HABERMAS VS. NOELLE-NEUMANN

THE IMPACT OF HABITUS ON THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

MANUEL WENDELIN
MICHAEL MEYEN

Abstract

The idea of the public sphere represents an important fundament of modern western self-images and is topic of communication theory. Habermas and Noelle-Neumann are two of the most renowned representatives in this field. Both developed their approaches in the same context, during the post-war era of 1960s West Germany. Nevertheless, fundamental differences exist between the two conceptualisations of the public sphere. This article seeks to make sense of these differences by comparing the authors' biographies and suggesting that a strong connection exists between author's life experience and his or her theory. We employed a category system based mainly on the habitus-concept of Bourdieu and complemented it with the generation-approaches developed in sociology of knowledge. Our findings show that the differences in theory between Habermas and Noelle-Neumann can be understood in terms of differences in their milieu of origin and their academic socialisation. Ultimately, even more important seem to be opposite experiences of the authors with the public on the one hand and the generational gap between them on the other.

Manuel Wendelin is research fellow in the Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München; e-mail: wendelin@ifkw.lmu.de.

Michael Meyen is Professor in the Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München; e-mail: meyen@ifkw.lmu.de.

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Introduction

This article seeks to emphasise a strong connection between scientific theories and life experiences. No understanding of a scientific theory can be achieved if the personal background of the theory's founder is not taken into account. To support this idea, we chose the topic of the public sphere and the contrasting explanations of this topic provided by Habermas and Noelle-Neumann. In choosing the public sphere, we wished to stress its importance to democratic societies. Since the eve of modern democracy and the era of Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the public sphere has been the institutional core of decision-making which makes citizens able to articulate their interests and opinions openly, evaluate the opinions and arguments of others, and arrive at a decision on this basis (Marcinkowski 2008).

We have chosen Habermas and Noelle-Neumann as the most renowned representatives of the two major theoretical schools in the field of the public sphere, known as the normative and functionalist concepts (Jackob 2008). Particularly in the USA, Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann 1974) gave rise to a great number of empirical investigations, making her one of the best-known figures in communication research worldwide (Meyen 2008). Despite the late translation of the *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* into English (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962/1989a), Habermas' book has been appraised as "the richest, best developed conceptualization available" (Calhoun 1992, 41). His Frankfurt School-inspired conception of deliberative democracy is presently undergoing a remarkable rebirth (Habermas 1962; 1989a; 2006; Huspek 2007). In addition, Habermas' work is the starting point of much Internet-based theory and research regarding the public sphere (e.g. Dahlberg 2008, 828), as well as discussions about the public sphere in Europe (e.g. Wimmer 2005).

Both theories were developed in the same context, during the post-war era of 1960s West Germany, where the Allies (USA, Great Britain and France) had established a media environment whose main purpose was to promote the so-called five D's (denazification, demilitarisation, democratisation, decentralisation and decartelisation). Nevertheless, fundamental differences exist between the two theories. Whereas Habermas defines the public sphere normatively (there exists an ideal against which reality can be compared) and conceptualises the public as a sphere of rational discourses limited to political issues, Noelle-Neumann takes the opposite stance in every regard, stating that a norm, as imagined by Habermas, is nonexistent and that the public sphere is solely about social control. She argues that people fear of social ostracism that might result from publicly expressing an unpopular opinion. According to Noelle-Neumann, the purpose of public opinion is to enforce social conformity, thereby stabilising society as a whole (Jackob 2008).

This article aims at making sense of the above differences in explanations of the public sphere by comparing the authors' biographies. Since Noelle-Neumann was born in 1916, 13 years before Habermas, she experienced both the Nazi regime and the post-war democracy in West Germany. She originated from a wealthy family, and was female, charming, and beautiful. These are qualities Habermas could only dream of, not solely because of his different sex. To explain the concept in more detail, we first focus on the sociology of knowledge at large and on the field theory

of Bourdieu in particular (Bourdieu 1987). Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a key in analysing the connections between theory and context. Next, we describe the methods and sources employed in our analysis. We used a category system consisting of the following denominations: first, social background and academic socialisation; second, public experience and role appreciation; and third, generation and present-day perspectives. The presentation of our results begins with a deeper comparison of the two theories, after which we illuminate the differences in the theory and life experiences of Habermas and Noelle-Neumann according to our category system.

