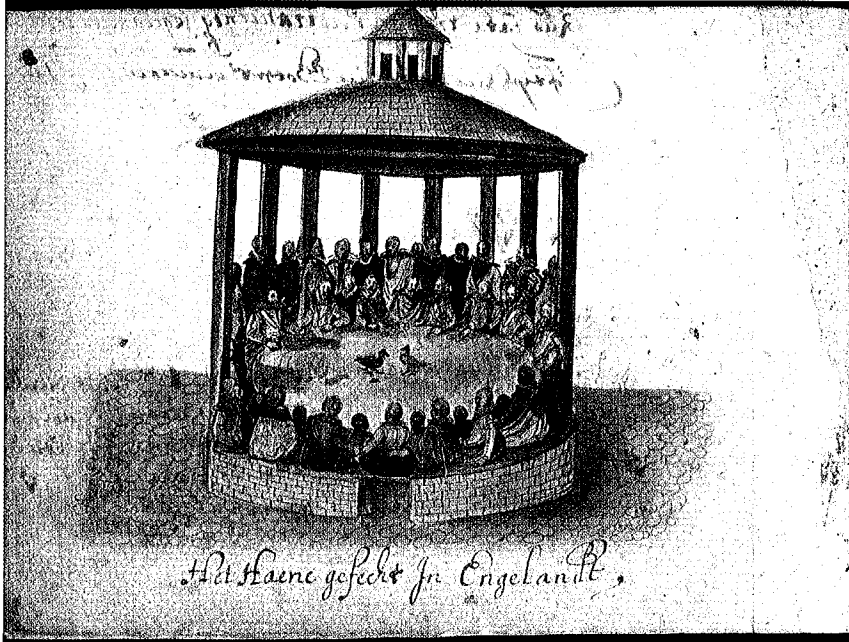
Figure 18. *Het Haene gefecht In Engelandt* [a cockfight in England], in the *Album amicorum* of Michael van Meer, Edinburgh University Library, MS, La.III.283, fol. 378v.

Opinions

«There are lots of papers going around and it'd be better if there weren't»

Broadsides and Public Opinion in the Spanish Monarchy in the Seventeenth Century

by *Antonio Castillo Gómez*

1. *Introduction*

The quotation in the title is from one of the reports included in the «Gazeta» of 19 November 1668 regarding the welter of anonymous papers during the minority of Carlos II[1]. Almost a century before, Felipe II had said something similar in connection with the numerous broadsides and libels which the mutineers had distributed that year in Zaragoza «against the chief ministers and the Holy Office of the Inquisition» and many of which were posted on the «corners of public squares and streets», a fact which demonstrates beyond doubt that the purpose was to «arouse and stir up the people»[2]. Meanwhile, during the Immaculate Conception crisis of the seventeenth century, the rector of Huesca's Jesuit College was not alone in accusing the Dominicans of «sowing discord» on the strength of the tone they used in the sermons, *coplas* or songs, and libels they delivered and disseminated in the city in the summer of 1658[3].

[1]   M. DANVILA Y COLLADO, *El poder civil en España*, 5 vols, Madrid 1885, vol. 3, p. 211.

[2]   Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE), Ms. 12719, fol. 69r, Commission of Felipe II to Jerónimo Fernández de Heredia, justice of the mountains and governor of Aragon, regarding the mutiny in Zaragoza, Madrid, 20 December 1591.

[3]   Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN), *Inquisición*, leg. 4453[1], exp. 29, fol. 9r, letter of the rector Gil Ballester, Huesca, 18 August 1658. On this, see A. CASTILLO GÓMEZ, *Panfletos, coplas y libelos injuriosos. Palabras silenciadas en el*

The facts arrayed in the previous paragraph make clear the capacity to mobilize that was attributed to broadsides and, consequently, their impact on the formation of opinion under the Spanish monarchy, above all during periods of great social, political, or religious tension. The Portuguese Jeronimo Freire Serrão was of a similar opinion when declaring that books, sermons, and libels were the three paths taken by truth to reach the ears of the king[4]. For that reason, in such situations it was quite customary to advise the king to bear in mind the petitions from the street, which often took the form of ephemeral documents. Antonio Pérez (1540-1611), who was secretary to Felipe II and had first-hand knowledge of the Zaragoza disturbances of 1591, made no bones of the matter in his *Norte de príncipes*:

«And because it is impossible to please them all on account of the different inclinations and characters of each—not only different but even conflicting—it is necessary to please the majority; but because under this monarchy I am accustomed, on this point, to consider two different factions, consisting in two different groups of people, the plebs and the *grandes*, it would be prudent to please the plebs which is the group that roars, shouts and publishes their grievances, and fears little on account of their number and the little they stand to lose»[5].

On the basis of these premises, the use I shall make in what follows of the concept of «public opinion» goes beyond the bourgeois and enlightened paradigm of Habermas[6], which is barely applicable to societies of the Ancien Régime. In its place, and in line with recent historiography, I shall explore the forms and spaces that the exercise of that opinion

Siglo de Oro, in M. Peña Díaz (ed.), *Las Españas que (no) pudieron ser. Herejías, exilios y otras conciencias (siglos XVI-XX)*, Huelva 2009, pp. 59-73.

[4]   J. Freire Serrão, *Discurso político da excellencia, aborrecimiento, perseguição & zelo da verdade*, Lisboa 1647, p. 134. For a detailed study see D. Ramada Curto, *O discurso político em Portugal (1600-1650)*, Lisboa 1988, pp. 143-155.

[5]   A. Pérez, *Norte de príncipe, virreyes, presidentes, consejeros y governadores, y advertencias políticas sobre lo público y particular de una Monarquía*, Madrid 1788, pp. 31-32: «Y porque a todos es imposible contentar por las diferentes inclinaciones que tienen y trazas, no sólo diferentes más aún contrarias, es necesario contentar a los muchos; mas porque en esta Monarquía, cuanto a este propósito, yo suelo considerar dos diferencias, y estas dos gentes, *Plebe* y *Grandes*, será prudencia contentar a la Plebe, que es la que brama, grita y publica sus quejas, muy poco temerosa por su multitud y por lo poco que tiene que perder».

[6]   J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 1962.

came to occupy in the early modern age[7]. In this regard, various scholars have addressed the need to revamp Habermas's theses if there is to be any proper evaluation of the influence exerted at different times in the history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe by debates in academies, cabinets, and salons and by the circulation of information and the distribution of pamphlets[8].

In the last few years, that debate, initially confined to the contemporary period[9], has spilled over into the most recent research concerning the early modern age in Spain[10]. Notable contributions have drawn attention to the emerging trade in manuscript and printed relations and news[11]; the

[7]   A. BRIGGS - P. BURKE, *A Social History of the Media. From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge 2009[3], pp. 61-90.

[8]   J.K. SAWYER, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France*, Berkeley CA 1990; A. HALASZ, *The Marketplace of Print. Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Cambridge 1997; D. FREIST, *Governed by Opinion. Politics, Religion and the Dynamics of Communication in Stuart London, 1637-1645*, London 1997; D. ZARET: *Origins of the Democratic Culture. Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England*, Princeton NJ 2000; J. VAN HORN MELTON (ed.), *Cultures of Communication from Reformation to Enlightenment. Constructing Publics in the Early Modern German Lands*, Aldershot 2002, and S. LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du people et savoir de gouvernement de Machiavel aux Lumières*, Rennes 2006.

[9]   G. CAPELLÁN (ed.), *Opinión pública. Historia y presente*, Madrid 2008, and G. CAPELLÁN (ed.), *Historia, política y opinión pública*, in «Ayer», 80, 2010, 4, pp. 13-162.

[10]   J.Mª. PERCEVAL, *Opinión pública y publicidad (siglo XVII). Nacimiento de los espacios de comunicación pública en torno a las bodas reales de 1615 entre Borbones y Habsburgo*, doctoral thesis Barcelona, 2004, http://www.tdx.cesca.es/handle/10803/4178 (accessed April 20, 2011); L.M. ENCISO RECIO, *Los mensajes de la opinión pública y la propaganda en la España Moderna*, in J.M. NIETO SORIA (ed.), *Propaganda y opinión pública en la historia*, Valladolid 2007, pp. 49-90, and F. BOUZA, *Papeles y opinión. Políticas de publicación en el Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2008.

[11]   J. DÍAZ NOCI - M. DEL HOYO, *El nacimiento del periodismo vasco: gacetas donostiarras de los siglos XVII y XVIII*, San Sebastián 2003; H. ETTINGHAUSEN, *Informació, comunicació i poder a l'Espanya del segle XVII*, in «Manuscrits», 23, 2003, pp. 45-58; S. LÓPEZ POZA (ed.), *Las noticias en los siglos de la imprenta manual*, La Coruña 2006; C. ESPEJO CALA - E. PEÑALVER GÓMEZ - Mª.D. RODRÍGUEZ BRITO (eds), *Relaciones de sucesos en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Sevilla*, Sevilla 2008, and C. ESPEJO CALA, *El impresor sevillano Juan Gómez de Blas y los orígenes de la prensa periódica. 'La Gazeta Nueva' de Sevilla (1661-1667)*, in «Zer: Revista de estudios de comunicación - Komunikazio ikasketen aldizkaria», 25, 2008, pp. 243-267.

political dimension of the theater[12]; the effects of theological argument and preaching on opinion forming[13]; the role of 'arbitrism' in constituting a kind of public lobby with an intention to influence the Court[14]; or the widespread pamphleteering at certain points of the seventeenth century[15]. In the wake of such studies, it has become clear how at the turn of the seventeenth-century criticism of government and the denunciation of abuses of power were becoming widespread. In short, the seventeenth century emerges as the scenario for a series of political crises and religious controversies, which found expression in genuine paper-and-ink uprisings, as I hope my back-to-front analysis of three events will show.

2. *Welters of anonymous papers in the reign of Carlos II*

«The tenuous union of the ministers is the origin of the people's rumoring, and that of the libels which are precursors of the tumults which lay the ground and provide the daring which enables the release of tensions—pent up inside by respect—to burst out in open disobedience. Thus malice makes efforts to discredit the prince and make his ministers hated, cautiously working at the disposition of the vassals' souls. It casts the plebs into distrust, fires them into bursting out in open sedition»[16].

[12] R. VALLADARES RAMÍREZ, *Teatro en la Guerra. Imágenes de príncipes y restauración de Portugal*, Badajoz 2002 and B.J. GARCÍA GARCÍA - Mª.L. LOBATO (eds), *Dramaturgia festiva y cultura nobiliaria en el Siglo de Oro*, Madrid - Frankfurt a.M. 2007.

[13] M. OLIVARI, *Fra trono e opinione. La vita politica castigliana nel Cinque e Seicento*, Venezia 2002, and F. NEGREDO DEL CERRO, *Los predicadores de Felipe IV: corte, intrigas y religión en la España del Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2008.

[14] D. STUDNICKI-GIZBERT, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea. Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640*, Oxford 2007.

[15] T. EGIDO LÓPEZ, *Sátiras políticas de la España Moderna*, Madrid 1973; M. ETREROS, *La sátira política en el siglo XVII*, Madrid 1983; M. ETREROS, *La sátira política, discurso del barroco español*, in «Boletín de la Real Academia Española», 70, 1990, 251, pp. 569-590; B.J. GARCÍA GARCÍA, *Sátira política a la privanza del duque de Lerma*, in *Lo conflictivo y lo consensual en Castilla: sociedad y poder político, 1521-1715. Homenaje a Francisco Tomás y Valiente*, Murcia 2001, pp. 261-298; N. SILVA PRADA (ed.), *La política de una rebelión. Los indígenas frente al tumulto de 1692*, Ciudad de México 2006; N. SILVA PRADA, *El disenso en el siglo XVII hispanoamericano: formas y fuentes de la crítica política*, in R. FORTE - N. SILVA PRADA (eds), *Cultura política en América. Variaciones regionales y temporales*, Ciudad de México 2006, pp. 19-42, and Mª.S. ARREDONDO, *Literatura y propaganda en tiempo de Quevedo: guerras y plumas contra Francia, Cataluña y Portugal*, Madrid 2011.

[16] P. PORTOCARRERO Y GUZMÁN, *Teatro Monárquico de España,* ed. by C. SANZ AYÁN, Madrid 1998, p. 404: «De la poca unión de los ministros, nace la murmuración del

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Published at the turn of the century, these words come from the *Teatro Monárquico de España* (1700) of Pedro de Portocarrero y Guzmán, patriarch of the Indies—more precisely from its seventh chapter, which deals with «seditions and tumults», the «ruin of empire». 1700 was also the year of Carlos II's death, after naming as heir his *great* nephew Felipe de Bourbon, Duke of Anjou, who arrived in Spain a few months later in January 1701, thus inaugurating the Bourbon dynasty amid an intense battle of pamphlets between the sovereign Felipe V and the archduke Carlos of Austria, who aspired to the throne. Of the pro-Austria party it was said that they had placed their trust «more than in rallying troops, in scattering bills which are then sold at three *reales* the barrel-load»[17].

Hitherto, libels—above all those criticized so fiercely by Portocarrero—had already given notice of their full political potential during the troubled minority of Carlos II. It might be recalled how, on 2 February 1666, the Marquis of Aytona, member of the Governing Council, wrote a note to Mariana of Austria, Queen regent on the death of her husband Felipe IV in 1665, when the future King was barely four years old, informing her of the boldness of the people who were prone, in his opinion, to «speak licentiously, as is proven by the countless broadsides against the government which, even if they have always existed and have never left unaffected even the most reputed, have never been seen in such number and of such frankness»[18].

pueblo, de ésta los libelos, que son los precursores de los tumultos que disponen la materia y dan osadía a que el desahogo – que ocultamente reprime el respeto –, prorrumpa en manifiesto desacato. Intenta la malicia por este medio, desacreditar al príncipe y odiar a sus ministros, indagando con cautela la disposición de los ánimos de los vasallos. Pone la plebe en desconfianza, dándole aliento a prorrumpir en manifiesta sedición».

[17] «... más que en agregar soldados, en espaviar papeles qua luego se venden a tres reales arroba para las especías»; quoted by D. GONZÁLEZ CRUZ, *Guerra de religión entre príncipes católicos. El discurso del cambio dinástico en España y América (1700-1714)*, Madrid 2002, p. 19.

[18] G. MAURA Y GAMAZO, *Carlos II y su Corte. Ensayo de reconstrucción biográfica*, Madrid 1911, vol. 1, p. 213: «hablar licenciosamente, como manifiesta tanta multiplicidad de pasquines contra el gobierno, que aunque nunca de éstos se han librado en otros tiempos, aún los más acreditados, pero tantos ni con tanta libertad nunca se han visto». Reproduced in M. FERNÁNDEZ VALLADARES, *Catálogo bibliográfico y estudio literario de la sátira política popular madrileña (1690-1788)*, Madrid 1988, p. 88.

Between 1666 and 1669 Juan José of Austria, Vicar General of Aragon and stepbrother of the King, entered into bitter disputes with Father Nithard, the queen's confessor. On this pretext, the Court was flooded with pamphlets distributed by both factions, which acted as efficient instruments of agitation by spreading the political argument far beyond the cliques of the palace aristocrats, which had generated it[19]. The pamphlets in favor of Nithard were gathered together in the manuscript *Razón de la sinrazón*, written according to the cover by «a citizen of the kingdom of truth» and dated Madrid 15 October 1670, while the letters and other documents written by Juan and his party were compiled and published in an issue of the «Gazeta de Madrid», which he had founded, in late 1669 or early 1670[20]. The precision of the attacks and insults is the result of the collaboration of anonymous writers and poets, as the Duke of Maura noted when writing about the year 1668:

«there can have been no professional or amateur writer sitting in Court with his arms crossed, nor pen idle, nor press unemployed, nor wealthy passerby without some juicy reading matter to purchase, day after day, during those months»[21].

Something similar may be said of the later confrontation between Juan José of Austria and Fernando de Valenzuela y Enciso, the favorite of the Queen regent. Their rivalry reached its peak towards the end of 1676 when Valenzuela was raised to the status of *Grande* on 1 November. Because of his plebeian background, the aristocracy viewed the appointment so dimly that it was not slow to organize an intense propaganda campaign with the aid of libels and satires, the result of which was the triumph of those who supported Juan. As Héloïse Hermant has suggested, the various outpourings of libels were diversely motivated: if between November 1675, when Carlos II sought the backing of his

[19] A. GRAF VON KALNEIN, *Juan José de Austria en la España de Carlos II. Historia de una regencia*, Lerida 2001, pp. 152-155 and the list of pamphlets from the years 1666-1688, which are included as an appendix (pp. 516-520).

[20] C. GÓMEZ-CENTURIÓN JIMÉNEZ, *La sátira política durante el reinado de Carlos II*, in «Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea», 4, 1983, pp. 11-33, here pp. 13-14. On the «Gazeta de Madrid», see E. VARELA HERVIÁS, *Gazeta Nueva 1661-1663 (Notas sobre la historia del periodismo español en la segunda mitad del siglo XVII)*, Madrid 1960.

[21] «... no debió quedar en la corte escritor profesional ni espontáneo cruzado de brazos, ni pluma ociosa, ni imprenta sin trabajo, ni ciego pobre sin papeles que vocear y vender, ni transeúnte adinerado sin sabrosa lectura que adquirir, día tras día, durante aquellos meses»; G. MAURA Y GAMAZO, *Vida y reinado de Carlos II*, Madrid 1990, p. 105.

stepbrother, and November 1676 the aim was to convince the King and his courtiers of the injustice of Juan's return; after November 1676 the objective became that of giving vent to the discontent and hatred inspired by the favorite; in short, the libels stopped being a form of protest to become one of action. Thus, the earlier broadsides sought to mobilize court sectors against Valenzuela, the target for numerous threats and satires, while the later ones were rather exercises in persuasion with the goal of justifying intervention on the part of Juan, to which end there were contributions from new textual genres such as the relations of the march on Madrid and the sermons in praise of his appointment as favorite. With this change in textual forms came new audiences of diffusion, for if between November 1676 and January 1677 the epicenter of this opinion-shaping campaign had been the court, from 23 January 1677 and Juan's designation as prime minister, a broader public was targeted, a fact reflected in the increased number of libels[22].

Once designated favorite, Juan José of Austria's mandate was clouded by confrontations with his adversaries and the delicate situation of the kingdom, afflicted by poor harvests, hunger, and outbreaks of plague. The favorite started to lose popular support as he came under fire in numerous broadsides like the one posted in the Casa de la Panadería in Madrid's main square, which greeted the morning of 9 April 1677 with the words: «What did mister Juan show up for? / To take down the horse and put up the price of bread?»; or another posted the week before, on 2 April, in the Palace: «Last year meat / cost fourteen; / bread costs eleven; / and so it hasn't gone down / more than the horse of bronze»[23]. With so many problems clogging the offices of power, it sounded like a bad joke that the favorite should be concerned about moving the equestrian statue of Felipe IV from the façade of the

[22] H. HERMANT, *La función de los libelos en la lucha política de los Grandes y de don Juan frente a la reina y su valido Valenzuela: publicidad, polémica y transacción (1676-1677)*, in A. CASTILLO GÓMEZ - J. AMELANG - C. SERRANO SÁNCHEZ (eds), *Opinión pública y espacio urbano en la Edad Moderna*, Gijón 2010, pp. 455-472 and H. HERMANT, *Guerres de plumes. Publicité et cultures politiques dans l'Espagne du XVIIe siècle*, Madrid 2012.

[23] J.A. VALENCIA IDIÁQUEZ, *Diario de noticias de 1677 a 1678*, in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España (CODOIN)*, Madrid 1877, vol. 67, pp. 105-106: «¿A qué vino el señor don Juan? / A bajar el caballo y subir el pan»; «La carne el año pasado / valía a sólo catorce; / el pan se vale a sus once; / y en éste no se ha bajado / más que el caballo de bronce».