Habitus and the Theory of the Public Sphere

Although it is almost 80 years since Karl Mannheim stated that ideas are determined by the social standpoint of the thinker and thereby his/her profession, religious background and the experience of his/her generation (Mannheim 1931), the sociology of science barely touches on this coherence, if at all, in contemporary analysis. According to modern sociology and to Thomas S. Kuhn (1962), scientific work is explained by the struggle for social power (Bourdieu 1988), communication processes within science (Mulkay 1991; Gibbons et al. 2000) or by external influencing factors (Weingart 2003). In his thesis of scientific revolutions, Kuhn provides reasons for constructing new theories, such as the appearance of new facts and problems.

The social and institutional influences on the ideas of the public sphere examined in this text are the same in both cases (Merton 1967; 1977): both theories were developed in the same geographical and political context, and in the same media environment. Hence, we focus on the biographical context, as requested by Mannheim, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus: a "socialised subjectivity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu used this notion to describe people's dispositions, along with everything that has shaped them since their earliest childhood: family, school, living conditions, career, and individual and collective experience. Habitus determines what is achievable – the way a scientist perceives the world, the way he/she judges other people, his/her tastes and values, ways of thinking and acting, and how he/she appears and moves his/her body. Therefore, the concept of habitus indicates what kind of subjects a person is interested in, explains the scientific work and theoretical constructions arrived at by a thinker; it is also aimed at long-lasting schemes of perception and thinking and acting, and emphasises that recent experiences are shaped by past experiences. It is not a rigid and unchanging system, but is time after time subject to modification, whereas the decisive determinant in this process is the social position of the agent. To describe the position and the power that scientists possess, Bourdieu uses the concept of capital, distinguishing four main types: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. He also assumes that capital determines experiences and therefore habitus.

To be in a position to empirically describe and scrutinise protagonists and concrete social activities, Bourdieu divided the term *habitus* analytical into *opus operatum* and *modus operandi*. The modus operandi depicts how protagonists behave, which is in turn defined by the opus operatum generated by their life story. Accordingly, a theory of the public sphere is to be seen as a modus operandi that can be explained by the opus operatum. To clarify this idea: the individual habitus

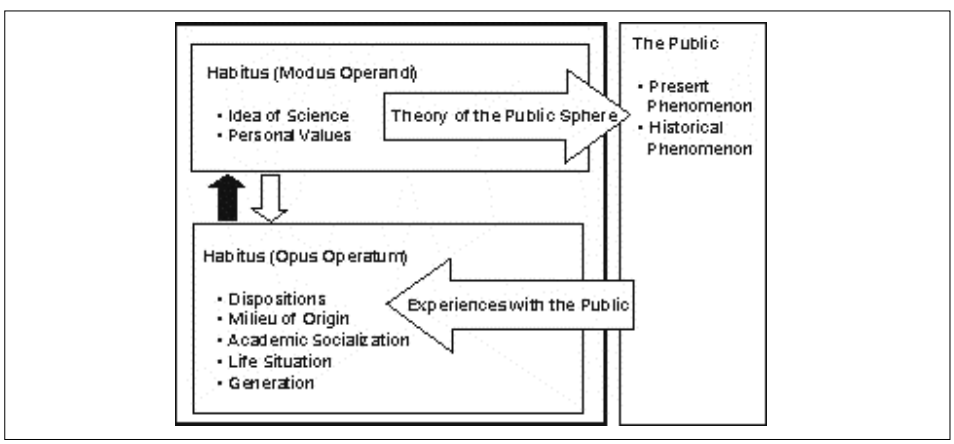
(opus operatum) should influence how the public sphere is described and which functions are distributed to it (also see table 1). According to Bourdieu, the opus operatum of a scientist consists of four main facets:

- *Dispositions*: age, sex, and physical appearance;
- *Milieu of origin*: generation; place of birth; social class; religious, political and regional background; first teachers;
- *Academic socialisation*: home university, subject, academic teachers, first steps of an academic career, careers outside of university; and
- *Life situation*: accumulated capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic), job satisfaction, family situation and activities outside the university.

Given the difference in age between Habermas and Noelle-Neumann, it is especially important to bear in mind the concept of "generation," as first found in the classic texts of Dilthey (1924) and Mannheim (1928). For Dilthey, the "concurrency" was crucial: individuals, who "experienced the same leading impacts in the years of receptiveness, make up for a generation when taken together." It was Dilthey who had already noted that generations do not necessarily have to regard themselves as such, but can be "constructions of historians" – an analytical instrument that helps to understand differences among individuals or understand social change. Neither Dilthey nor Mannheim regarded generations as a "succession of descendants" or cohorts; instead, they were viewed as a "coeval community of fate." In this case, the term "fate" refers to adolescence, a phase of life in which people are especially open-minded and develop patterns of perception, some "sort of filter" that will accompany them as long as they live.

Category System – Habitus and the Theory of the Public Sphere

Figure 1: Category System - Habitus and the Theory of the Public Sphere



Generation, dispositions, milieu, academic socialisation and life situation influence the idea of science (epistemology, methods and aim of science), personal values and thereby theoretical ideas. Not only does a theory of the public sphere depend on a subjective habitus, but on what was written about it in the past and its present perception in the scientific world, as derived from these earlier studies.

The idea of the public sphere is also influenced by the current media system and, finally yet importantly, by the scientists who, like everybody else, had experiences in and with the public. Naturally, these experiences were controlled by sex, age and physical appearance, and they uniquely shaped the habitus of every thinker, thereby influencing that which these people came up with. The category system listed in table 1 highlights the described connections.

Method and Sources: Analysis of Content and Context

Our heuristic was transformed in a two-staged scientific process. First, we used a qualitative content analysis to assess theoretical texts of Habermas and Noelle-Neumann concerning the public sphere, considering all relevant publications up to the mid-1960s. The main argument for this temporal restriction is the change in context that occurred at the end of the decade. Theories of the public sphere written in the aftermath of the 1968 student movement differ from those conceptualised before the movement. Second, we (re-)constructed the biographical and historical context in order to interpret the outcome of our content analysis. The basis for this re-contextualisation is the research categories derived from the fundament of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as explained above. In analogy to the instruments of quantitative content analyses, such category systems feature the following two functions (Löblich 2008):

- They constitute a theoretical principle of formation in view of the research question. Complex research objects are divided into definable aspects as regards content;
- They offer a strategy of identifying and classifying in view of the analysed texts.

Hence, category systems applied in historic research are perfectly suited to specifying the research question and distinguishing the research object. Furthermore, they direct the search for and selection of relevant historical sources, as well as the information provided by these sources. The purpose of using category directed processing as a method is to achieve greater transparency concerning decisions made in the historical research process. Although interpretation remains the paradigm, there exists no shift to quantification. The proposed approach is normative-oriented on the criteria of empirical and analytic social science. In this regard, the demand for intersubjective verifiability is most important. Therefore, category directed processing is more structuralised than hermeneutic and less structuralised than quantitative content analysis. There exist theory-bound categories, although principally they remain open because specifications are not defined *a priori* (Löblich 2008).