Alcazar to the Buen Retiro while the price of bread rose unabated and the crisis of basic staples was worsening. So great was the government's disrepute that jokes and jibes abounded in the form of libels and *coplas* distributed and read in the streets of Madrid[24].

The events outlined above underline the importance attained by broadsides when it came to shaping opinion in the age of Carlos II, reaching peaks of intensity in the years 1669-1670, 1671-1679, 1693-1695 and 1700. This was, in short, a period enveloped in a «cloud of anonymous papers», in the felicitous expression of Juan Antonio Armona[25], papers which were certainly capable of stirring and mobilizing the people, as some of the news items gathered in the «Gazeta» for 1668 testify:

«The current novelties at court are as follows: a broadside was seen by the palace gates, which shall be overlooked on account of its excessive shamelessness. There are lots of papers going around and it'd be better if there weren't; one and all stir up the people»[26].

Setting aside their reference to Spanish exceptionality that context accounts for the terms doctor Geleen used when writing to the Elector Palatine in March 1697:

«The King drives out in his coach to the countryside every afternoon but is still very melancholic even though the Queen does all she can to amuse him. She is now such a decisive influence on him that the well intentioned bless this illness for the excellent result it has wrought. However, the slanderers intensify their attaches and speak of separating King from Queen and putting the latter in a convent. Such free speaking against the monarchs is unheard of; no German prince would tolerate that people spoke with such impunity half as much as they do in Madrid»[27].

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[24] A. GRAF VON KALNEIN, *Juan José de Austria en la España de Carlos II*, pp. 483-487.

[25] BNE, Ms. 18206, fol. 90v. Quoted by C. GÓMEZ-CENTURIÓN JIMÉNEZ, *La sátira política*, p. 11.

[26] M. DANVILA Y COLLADO, *El poder civil en España*, vol. 3, p. 211: «Las novedades que al presente hay en la Corte son las siguientes: se vio un pasquín en las puertas de Palacio, que por demasiado desvergonzado no se refiere. Andan muchos papeles, que más valiera que no; porque unos y otros inquietan al pueblo».

[27] A. DE BAVIERA - G. MAURA GAMAZO (eds), *Documentos inéditos referentes a las postrimerías de la Casa de Austria en España*, Madrid 2004, vol. 1, p. 607: «El Rey sale en coche al campo todas las tardes, pero sigue muy melancolico, aunque la Reina hace todo lo posible por divertirle. Tiene ahora sobre él influencia decisiva, tanto que los bien intencionados bendicen esta enfermedad que ha traí este óptimo resultado. Los calumniadores, en cambio, redoblan su ataques y hablan de separar a los Reyes y de meter a la Reina en un convento. Nunca se oyó hablar con tanta libertad contra los

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3. *Paper wars in the age of Felipe IV*

The earlier age of Felipe IV and his favorite Olivares was no less prodigal in its use of broadsides as tools of agitation, which were circulated around the different territories of the kingdom, which had taken up in arms against the hegemony of Castile, with Catalonia and Portugal at the forefront. This rebellion found expression in «papers posted on walls which invited to uprising», as Antonio Carvalho de Parada informed the Conde-Duque in 1634 in relation to events in Portugal[28]. Although single page libels continued to be handed around, the lion's share of opinion forming of a particular kind fell to other texts better suited to argument and the discussion of ideas, texts which led to the outbreak of genuine *guerras de papel* (paper wars), defined as the «literary and propaganda phenomenon generated by works written around and justifying the wars of 1635 and 1640 in response to others written by the enemy, whether Spanish or foreign»[29].

In the case of Portugal, one of the supporters of the cause of the Spanish monarchy, Nicolás Fernández de Castro, in 1647 published his work *Portugal convencida con la razón para ser vencida con las católicas potentísimas armas de don Felipe IV*, which accused his fellow countrymen of having disseminated around the world so many texts, translated into every language, against the King of Castile that no day went by without some sort of publication: «today a manifesto, tomorrow a history, one day a book, another a volume» and so on («in a continuous outpouring», «flowing ceaselessly»)[30]. Preceded as it was during the reigns of Felipe III

Soberanos; ningúm Príncipe alemán toleraria que se dijse impunemente ni la mitad de lo que en Madrid se dice».

[28] Lisboa, Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (hereafter IAN/TT), *Casa Fronteira*, 20, p. 67: «papeles fijados en las paredes convidando ad levantamiento». On the importance of handbills in the protests against the Conde Duque, see T. EGIDO LÓPEZ, *La sátira política, arma de la oposición a Olivares*, in A. GARCÍA SANZ - J. ELLIOTT (eds), *La España del Conde Duque de Olivares*, Valladolid 1990, pp. 339-372.

[29] Mª.S. ARREDONDO, *Literatura y propaganda en tiempo de Quevedo*, p. 123 and, more generally, pp. 123-355.

[30] N. FERNÁNDEZ DE CASTRO, *Portugal convenzida con la razón para ser venzida con las cathólicas potentíssimas armas de Don Philippe IV ...*, Milan 1647, p. 5: «hoy un manifiesto, mañana una historia, otro día un libro, otro un volumen»; «en movimiento continuo»; «girando sin sosiego».

and Felipe IV by a rich vein of anti-Castilian agitation in the form of tracts, manifestos, and anonymous political writings which were largely the work of members of the church who set down on paper what they proclaimed from the pulpit[31], between 1640 and 1668 the Portuguese War of Independence fuelled intense pamphleteering, whether written or printed. Portuguese activity in this regard clearly outstripped that of the supporters of Felipe IV in spite of the remarks of Father Timotheo de Cimbra Pimentel: «Not without good cause and reason do I say, soldiers, that the Castilians of today are bigger blusterers than heroes, more able with their tongues than their swords, skilled in all manner of offences and broadsides»[32]. Fernando Bouza has attributed this to a certain reticence on the Crown's part lest their propaganda be taken as anti-Portuguese and to the greater attention that was being paid to clashes with France in Catalonia and other parts of Europe[33].

As for the Catalan uprising, a genuine propaganda war between opposed political views took place there[34]. Henry Ettinghaussen has documented the wide-ranging pamphleteering that went on during the *guerra dels segadors* (1640-1652): according to his estimates, based on the examples held in the Bonsoms collection of the Biblioteca de Catalunya, on

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[31] J.F. MARQUES, *A parenética portuguesa e a dominação filipina*, Porto 1986, pp. 50-51. On sermons as agitation see also the same author's *A parenética portuguesa e a Restauração 1640-1668: a revolta e a mentalidade*, 2 vols, Porto 1989.

[32] T. DE C. PIMENTEL, *Exhortação militar, ou lança de Achilles, aos soldados portuguezes, pela defensão do seu rey, reyno, & patria, em o presente apresto de guerra*, Lisboa 1650, fol. 19r: «No lo digo, soldados, sin causa y grandes motivos, que los castellanos hoy son más fanfarrones que hazañosos; manejan mejor la lengua que las armas, diestros en todo género de delitos y pasquinadas».

[33] F. BOUZA, *Papeles y público barrocos. En torno a la publicística hispana durante la guerra y Restauração portuguesas de 1640 a 1668*, in A. MEROTA - G. MUTO - E. VALERI - M.A. VISCEGLIA (eds), *Storia sociale e politica. Omaggio a Rosario Villari*, Milano 2007, pp. 371-407, supplemented with appendix 2 (pp. 397-407). These clashes were accompanied by a well-established pamphleteering tradition that reached a peak in 1635, as argued in the classic study by J.Mª. JOVER ZAMORA, *1635. Historia de una polémica y semblanza de una generación*, Madrid 1949.

[34] J. REULA BIESCAS, *1640-1647: una aproximación a la publicística de la «guerra dels segadors»*, in «Pedralbles: Revista d'historia moderna», 11, 1991, pp. 91-108, and *Guerra y propaganda en la Cataluña de 1635-1659*, in «Historia y comunicación social», 1, 1996, pp. 87-107.

average 21 news pamphlets were printed each year[35]. That figure would be greatly increased if other collections were included in the calculation and the significant but more slippery manuscript output. Whether employed by Olivares for the purposes of his own propaganda or by those in Catalonia who were fighting for independence, the pamphlets were passed from hand to hand, generating considerable anxiety and concern in the process. In a note, the Conde-Duque was grieved to observe that the large quantity of manifestos which flooded the streets of Barcelona during the troubled year of 1640:

«had reached the extremes observable today, so that it may be affirmed that all credulity is strained by the disrespect, disobedience, and agitation, for they have armed, have publicly made manifestos, have stirred up the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, have even, so they say, written to the Pope and others, opened the gate to the French and their levies of cavalry ...»[36].

Similar terms were employed in 1640 by the author of *Discursos tocantes al Principado de Cataluña para su gobierno y conservación* when reporting the atmosphere of tension that reigned in the capital of Catalonia after the publication of the *Proclamación Católica a la Magestad piadosa de Felipe el Grande*, written in Castilian by the Augustine friar Gaspar Sala, but officially signed by the city's councilors and published in October of the same year with the aim of spreading among the men in the street the arguments devised by the *Junta Especial de Teólogos* [Special Theological Committee] at the behest of the Principality to explain its right to take up arms in its own defense. In various editions and translated into French, Dutch, and Portuguese, this work—as José Pellicer noted—was sent out «after various letters and libels with the stamp of manifestos» and «ended up frustrating all efforts to preserve order»[37]. The following month, acting on the orders of the city magis-

[35] H. ETTINGHAUSSEN, *La guerra dels segadors a través de la premsa de l'epoca*, Barcelona 1993, vol. 1, p. 14

[36] IAN/TT, *Manuscritos da Livraria*, liv. 1116, no. 81, *Papel que o Conde Duque de San Lúcar fez sobre as alterações de Catalunha*, p. 716: «haya llegado a las extremidades que hoy se ven, que se puede decir que no es posible creer más en cuanto al desacato, inobediencia y concitación, habiéndose armado, públicamente echo manifiestos, concitado los Reinos de Aragón y Valencia, escrito, según dicen, al Papa y quizá a otros, abierto la puerta a los franceses para sus levas de caballería ...».

[37] J. PELLICER DE OSSAU I TOVAR, *Avisos: 17 de mayo de 1639-29 de noviembre de 1644*, ed. by J.C. CHEVALIER - L. CLARE, Paris 2002, vol. 1, p. 157: «después de diversas cartas y libelos con voz de manifiestos»; «acabó de desbaratar todos los medios de concierto».

trates, 3,000 copies were printed of the *Noticia Universal de Cataluña*, also written in Castilian, by the lawyer Francesc Martí i Viladamor. This work mentioned the various occasions on which Olivares had contravened the *constitucions* and raised the possibility of the Principality's separating from the Spanish monarchy[38]. Earlier, the Junta de Ejecución del Consejo de Aragón [Executive Committee of the Council of Aragon] had already registered alarm at the proliferation of seditious writings and pamphlets and had even agreed at its meeting of 17 July to impede their circulation and appoint a special committee to examine the contents of those that were already in the streets[39].

Nor were complaints about the intensity and diffusion of broadsides forthcoming from the Court alone. The Catalan party too remarked the ease with which the enemy of the Principality acted. In one manifesto, the *Secrets publichs. Pedra de toch, de les intencions del enemich y llum de la veritat* (1641), another work by the aforementioned Gaspar Sala, which was translated into Portuguese, French, and Castilian, specific mention was made of the «loose-leaf deceptions and posters being distributed by the enemy of the Principality of Catalunya» in further testimony of the capacity to agitate which both sides attributed to broadsides. As Sala puts it:

«To throw into confusion those who govern; to fill with doubt the well-intentioned; to deceive the people and, ultimately, to sow discord, upset spirits, divide wills, kindle disagreement and destroy Catalunya in civil wars, loose sheets are being distributed which summarily offer a general pardon to all Catalans as if they had committed an offence in using their right to self-defense ...»[40].

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[38]   G. PARKER, *El desarrollo de la crisis*, in G. PARKER (ed.), *La crisis de la monarquía de Felipe IV*, Barcelona 2006, p. 92. On the role of these texts in the evolution of the Catalan rebellion, see A. SIMON I TARRÉS, *Els orígens ideològigcs de la revolució catalana de 1640*, Barcelona 1999, pp. 173-198.

[39]   Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, *Consejo de Aragón*. leg. 287, caja 24. In this connection, see J.H. ELLIOTT, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain (1598-1640)*, Cambridge 1963.

[40]   *Secrets Publichs. Pedra de Toch, de les intencions del enemich y llum de la veritat. Que manifeste los enganys, y carteles de uns papers que va distribuint lo enemich per lo Principat de Catalunya*. Biblioteca de Catalunya, *Fullets Bonsoms*, 9971, fol. A1r. The Castilian version quoted here is in the same collection, 2181, fol. A1r: «Para enturbiar a los que gobiernan; para hacer vacilar a los bien intencionados; para engañar al pueblo, y últimamente para sembrar cizaña, perturbar los ánimos, dividir las voluntades, despertar discordias y destruir a Cataluña con guerras civiles, van distribuyendo unos

4. *Harsh words regarding the Immaculate Conception*

If the events discussed so far had to do with the political organization and government of the Monarchy, similar phenomena also cropped up in the field of religious controversies. In connection with the matter at hand, this is best illustrated by the debate over the Immaculate Conception that chiefly took place in the early decades of the seventeenth century and bore four important features: its length in time, its intensity, the sizeable production of different tracts and broadsides, and the spread of the controversy through the different territories of the Spanish Monarchy.

Setting aside the theological issues, it should at least be noted that the dispute over the Immaculate Virgin had been dragging on in Christendom since the twelfth century, when the clergy of Lyon instituted the feast day of the same name on 8 December. Unfinished business ever since the Council of Trent, where the assembled prelates avoided any decision on the question when passing judgment on original sin, the dispute broke out again in the early seventeenth century as a result of two papal dispositions, one issued by Paul V (1617), another by Gregory XV (1622), which were favorable to supporters of the mystery. Later, on 8 December 1661, Alexander VII would promulgate the bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* that defined the true meaning of the word «conception» and sanctioned any public questioning or discussion of the matter[41]. In the early 1600s, while embassies went back and forth to Rome to obtain the pontifical *venia*, the situation in different cities of the Spanish world on both sides of the Atlantic grew particularly stormy.

One of the places where the controversy made itself felt with a vengeance was Seville, a city immaculate in its religious observance. A turning point came with the sermon preached by Fr. Domingo de Molina, prior of the Dominican convent of Regina Angelorum, on the day of the Virgin's Birth (8 September) of 1613. In it he argued that the Virgin had been conceived like any other mortal, «like you, like

papeles sueltos, que sumariamente ofrecen perdón general a todos los catalanes, como si hubiesen delinquido en usar del derecho de la natural defensa ...».

[41] E. Ruiz-Gálvez Priego, *Du péché originiel au péché des origines: évolution et socialisation de la notion de «macula» (Espagne XIIIe-XVIe siécles)*, in E. Ruiz-Gálvez Priego (ed.), *L'Immaculisme. Un imaginaire religieux dans sa projection sociale*, Paris 2009, pp. 98-126.

me and like Martin Luther, and then sanctified»[42]. This was followed on 9 February 1615 by the Dominican friars' efforts to hinder the departure of the procession of the figure of the Immaculate Virgin, which was kept in the same convent, and by the broadside they posted on the cathedral's Door of Forgiveness a month later[43]. As was customary, that broadside was answered by canticles and libels, as well as by the plethora of posters displayed at the Puerta Colorada and numerous of the city's public buildings and houses which proclaimed «Holy Mary, conceived without the stain of original sin», as may be read from a handwritten example kept together with the various texts that accompany the *Memorial sumario ... cerca de las contradicciones que los religiosos de santo Domingo han hecho a los que defienden y siguen la opinión pía* (1615), which the archbishop of Seville and chief promoter of the Immaculate cause, Pedro de Castro y Quiñones, published in order to refute and to curb the daring polemicizing of the Dominican friars[44].

The upshot of all this was a series of confrontations in various parts of the archbishopric (Seville, Aracena, Écija, Morón de la Frontera, Osuna, and Jerez de la Frontera), reports of which never tired of highlighting the acts of infamy and aggression perpetrated by the friars on the supporters of the Immaculate Conception, and above all on the Jesuits and Franciscans, who were—as the *Memorial* remarks—the butt of gibes couched in «ásperas palabras» (fol. 3v) [harsh words]. In minute detail the *Memorial* records the invectives poured out in different sermons and the libels spread around in *coplas* and libels, posted «at every corner of the city», as were the many distributed by the Dominicans in Seville and in other of the archbishopric's towns on the occasion of the eight

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[42] J.L. LABRADOR - R. DI FRANCO - J.M. RICO GARCÍA (eds), *Cancionero sevillano de Fuenmayor*, Sevilla 2004, pp. 30-31: «como vos, como yo y como Martin Lutero, y luego santificada».

[43] M. DE LOS REYES PEÑA, *Un pasquín anti-inmaculista en la Sevilla del primer tercio del siglo XVII*, in R. REYES CANO - M. DE LOS REYES - K. WAGNER (eds), *Sevilla y la literatura. Homenaje al profesor Francisco López Estrada en su 80 cumpleaños*, Sevilla 2001, pp. 133-160.

[44] *Memorial sumario de las veynte y quatro informaciones que el Arzobispo de Sevilla mandó hazer cerca de las contradiciones que los religiosos de santo Domingo han hecho a los que defienden y siguen la opinión pía de que la Virgen N. S. fue concebida sin pecado original*, 1615; BNE, Ms. 9956, fol. 1: «Maria Santisima concebida sin mancha de pecado original».

days of festivity in honor of the Virgin. In addition to the diffusion of blasphemies and impious opinions, the Dominicans were accused of acts of actual physical violence against those who defended Mary's Immaculate Conception—against even the children who had a hand in spreading the cause. The involvement of the schools and children in disseminating pro-Immaculate Conception fervor is reflected in various libels such as the one, which «was posted in Madrid, in the doorway of the church of the Dominican Fathers» and invoked to boot «the opinion of the children of Seville»[45].

The Immaculate Conception cult was defended belligerently by some sectors of the church and was taken up by the public with considerable enthusiasm; this translated into a copious output of papers, prints, libels, and *coplas*. In Seville, the controversy kept the presses so busy that between 1615 and 1617 a total of 117 documents concerning the issue were printed, 36 of which were accounts of festivities[46]. As for *coplas*, an *Instrucción*, or instruction manual, was even printed giving the correct melody for their singing. It also stated that those songs had to be taught to children in school for two or three weeks so that they could then sing them «at home and in the street at all hours, day and night»; everyone else, meanwhile, should teach them «to each other so that all in unison might say the same thing». In a footnote, it directed teachers and companies of monks and nuns to post «a printed version, and *coplas* of these [songs] on a board or card in a public place where all might read and learn them»[47].

However, as I said above, the echo of the Immaculate Conception controversy was heard in other cities. In 1618, in the capital of New

[45] BNE, Ms. 9956, fol. 134v: «se fijó en Madríd, en las puertas de la iglesia de los Padre Dominicos»; «la opinión de los niños de Sevilla». This libel is preceded and followed by other transcriptions of diverse verses, mottos, and compositions related to the Immaculate Conception controversy.

[46] A. DOMÍNGUEZ GUZMÁN, *La imprenta en Sevilla en el siglo XVII. 1601-1650 (Catálogo y análisis de su producción)*, Sevilla 1992 and A. DOMÍNGUEZ GUZMÁN, *Relaciones de fiestas inmaculistas en Sevilla (1615-1617). Catálogo descriptivo*, in R. REYES CANO - M. DE LOS REYES PEÑA - K. WAGNER (eds), *Sevilla y la literatura*, pp. 231-245.