However, the main differences between a systematic approach to history as proposed in this article and historic ideography go along with such normative conflicts. Moreover, they affect an epistemic dimension. We may refer to the theoretical discussion concerning the sociology of knowledge. If a scientific text configures Mannheim's postulate (whereby everyone's beliefs are in principle a product of the context in which they were created) as its theoretical fundament, this assumption must also be effective concerning its own processing: presuppositionless cognition of (historic) reality is impossible. Historical sources are never

recognised out of themselves, but are always perceived via a theoretical perspective in a present-day context. To ensure that the proper perspective of a study on historic occurrences is at least traceable and discussible, research categories have to be theoretically grounded and revealed. Furthermore, systematic approaches aim to apply empirical findings (created by historical research) to present cognitive interests (Stevens & Dicken Garcia 1980) – in our case, the subjective constraints of social scientific practice.

To analyse the differences between the theories, we focused primarily on Habermas' preface of his study *Student und Politik* (Habermaset al 1961) and on his postdoctoral lecture qualification *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989a). Concerning Noelle-Neumann, we analysed several articles published in scientific journals; in particular, *Mass Communication, Media and Public Opinion* (1959), *Die Träger der öffentlichen Meinung* (The bearers of public opinion, 1962), *Information und öffentliche Meinung* (Information and public opinion, 1966a) and, most importantly, her inaugural lecture at the University of Mainz, *Öffentliche Meinung und soziale Kontrolle* (Public opinion and social control, 1966b;). This last paper in particular already contains the central components of the theoretical figure that she later termed "the spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann 1974; 1993). We also implicated Noelle-Neumann's dissertation *Amerikanische Massenbefragungen über Politik und Presse* (American polling of masses about politics and the press 1940), acknowledging that this work was written under the Nazi regime and therefore in a different historical context.

Our (re-)construction of the context is mainly based on biographical and autobiographical sources. In his Kyoto Prize speech (2004), Habermas spoke about the "biographical roots of two motifs" in his thoughts. Additional information can be found in a diverse range of interviews with Habermas conducted by Gad Freudenthal, Detlef Horster and Willem van Reijen, and in the *New Left Review*, all edited by Peter Dews (Habermas 1986; 1985). The biography of Habermas published by Rolf Wiggershaus (2004) is also interview-based. Noelle-Neumann herself gave accounts of her life on several occasions (Noelle-Neumann 1997; 1998), the last of which is contained in her *Erinnerungen* (Memories, 2006). Therefore, our study is based on a comparatively broad fundament of sources, especially given the critical reflections available on the lives of both Noelle-Neumann and Habermas (e.g. Simpson 1996; Kepplinger 1997; Busche 2006). This circumstance mitigates some of the difficulties that commonly arise with autobiographical sources: biases caused by the interest seeking to portray personal vita in a positive light, or the selectivity of memory. We generally had several options in terms of verifying the required information.

Theory of the Public Sphere: Normative-Theoretical Variation

Before discussing subjective constraints on different social practices, it is necessary to identify the variations between such practices. To compare and emphasise the differences between the theories of Habermas and Noelle-Neumann, we focused on the structural elements, such as "person groups acting" and "topics relevant" in public, as well as the main functions the authors attribute to the public. Habermas pictured an idealistic view of the public sphere. In his eyes, this ideal type

corresponds for the most part to the conditions of early bourgeois society. According to this perspective, he interprets all further development of the public sphere as a history of decay. Fundamental to this concept is the separation of a public (tax-based) state from a private (market-based) society (Habermas 1989a; 1962; 2006, 412). This evolutional process is described as bourgeois emancipation. With growing economic importance, bourgeoisie increasingly realised its relevance as a social stratum. Demands on the absolutistic authorities were publicly held in a self-confident way. Thus, the public had become a sphere, mediating the state with the needs of society. An exchange of arguments and counter-arguments took place in this sphere. The unconstrained constraint of the better argument guaranteed the rationality of the discourse.