[47] BNE, Ms. 9956, fol. 12r: «en su casa y por las calles a todos tiempos, de día y de noche»; «unos a otros, de manera que todos lo puedan leer y aprender»; «una estampa, y coplas de éstas en una tabla o cartón, en una parte publica donde todos lo puedar leer y aprender».

Spain the silversmith's guild organized a feast day in its honor under the aegis of Paul V's brief[48]. As in Seville, the party in favor received support from the Franciscan archbishop and promoter of the cult, Juan Pérez de la Serna; as the Dominicans were opposed, fear of losing the Chair of Thomism at the newly inaugurated Royal University of Mexico came into the equation[49]. Once the controversy hit the streets, the Dominican friars produced numerous *coplas* and satires which ironized on the celebration of the mystery and which the Franciscans answered with other verses of devotion to the Virgin. The episode came to be known as the *guerra de versos* [war of the verses] given their intensity and abundance. It is no surprise that the sonnets and songs were said to have been used almost as *proyectiles* [projectiles] since «in considerable numbers they passed from hand to hand»[50].

Events took a similar course in Huesca in the stormy summer of 1619. Several months earlier, on 16 April, in line with other academies the university had sworn allegiance to the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, in which they were followed immediately by the municipal authorities[51]. In the course of the program of festivities sermons were preached, plays were put on, and different *coplas* and satires were handed around, which were hostile to the Dominican position, as one such, Father Juan de Biescas, later professor in the same university, reported in a letter to the Supreme Council of the Inquisition on 19 June. To be more precise, in connection with the libels he noted that «an outrageously blasphemous verse is going round in which the author swears terrible oaths against those of the opposite opinion» and «there is also a satire going round which starts off by telling the Virgin that it keeps clean during the week but is dirty on Sunday and whose sole

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[48] J. JIMÉNEZ RUEDA, *Breve relación de las fiestas que los artífices plateros, vecinos de México, celebraron a la Purísima Virgen María, el día de la Inmaculada Concepción. Año 1618*, in «Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación», 30, 1945, pp. 349-383.

[49] M. CHOCANO MENA, *La fortaleza docta. Élite letrada y dominación social en México colonial (siglos XVI-XVII)*, Barcelona 2000, pp. 232-237.

[50] Ciudad de México, Archivo General de la Nación, *Inquisición*, vol. 485, exp. 16, fols 230-236: The file consists of approximately 160 sheets recording many versions of the *coplas* which circulated.

[51] M. RODÉS VINUÉS, *Huesca y la Inmaculada*, in «Argensola. Revista de Ciencias Sociales del Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses», 37, 1959, pp. 47-60.

concern is to abuse the Dominicans by telling them that they make the Virgin dirty»[52]. Once again, the Dominican order was at the epicenter of the invective, while the promoters of the pro-Immaculate Conception theses were the Jesuits. Indeed the latter ended up opening a college in the city, which explains in part why—as in Mexico—the confrontation between Dominicans and Franciscans in Huesca had much to do with gaining control of education at a time when the city's university was emerging from a period of lethargy.

5. *Publication and public opinion*

The episodes we have considered in the foregoing sections are all similar in being genuine written events. And this is so not just because print technology enabled them to be recorded and later recalled, but chiefly because writing played an active part in their coming to be historical facts as well as in their introduction into the public sphere, with the result that the public could become aware of what was happening and take part in its evolution. As we have seen, public diffusion by means of broadsides, libels, and *coplas* was a feature common to the power struggles unleashed during the minority of Carlos II, the «paper wars» of the reign of Felipe IV and the vehement Immaculate Conception controversy of the early seventeenth century.

Although in other situations the broadsides functioned as «signs of troubles», to adopt Francis Bacon's phrase[53], in other words, as warnings of popular discontent with those in government, as far as the events I have described here (and others which could also have been adduced) are concerned, it was written texts that actually incited to action. In so far as the political and religious tracts lent themselves to a more leisurely perusal behind the closed doors of the offices where some of the uprisings were hatched, the broadsides of the streets passed from hand to hand like

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[52] AHN, *Inquisición*, leg. 4453[1], exp. 22: «anda un soneto escandaloso y blasfemo en donde el autor hace juramentos horrendos contra los de la opinión contraria»; «también anda una sátira que comienza diciendo a la Virgen que anda limpia entre semana y sucia el domingo, donde todo es maltratar a los religiosos dominicos diciéndoles que hacen sucia a la Virgen».

[53] F. BACON, *Of Seditions and Troubles*, in *The Essays*, Harmondsworth 1985, p. 101 [*Essays*, London 1625].

in an early system of *samizdat*[54]. One need only recall how, for example, in the times of the viceroy Palafox in Mexico, over 2,000 printed and manuscript copies were made of a libel attributed to the judge González de Villalba and circulated throughout the West Indies[55].

In each set of circumstances, the levels of argument and social agitation reached were clearly related to the use made of intense political and religious pamphleteering. Distressed at the widespread contestation of Felipe IV, Saavedra Fajardo, a loyal diplomat, wondered in one of his *empresas políticas* [political enterprises]: «What defamatory libels, what false manifestoes, what feigned Mounts Parnassus, what malicious broadsides have yet to be spilled against the Monarchy of Spain?»; he attributed it all to the fondness for rumoring and lying when—in his opinion—the splendor and justice of the Christian prince were at their height[56]. Bearing in mind the capacity to mobilize and to shape opinion attributed to the broadsides, it becomes easy to understand the severity of such prohibitions as the one, which was attempted of the pamphlets accompanying the Catalan rising against the same king:

«let nobody own, read, or hear any book or paper, be it printed or handwritten, which justifies, warns, counsels, and encourages the uprising in this principality and the continuance of the war; and be it forbidden that anyone who knows by heart any part of those books or papers should relate them or that anyone should hear them»[57].

The ephemeral nature of some of these texts or *coplas*, which were often sung in tandem, was made up for by the public nature of their diffu-

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[54]   P. BURKE, *Varieties of Cultural History*, Ithaca NY 1997, p. 116.

[55]   J. TORIBIO MEDINA, *Historia del Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en México*, Santiago de Chile 1905, p. 220, quoted by N. SILVA PRADA, *El disenso en el siglo XVII hispanoamericano*, p. 35.

[56]   D. DE SAAVEDRA FAJARDO, *Empresas políticas* (1640), ed. by F.J. DÍEZ DE REVENGA, Barcelona 1988, p. 90: «¿Qué libelos infamatorios, qué manifiestos falsos, qué fingidos Parnasos, qué pasquines maliciosos no se han esparcido contra la monarquía de España?».

[57]   *Constituciones Synodales del obispado de Lérida. Hechas en el Synodo que ha celebrado en la Cathedral en 29 de mayo de 1645 Años, el Illustríssimo y Reverendísimo Señor Don F. Pedro de Santiago, su Obispo y predicador de su Magestad*, Lérida, 1645, fol. 13. Cf. A. SIMON I TARRÉS, *Els orígens ideològics de la revolució catalana*, p. 218: «que nadie tenga en su poder, no lea, ni oiga leer libro ni papel alguno; ahora sea de imprenta o de letra de mano en que justifique, exhorte, amoneste, aconseje y anime el levantamiento de este Principado, y a la continuación de la guerra; y que el que supiere de coro *[i. e. de memoria]* algunas cosas de estos libros o papeles no pueda relatarlas, ni nadie oírlas».

sion, the daily reading of them by huddles of people, and finally their memorization[58]. This was above all due, as proclaimed by a broadside against Louis XIV of France published in Barcelona in 1689, to the fact that «odd leaflets of a few pages penetrate, are read, and get through much better and faster than books»[59]. This is vouched for by the assessment Father Gil Ballester, rector of the College of the Company of Jesus in Huesca, provided in a letter to the Supreme Council of the Inquisition on account of the libels and *coplas* which were spread around the city in the summer of 1658 as part of a new chapter in the Immaculate Conception controversy, which also witnessed a growing suspicion of power and the influence being accumulated by the Jesuits.

To judge from the qualifications document, it was a «a joke at the expense of the pious doctrine of the Pure Conception, and accordingly in contravention of the apostolic briefs», as well as «a most grave and defamatory libel against the religion of this Company of Jesus, which denigrates its reputation and doctrine on the most serious of subjects[60]. Identical arguments were applied to other printed *coplas*, likewise censured, entitled *Soliloquio pío entre los padres Escobar, Mauricio y Torres*; written in dialogue form, these accused the Jesuits of defending the mystery of the Immaculate Conception for purely economic reasons. The exposition concluded that the author deserved no other qualification than «sower of discord», in Gil Ballester's opinion. In his letter, apart from thus qualifying the alleged author of the *coplas*, Lorenzo Cabero, who argued that «they had come into his hands» and that he had them at home together with another handwritten paper, the rector

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[58] A. CASTILLO GÓMEZ, *Leer en la calle. Coplas, avisos y panfletos áureos*, in «Literatura. Teoría, Historia, Crítica», 7, 2005, pp. 15-43, and by the same author, *Entre la pluma y la pared. Una historia social de la escritura en los siglos de Oro*, Madrid 2006, pp. 229-237.

[59] *Suspiros de la Francia esclava, que aspira a ponerse en libertad*, s.l., 1698, fol. [1]: «los papeles curiosos de pocas hojas penetran, se leen y se despachan mucho mejor y más prontamente que los libros», Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, H.G. 14984/7 P., http://purl.pt/21848 (accessed April 6, 2012); cf. A. ESPINO LÓPEZ, *Publicística y guerra de opinión. El caso catalán durante la guerra de los nueve años, 1689-1697*, in «Stvdia Historica. Historia Moderna», 14, 1996, pp. 173-190, here p. 177.

[60] AHN, *Inquisición*, leg. 44531, exp. 29, fol. 9r, Huesca, 18 August 1658: «una chanza contra la opinión pía de la Purísima Concepción, en lo aval contraviene contra los breves apostólicos»; «un gravísimo libelo infamatorio conra la religión de esta Compañía de Jesus, denigrativo de su fama y opinión en materias gravísimas».

mentions other details with a direct bearing on the forms of publication employed on these occasions:

«That good old gentleman, Lorenzo Cabero, with disregard for God, His saints, and our company, goes around looking for tittle-tattle, shaggy dog stories and defamatory libels with which to slander us because we do not discharge his son; and with equal disrespect he goes reading it all in knots of people, in squares and at meetings; and if he finds any of the Company in the street or by the churches he lays into them, telling them that 'thieves, usurers, revealers of confessions, and such and such do not hurry to go out into the street or to appear before the people,' and shouting and summoning such a crowd that the fathers think twice before setting foot outside their house. And it seems to me that the Lords Inquisitors are quite right to arraign him so that he might give account of the confessions we reveal, and so forth; and for being instigator and publisher of defamatory libels which he carries around the whole city and reads and concluding, saying 'Get to know all these thieves,' etcetera, heaping a thousand insults on religion, to the point where the whole of Huesca is outraged, since as there are so many riff-raff and bad Christians, they laugh with him, read in public and listen, and will have copies made»[61].

In short, without diminishing in any way the importance of those texts that took the form of tracts and were usually circulated in more select and better-educated circles, we should not underestimate the repercussion of the broadsides, both pinned up on walls and passed around or sung in the streets. Nor should we overlook the importance of the language and style in which they were written: they commonly adopted the language of everyday speech and very often turned to composition in verse (satires, romances, sonnets, ten-liners) or in dialogue or question and answer form, since all of these textual strategies made for greater memorability and transmissibility. Thus, during the anti-French disturbances in Catalonia, one of the printed reports

[61] AHN, *Inquisición*, leg. 44531, exp. 29, fol. 9r, Huesca, 18 August 1658: «habian llegado a sus manos»; «Este buen viejo don Lorenzo Cabero, sin respeto a Dios ni a sus santos ni a nuestra Compañía, va buscando chismes, patrañas y libelos infamatorios con que infamarla porque no le despiden a su hijo, y con igual descrédito lo va leyendo en corrillos, plazas y juntas, y si encuentra algunos de la Compañía por calles e iglesias arremete a ellos diciéndoles 'no se corren de ir por las calles ni aparecer delante de gentes los ladrones, usureros, reveladores de confesiones y otras cosas a este tono', gritando y convocando concurso de suerte que reparen los padres en salir de casa. Y me parece tienen bastante razón los señores Inquisidores para llamarle, para que dé razón de las confesiones que revelamos, etcétera; y por fautor y publicador de libelos infamatorios, que los va llevando y leyendo por toda la ciudad y echando el contrapunto diciendo 'conózcanlos todos a estos ladrones', etcétera, con mil denuestos de la religión, que tiene escandalizada a toda Huesca, pues como hay tanto vulgo y malos cristianos se ríen con él, leen públicamente y oyen y habrán hecho copias».

mentioned a group of eight Catalans, «afectos a la nación española» [loyal to the Spanish nation], who were organized into two groups and went around proclaiming their stance at five o'clock in the afternoon in Barcelona's Born Square. When one group shouted «Viva España», the other responded «Viva, Viva»; when the former continued, «Muera Francia y su gobierno» [Death to France and its government!], the latter replied «Muera Francia y muera luego» [Death to France, and two times death!]. The report adds that as they went shouting through the crowded streets «the tumult and shouting grew louder and louder until midnight, when the people calmed down again» but the atmosphere had already been primed and the next day was stoked still further by at least three different broadsides which appeared at daybreak «in four parts of the city, in the Catalan tongue, and they remained posted all day, with no one bold enough to take them down»[62].

In other cases, the use of images assisted in the reception and interpretation of the messages, as attested by a Portuguese satire of 1641 in which Felipe IV and the Conde-Duque were caricaturized as Don Quijote and Sancho, just when they were preparing to take reprisals for Portugal's declaration of independence[63]. Satirical drawings and other pictorial elements pinned to walls are evidence of the tight link between written culture and the image, even more so in so far as quite a number of texts were highly visual in conception. A good example of this is the intense anti-Spanish propaganda produced in Flanders during

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[62] *Relación de la famosa Vitoria que han tenido las armas de Su Majestad en el Principado de Cataluña en la toma de las villas y castillos de Alcarraf y Scananbou por los fines de enero deste año de 1651. Dase quenta de los grandes alborotos y discordias que ay en Cataluña entre catalanes y franceses, y los pasquines que se han puesto en la ciudad de Barcelona contra los franceses y los que siguen su parcialidad en aquel Principado,* Sevilla 1651, pp. 1-2, «fue creciendo el tumulto y vocería hasta medianoche, que se sosegó la gente». El clima, sin embargo, ya estaba caldeado y al día siguiente tuvo su continuación, pero esta vez mediante pasquines, al menos tres distintos, que amanecieron «en cuatro partes de la ciudad, en lengua catalana, y estuvieron todo el día fijados sin que nadie se atreviese a quitarlos», Sevilla, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, Impreso 61-5-8/41. I owe this reference to Jaime Pereda Martín.

[63] New York, Hispanic Society of America, MS HC 380/80. Cf. J.H. ELLIOTT, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline,* New Haven CT - London 1986, p. 621. On this libel and the use of Cervantes's characters, see E.L. ROVERS, *Don Quixote's Fatherly Advice, and Olivare's,* in «Cervantes», 18, 1998, 2, pp. 74-84, and J. MONTERO REGUERA, *El* Quijote *en 1640: Historia, política y algo de literatura,* in «Edad de Oro», 25, 2006, pp. 437-446.

the revolt in the Low Countries, above all between 1566 and 1584, the year when William of Nassau «The Taciturn» was assassinated; so much so, in fact, that the Eighty Years' War may well be considered the first major «paper war» to be waged on the European stage[64].

As I said at the start, it may be that what we are dealing with here are manifestations of public opinion in the strict sense of Habermas in whose eyes before the eighteenth century it only made sense to speak of opinions expressed by isolated individuals and with no political consequences. Or it may be that the concept should be given a spin and understood along the lines proposed by the German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who, after reviewing the different definitions which have been offered for public opinion, suggests that they all stem from two basic concepts:

«1) Public opinion as rationality. It is instrumental in the process of opinion formation and decision-making in a democracy.

2) Public opinion as social control. Its role is to promote social integration and to ensure that there is a sufficient level of consensus on which actions and decisions may be based»[65].

For Noelle-Neumann, the latter concept proves to be more efficient since it is not so much concerned with rational debate and the quality of ideas expressed therein as with the ways of building social consensus; and that confers validity on the sum of opinions expressed in a given situation and in relation to matters of all kinds. *Mutatis mutandis* it might even find an analogy in the Baroque notion of *común opinion*, which, in the words of Sebastián de Covarrubias in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), is «What is most commonly received by the majority»[66]. And that was the very goal of many of the broadsides, written documents, and street songs that appeared around the three events of the seventeenth century that I have considered here.

[64] I. SCHULZE SCHNEIDER, *La leyenda negra de España. Propaganda en la Guerra de Flandes (1566-1584)*, Madrid 2008, p. XIII.

[65] E. NOELLE-NEUMANN, *The Spiral of Silence. Public Opinion – Our Social Skin*, Chicago IL 1993[2], p. 220 (orig. ed. *Die Schweigespirale: Öffentliche Meinung, unsere soziale Haut*, München - Zürich 1980).

[66] S. DE COVARRUBIAS, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, ed. by M. DE RIQUER, Barcelona 2003[5], p. 838: «la que está comúnmente recibida por los más».

The Making of a Public Issue
in Early Modern Europe
The Spanish Inquisition and Public Opinion in the Netherlands

by *Arjan van Dixhoorn*

1. *Introduction*

Public opinion is considered to be one of the defining features of
modern open societies. It is predominantly believed to have been a
novelty from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that rose in
tandem with the bourgeoisie's political clout and Enlightenment culture.
Historians of early modern culture and society from E.P. Thompson
to Peter Burke have argued that early modern middling groups were
the first to acquire a form of political consciousness and agency and
create an effective political culture. They supposedly did so as a result
of their appropriation of a culture of knowledge and rationality and
a subsequent emancipation of their minds from the powers of magic
and traditional religion, which, it can be inferred, paved the way for a
more rational calculation of their interests and wishes, a critical attitude
towards the authorities, and rational political organization as opposed
to the moralistic, reactive, incident-oriented and stomach-driven col-
lective action of the Middle Ages and much of early modern Europe[1].
Consequently, scholars of public opinion interested in the origins of
modern society have focused on this perceived shift, the most influ-
ential being the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, whose work
with the revival of interest in the origin and nature of civil society
after 1989 became the most important work of reference in the field.
This is arguably because in his master narrative he succeeds in relating
the rise of public opinion and civil society to numerous other trends

[1]   E.P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London 1963; P. BURKE,
Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, London 1978.

in early modern European history[2]. The identification of the study of public opinion history with the rise of modern society and culture is the result of a long-term trend in which public opinion became firmly integrated into the political philosophy of democratic societies and the political rhetoric of democratic institutions as the expression of the will and interests of the sovereign public of the nation state. The scholarly, journalistic, and political interest in the nature of public opinion grew with the gradual expansion of the suffrage in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere. With the introduction of statistical analysis in the social and political sciences, in the mass democracies of the twentieth century, this interest in public opinion would lead to the creation of public opinion research as an academic discipline and an industry strongly linked to politics and the media. By then, the elitist definition of public opinion as the publicly recognized outcome of an informative debate among engaged citizens discussed by Habermas and other historians of modern society, had largely given way to a scientific, static, definition of public opinion as the aggregate of the individual opinions in a geopolitical space. The first sort of public opinion is often identified with newspapers and the electronic media and the second with elections and opinion polls. More recently, public opinion research has again turned to the communicative aspects of public opinion formation, the role of public opinion as a reference in political discourse and the role of media, and phenomena such as lobbying in the perception of public opinion in political institutions[3].

The study of public opinion history has developed in a much more haphazard way, with scholarship that is explicitly dedicated to the study of public opinion in history currently being defined by the Habermas-thesis that public opinion necessarily was a phenomenon of the modern era[4]. Historians who are unconvinced by this view will

[2]   J. HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M 1990 (1962[1]).

[3]   See I. CRESPI, *The Public Opinion Process: How the People Speak*, Mahwah NJ 1997; V. PRICE, *Public Opinion*, Newbury Park CA 1992; S. HERBST, *Reading Public Opinion: How Political Actors View the Democratic Process*, Chicago IL 1998.

[4]   See also A. BRIGGS - P. BURKE, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge 2002; R. WOHLFEIL, *Reformatorische Öffentlichkeit*, in L. GRENZMANN - K. STACKMANN (eds), *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 41-52.

find it difficult to situate their research other than as a contribution to the Habermas-debates, thus adding to the centrality of his views[5]. From the perspective proposed here, a bewildering range of older and recent historical research suddenly becomes relevant. In opposition to the modernity thesis, this article pursues an empirically driven approach from the starting point that from the perspective of practices and processes public opinion is a structuring element of human society and culture and should therefore be a category of research in the historical sciences[6]. Consequently, the study of public opinion as a historical phenomenon should take into account its historical specificity in the institutional, epistemological, and communicative context of the society and culture under study.

From this perspective, the study of public opinion in early modern Europe (i.e. before the shaping of the typically modern discourses of public opinion) is legitimized by the need to understand how people in the pre-modern world identified, interpreted, prioritized, and judged issues, events, institutions, and people; how any resulting views affected their actions and later developments; and whether and if so how those in power perceived and judged these views, how they acquired, categorized, and valued that sort of knowledge, and how their actions and views in turn were affected.

The traditional view was that pre-modern peoples were collectives affixed to immutable mentalities (a by now problematic notion equivalent to the pictures in the mind of public opinion critics such as Walter Lippmann[7]). These mentalities supposedly changed slowly and rather organically and only triggered people into (reactive) collective action in response to outside stimuli such as food shortages, rising prices, and taxation. The discursive level of interpretation, deliberation, and coordinated action that results from interacting minds was apparently

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[5] For example in C. SYMES, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras*, Ithaca NY 2007.

[6] See also M. MEAD, *Public Opinion Mechanisms Among Primitive Peoples*, in D. KATZ et al. (eds), *Public Opinion and Propaganda: A Book of Readings Edited for the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues*, New York - Chicago - San Francisco 1954, pp. 87-94; E. NOELLE-NEUMANN, *Die Schweigespirale: Öffentliche Meinung, unsere soziale Haut*, München 1980, pp. 266-292.

[7] W. LIPPMANN, *Public Opinion*, New York 1922.

missing[8]. Even though in the last few decades many studies have revealed the political and discursive agency of premodern European people, the results have only seldom been used to reconsider the basic tenets of the modernization thesis[9]. A combination of the unreflective use of public opinion by scholars of early modern culture, the focus on modernization theory and a fear of anachronism has hampered the development of public opinion research into a historical sub discipline. Instead of turning to other champions of modernization theory such as Niklas Luhmann or Michel Foucault which might further enhance the focus on the perceived modernity of public opinion, a case could be made to look for inspiration in the fields of modern public opinion research, the history of communication, the study of popular politics, and historians of literature and the arts to rejuvenate and expand the traditional study of the history of public opinion, which—it is argued here—could help us understand premodern societies (as well as modern ones)[10]. The Habermasian approach has focused on infrastructures (the means through which individuals come together as a public) and discourses (in particular the discourse of a «public opinion» that represents the consensus among the actual public in the political realm). This article integrates infrastructures and discourses into an actor-oriented approach which evaluates the interaction of actors in the making of actual public issues which (also) are the core interest of modern public opinion research. It proposes the study of the role of unknown and well-known people, formal and informal media, actions and events, and the development of interpretative frames in the step-by-step formation of views on and attitudes towards actual (controversial) issues which are topics of interest to larger numbers of people[11]. In a way, the study of public

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[8] For example in E.P. THOMPSON, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century*, in «Past and Present», 50, 1971, pp. 76-136.

[9] Compare the work on the Reformation as a social movement in R. SCRIBNER, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*, London 1987, with the idea of the social movement as an essentially modern phenomenon in C. TILLY, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge 2008.

[10] See an attempt in J. BLOEMENDAL - A. VAN DIXHOORN, *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Early Modern Netherlands*, in J. BLOEMENDAL - A. VAN DIXHOORN - E. STRIETMAN (eds), *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650*, Leiden 2011.

[11] F. NEIDHARDT, *Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen*, in F. NEIDHARDT (ed.), *Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen* (Sonderheft, der

opinion through a focus on actual issues has a long tradition in history writing. It has been renewed more recently by work on collective action (Charles Tilly and others), the study of popular politics (Ethan Shagan and others)[12], Robert Scribner's innovative study of the Reformation as a social movement, and, in explicit critique of the Habermas-thesis by scholars of popular political opinion in pre-revolutionary France in the eighteenth century such as Arlette Farge and Robert Darnton[13]. These historians and many others have shown how (local and regional) issues could develop in societies in which print culture (so important in the Habermas-thesis) was not predominant. Furthermore, these issues did not become public (that is, widely known) through the enlightened form of exchange in polite society that features as the precondition for the emergence of modern public opinion in the elitist (Habermasian) model[14].

Historical public opinion research as proposed here is the study of how people relate to one another and to their society through issue formation. A public issue arises when larger numbers of people engage in a topic raised by a person or a group of people, or caused by acts of government, or when people are confronted with events that require action. Often, when issues become public, this happens because the initial stakeholders are divided which means that issues are often also controversies between people holding different views of the problem and/or of the solution. Issues are often related to events, particularly in face-to-face societies; or to put it differently, events are a particular sort of issue (some big, others small) that are often related to a larger issue. The «Spanish Inquisition» in the sixteenth-century Netherlands was such a large, long-running issue that was made up of multiple smaller

«Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie», 34), Wiesbaden 1994, pp. 7-41; J. RAUPP, *Zwischen Akteur und System: Akteure, Rollen und Strukturen von Öffentlichkeit*, in P. SZYSKA (ed.), *Diskurs zu einem Schlüsselbegriff der Organisationskommunikation*, Opladen - Wiesbaden 1999, pp. 113-130.

[12]   E.H. SHAGAN, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, New York 2003.

[13]   A. FARGE, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1992; R. DARNTON, *An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, in «The American Historical Review», 105, 2002, pp. 1-35.

[14]   A relevant critique of the elitist model in A.S. KU, *Revisiting the Notion of «Public» in Habermas's Theory – Toward a Theory of Politics of Public Credibility*, in «Sociological Theory», 18, 2000, pp. 216-240.

issues, events, particular people, and institutions, and an overwhelming number of texts and images. The issue suddenly became highly visible and controversial at the end of 1565, culminating in April 1566 in the theatrical submission of the petition of the nobles to Margareta of Parma, governess of the Netherlands demanding the abolishment of the anti-heresy laws amidst a swinging media (from pamphlets to performance) and lobby campaign (by government insiders and outsiders) in which various circles took part. This article aims to highlight some aspects of public opinion making in early modern society by exploring the making of this issue.

2. *The making of a controversial issue*

a. The geopolitics of anti-heresy laws

The principalities of the Netherlands, with the exception of most of the county of Flanders, were part of the Holy Roman Empire. Ties with the German-speaking lands were strong, either through trade networks, the strong presence of a German nation in Antwerp, exchange on the level of artisans or humanists, the book trade and book translations, and through the ruling dynasty of the Habsburgs, which was Austrian but was also elected to the Imperial Crown from the late fifteenth century onwards. At the Imperial Diet of Augsburg of 1548, the Emperor Charles V achieved the unification of the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands, including Flanders, in an imperial *Kreits* under the lordship of the Habsburgs. By the 1560s, the notion of *de Nederlanden* in plural or *het Nederland* in singular was increasingly used to refer to the new commonwealth as a single polity with connotations that resemble those of the later nation state. The cultural, economic, and political proximity of the Netherlands to the German lands also ensured the rapid introduction of Lutheran theology in the 1520s and Anabaptist theology in the 1530s. However, the number of people that would break with the church remained small; the Lutheran and Radical Reformation did not attract the mass support that could lead to the establishment of reformed regimes as happened in Germany[15].

[15] See the contributions in G. DARBY (ed.), *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, London - New York 2001, in P. BENEDICT (ed.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands, 1555-1585*, Amsterdam 1999, and in J. POLLMAN -

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Traditional scholarship however has often assumed that the Reformation was highly popular but was only halted because the ruling dynasty had chosen to defend the Old Faith. This erroneous view has severe consequences for the evaluation of the anti-heresy policies that were put into place in the Netherlands from 1520 onwards. They are often assumed to have been imposed against the nature of the land, against the will of the majority of the Erasmian ruling elites[16]. The absence of significant resistance against these policies and the lack of collective action in favor of reform are often ignored. The evidence supports the view that the Netherlands were a Catholic country not through coercion but by conviction. The largest number of people might have been traditional Catholics with varying spiritualities who however were increasingly pressed by an ardent network of (humanist) proponents of Catholic reform, led by Louvain trained clergy, to adapt their life to a new Orthodoxy. Differences of opinion between clergy and lay officials show that ardent Catholics were perceived to be at risk of criminalizing traditional Catholics, confounding lay theology and devotion or lack of knowledge of the orthodox doctrine with active heresy.

The idea that the majority of people, including the ruling elites, remained attached to the Roman Church does not necessarily contradict the fact that local and regional councils opposed particular aspects of the anti-heresy policies or expressed dissatisfaction with the execution of the law. Their main concern in fact seems to have been with attempts from the side of a clerical lobby to diminish the role of the city councils in the prosecution of heretics according to the privileges and customs of the land[17]. That city councils strove to attain the right to persecute

A. Spicer (eds), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke*, Leiden 2007.

[16] For the traditional view see J. Woltjer, *Political Moderates and Religious Moderates in the Revolt of the Netherlands*, in P. Benedict, *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, pp. 185-200; J. Woltjer, *Public Opinion and the Persecution of Heretics in the Netherlands, 1550-1559*, in J. Pollman - A. Spicer, *Public Opinion and Changing Identities*, pp. 87-106; also A. Duke, *Patriotism and Liberty in the Low Countries, 1555-1576*, in J. Pollman - R. Stein (eds), *Networks, Regions, and Nations. Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, Leiden 2010, pp. 217-240, here pp. 228-229.

[17] For the context, see G. Marnef, *Resistance and the Celebration of Privileges in Sixteenth-Century Brabant*, in J. Pollman - A. Spicer (eds), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities*, pp. 125-140.

heresy in fact shows a clear lack of concern for convinced heretics. The existence of such an attitude can be inferred from a chilling fact that is too often downplayed in the historiography of the Netherlands. Alistair Duke and F.E. Beemon have pointed out that the persecution in the allegedly tolerant Netherlands was very severe compared to other countries including Spain. Between 1523 and 1566, at least 1,300 to 2,000 people out of a population of 2 million (where religious dissidents were a small and hidden minority), were executed for their religious beliefs[18]. This minimum figure does not account for the number of people banished, sentenced to long-distance pilgrimages, or fined, and people indicted and incarcerated but set free after criminal proceedings that could take years. Furthermore, Guido Marnef counted the execution of 131 people between 1550 and 1566 in Antwerp alone; an astounding average of almost eight executions per annum[19].

Given the fact that local and regional courts prosecuted heresy as a criminal offence, most executions resulted from death sentences by local and regional councilors. Consequently, the high number of executions seriously undermines the country's reputation for resistance against the anti-heresy laws[20]. A survey of Antwerp documents carefully anticipating a local anti-heresy policy, of the sources of interrogations and sentences of the criminal court, of decisions taken by the Broad Council as the representative of the citizenry, and of the (secret) correspondence of magistrates with their deputies in Brussels shows no signs of mercy or any concealed discontent with the executions[21]. Antwerp citizens wor-

[18] See H. VAN NIEROP, *The Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands: Between Church and King, and Protestantism and Privileges*, in P. BENEDICT (ed.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, pp. 83-98, esp. pp. 89-90.

[19] G. MARNEF, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie. Ondergronds Protestantisme in een handelsmetropool 1550-1577*, Antwerpen 1996, here p. 124.

[20] A similar view in F.E. BEEMON, *The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition and the Preconditions of the Dutch Revolt*, in «Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte», 85, 1994, pp. 246-264, here pp. 246-248.

[21] Based on information from: Stadsarchief Antwerpen (Antwerp City Archives, hereafter ACA), *Archief van de Vierschaar, Amman*, inv. nr. 314, «Nieuwe religie, 16e eeuw. Informatiën over personen, beschuldigd de nieuwe leer aan te kleven, 1520 tot 1560»; P. GÉNARD, *Personen te Antwerpen in de XVIe eeuw voor het feit van religie gerechtelijk vervolgd. Lijst en ambtelijke bijbehoorige stukken*, in «Antwerpsch Archievenblad», 7 (s.d.), pp. 469-472; *ibid.*, 8 (s.d.), pp. 322-472; F. PRIMIS (ed.), *De briefwisseling tusschen het Antwerpsch Magistraat en zijn Gedeputeerden, juli 1565-april 1566*, Dendermonde 1925.

ried instead about inconveniences for innocent people or their city's image of loyal service to the king. The indifference of the local elite is shown in the letter of the Antwerp government to Margaret of Parma asking permission to end the public executions of heretics and execute them in secret, in recognition of the (perceived) appeal that the heretic's zeal might have on the people[22]. For a very long time, the anti-heresy laws were troubling to only two groups: the minority of religious dissenters, including Protestant-minded members of the elites, and the high nobles related to the Protestant nobility of Germany. Otherwise, until 1566, the Netherlands were a bastion of Catholicism and loyalty to the ruling dynasty.

b. Framing through naming in 1565

Recently, historians have begun to study the role of word of mouth in the dynamics of rumor spreading through intermediary oral networks, in interaction with manuscript, cheap print, and performative action, painted or engraved images. These studies show how news was a collective effort that was constantly in the making. The fact that government and market decisions were largely based on interpretations of flows of information that almost always originated in face-to-face settings already explains why studying «public opinion» (i.e. what people write, say, and do) was fundamental to early modern governance, as is paramount from government archives in the Netherlands. Exerting a form of control on the flow and interpretation of news was crucial, and would become more so if the government itself became the (negative) subject of news flows[23].

The early modern equivalent of headlines was the name given to events, people, parties, and issues, such as the Spanish Inquisition, which already reveal who was effectively framing the issue. It is the news frames that often enter into historiography through chronicles and still inform our relation to that particular moment. The fact that control over such

[22] F. PRIMIS, *De briefwisseling*, letter of March 14, 1566.

[23] H. VAN NIEROP, *«And Ye Shall Hear of Wars and Rumours of Wars»: Rumour and the Revolt of the Netherlands*, in J. POLLMAN - A. SPICER (eds), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities*, pp. 69-86; A. FOX, *Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England*, in «Historical Journal», 40, 1997, pp. 597-642.

names equals control over the definition of the issue was certainly well known in the early modern Netherlands. This might be inferred from an event that happened when the dissent over the anti-heresy laws in ruling circles was beginning to spill over into everyday talk. In fact, the rumor that was investigated in Antwerp in late 1565 might have been part of a deliberate campaign to plant the name of the Spanish Inquisition into the hearts and minds of Antwerpers by a group that became the core of the opposition movement: the Calvinists. Papers on the Spanish Inquisition in the city archives show how this might have worked[24].

Ten days after the governess had sent letters to the local and regional councils to execute the king's orders concerning the anti-heresy laws, the new bishops, and the decrees of Trent, on December 28, 1565, several inhabitants of Antwerp, including some of apparent Spanish descent, were called before the local court to give evidence related to a rumor that upset the city government[25]. The names are on two lists in a file compiled by the aldermen who believed that the rumor originated from handbills posted December 21 at the city hall, the city weigh-house, at the Franciscans, near the Exchange, and at the houses of some of the wardens of the city. The warning against the Inquisition in these handbills was publicly condemned by the city as completely «false and fabricated», and the government called for information on their authors[26]. Witnesses called forth referred to common hearsay as their source. Lawyer Wynant van Heylwyghen distinguished two rumors heard «from common hearsay». People at the Exchange warned that the Inquisition would be introduced, and others said that the inquisitors would be Spaniards. He also claimed that Peter Backart, a city clerk, told him of some Spaniards having said that the king would introduce the Inquisition despite opposition. Backart stated that two weeks earlier he had met with a group of «honorable men to settle the purchase of a house». They had not finalized the purchase and a few

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[24] ACA, *Privilegekamer*, inv.nr. 1561 «1522-1609: heresie, preken, inquisitie».

[25] F. PRIMIS, *De briefwisseling*, letter of December 21, 1565, Antwerp government to deputies in Brussels, and several other letters on the rumors in Antwerp and Brussels between December 21st and 30th.

[26] F. PRIMIS, *De briefwisseling*, p. 30; ACA, *Privilegekamer*, inv. nr. 1561 «1522-1609: heresie, preken, inquisitie».

days later Marten van den Bruele came to visit, who had dissuaded him from buying the house because he had overheard some Spaniards at the Exchange say that the Inquisition would soon be introduced. Remarkably, of four «Spaniards» on the list of the aldermen who might have been the source, two might be identified as New Christians, a group of Jewish *conversos* whose ancestors had experienced the Spanish Inquisition, and some of whom were among the leadership of the underground Dutch Reformed Church of Antwerp. It is thus possible that the four «Spaniards» had deliberately planted the rumor at the Exchange around December 20[27].

Whether the association of the Inquisition with Spain and Spaniards was the result of a well-targeted effort by some, or the effect of deduction from bits and pieces by many, in any case, the notion of the Inquisition with its connotations of ruthlessness in disregard of privacy and privileges did become closely associated with Spain in the talk of town, at least, in some circles[28]. It thus spilled over into the consciousness and onto the agenda of the Antwerp government whose members were confirmed time and again by the central government in Brussels that the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition was no objective of the king. The Spanish Inquisition became a powerful frame with which opponents slammed the king's policies and the law of the land as foreign[29]. The notion in effect was a shortcut amalgamating the king's wish to execute the anti-heresy laws with the introduction of new bishoprics and the reform of the church along the decrees of the Council of Trent. The king's policies however were not only met with opposition, they were

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[27] The Spaniard Francesco Aliaga and the Portuguese Francesco Alvarez. See, J.A. GORIS, *Etude sur les colonies marchandes méridionales (Portugais, Espagnols, Italiens) à Anvers de 1488 à 1567: contribution à l'histoire des débuts du capitalisme modern*, Louvain 1925, p. 612 and p. 616. With thanks to Prof. H. de Ridder-Symoens for the reference.

[28] See also, A. DUKE, *Dissident Propaganda and Political Organization at the Outbreak of the Revolt of the Netherlands*, in P. BENEDICT (ed.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, pp. 115-132.