In Habermas' discourse-ethics, no other forces should gain any influence on the course and outcome of a debate, especially not social origin: both aristocrats and bourgeois should participate in the same way. Indeed, entrance requirements were education and property. On this basis, a common bourgeois class interest ensured that the public discourse was thematically oriented at the common good: private interests should have been subordinated. The reason for the decay of the public sphere was its "occupation" by the unpropertied. According to Habermas, the competition between the private interests of labourers and bourgeois in the public sphere destroyed its rational fundament. The claims for state responsibility on private requirements led to a new entanglement of state and society. The same idea is devised as "colonisation of the lifeworld" in Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*); for example, by extension of the welfare state (1984; 1987; 1981; Calhoun 1992, 6).

Most of the agreement, which should be achieved by discourse generally, must be installed beforehand; however, Habermas is obviously not a supporter of the Platonic idea of the philosopher kings. Ruling by the public sphere is not the goal of public discourse; rather, it is the rationalisation of government by deliberative elements. This is the main function that Habermas refers to the public sphere. In the existing (1962) media society, he complains that the public sphere has adopted the functions of advertisements. Rationalisation has been displaced by mere presentation and the call for acclamation. Central to his conceptualisation of the public sphere are:

- Education and property as entrance requirements (elite concept);
- Thematic orientation on the common good (focus on policy); and
- Rationalisation of government by bourgeois emancipation (function of deliberation).

In contrast, the works of Noelle-Neumann do not describe a rational discourse, but a social-psychological process. The main components of this process are the fear of social isolation and in conjunction the pressure to conform. Those holding a view in opposition to the dominant position in a community are threatened with rejection and loss of reputation. Because it is a valuable good to be included, the push to act in compliance with established attitudes is extremely effective (Noelle-Neumann 1966b). Noelle-Neumann's subject is public opinion, and in her earlier articles she avoids speaking of the public or the public sphere. "The public sphere" as a term can here be understood as an "institution of social control" (Jackob 2008, 3938). It comprehends the social space in which the process of public opinion takes

place. The special character of this social space is visibility. Noelle-Neumann later uses the metaphor of a "public eye" to specify the changes in ones behaviour, leaving privateness and becoming visible and thereby open to judgement by others (Noelle-Neumann 1992, 293).

Because every member of a community is concerned by this process, public opinion could not be seen to be restricted to social elites. Thus, the scope of Noelle-Neumann's approach is broader than that of Habermas' elite concept, not only regarding the affected persons. Also of importance are differences in the thematic adjustment of the public sphere allowed by the two concepts. The process of public opinion, according to Noelle-Neumann, is not limited to political issues; instead, the abeyance of topics is the deciding factor. The process of public opinion proceeds in every value-laden and controversial matter (Noelle-Neumann 1966b, 16), of which fashion is a good example. Unlike Habermas, the most important elements of Noelle-Neumann's theory of public opinion are:

- Involvement of everyone (concept of social control),
- Universality of topics (focus on value conflicts), and
- Enhancement of coherence in communities (function of integration).

In this concept, Public opinion primarily fulfils an integration function. By virtue of the interplay of the fear of social isolation and the pressure to conform, social control causes and enhances the degree of coherence in communities (Noelle-Neumann 1966, 10, 26). Whereas Habermas' theory of the public sphere is geared to social change, Noelle-Neumann provides a conservative perspective on this important bourgeois idea of Enlightenment. This normative-theoretic variation in theory refers not only to differences in the political orientation of the two scholars of the public sphere, by which they are personally guided: it also refers to differences in their scientific habitus.

Habitus (Modus Operandi): Differences in Ideas of Science and Personal Values

To ascribe the displayed theoretical variation on differences in the scientific habitus of the two scholars, we analytically split our bulky category "idea of science" into three sub-categories: "epistemology," "methods" and "aim of science" (see table 1). The texts of Habermas analysed in this study were written before his comprehensive epistemological discussions. In particular, the *Erkenntnis und Interesse* ("Knowledge and Human Interests") published in 1968 must be mentioned in this context. Nevertheless, the dialectic coherence of theory and practice is also the epistemic base, and at the same time induces the objective of his earlier works on the public sphere: the mission of science involves change in society for the better. In this goal, the spirit of the Frankfurt School is clearly visible (Horkheimer & Adorno 1997; 1947).