[29] Cf. the different view of F.E. BEEMON, *The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition*, who argues that the Confederates did not oppose the anti-heresy laws as such, but only opposed the introduction of a Spanish-style Inquisition. The claim that the main difference within the ruling elites was how to control heresy, however, only justifies the view that the nobles' opposition was not a unique revolutionary event if the public opinion process is ignored.

also well-grounded in a dynamic local movement that not only supported, but to a large extent inspired and actively shaped the king's policies whose basic outline—the eradication of heresy—furthermore, seems to have been widely shared among the population and local and regional governments, in spite of what historians of the Netherlands often claim. The views developed in the various factions, networks, and groups with high stakes in the persecution of heretics had slowly merged into two parties whose alleged leaders were known to the engaged public in the 1560s. Before 1565, the issue was not whether to persecute heretics, but how and by whom this had to be done. Furthermore, a lobby of native clergymen and zealous Catholics clearly set the agenda in policy and publicity making. By the end of 1565, the initiative in agenda setting and in public discourse had suddenly moved to their fiercest opponents of the time: the Calvinists.

c. Lobbying, petitioning, publicity, and issue-ownership

The issue of the Spanish Inquisition was made in the interaction of several circuits with their definitions of the problem, their objectives, and communicative practices. The objective of the opposition in branding the notion in 1565 and 1566 was to redefine the consensus underlying the law of the country, which had been to eradicate heresy. By associating the consensus with foreign influences disrespectful of the nature of the country, the opposition must have hoped to dissociate the people and local rulers of the Netherlands from the Inquisition and the anti-heresy laws. The new consensus they sought to create would abolish the anti-heresy laws, some might have wished for new laws made by the States General (which is what the confederate nobles requested in 1566) and others might have wished for freedom from persecution for themselves but not for others (which is what the Calvinists openly requested in 1564 and 1565). In fact, the coalition that had formed against the Inquisition in November 1565 (or earlier) must have been as divided over the intended outcome as the country had been over the precise conditions for the execution of the anti-heresy policies.

Already before the Calvinist and confederate opposition complicated matters in 1565, the issue of the anti-heresy laws had been controversial. The legal and political fights over the execution of the policy began soon after the Lutheran doctrines had been condemned by the

Louvain Faculty of Theology in 1519, the first anti-heresy laws had been published in 1520, and the first martyrs had been executed in Brussels in 1523[30]. The controversy concerned the interpretation of the laws, and local governments and a clerical lobby were at odds over the role of the clergy and/or provincial courts in the persecution. While the governments and some of the local clergy might have stressed moderation, another group of people (including clergymen, but also lawyers, government officials, high nobility) pressed for a harsher campaign against the heretics. In a petition to the chancellor of Brabant in 1533, a group from Antwerp suggested that the Spanish Inquisition should be introduced. They also revealed the names of people suspected of heresy, a form of intelligence that must have been widespread[31]. In addition—with reference to an Antwerp spokesperson—in 1546, a German pamphlet claimed that the clergy openly used the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition as a threat, which suggests that before the 1560s the notion was «owned» by Catholic activists in opposition to what they deemed a lax and ineffective treatment of heresy by the authorities[32].

The available evidence suggests that such groups and networks of clergymen, officials, and other zealous Catholics were effectively weighing on local, regional, and central policies in the Netherlands through immediate access to the central councils and the ruler or through petitions and proposals sent to figures with a crucial role in government. These groups were aiming at a profound reform of church and society as is already clear from the reorganization of the dioceses in the Netherlands

[30] G. WAITE, *Reformers on Stage. Popular Drama and Religious Propaganda in the Low Countries of Charles V, 1515-1556*, Toronto 2000, p. 19; A. DUKE, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries*, London - New York 2003, pp. 152-174.

[31] R. VAN ROOSBROECK (ed.), *Een nieuw dokument over de beginperiode van het Lutheranisme te Antwerpen*, in «De Gulden Passer», nieuwe reeks, 5, 1927, pp. 267-284. See also the report submitted by the Antwerp clergy to a committee investigating Calvinist activities in Antwerp in late 1558 – early 1559 in G. MARNEF, *Publiek versus geheim: Adriaan van Haemstede en zijn striven naar een publieke kerk te Antwerpen in 1558*, in J. DE ZUTTER et al. (eds), *Qui valet ingenio*, Gent 1996, pp. 373-384.

[32] *Von der Unchristlichen tyrannischen Inquisition den Glauben belangend geschrieben aus Niderland*, Wittemberg, 1546; F.E. BEEMON, *The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition*, refers to a petition of the wardens of Antwerp in 1553, invoking the fear of the Spanish Inquisition, which however must be 1563.

and the fact that new bishops were from this movement[33]. The claim
to expertise in heresy trials by the clergy without doubt was seen by
local and regional councils as undermining their prerogatives and a
danger to innocent people who lacked precise knowledge of doctrine,
as the States of Brabant argued in a petition presented to the governess
in December 1565[34]. While the clergy used every medium available to
weigh on the fight against heresy, the local and regional governments
mainly opposed the inquisitorial methods through inside lobbying and
petitioning using their access to the court in Brussels to and members
of central councils. It is clear from the secret correspondence of the
Antwerp burgomasters with deputies attending the assembly of the States
of Brabant, or meeting with crucial figures, that (most of) the Antwerp
magistrates were overwhelmed by the actions of the confederate nobles
in 1566, they also seem to have been annoyed by the rude intervention
with their lobbying schemes through which they had expertly aimed to
influence the interpretation of the king's wishes to their advantage[35].

However, although members of government tried to keep their dealings
with the anti-heresy policies secret, they were critically watched from the
underground by a community of (well-connected) stakeholders benefiting
from inevitable leaks by dissenting figures within the government. A
handbill in the form of a petition addressed on behalf of the citizenry
to the Antwerp government, posted at public places on December 21,
1565, referred to the letters sent by the king on the publication and
execution of the Inquisition. The petition claimed inside knowledge by
arguing that the orders contradicted promises made by emperor and
king, recently repeated in Spain to deputies of the city of Antwerp. The
petition further (incorrectly) states that the governess would soon order
the city to publish the introduction of the Inquisition under the pretext
of the Council of Trent, which would be the jurisdiction of the new
bishops, archbishops, and other members of the clergy. The petitioners
warn the city against future troubles and inconveniencies caused by the

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[33] A fact also noted in F.E. BEEMON, *The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition*. More fundamental aims to change the role of the clergy and the church in society are discussed in A. VAN DIXHOORN, *Lustige geesten. Rederijkers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, 1480-1650*, Amsterdam 2009, pp. 209-226.

[34] ACA, *Privilegekamer*, inv. nr. 1561 «1522-1609: heresie, preken, inquisitie».

[35] F. PRIMIS, *De briefwisseling*, exchanges between burgomasters and deputies of 5-10 April, 1566.

introduction of the Inquisition. They urge the Antwerp government to indict the king for a breach of privileges before the *Reichskammergericht* of the Holy Roman Empire. That, the petition claimed, would be in accordance with the contract made between the German lands and the Netherlands in 1548, and with the *Religionsfrieden* of 1552 and 1555, which they argued granted the Netherlands exemption from the Inquisition[36]. In fact, in April 1566, in the wake of the petition of the nobles, the *Libellus supplex* and the *Oratio ecclesiarum Christi* were presented to the Augsburg Diet, demanding freedom of worship for the Reformed Churches[37]. These petitions suggest that the (irregular) petition of late 1565 had a similar origin. They were the result of politicization within the reformed (Calvinist) international community which had already shown political objectives with Van Haemstede's martyrology of 1559 and a petition demanding religious freedom for the reformed submitted to the governess in 1564, published in the martyrology of a minister executed in Antwerp that year, and re-issued in June 1565[38].

Calvinist political activism had been developing quickly from the establishment of the first congregations in the Walloon cities and Antwerp in the 1550s. By 1564, the Antwerp Dutch Reformed Church was in touch with the Calvinist Count Palatine in Heidelberg. In 1565 and 1566, the political leadership of the Calvinists was (secretly) meeting with the leadership of the confederation and the grandees. The confederation or the New League was the result of the opposition against the king's policy among some high and low noblemen and gentry, many of whom were related by birth or through marriage to the Protestant nobility of Germany. They were headed by the charismatic Count Brederode, a

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[36] ACA, *Privilegekamer*, inv.nr. 1561 «1522-1609: heresie, preken, inquisitie». Also published in *Vertoogschriften, aen het magistraet der stad Antwerpen ingediend, in de jaren 1564 en 1565, wegens het invoeren der inquisitie, enz.*, in J.F. WILLEMS (ed.), *Belgisch museum voor de Nederduitsche tael- en letterkunde en de geschiedenis des vaderlands*, 4, 1840, pp. 225-239, here pp. 225-228.

[37] G. MARNEF, *The Dynamics of Reformed Militancy: The Netherlands, 1566-1585*, in P. BENEDICT (ed.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, pp. 51-67, here p. 52.

[38] Adriaan Cornelisz van Haemstedium, *De gheschiedenisse ende den doodt der vromer Martelaren ...*, s.l. 1559; *Historie ende gheschiedenisse vande verraderlicke gevangenisse der vromer ende godsaliger Mannen Cristophori Fabritij ...*, in S. CRAMER - F. PIJPER (eds), *Bibliotheca reformatoria Neerlandica: geschriften uit den tijd der Hervorming in de Nederlanden*, 8, Den Haag 1911, pp. 281-460.

grandee who was not a member of the central councils of government. The New League was inspired by the first league, founded in 1563 by the grandees in opposition to Cardinal Granvelle and the cardinalists who were accused of controlling the governess and the government of the country. Whereas the members of the first league were members of the central government and could employ the dynamics of court life, members of the New League were outsiders to the central councils in Brussels. The grandees maintained correspondences with the king but also had access to high aristocrats and princes of the blood in Spain, France, England, and Germany. They could use the means of diplomacy to accomplish their objectives, a path also used by Brederode and a few other high nobles of the confederation[39].

Politicians and activists in the early modern Netherlands had their knowledge about the importance of the perceptions of people and the need to influence them, which could be achieved by oral, printed and written discourse, image and performance, and most effectively through a mix. The opposition of the grandees shows how the perception of the views of the public in- and outside government could be influenced deliberately. In a publicized attack on the cardinal and the cardinalists in 1563, the grandees dressed their servants in plain-grey liveries as opposed to the colorful liveries of the cardinal's servants, a clear attempt to mock the cardinal as a parvenu. They also attached fool's caps and a cardinal's hat to their sleeves[40]. An English agent reported how the mockery met with approval in Brussels, measured in the fact that tailors could not meet demand for the grey dress and in the amount of satirical verse targeting the cardinal[41]. The grandees were then able to refer to this popular appeal in a letter of protest against Granvelle sent to the king, arguing that the people had publicly professed such grievances against the cardinal, that he had become a danger to the peace and harmony of the country[42]. The incident shows that once political differences could not be solved within the ruling elite they were easily

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[39] See the contributions in G. DARBY (ed.), *The Origins*; A. DUKE, *Dissident Propaganda*.

[40] A. DUKE, *Dissident Propaganda*, pp. 140-142.

[41] J.W. BURGEON (ed.), *The Life and Times of Thomas Gresham*, London 1839, letters of 1563 (Thomas Gresham and Richard Clough).

[42] L.P. GACHARD (ed.), *Correspondance de Guillaume le Taciturne, prince d'Orange*, Bruxelles 1850, pp. 42-47, letter by Orange, Egmont, Horne to the King, July 29, 1563.

revealed to the public and taken to the streets in an attempt to acquire popular support, which then could be used to build a new case with reference to «the people»[43].

Having gained control of government when the king recalled Granvelle from his duties in Brussels in March 1564, the League intensified its opposition to the power of the clergy and against the anti-heresy laws[44]. These attempts ended in defeat with the letters from the Segovia Woods sent by the king in October 1565. The second League then combined the public outreach of the grandees in 1563 with the example set in France by the Prince de Condé who had submitted a petition for freedom of religion to the king on April 8, 1562[45]. Amidst rumors about the Spanish Inquisition stirred by handbills posted in Antwerp and Brussels, on April 5, 1566, about 200 nobles of the confederation paraded to the court headed by a cripple from Artois (probably in mockery of the bishop of Arras, Granvelle) and applauded by bystanders. Count Brederode then submitted a petition to the governess demanding the abolishment of the anti-heresy laws and negotiations over an entirely new policy. The governess granted a moderation of the laws a few days later, when the opposition movement was already acquiring a whole new dynamic within the population. These texts were immediately published in print and also circulated in manuscript[46].

The confederates immediately reached out to the public, not only through manuscript and print and oral means, but also through the engaging means of performative media. They dressed in plain grey clothes adorned with small wooden bowl's on hats and belts, wore medals with the king's portrait and a satirical motto, shaved their beards and grew large moustaches in the Turkish fashion in a reference to the greatest enemy of Christianity at the time. Men and women from Brussels and Antwerp to Amsterdam joined the opposition by openly wearing beggar symbols and shouting «Vive le Gueux» in streets, taverns, and at meals

[43] A. DUKE, *Dissident Propaganda*.

[44] See for a short-lived opposition against the Spanish (and Flemish) Inquisition in Antwerp in 1562 and 1563, related to the opposition against the new dioceses, F.E. BEEMON, *The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition*.

[45] M. GREENGRASS, *Financing the Cause: Protestant Mobilization and Accountability in France (1562-1589)*, in P. BENEDICT (ed.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, pp. 233-254.

[46] A. DUKE, *Dissident Propaganda*, p. 121.

and banquets[47]. The Reformed Churches started to organize clandestine sermons in the open air, the so-called «hedge-preachings»; attended by hundreds of people. At hedge-preachings near Antwerp that summer the attendants—guarded by men in arms—brought songs, ballads, books, and images that rallied against the Inquisition. A Catholic chronicler in Amsterdam noted that loyal Catholics also began to reach out to the public inverting the opposition's theatricalities. Cardinalist nobles and their party wore silver crucifixes, pilgrims' signs, and medals with images of the *Salvator Mundi* and Our Lady of Halle, a Marian devotion associated with the dynasty. Both parties added to the festivalization and popularization of the political differences when Catholics yelled «Vive le roi» in public, or, in rhyming response to the beggars' yell «Vive le Gueux», echoed «Vive bien pour eux»[48].

d. The discursive public

The (scribal and printed) petitions, letters, pamphlets, handbills, poems, and the performative events (recorded in many other media) of the 1560s exemplify the crucial role of the public in political conflicts both as a discursive referent and an active agent. Observers from the side of the general public as well as from the government were constantly gauging the public mood in particular in times of political and economic instability.

References to a general public were present in the political imagination as the intended or unintended effect of observation and conversation, but 'the people' was also a key category in juridical-political discourse either referred to as a source of instability, disharmony, sedition, and self-interest, or as a source of morality and the common good. The chronicler Godevaert van Haecht, a young painter's apprentice from Antwerp for example, was convinced that the actions of the (local) government that he approved of responded to demands of the people, whereas actions he disapproved of resulted from the self-interest of

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[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 121-125.

[48] H. Van Nierop, *A Beggars' Banquet: The Compromise of the Nobility and the Politics of Inversion*, in «European History Quarterly», 21, 1991, pp. 419-443; H. Van Biesten, *Anteykeningen gedaen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten, oratuer van de Minnebroeders binnen Amsterdam, ... (1534-1567)*, in «De Dietsche Warande», 7, 1866, pp. 519-550.

members of the government[49]. The Lutheran Van Haecht viewed the *gemeente* (the burghers) as a moral source, whereas a Catholic chronicler was convinced of the wickedness of the *gemeente* of Antwerp in opposition to the virtue of the government[50]. Remarkably, the Calvinist martyrology of 1564 agreed with the latter assessment. A concluding song chastised the city of Antwerp and its merchants for persecuting the faithful. In the petition to the governess, published in the same pamphlet, the Reformed Church of Antwerp called the people seditious and easily mislead, accusing the «Lords and Authorities» of heeding to «the whims of the common people» and complaints of the clergy «who have always risen against Christ and his Holy Word»[51]. References to the people abound in texts produced for the secretive negotiations and lobbying inside the government. In their petition against the «clerical Inquisition» of December 1565, for example, the States of Brabant argue that the good subjects of the king are in large majority loyal to the Christian religion, even more so than ever, and do not deserve to be subjected to suspicion unless there are very good reasons[52].

The petition of the confederates too reminded of the danger of rebellion if the Inquisition were introduced. Given their first-hand knowledge of the tumultuous state of the people, they claim to feel obliged to warn the king of the unrest that was steadily growing, «meaning that the danger of uprising and mutiny is at the door throughout the country»[53]. The problem with such references to the tumultuous state of the people in the handbill and the petition is the absolute lack of evidence of public discomfort until the open letter of the confederation of November and the (Calvinist) handbills of December 1565, the Confederate Petition of April 1566, and word of mouth stirred the people. Van Haecht in any case only became interested in the issue of the Spanish Inquisition

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[49]   R. VAN ROOSBROECK (ed.), *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, Antwerpen 1929, pp. 16-42.

[50]   *Chronycke van Antwerpen sedert het jaer 1500 tot 1575 ..., volgens een onuitgegeven handschrift van de 16e eeuw met Fac-simile van het HS*, Antwerpen 1843, p. 64.

[51]   *Historie ende gheschiedenisse vande verraderlicke gevangenisse.*

[52]   ACA, *Privilegekamer*, inv. nr. 1561 «1522-1609: heresie, preken, inquisitie».

[53]   *Copie de la requeste presentée a la ducesse de Parme &c. regente, le cincquiesme jour d'avril XV.c soixante cincq ... sur le fait de l'inquisition & l'execution des placcats de la religion catholicque*, Bruxelles 1566.

in December 1565. His source is unknown; he might have added bits and pieces, or found someone who claimed to know all about it, but he believed that the Spanish Inquisition meant that every citizen was questioned by an inquisitor and people thus were forced to accept Christianity. He added that such a method might be in line with the history of Spain, but «the Netherlands are not like that, and hence do not want to be forced in the Spanish way». However, he then glossed that «many people though are executed here as well», which shows some doubt regarding the benign nature of his own country[54]. In any case, the claims of the petition or Van Haecht's gloss, and other references pertaining to the will of the people as a whole, show how the making of an issue was related to discourses of the people and the common good which in turn were related to perceptions of and attempts to understand or influence the public mood.

3. Conclusions

Public opinion making in the early modern Netherlands was character-ized by a strong interaction between the central state, local and regional authorities, various lobby-and interest groups, an engaged and highly literate public, and the general population[55]. The making of the Span-ish Inquisition into a controversial issue was the effect of a clustering of related and often opposing discourses developed by people trying to identify, interpret and define a problem, develop solutions, and set objectives for action. These discourses would often also develop in the relative secrecy of council meetings, in lobbying at private banquets, and in conversations between private people. However, an issue would only become public if it was taken to the streets and became the talk of town. In the early modern Netherlands, public outreach was maxi-mized by combinations of print, manuscript circulation, images, and in particular the spectacular and immediate effect of performative action.

[54] R. Van Roosbroeck, *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, pp. 17-18.

[55] See more extensively A. Van Dixhoorn, *The Grain Issue of 1565-1566. Policy Making, Public Opinion, and the Common Good in the Habsburg Netherlands* in E. Lecuppre-Desjardin - A.L. Van Bruaene (eds), *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th-16th c.)*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 171-204.

The communicative effects of organized media would only acquire real significance through the informal and collective elaboration in the oral networks that were essential to effective publicity making.

The people were a key category in the discourses that governments, opposition movements, lobbyists, or even observers created to deal with issues. They usually attributed the agency of arbiter, moral authority or immoral influence to the people as a whole. The representation of the people in political discourse could be topical, fabricated for a purpose, but was also influenced by interpretations of events, actions, hearsay, and conversations. Conversely, an invocation of the tumultuous nature of the people might cause real fear and the invocation of its intellectual simplicity might lead to leniency towards common folk heretics.

The complexity of early modern issue formation in a society such as the Netherlands in which publicity making, despite the importance of scribal and printed media, ultimately depended on the use of oral, visual, and performative means and thus on the collective process of defining, prioritizing, and framing issues, calls for a profound reconsideration of the modernity thesis and the related approaches in the study of public opinion history.

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Public Opinion and Free-market Morality in Old Regime and Revolutionary France

by *Charles Walton*

Since the late 1980s, public opinion has been at the center of historical treatments of the French Enlightenment. This trend was initially inspired by renewed interest in Jürgen Habermas's 1962 study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Historians, though, have significantly modified the German sociologist's model. Whereas Habermas saw a public sphere of critical discussion developing outside, and often against, the state, historians now see the state as driving its development, in at least two ways. First, the royal administration and the sovereign courts, the *parlements*, appealed explicitly to «the public» in the course of battling each other. Through the treatises, pamphlets, and broadsides they circulated from the 1720s onward, they helped create and legitimize a force that would later bring about their demise[1]. Second, these institutions made the public aware of its own importance by policing it[2]. As surveillance and repression intensified in the first half

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[1]   For the legitimization of the public's judgment, see K.M. BAKER, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge MA 1990 (esp. ch. 8, «Public Opinion as Political Invention»). For the sociological expansion of public opinion, see R. DARNTON, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Prerevolutionary France*, New York 1995. For a synthesis of the vast historical literature on public opinion in eighteenth-century France, see H. CHISICK, *Public Opinion and Political Culture in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century*, in «English Historical Review», 470, 2002, pp. 48-77 as well as C. WALTON, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech*, New York 2009, ch. 1.

[2]   For one of the strongest formulations of this view, see A. FARGE, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1992.

of the eighteenth century, people realized that their opinions mattered. So although a public sphere did develop, as Habermas argued, in the interstices of the state—in salons, academies, Masonic lodges, and theaters—the state nevertheless looms large in the story of an expanding public sphere in eighteenth-century France.

Perhaps the most notable departure from Habermas's model in the recent scholarship on the public sphere eighteenth-century France is the suppression of its «bourgeois» component. Historical interest in the topic took off at a time when the Marxist paradigm was in full decline. As historians taking the linguistic turn focused on political discourse and language, the socio-economic dimensions of the public sphere tended to be left unexplored. A notable exception to this trend can be found in the work of Colin Jones. In an important article appearing in «The American Historical Review», Jones showed how French newspapers of the 1780s helped spread bourgeois consciousness[3]. Through advertisements, they cultivated a commercial view of society in which individuals sought satisfaction through consumption. More importantly, they promoted a spirit of critical reflection, as journalists and critics managed to outfox the royal censors with subtly coded news reports and book reviews[4].

In this essay, I build upon Jones' effort to explore the socio-economic dimensions of public opinion in late eighteenth-century France, pushing the analysis, however, in a different direction. I focus not on the development of bourgeois consciousness through print, but rather on economic liberalization and how efforts to implement it brought about changes in the way the state engaged with public opinion. Initially contemptuous of the public, reformist ministers in the 1760s and 1770s tried to impose their agenda through force. Their efforts failed, and by the 1780s, they realized that they would need to put more energy into managing public opinion, principally through manipulation and ruse. Those efforts failed as well. Once the Revolution broke out and created

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[3]   C. JONES, *The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution*, in «American Historical Review», 101, 1996, 1, pp. 13-40.

[4]   V.R. GRUDER has also analyzed how censored newspapers managed to convey coded political criticism, *Political News as Coded Messages: The Parisian and Provincial Press in the Pre-revolution, 1787-1788*, in «French History», 12, 1998, 1, pp. 1-24.

a more democratic environment, force and ruse were no longer politically viable. Revolutionaries seeking to liberalize the economy, secure republicanism, and win over public opinion now realized that they would have to persuade and enlighten. Moral regeneration, through public instruction and propaganda, became one of the government's most important objectives.

The relationship between economic liberalization and public opinion has received scant attention by scholars of the period[5]. Moreover, most studies on public opinion focus on the Enlightenment and pre-Revolutionary periods rather than the Revolution itself. This strikes me as odd. One would think that the problem of public opinion would have become even more significant in the more democratic context. The scholarship that does exist on revolutionary public opinion owes much to the analysis Mona Ozouf[6]. She identifies two conceptions of public opinion in eighteenth-century France: the first, «l'opinion publique», was liberal, modern, and pluralist; the second, «esprit public», or «public spirit», was illiberal, archaic, and unitary. She maps these two conceptions onto the chronology of the Revolution. Between 1789 and 1792, she argues, revolutionaries maintained a liberal conception of public opinion, as reflected in the rights of free expression and opinion in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. Upon the fall of the monarchy and rise of Jacobins to power in 1792, this liberal «public opinion» gave way to its illiberal variant, «public spirit.» The latter concept, she maintains, was inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idealizations of Spartan morality and equality. Jacobins, alarmed by relentless political discord, invoked «public spirit» in their utopian campaign to morally regenerate society, but their ideological commitments to virtue and the «general will» created a Manichean

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[5] For societal responses to the Old Regime's efforts to liberalize, the economy, see S.L. KAPLAN, *Bread, Politics, and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols, The Hague 1976, and C.A. BOUTON, *The Flour War: Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Regime France*, University Park PA 1993.

[6] M. OZOUF, *L'Homme régénéré*, Paris 1989. See also her essay *Esprit public*, in F. FURET M. OZOUF (eds), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, Paris 1988, pp. 711-719. Keith Baker's view resembles Ozouf's. He sees the French as generally pessimistic about a pluralist public opinion, which they tended to see as anarchic; K.M. BAKER'S *Inventing the French Revolution*. See also J. COWANS, *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, New York 2001. Cowans' view owes much to the perspectives of Baker and Ozouf.

worldview in which individuals were either virtuous citizens or enemies of the nation. Regenerate or purge—these were the only political options revolutionaries could see through their Rousseauian lenses.

There is no denying revolutionaries' obsession with public spirit. However, they saw it less as a dogmatic alternative to public opinion than the intellectual and moral foundation upon which rational, civic-minded opinions could be formed[7]. Jean-Marie Roland, the first Minister of the Interior of the First Republic and founder of the Bureau of Public Spirit in 1792, explained:

«Public spirit is not what people often confuse unthinkingly with public opinion, whose flux and partial applications can take on an indefinite variety of forms. What I call public spirit is a natural tendency, imperious towards all that can contribute to the happiness of the country; it is a most profound and religious sentiment which places the interest of our common mother [the nation] above our [particular] interests».

The idea that opinions should be grounded in morality and reason in order to be free was hardly an «archaic» or specifically Rousseauian point of view. Many Enlightenment philosophers, from Benedict de Spinoza in the seventeenth century to Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth, argued as much. More revealing about the tensions fueling the Revolution's radicalization are the means Roland tried to employ to secure the collective interest: the freeing up of private interests. His public spirit campaign was motivated, in part, by his desire to persuade society to accept otherwise unpopular liberal economic reforms. Thus, moral regeneration during the Revolution owed as much to revolutionaries' philosophical commitments to Adam Smith and Arthur Young as to their obsessions with Rousseau[8].

In the 1750s and 1760s, however, economic reformers were not thinking much about Smith or Rousseau, nor were they concerned about winning over mass opinion. Inspired by the Physiocrats, government ministers

[7] J.-M. ROLAND, Minister of the Interior after the fall of the monarchy, stressed this distinction in *Compte rendu à la Convention Nationale par Jean-Marie Roland, Ministre de l'Intérieur, De toutes les parties de son Département, de ses vues d'amélioration et de prospérité publique; Le 6 janvier de l'an II de la République française*, Paris 1793, chapter XXV, p. 227.

[8] For revolutionaries' appropriations of Adam Smith and Arthur Young, see R. WHATMORE, *Adam Smith's Role in the French Revolution*, in «Past and Present», 175, 2002. For the period of the Directory, see J. LIVESEY, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, Cambridge MA 2001.

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set out to revamp the old Colbertian economy by prioritizing agriculture over commerce and industry. To this end, the royal administration supported the creation of agricultural societies throughout France. These proto think tanks and scientific experimental groups were devoted to advancing farming technology and to elevating the status of agriculture more generally. (Husbandry was not considered honorable in elite circles at the time.) But the reach of agricultural societies was limited, and royal intendants, even ones sympathetic to Physiocracy, were prone to meddle in their affairs and cut their funding[9]. Meanwhile, in 1764, the administration liberalized the grain trade, abolishing regulations and instructing local officials to shift their attention from regulating subsistence to policing private property[10]. Virtually no effort was made to win over mass opinion. As Steven L. Kaplan notes in his exhaustive study of the liberalization of the grain trade in the 1760s, even one of the most active champions of Physiocracy during the time of these reforms, Guillaume-François Letrosne, was «deeply pessimistic about the prospects of convincing the people to share his understanding»[11]. Those in charge of implementing the policy, especially Louis XV's Controller-General, Clément-Charles-François de Lavardy, found himself having to mobilize local militias and the royal army. When those forces proved unreliable, he had false rumors spread about a return to market regulation, to allay fears of famine and short-circuit resistance. Neither approach was effective, at least not in the long run.

Facing hostile public opinion in Paris and open revolt in the provinces, the royal administration abandoned its liberal economic policy in 1768. The Physiocrats were furious. Whereas they had kept a low public profile to avoid provoking resistance to the administration's liberal policies, they now exploded into the public sphere to denounce the ignorance of not only the masses but of the *philosophes* who disagreed with them as well. In 1769, a bitter war broke out in the Republic of Letters over the issue. As Dena Goodman notes, this debate was not only about the soundness of Physiocratic science; it was also about

[9]   J. SHOVLIN, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution*, Ithaca NY 2006, pp. 83-92.

[10]   S.L. KAPLAN, *Bread, Politics, and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols, Den Haag 1976.

[11]   *Ibid.*, 2/2, p. 476.

appropriating the mantle of the Enlightenment[12]. Several leading *philosophes*, including the Italian economist Ferdinando Galiani, derided the Physiocrats as arrogant, self-righteous, and fanatical. Rather than engaging public opinion, the Physiocrats lectured down to it, often using incomprehensible jargon.

In 1774, the pendulum swung towards liberalization again. The newly appointed Controller-General, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, issued edicts liberalizing the grain trade and abolishing the guilds and corporations. Though he was an economic liberal, he was absolutist in his approach to implementing reforms. While his political ally and recent appointee as Inspector General of *la Monnaie de Paris*, the marquis de Condorcet, was writing a tract in favor of press freedom, Turgot ordered the suppression of all writings defending the guilds and corporations[13]. His muscular methods provoked so much opposition and violence that the reforms had to be abandoned[14]. Grain regulations and the guilds were restored (though the guilds were significantly restructured). In 1776, Turgot resigned.

Histories of the Old Regime's final decade tend to shift attention from efforts to liberalize the French economy to the problem of finances, and for understandable reasons. By the mid 1780s, the French state was deep in debt. When Charles Alexandre de Calonne became Controller-General in 1783, interest payments alone were consuming 50% of annual revenues[15]. The story of Calonne's failure in 1787 to persuade a handpicked Assembly of Notables to relinquish fiscal privileges, and of his successor's failure to convince a second Assembly of Notables, is well known. His back to the wall, Louis XVI summoned a meeting of the Estates General for 1789. Often overlooked in this narrative is the return to economic liberalization in these years, the reach of which surpassed the policies of Lavardy and Turgot by extending into

[12]   D. GOODMAN, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, Ithaca NY 1994, pp. 186-222.

[13]   S.L. KAPLAN, *La fin des corporations*, Paris 2001, p. 80. For Condorcet's tract on press freedom, see M.J.A.N. DE CARITAT, MARQUIS DE CONDORCET, *Fragments sur la liberté de la presse*, in M.-F. ARAGO - A.C. O'CONNER (eds), *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, 12 vols, Paris 1847, pp. 254-314.

[14]   *Ibid.*, pp. 77-127; see also C.A. BOUTON, *The Flour War*.

[15]   J. SHOVLIN, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 152.

international trade. In 1786, France signed a free-trade agreement with England—the Treaty of Eden, which bears the name of its British negotiator, William Eden[16]. Unlike the British government across the Channel, the French administration did not seek to rally public support for the treaty and was especially cautious and selective in consulting commercial bodies during negotiations. The initial agreement, which was signed on September 26, 1786, covered a wide range of manufactured and agricultural products. It was expanded in January 1787 to cover even more. In June, the royal administration authorized the exportation of grain, liberalizing that market as well.

Calonne explained the benefits of free trade to the Assembly of Notables in his published *Mémoire sur le commerce des grains*. He concluded that public debate on the matter had gone on long enough and that arguments in its favor had prevailed. Deregulation would distribute grain more efficiently by spurring private interests, which were «the unique safeguard of the common good»[17]. Perhaps with prior failures to liberalize the grain trade in mind, he insisted that it was time to «fix» public ideas about the issue[18]. The greatest obstacle to implementing liberal economic policies, Calonne believed, was the irrational fear of the masses. To convince them, he proposed a law that would authorize administrators to intervene in grain markets in times of crisis. He assured his readers, however, that the law would never need to be enforced since free markets would supply grain effectively. Should grain riots appear likely to erupt, local administrations should intervene, but not publicly as suggested by the law. In Calonne's scheme, this law was merely a public-relations expedient. Rather, administrators were advised to collaborate secretly with grain suppliers. This plan summarized what local administrations were, in fact, already doing: simulated sales[19]. In

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[16] I am currently examining the Eden Treaty, its impact, and the political controversies surrounding it. For the most recent treatment of the topic, see M. DONAGHAY, *Calonne and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786*, in «Journal of Modern History», 50, 1978, 3, D1157-D1184.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 475.

[18] C.A. DE CALONNE, *Mémoire sur le commerce des grains*, in H. PIGEONNEAU et al. (eds), *L'administration de l'agriculture au contrôle général des finances (1785-1787): procès-verbaux et rapports*, Paris 1882, p. 474.

[19] J.A. MILLER, *Mastering the Market: The State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700-1860*, Cambridge MA 1999, pp. 50-71.

such arrangements, administrators would purchase grain with public funds but have it brought to market by farmers or merchants, creating the illusion that market forces alone were at work. Such methods, he believed, would prevent fears from distorting grain prices, thereby making such covert interventions in grain markets less necessary over time. In sum, Calonne's plan for «fixing» the public's ideas about free trade amounted to manipulating public opinion, not to mention markets, in order to foster trust in free-market forces. The success of free trade, he believed, depended on managing public perceptions about it.

Like previous attempts to liberalize grain markets, those of 1786 and 1787 failed. Again, they did so spectacularly. But in the rush of so many spectacular events in the late 1780s, it is easy to overlook the political implications of the failure. Contemporaries, however, were well aware of the treaty's devastating impact on the French economy. While British manufactured goods poured into France, generating unemployment, grain seeped out, driving up its price. Free-market policies were denounced regularly in the public sphere. Provincial newspapers found clever ways to circumvent censorship to criticize the treaty[20]. Many *cahiers de doléances*—the lists of grievances drafted throughout France and presented to the king at the meeting of the Estates General in May 1789—called for either abandoning or greatly modifying the treaty[21]. Meanwhile, officials' covert interventions in the grain trade, far from fostering faith in free-markets, raised suspicions. People knew that administrators were up to something but could not determine if they were facilitating or frustrating access to affordable food. (Nor, by the way, could investigators who were charged with looking into the matter.) In any case, in April 1789, on the eve of the meeting of the Estates General, the monarchy reversed its liberalization policy, instructing authorities to resume regulating the grain trade.

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[20] C. JONES, *The Great Chain of Buying*, p. 38, fn. 104.

[21] I am currently counting the number of *bailliage cahiers* that called for canceling or modifying the Eden Treaty. A typical demand appears in the cahier drafted by the Third Estate of Abbeville: «The Third Estate of Abbeville, in addition to calling for pensions to be accorded strictly on the basis of services rendered to the state, declared that «la traité de commerce avec l'Angleterre a porté le coup le plus funeste à nos manufactures; il faut donc en demander la revocation»; J. MAVIDAL - É. LAURENT (eds), *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, 82 vols, Paris 1867-1913, 82/5, p. 442.

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Force and ruse, then, were the means late Old Regime administrators employed to impose «legal despotism»—a term coined by Physiocrats. But instead of furnishing markets with grain at reasonable prices, these methods stoked suspicions and violence over its ever rising cost[22]. The democratization of politics in 1789 made such methods even less tolerable. As sovereignty shifted from the king to the nation and the freedom of expression was declared, public opinion became invested with greater legitimacy. To some, it was the expression of popular sovereignty. Yet, even as deputies in the National Assembly pursued democratic reforms, they also pursued economic liberalization. On August 29, 1789, two days after completing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, they declared one of the most liberal economic laws to date. Although the law banned exports of grain (which came as a relief to many), it authorized off-market sales and banned inspections of private grain supplies, thus giving grain merchants complete freedom to buy and sell grain as they pleased, with no public oversight[23]. Little more than a month later, thousands of women from Paris marched to Versailles to demand bread in the famous Women's Bread March. They carried their demands to the Royal Palace, as is well known, but they also stormed the National Assembly, pushing deputies aside at the podium and crying out «du pain! du pain!—pas de discours!»[24].

The Revolution continued swinging back and forth between free trade and market regulation over the next five years, polarizing public opinion and undermining the new regime's legitimacy. In the wake of the monarchy's overthrow on August 10, 1792, and the rise of Jacobins to power, Jean-Marie Roland, Minister of the Interior, sought once again to liberalize the grain trade. A staunch republican, he was convinced of the need to persuade public opinion, rather than sneaking around it or running roughshod over it. With funds accorded to him by the

[22] According to J. NICOLAS's quantitative study of peasant revolts in the eighteenth century, grain related revolts rose markedly in the Regime's last thirty years, and especially in its final years; *La Rebellion francaise: mouvements populaires et conscience sociale (1661-1789)*, Paris 2002.

[23] J.A. MILLER, *Mastering the Market*, pp. 125-128.

[24] *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur, seule histoire authentique et inaltérée de la Révolution française, depuis la réunion des Etats-Généraux jusq'au Consulat (mai 1789-novembre 1799), avec des notes explicatives* (hereafter *Moniteur*), 31 vols, Paris 1858-1863, 1/71 (October 10, 1789), p. 290.

legislature, he and his wife, Mme Roland, set up a «Bureau of Public Spirit». Together with the assistance of their longtime friend, Xavier François Lanthenas, they established a nationwide network of agents to spread propaganda and instruct the public. Republicanizing hearts and liberalizing minds were two of the most important objectives of Roland's campaign to morally regenerate society. People needed to understand and submit to natural economic laws, which prescribed free trade. «Such is the kind of revolution still needed», Roland declared in a speech to the National Convention in which he complained of resistance to free-markets, «une révolution des moeurs!»[25].

But for many, the free market's invisible hand was delivering invisible benefits. The price of grain was soaring, for several reasons, including the plummeting value of the revolutionary currency, the *assignat*. Even as France was being invaded by foreign troops, Roland continued trumpeting the free market, tethering it to the «general will». He entrenched himself in his economic dogma and grew paranoid about the forces opposing them. In an address on September 1, 1792, he announced his suspicions that «enemies of the Revolution» were stirring up fears about the free market to advance their particular interests at the expense of the general interest.

«A league similar to the one formed against you in 1789 is plotting against you today ... they stir up imaginary fears [of famine] to distract us from the evil they are preparing for us ... [they seek to] weaken us by provoking internal quarrels, from which they profit»[26].

Roland discounted the widespread belief that it was wealthy farmers and merchants who were plotting against the people by hoarding and exporting grain. «Could farmers and the owners of grain supplies, who have made such great profits in recent years, calculate so coldly in the pursuit of even greater profits?»[27] Many thought that they could, and reports from border regions and from abroad confirmed that exports of staples were going unstopped, despite laws banning

[25] J.-M. ROLAND, *Lettre du Ministre de l'Intérieur à la Convention nationale, du 30 septembre 1792, l'an premier de la République Française. Imprimée par ordre de la Convention nationale et envoyée aux 83 départements*, Paris 1792, p. 8.

[26] J.-M. ROLAND, *Le Ministre de l'Intérieur aux corps administratifs, et, par eux, à tous les citoyens*, September 1, 1792, p. 1.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

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them[28]. But Roland's question was rhetorical, and he did not bother answering it. Instead, he turned to what he took to be the real problem: free-market obstructionists. These «enemies of the public weal [*la chose publique*]», he insisted, were to be «punished terribly!»[29].

The alternative to punishment was persuasion. Later that autumn, Roland urged patriotic and popular societies throughout France to instruct the people about their true interests and duties. «Friends of the Constitution, teach people SUBMISSION TO THE LAW; teach them how its yoke is sweet and honorable under a free Constitution that secures the general will. Through your example and speech, ensure that grain circulates freely»[30]. Roland's adversaries in the Jacobin Club had little difficulty exploiting popular discontent over Roland's economic policy. Yet, even supporters of deregulated grain markets were troubled by their practical and moral implications. In a joint report to the National Convention in November 1792, the Committees of Agriculture and Commerce concluded that the penury of grain in many parts of France was the fault not only of merchants, who were hiding and exporting it for

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[28] Roland's predecessor, Bon Claude Cahier de Gerville, admitted knowledge of this to the National Assembly but thought nothing could be done to stop it; *Moniteur*, 11/59 (February 28, 1792), p. 490. See the report written by the citizen Cusset concerning the exportation of grain by French farmers in the department of le Nord to the generals of enemy troops, *Moniteur universel*, December 7, 1792, 14, pp. 342, 663. The public-spirit agent Louis-Guillaume Régnier reported that wholesale merchants in Bayonne were regularly exporting to Spain, England, and Holland. See his report dated December 12, 1792, in Archives Nationales de France (hereafter AN), H¹ 1448. A Frenchman in Holland by the name of «Monsieur Fouscuberte» informed the Minister of the Navy in spring 1792 (after exportations had been banned) that staples from the French colonies, initially imported into the interior of France, were being redirected as exports to Holland, thus driving up their price; see AN, H¹ 1439, «Extrait d'une lettre écrit au Ministre de la Marine par M. Fouscuberte ... à Rotterdam, le 9 avril 1792». Claude Fauchet reported to the Legislative Assembly in February 1792 that the royal government was secretly authorizing the sale of grain to England then reimporting it with public funds to deal with subsistence crises; *Moniteur*, 11/50 (February 19, 1792), p. 411.

[29] J.-M. ROLAND, *Le Ministre de l'Intérieur aux corps administratifs*, pp. 2-3. Roland also called for punishing landowners who threw in their lot with the enemy and farmers who purposely withheld staples to drive up prices.

[30] J.-M. ROLAND, «À mes Concitoyens*» The asterisk note reads, «Particulièrement à ceux qui réunissent en société patriotique»; AN, H¹ 1439, doc. 107 (penciled). Also in BnF, folio Lb-41-5364(5). Capitalized emphasis in original.

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fear of seeing it looted or sold at a loss, but also of local administrators who, often wealthy farmers and merchants, were using their authority to manage grain movements in ways to drive up prices[31]. While supporting free markets in theory, the committees recommended regulations, specifically, obliging grain merchants to sell in times of scarcity while reinforcing the protection of granaries from pillage. These measures, they hoped, would establish a climate of trust, reassuring the people that their fate was not left to greedy speculators while reassuring farmers and merchants that their property would be safe from spoliation.

Less than two weeks later, however, the Executive Council, on which Roland and Étienne Clavière (international financier, Minister of Finances, and adept of Adam Smith) sat, issued a proclamation calling for totally free subsistence markets[32]. Unlike Roland's public-spirit propaganda, which put the general interest before particular ones, the proclamation insisted on giving particular interests free reign, or at least the particular interests of *négociants*.

«If domestic commerce in France is free, if négociants are not disturbed in the purchase or transport of grain, they will be spurred by their interest to send grain to areas where prices are high and supplies low. [With these shipments] prices will begin to drop, and individuals, no longer afraid of starving, will be able to return to work»[33].

In early December, the Convention passed a raft of laws enforcing free-market policies, including one that imposed the death penalty on anyone found obstructing grain movements, even through alarmist speech[34]. In the clash between economic liberalization on the one hand and public opinion and free expression on the other, it was the latter that was to give way.

Roland received enthusiastic support for his propaganda from some quarters. Many local administrators were delighted to see national leadership on the issues of economic liberalization and social discipline. The mayor

[31]   *Moniteur*, 14/309 (November 4, 1792), pp. 377-378.

[32]   Clavière's interest in Smith was conveyed to Jean-Baptiste Say, who collaborated with Clavière in the late 1780s. J.H. HOLLANDER, *Adam Smith, 1776-1926*, in «Journal of Political Economy», 35, 1927, 2, p. 193.

[33]   *Moniteur*, 14/319 (November 14, 1792), p. 462.

[34]   J.A. MILLER, *Mastering the Market*, pp. 142-143. See especially the law of December 8, 1792, in *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. 54, 688. Debate in the National Convention indicates that «provoking obstruction» encompassed alarmist speech and writing.

and municipal officials of Neufchâtel (department of Seine-Inférieure) applauded Roland, «for all your efforts to enlighten your fellow citizens about their true interests and their duties»[35]. A district administrator in the city of Niort, Emmanuel Guillemeau, wrote a long letter to Roland elaborating on Roland's economic principles and explaining the main obstacle to their realization: ignorance. «I am a victim of the ease with which ignorant people can be alarmed by anything that differs from their ordinary ideas»[36]. Guillemeau believed that education was the Republic's most urgent task. It was even more urgent than securing food. Acknowledging the poor's plight, he nevertheless saw acts of charity as so many sterile bribes. They would not, at any rate, bring about moral regeneration. «The goods that are given to the poor only affect them as long as the goods are given. The poor are disposed to rally to the cause of those who provide [this charity] only for the day that it is provided. The next day, the benefactor is forgotten.»

Heartened by this kindred spirit, Roland returned a warm letter of appreciation. «France would be better off if more people thought like you. Your ideas are the ones I most cherish. One obeys laws not because they are imposed but because they are inscribed in one's heart»[37]. Roland asked Guillemeau to provide the names of potential public instructors in the countryside around Niort to whom he could send «good readings food». It is difficult to discern whether the strikethrough of «bonnes lectures» and insertion of «bonne nourriture» indicates Roland's sincere use of a metaphor for public instruction or the ironic protest of an assistant, such as the more socially minded Lanthenas, who left the bureau in November and distanced himself from the Rolands, his longtime friends.

Agents found that people were often receptive to the Minister's propaganda when it was accompanied by food, clothes, even small change. Numerous reports speak of such spontaneous acts of generosity. The agent Gadol worked on converting radicals in the faubourg Saint-Antoine to Roland-style republicanism with dinners and drinks at a neighborhood tavern; Gonchon took two destitute and wayward

[35] AN, F¹c III, Seine-Inférieure, carton 15, doc. 162.

[36] AN, F¹c III, Vendée, carton 7, doc. 26, letter dated August 21, 1792.

[37] AN, F¹c III, Roland's response is joined with the original letter.

soldiers out for dinner and gave them 10 *francs* each; Lalande gave the poor parents of seven children a meal and five *livres*[38]. Roland did not complain about such informal acts of charity. But he reprimanded his agent Enenon, who insisted that such generosity be institutionalized, constituting a fundamental component of republicanism. After weeks without receiving new propaganda shipments and fearing insurrection, Enenon began dispensing small sums to people in the department of Vienne. «The misery of some individuals, combined with the zeal of others, necessitates the greatest generosity»[39]. He was, indeed, generous. The items enumerated under the rubric «dépenses et charités» of his four page expense report for the months of September and October amounted to 1002 *livres* and 5 *sous*, much of it charity[40]. In early September, Enenon explained,

«The people are forced to turn to a charitable hand for subsistence, and this hand determines their opinion ... I can think of no more powerful way to transform the masses corrupted in the name of the divinity than to alleviate the misery of the working class ... the least bit of charity performs miracles!»[41].

Lanthenas, Roland's assistant, agreed.

«Your reflections on the ways to attach people to the Revolution by relieving it of its misery are just and sound ... nothing is more imperative now than to convey that a government by the people must also be for the people ... that the aid people can expect to receive will be greater and less humiliating than the insolent charity handed out by its former tyrants»[42].

Once Roland became aware of this conversation, he scolded Enenon.

[38] Gadol's «corrupt» methods were revealed in a public investigation of the bureau in April 1793, *Rapport fait par le Citoyen Brival au nom du Comité de sûreté générale, relativement aux papiers trouvés chez le citoyen Roland et inventoriés par les commissaires de la Convention*, Paris 1793. Gonchon's generosity was described in his report as sent from Bar le Duc on September 14, 1792. Lalande's charity was recounted in his report from Civray, dated October 30, 1792. The latter two reports can be found in AN, H¹ 1448.

[39] AN, H¹ 1448, report dated October 31, 1792.

[40] AN, H¹ 1448, «État des dépenses que j'ai faites depuis le premier septembre jusqu'au 31 octobre», included with the report written on this date.

[41] AN, H¹ 1448, report sent from Poitiers, dated September 3, 1792.

[42] AN, H¹ 1448, letter of September 1792 (no date specified), my emphasis.

«Your mission is purely moral. Its aim is to instruct and inspire patriotism through the simple means of persuasion, zeal, and example. It does not authorize you to spread liberalities ... such alms are on your personal account since I did not authorize you to hand them out. They tend to distort your mission, buying sentiments that cannot be bought»[43].

But couldn't republican sentiments—or public opinion—be bought? Modest farmers and National Guardsmen in the department of Seine-Inférieure thought so. In January 1793, they sent the minister a letter stipulating the terms of their loyalty to the new order:

«Bread, wine, good meat—[securing] these resources will most certainly secure our favorable disposition ... Without them, [our opinion] becomes marred, errant, and prey to the will of those who provide us aid in our state of need»[44].

They continued by outlining «the most certain measures» that the government should adopt «to attach us [to the Republic]». The measures included the regulation of staple markets.

Revolutionaries failed to reconcile competing views on economic liberalization in the realm of public opinion. The Girondin-wing of the Jacobin Club, of which Roland was a leading figure, was purged from the club in the fall of 1792, and several Girondins were arrested and executed the following year. Opponents of economic liberalization began gaining the upper hand in politics, and demands for market controls and wealth redistribution were translated into legislation. On May 4, 1793, the National Convention set price ceilings for grain and called for distributing bread to the families of soldiers: two measures that turned out to be controversial. Yet, even during the Terror, leading Jacobins tried at times to advance the cause of economic liberalization. Roland's successor to the Ministry of the Interior, Dominique-Joseph Garat, gave his itinerant agents copies of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Arthur Young's *Journey through France*. He asked them to provide him with reports on local conditions, calibrating their observations in light of the perspectives of Smith and Young. In the context of the Terror, however, Garat did not encourage widespread diffusion of these texts. Some agents, enthralled with Smith, requested further

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[43] AN, H¹ 1448, letter by the Minister of the Interior to Enenon, dated November 25, 1792.

[44] AN, F¹ᶜ III, Seine-Inférieure, carton 15, undated but grouped with documents of January 1793.

copies to distribute, but there is no evidence in the correspondence that such requests were satisfied[45]. With pike-fisted *sans-culottes* largely in control of Paris, and unofficial armies of *sans-culottes* roaming the countryside delivering rough justice to speculators and hoarders of grain, it was not the time to propound free-market ideas publicly[46]. Revolutionaries would resume liberal economic policies after the Terror, once the government had repressed the popular movement and, hence, popular opinion.

This brief account of public opinion and the problem of economic justice will, I hope, incite further reflection on how economic liberals have approached the problem of public opinion in the modern era. Political liberalism, which espouses free speech and sanctifies public opinion, has evolved alongside economic liberalism, which espouses free markets and sanctifies natural economic laws, often without regard to public opinion. Whereas late Old Regime economic reformers treated public opinion with contempt and cynicism, revolutionary republicans adopted an earnest, pedagogical approach, at least during the Revolution's early years. As their frustrations with a recalcitrant public grew, they became ever more fanatical about regenerating society and ever more intolerant of dissent. At the same time, some opponents of economic liberalism consolidated their anger into militant groups, such as the *sans-culottes*, who terrorized grain merchants in the provinces and Girondin leaders in Paris, eventually bringing about the latter's purge and execution in 1793. But by spring 1794, the Terror began turning against radicals, as is evident in the liquidation of the *Hébertiste* faction in Paris. In striking at liberals and levelers alike, the Terror, I believe, gave expression to unresolved tensions over economic justice. Was society to be based on free markets and inviolable property rights or was it to be based on market regulation and wealth redistribution? The public sphere failed

[45] On October 13, 1793, the agent Jean Garnier repeated his request for copies of the works of Smith and Young to be sent to him by the Minister of the Interior. P. CARON (ed.), *Rapports des Agents du Ministre de l'Intérieur dans les Départements (1793 - an 2)*, 2 vols, Paris 1913, 2/1, p. 443.

[46] For classic studies on the sans-culottes and the question of subsistence, see A. MATHIEZ, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur,* Paris 1927; A. SOBOUL, *The Parisian Sans-culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-94,* trans. by G. LEWIS, Oxford 1964; R. COBB, *Les armées révolutionnaires; instrument de la Terreur dans les départements, avril 1793 (floréal an II),* 2 vols, Paris 1961-1963.

to function as a place where opposing opinions on these matters could be transformed into consensus. Passions were too intense, interests too great. Struggles over determining the republican terms of economic justice thus degenerated into *rapports de force*. Those struggles brought forward another tension, one that persists today, namely, between public opinion as a source of sovereignty and public opinion as an object of discipline and control.

Public/Secret: Eighteenth-Century Hesitations about «Public Opinion»

by *Edoardo Tortarolo*

One of the foundational elements of the Enlightenment project is the vision of a world in which what is public prevails not over what is private (which is, rather, recognized and reinforced as a part of the human overall advancement), but over what is kept secret. The «Man of the Enlightenment» was a public person who interacted with his peers in the light of day[1]. He came to the conclusion that belonging to the upper crust of society is morally illegitimate if not substantiated by individual merit which has proved itself under the scrutiny of others. He mixed freely with his peers and accepted their opinions while he considered himself entitled to put their opinions under the microscope of criticism.

Living conditions in the eighteenth century can hardly be compared to the world experience of the twenty-first century. Any form of anachronism should be carefully avoided. Still, it can be claimed that crucial elements of this attitude have been inherited by our present concern with transparency and our urge to know what is hidden beneath the veil of secrecy[2]. Even those who blame the Enlightenment for the approaching collapse of the capitalist world argue in terms of emancipation from secrecy[3]. The dichotomy of public/good and secret/bad is an axiom

[1]   For a good introduction to the social dimensions of this obviously highly abstract idea, see the essays in M. VOVELLE (ed.), *Enlightenment Portraits*, transl. by L. Cochrane, Chicago IL 1997.

[2]   Micah Sinfry mentions Assange's project as striving to build a global «lawless news organization» that explicitly echoes the Enlightenment project, cfr. M. SINFRY, *WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency*, Berkeley CA 2011, p. 170.

[3]   S. ŽIŽEK, *Good Manners in the Age of Wikileaks*, in «London Review of Books», 33, January 20, 2011, 2.

upon which democracy is believed to be based; an axiom to which we all adhere, more or less sincerely, whilst keeping aside a residual role for private matters. In Enlightenment discussions and writings, however, the public and the secret constituted, above all, problems that needed clarification, not established facts. The gradual redefinition of these terms has had an evident impact on our perception of society and its regulating institutions. Chronicling the tensions, which hold together these opposed poles in the reflections of leading European Enlightenment thinkers reveals the emergence of some fundamental concepts of our culture. These concepts are by now substantially altered, and can be difficult to grasp even though we continue to use the same words for them, in a way that can be sometimes misleading.

A revision of the canonical interpretation that Jürgen Habermas worked out in the 1950s is necessary to reconstruct the problematic and sometimes even contradictory elements of the eighteenth-century notion of public opinion[4]. For Kant, to whom we owe the celebrated definition of Enlightenment as man's emergence from his «self-incurred immaturity», the exercise of reason presupposes a society of equals who concur in the search for truth: the space of the public is the space where the process of Enlightenment unfolds. The emancipation from superstition and unfounded beliefs could not be kept secret. Keeping Enlightenment secret would make no sense at all, as this would rule out any chance of achieving the desired result regarding its specific object: society as a whole and not a restricted group or a privileged individual. Secrecy may at the most be a temporary expedient in a difficult moment, a transitional phase in a relentless publicizing process that must resist the oppression of a blind and irrational power. In his *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), Kant signaled the crucial importance of this theme and overturned, at least apparently, the traditional terminology[5]. A private society is necessarily a limited one where everybody complies with the

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[4] Habermas himself proposed some ideas for revision in the introduction to the 1990 edition of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 1990. A revision of the concept of public opinion, which uses Koselleck's «Kollektivsingular», can now be found in K. WETTERS, *The Opinion System. Impasses of the Public Sphere from Hobbes to Habermas*, New York 2008.

[5] J. SCHMIDT, *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, Berkeley CA 1996.

rules, performs his or her function as an instrument of the collective good, and plays his or her assigned role. These are noble and necessary tasks, but they also differ from the free and disinterested public dialogue, which has the aim of better understanding our civil and religious life. Anyone who wishes to participate in the Enlightenment—as an official, teacher, or businessperson—does not only follow the rules that bind the subjects of a monarchy. He is also a public person who, as an active participant in the public sphere, thoroughly examines and analyzes the very laws he obeys. He is profoundly interested in seeing the reality of the world and demands an osmosis between the public world of criticism and the public world of political decisions, much more strongly than Kant suggested only implicitly, for obvious reasons of prudence. Kant later, when the French Revolution was reverberating across the rest of Europe, demanded that the more public of men, the philosophers, play a role in resisting the secret politics of the rulers, and strive to thwart the plots of the governing class if these should be unjust, as he claimed in his writings on perpetual peace in 1795.

When Kant wrote of the public and the secret, he was continuing a tense discussion about various, turbulent historical events, which had confronted those who lived through the eighteenth century; the effort made to follow these changes, to understand them, to evaluate them empirically and morally, to find some significance in them was never-ending and weighed down with all the uncertainties one encounters when trying to grasp new concepts.

Let us look at this profound transformation and consider how much the public space was enlarged, how much the space of the secret had to provide new, sometimes forceful arguments in order to trump the evident demand for publicness which was coming from the educated classes of European society. The will to open up public spaces did not preclude the consciousness that not everything should become public. There was certainly an enthusiastic rush to push the limits of the public, to annex increasingly large portions of social knowledge, in the conviction that the social dimension was in itself a contribution towards the common good. This was also said by du Marsais in a text included in the *Encyclopédie*, but written between the 1720s and '30s, in which he defined a philosopher: «man is certainly not a monster who should live only in the depths of the sea or in the thick of a forest ... Reason demands of him that he should know, study and commit himself to attaining

sociable qualities [les qualités sociables]»[6]. The ideal Enlightened man is one who lives, or who at least would very much like to live amidst the circulation of ideas and free discussion; continually advancing his knowledge of nature and of human society. He should also profit, in his private, familial and individual life, from all of the truths, which an incipient but already visible modernity causes to emerge.

Anything that is kept secret is fundamentally suspect because it is removed from the scrutiny of human reason. When a secret is revealed, it shows its true nature, whether of deception, manipulation, violence, or another type of inhumanity. The Roman and Spanish Inquisitions became symbols of a practice of secrecy, which characterized the major part of their actions: from persecution to the deliberation of the punishment, all conducted within the prison walls. On the other hand, at the root of the diffusion of superstitions there is always a secret: a decision, an event, a thought, whose existence has been knowingly concealed under a veil of deception and is propagated in order to reinforce the superstitions, which—as was said in an early work of radical Enlightenment thought—keep the population in an abyss of ignorance to the advantage of the rulers and clergy[7]. Only when a secret is made known to all or to the majority can it cease to have negative effects. At the same time, there is no reason to keep hidden something that is positive and of benefit to the human race. And in fact, examples of goodness—when they become known—will act as a spur and an example to emulate: their becoming public will trigger a virtuous circle of imitation. It is these reflections on the public and the secret which never had an exact correspondence in eighteenth-century reality, but which guided behaviors and decisions, and not least a growing obsession to see everywhere conspiracies of hidden powers secretly at work, with the aim of endangering society and its rulers. The abolition of the Order of Jesuits in 1773, as a consequence of continuous pressure from the Bourbon rulers joined with public opinion, was saluted as a liberation from a hidden and inscrutable power, damaging as much to the ruling class as to the people. There was also the widespread conviction

[6] CÉSAR CHESNEAU DU MARSAIS, *Le philosophe*, ed. by G. MORI (Studi settecenteschi, 23), Napoli 2003, p. 41.

[7] *Trattato dei tre impostori. La vita e lo spirito del signor Benedetto de Spinoza*, ed. by S. BERTI, Torino 1994, p. 67.

above all in the French Enlightenment movement that the long period of despotism had corrupted human nature, making people weak and fearful and ignorant of their own strength: only free and public discussion would once again accustom them to being themselves.

However, moments of fatigue, of desperation, were not lacking. D'Alembert, together with Diderot the central character in the undertaking of the *Encyclopédie*, denounced the fact that even within the Republic of Letters there were hidden «enemies furtive and fearful of recognizing the true talent, which disdains them, and mysterious protectors of lowbrow literature, which, instead, despises them»[8]. In one of the most-read texts of the century, *De l'homme*, (posthumously published in 1773) a brilliant avowal of the liberty of the press and its necessity for human contentment, the author Helvétius became caught up in the painful belief that it was already too late. «The suffocation of thought in minds and virtue in spirits is a fact of despotism»: open confrontation between opposing views, the only guarantee of progress, was by then impossible in France.

When they posed the question of the movement of boundaries between the public and the secret, Enlightenment thinkers had precise references in institutional and social reality. In this period, any intellectual product had to take into consideration the practical conditions in which the movement from secret to public could take place. Eighteenth-century Europe was for the most part dominated by mechanisms of control over the circulation of ideas, most importantly those of the institutions of censorship, which subjected manuscripts to examination before printing. The dominant model was that of the Roman Catholic Church, which had emerged from the Counter-Reformation and which was the jealous custodian of a fixed liturgy, practiced in a form of Latin that had become incomprehensible to most, and the guardian of indisputable dogmas on all aspects of human life on earth and in the hereafter. In spite of all the tensions, which existed, state and ecclesiastical institutions were closely interwoven with regards to their members and structures and they shared for a large part of the century the fear that access to knowledge would undermine the foundations of obedience and respect. Writers necessarily had to engage with the mechanisms that would

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[8]   J. D'ALEMBERT, *Mélanges de literature, d'histoire, et de philosophie*, Amsterdam 1764-1767, vol. 5, p. 494.

lead to the approval and publication of their texts, and they were well aware of the limits imposed by the authorization procedures. Without any appreciable distinction between monarchies and republics, the first mechanism for keeping secret that, which should remain secret, was censorship.

An exception was England, where prepublication censorship was abolished by Parliament in 1695, as well as the Netherlands where political power was from the start too decentralized and fragmented to permit the implementation of systematic control. Where the move from the protection of the Roman Catholic Church to secular rule took place, as in some Italian states and in the Hapsburg territories under Maria Theresa and Joseph II, the criteria for secrecy changed, but the principle remained that it was the responsibility of the civil or ecclesiastical authorities to clearly separate what was public, and what was not to become public. Also in England and the Netherlands, however, printed matter deemed unacceptable was seized, destroyed, or, in some cases, publicly burnt to symbolize the right of the sovereign, of his magistrates and indirectly of ecclesiastical institutions, anywhere in Europe, to reverse the passage from secret to public. This was evidently an unrealistic ambition: the porous borders between the various states, the differing censorship policies of different countries, the interest of some states to permit publishing articles aimed at exportation, the growth of a public of readers curious for novelty—all these factors encouraged a host of writers to progressively push back the boundaries between secret and public.

More than an abstract battle for freedom of the press, the century of the Enlightenment demonstrates a continuous renegotiation of the boundaries between the secret and the public. From this there emerged at the end of the century the principle that the right of press freedom was a right to be protected constitutionally, and a search to increase the flexibility of the boundaries between the legal market of knowledge, of ideas, of information and the vast irrepressible area of clandestine or anonymous print, to reinforce the mechanisms of publicity, which were guaranteed by the printing of periodicals and weekly gazettes. It was during the discussions about these boundaries between secret and public, how to define and defend them, in connection with the changing political situations of each country, that the men of the Enlightenment period became aware of the theoretical and practical

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implications of the separation between the secret and the public and discerned both the boundaries imposed by institutional repression on what had become public, as well as the restrictions which writers had to impose on themselves before divulging their ideas, news, speculations, anxieties and dreams. In the middle of the century, Malesherbes, who was responsible for the censorship of books for the French monarchy, and an intellectual close to the Enlightenment movement, indicated the necessity of widening the boundaries of what was permissible to print because the customs and knowledge, in short, «the spirit» of French society had progressed, but also in order to reaffirm the principle that the state had the right to control what was made public. In 1775, once more taking up this topic, Malesherbes maintained that the invention of the press restored to the nation the right to publicly discuss the acts of government. This had been possible in an age when words were spoken publicly in assemblies, but had become impossible in the age of the (hand)written word, the age of secrecy from which they were now emerging.

«The 'Public' thus took on the role of an independent tribunal for all powers, which all powers should respect, which should prize all talents, and pronounce on that, which merits discussion. And in an enlightened century, in which every citizen may use the press to speak to the entire nation, those with the talent to educate or to inspire others—in short, the literati—are as close to their disparate public as were the orators of Rome and Athens who spoke amidst the public assembled to hear them»[9].

Malesherbes, and with him the Enlightenment thinkers, was aware that this process of creating a public sphere was taking place before their very eyes: from the middle of the century one finds—to mention only one aspect—the new notion of «public opinion», which spread from France across the rest of Europe: in this new concept, «opinion» lost the connotation of «belief prevalent but erroneous», and acquired the connotation of prevailing and correct opinion: it came to mean the expression of the good sense of the enlightened majority. Governing bodies, in particular that of the French absolute monarchy, were slow, however, or lacking determination to adapt their judicial and administrative systems to the new reality of expectations, interests, perceptions of the right to information. In the case of France, the French Church had been excluded from the mechanism of censorship, which was based on

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[9] C.-G. DE LAMOIGNON DE MALESHERBES, *Mémoires sur la Librairie. Mémoire sur la liberté de la press*, Paris 1994, pp. 31-33.

the accountability demanded of the censors and the publishing companies by the monarchy. These censors and publishers were obviously interested in maintaining tight control of the monopoly of publishing, but it was not until July 1789 that the control system collapsed and imploded. The Spanish monarchy had organized a screening system for the press and printed material imported from other countries, paying particular attention to correctly interpreting the demands of the Catholic Church, and tightening the reins towards the end of the century. In the Italian states, there was a notable diversity of objectives and methods. But all of the states, and the Republic of Venice above all, as an international centre of journalism and scholarship, were at pains not to lose the economic advantages of this flourishing publishing activity and of a public well informed about European culture and who demanded up-to-date and interesting books, but who were also careful not to enter into confrontation, or at least not too obviously, with the ecclesiastical institutions, with moral and juridical conventions, or with the rules of a society of inherited privilege. The paradoxical fragmentation of the centers of power in Central Europe had the effect of creating a free space, which had not been planned, the result of innumerable micro-censorship regimes enacted by every political, secular, or religious unit, be they Lutheran or Roman Catholic, monarchical, diocesan or civilian. The coordination of the many conflicting interests was impossible, in spite of the desire of the imperial authorities to hold on to the office of supreme justice. Within this process of the expansion of the public sphere by the press, the censorship reform brought in by Joseph II in 1781 replaced the concerns of religious orthodoxy with the educational function of the state and a general slackening of the prohibitions, hailed (or alternatively disapproved of) as «freedom of the press».

Despite the cautious transition from a harsh severity to a mild toler-ance on the part of the censors, often in correspondence with writers, commercial concerns and the at times influential pressure applied by the printers, no European country chose to go down the route taken by the English Parliament in 1695. To the surprise of most travelers to England, the English Parliament allowed a flourishing printing press to treat of political, religious, and moral authorities occasionally very disrespectfully and to indulge in patently false or exaggerated news and personal slander verging on blackmail. Ruling elites in Continental Europe shied away from experimenting with a radical revision of the

boundaries between the secret and the public, between the sayable and unsayable, between education and manipulation, nor had they witnessed such unbridled growth in the number of readers, capable of dictating the success of a writer by virtue of their preferences and thus of expressing their own political orientations.

Nevertheless, in England too—where, in the 1770s, works by supporters of the War of Independence in the American colonies were being freely printed—distinctions were still perceived between what was publishable and not, and government action called for to restrict the freedom to transform everything into public knowledge. Hume commented on this, although not renouncing the obligation, which he had argued years before, for the possibility of wide discussion[10].

The most interesting examples of the shift from strict censorship to a practice of public criticism were furnished by the absolute monarchies, however, where the theory of a state monopoly of secrecy proved incompatible with the widespread practice of the diffusion of texts, and official censorship was in conflict with the self-perception of writers as a civilizing force in society. Between the beginning and the end of the century, the boundaries between the secret and the public in fact moved significantly. In absolute monarchies, secrecy surrounded all the decisions of the monarch and state organs: ignorance of the reasoning behind such decisions was considered the basic condition for ensuring obedience. Nevertheless, before being endorsed during the French Revolution, public criticism was exercised by means of allusion, metaphor, the search for a dialogue with readers capable of reading between the lines and gathering the true meaning of the text. The texts of the Enlightenment thinkers were read—and should still be read—with the utmost of attention paid to the implicit, to the aspects mentioned above, to the contrast often hinted at between past and present, between present and future, between discussion of the exotic and the local. The confrontation between censors and writers is always conducted in the virtual presence of the actual «receiver» of the thoughts of one or the other, namely the reader. However, topics and specific information could not be dealt with only implicitly, between an allusion and an erudite

[10]   *Essays on the Freedom of the Press*: DAVID HUME, *Essay II. Of the Liberty of the Press*, in D. HUME, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. by T. HILL GREEN and T. HODGE GROSE, London 1882, vol. III (reprint Aalen 1964).

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reference, nor be exclusively confined to the illegal press. The Enlightenment critics found it necessary to make public and legitimate what had been concealed by secrecy. Topics as diverse as internal revenues, military outgoings, court expenses, the organization of the army were all supposed to remain secret for a large part of the century.

When the recurring crises in France made it necessary to publish data that could demonstrate the gravity of the situation, extensive concealment was still employed: Minister Vauban had to witness the confiscation of copies of his fiscal reform proposals in 1710, which would nonetheless have been destined for a very small and well-controlled circulation. Only in 1781 did Necker publish his *Compte-rendu au Roi* on the financial situation of the monarchy. This scanty and unreliable picture of the state balance sheet was hailed as the end of an age of secrecy and the opening up of debate in France, even on financial questions, although it cost Necker his ministerial post. For Diderot, demonstrating expenses for a war or other exceptional circumstances to the nation was not only a duty, but also a positive instrument for maintaining the loyalty of the population[11].

In the course of the century, everything to do with judiciary practices and criminal procedures would be included in the discussion about the limits of secrecy. The reordering and rationalization of the right to punish inevitably led to the publishing of social codes and the open discussion of their revision and reform. In 1777, Voltaire asked himself if: «all the secret procedures are too much like the fuse which burns imperceptibly and sets off the bomb. Must justice be secret? Only a criminal should hide himself»[12]. More aware of the implications of secrecy in social life, in 1762 Beccaria had indicated secret accusations and punishments as a cause of the moral corruption of citizens, who lose all hope in the future:

«Who can defend himself from calumny, armed with that impenetrable shield of tyranny, secrety? What a miserable government must that be, where the sovereign suspects an enemy in every subject, and, to secure the tranquility of the public, is obliged to sacrifice the repose of every individual?»[13].

[11] D. DIDEROT, *Entretiens avec Catherine II*, in *Œuvres politiques*, ed. by P. VERNIÈRE, Paris 1963, p. 211.

[12] VOLTAIRE, *Prix de la justice et de l'humanité*, A Londres 1777, p. 100.

[13] C. BECCARIA, *On Crimes and Punishments*, Albany NY 1872, ch. 15, p. 27.

Beccaria courageously developed and generalized Montesquieu's observation that secrecy suits the monarchy, where the passion for making things public is less than in republics; in the raising of public awareness of accusations as well as of punishments, an extremely strong argument in favor of the freedom of speech and criticism was implicit[14]. Using secrecy renders even the operations of governments suspect, which are in fact acceptable and congruous with the aspiration of the *philosophes*.

The political affairs of the second half of the century put people on guard against Machiavellianism in those who ruled over the lives of the population beneath a veil of secrecy. When the three rulers of Prussia, Russia, and Austria annexed parts of Poland during 1772, it was the secrecy of the treaties which provoked surprise across Europe and was seen as a moral aggravation of the already reckless conduct of the rulers in at least two of the three cases—those of Frederick II of Prussia and Catherine II of Russia, who had been considered loyal friends of the *philosophes*.

The principle that institutions function in secret without making their operations public is the constant polemical target for pushing back the boundaries of secrecy. The physiocrats make use of the rhetoric of secrecy, which must be unmasked in order to spread the principles of their social beliefs and of the production and diffusion of their knowledge to restricted circles of administrators in the educated classes of European society. The motivations for irrational fiscal organization were kept secret because, if it were discussed, they would lose their value.

What moves in the shadows represents a danger; the attack on the Jesuits had its fundamental motivation in the secrecy, which enveloped the life of the Order founded by Loyola to support the papacy. Metaphors about the light of day, which illuminates everything and about the veil of secrecy being eventually lifted to expose reality became popular and were invoked to call for the suppression of the power—real or perceived—of the Jesuit Order.

Expanding the space of the public was always a delicate and ambiguous task that may require a transition before reaching its full completion. It meant above all experimenting with esoteric forms of self-organization, such as in Masonic lodges, which in the ideal-typical case protect free

[14] Ch. SECONDAT DE MONTESQUIEU, *Esprit des lois*, Paris 1973.

speech from suppression by the authorities, with the expectation of divulging the rational teachings developed within such groups[15]. It also meant confronting within society itself the resistance of those who base their economic position upon secrecy. The *Encyclopédie* by Diderot and d'Alembert, even more than being a multi-volume discussion of philosophical and religious essentials, is a *Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts*.

It reveals to the public the secrets of artisans and the functioning of the human body and so forth; it democratizes knowledge, which has not only increased but which also touches and will continue to touch an increasing percentage of the population including future generations, as explicitly mentioned in the chapter *Encyclopédie*[16]. Only that which is available to the public represents a lasting contribution to its happiness in general.

Making things public is a commitment and a responsibility that is projected into the future of political developments. For the Paris of 2440 Mercier, one of many writers inspired by Rousseau, projected a system of censors who control the private life of future citizens as the all-seeing eye of God scrutinizes their intentions. However, outside of this utopia and alternative history, the picture looks completely different. Visibility of actions and transparency of collective decisions are principles of enlightened politics. When reality is an irritating or disappointing subjection to monarchical despotism, a commentary on existing or dreamed-of republics permits one to consider mechanisms, which might guarantee the publicness of decisions. The American republics commented upon by Mably in 1783 demonstrate to him the excellence of the newly founded political system in Pennsylvania. Its legislative assembly was described thus:

«The citizens will find a school in which they may be educated. It is of use to publish, every eighth day, the journals of the session. Democracy is an enemy to mystery, and stands in need of being enlightened»;

nevertheless, so Mably, it is necessary to remember that the population is still uneducated and could misinterpret the decisions taken by their

[15] M. NEUGEBAUER-WOLK, *Esoterische Bünde und Bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Entwicklungslinien zur modernen Welt im Geheimbundwesen des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Wolfenbüttel 1995.

[16] *Encyclopédie*, vol. 5, 1755.

representatives[17]. For d'Holbach, who theorized on the necessity of making political life public, the squaring of the circle takes place by means of a radical reform of the institution of monarchy as defender of the rights of its subjects and transparent executor of the duties of impartial politics.

«If tyrants want to reign over the blind, good rulers prefer to command with reason over reasonable people, capable of listening and collaborating with their commendable and constructive plans: the virtue of ruling well is acting openly»[18].

The foundation to this new policy had be laid in private spaces with a limited publicness. The network of Masonic lodges constitutes the premise of a universal diffusion of truths, which are temporarily reserved to restricted groups. In the same way the salons and the literary clubs which took root throughout Europe were experimental laboratories whose apparent and very moderate secrecy had the characteristics of being temporary, dictated by the necessity of avoiding head-on confrontations with either state or church and with the awareness that the popular classes are often not prepared to absorb new ideas. In these spaces, during frequent discussions and sociability between peers, it was debated to what point to extend publicness to workers and peasants, women and young people. Participants would often address the question if the obscene and the morally reproachable should be made public or silenced if it could morally corrupt the young. Diderot, in an attempt to try to reconcile a sense of humanity with the severity of the laws for a population still far from virtuous, foresaw that civil law would have secret articles, which mitigated their severity, thereby preserving the effect of striking a salutary sense of fear. And once again, Diderot, this time as an art critic, hesitated at the idea that any type of painting could be exhibited if it could lead to immorality, as in the question of homosexuality; such art should not be shown to those who may be susceptible to bad examples.

The tension between the public and the secret was resolved by the concept of public opinion. At the border between public and secret Enlightenment thinkers came up with a concept to which they gave a decidedly positive meaning, because they assigned it a positive value, that

[17] G. BONNOT DE MABLY, *Observations sur les lois et le gouvernement des Etats Unis d'Amérique*, Amsterdam 1784, p. 56.

[18] T. D'HOLBACH, *Ethocratie*, Amsterdam 1776 (reprint Paris 1967), p. 160.

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being the expression of the ideas of the educated and rational members of society. Through the filter of reason, the best ideas emerge from the obscurity of secrecy to move into the light of common knowledge, slowly becoming part of a shared patrimony. However, public opinion is also an abstract judge, who sanctions those authorities that violate the unwritten rules of humanity and opportunity, of human rights and dignity. At the end of the historical trajectory of the Enlightenment, Filangieri spoke of the supreme power of public opinion as the ultimate judgment on the decisions of the monarch: the perfect conjunction of moral equilibrium and political efficacy, based on the overcoming of secrecy, which was imposed with violence because it was not justified by the situation[19]. It was not the foreshadowing of the absolute transparency that Rousseau would have liked, the absolute absence of secrets between pure minds who contemplate each other with equality of virtue and who became a fundamental idea in the Jacobin revolution. It was rather the critical re-writing of rules regarding the division between public and secret that was to form the basis for a society as unauthoritarian and equal as can be imagined.

[19]   V. FERRONE, *La società giusta ed equa. Repubblicanesimo e diritti dell'uomo in Gaetano Filangieri*, Bari - Roma 2003, pp. 59, 65 and 145.

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