It is also important that science should not forget its own social preconditions. Science is always a product of the society to be changed, and thus is driven by human interests (Habermas 1973a; 1963; 1989b; McCarthy 1978). Habermas' methodological approach also follows from this relation between "epistemology" and "aim of science," and is best described as "critical" social-historic analysis. Existing cultural norms are identified by historical research and confronted with a negative

perceived current state. This confrontation creates confusion in the readers, and should motivate them to act in a direction that contributes to correcting the revealed negative conditions. Later, Habermas defended his model of the "ideal speech situation" against allegations of a lack of empirical reference by calling it an "operational effective fiction" (Habermas 1973b, 258: Operativ wirksame Fiktion).

The request to change society for the better is a political aim. Thus, the underlying moral concept leading to the particular definition of this "better" is important in explaining the developed theory as an outcome. In Habermas' case, the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment are the first aspects to be mentioned. Later on, from the 1980s in particular, he strongly advocated the principle of "rationality" against "postmodernism" (Habermas 1988). A Marxist orientation can also be observed in the dialectic basis and "critical" emancipative attitude of Habermas' works. Concerning this element of his moral concept, he emphasises the predicate "unorthodox" (Habermas 1986, 79–80). Habermas represents a liberal interpreted Marxism, which gave rise to hostility from the more radical Left (Abendroth 1969).

Whereas the scientific Habitus of a "critical" philosopher of the Enlightenment conceptualised "rationalisation of government" as a main function of the public sphere, the accentuation of the integration-function by Noelle-Neumann refers to a modus operandi, summarised by the elements "empirical social research" combined with a more conservative orientation in political and moral issues. The epistemological fundament of Noelle-Neumann is Empiricism. Where Critical Theory wants to cause irritation, she is concerned with providing orientation. For Noelle-Neumann, the aim of science consists of a continuing approximation of reality via experience-based research. In *Umfragen in der Massengesellschaft* (1963, Opinion polls in mass society), she presented and promoted her view on social science. Central to this idea of science is the opinion survey as a method, based on probabilistic theory. In part, it is even plausible to interpret Noelle-Neumann's theory of public opinion as an instrument to legitimise her methodological approach. A concept that links public opinion and social control relies on polls for empirical verification. Beyond this, Noelle-Neumann considers opinion surveys in general as vital for the future of social science (Noelle-Neumann 2006, 304-312).

Whereas a theoretical discussion marked the beginning of Habermas' works, Noelle-Neumann started with empirical problems. Among other things, she generated election forecasts and accomplished contracts with the Adenauer administration. From the mid-1960s, she advised the later chancellor Kohl in his campaigns. Noelle-Neumann has never hidden her preference for the conservative party (Meyen & Löblich 2006, 262). In contrast to Habermas, she disapproved of the shift of values that took place in society during the 1960s (Noelle-Neumann 2006, 187–192). In Noelle-Neumann's habitus, positive science meets with an elitist consciousness. This modus operandi is more likely to lead to the perception and addressing of integration problems within society than to a focus on its political change. According to Bourdieu, differences in the modus operandi of several actors emerge in the context of their life experiences (1977). Below, we reconstruct significant components of the opus operatum in order to explain these differences in the modus operandi of the two scientists and thereby their theoretical processing of the public sphere.

The Importance of Milieu of Origin, Experiences with the Public, and Academic Socialisation

Habermas

Habermas grew up in the small town of Gummersbach in Western Germany. The family was well integrated in the bourgeois milieu of its hometown. Ernst Habermas (1891–1972), father of Jürgen Habermas, was a teacher. After his marriage to Grete Köttgen (1894–1983), he worked as an advocate for an employers' federation and was at the same time engaged in a leading position at a subsidiary of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Gummersbach. He also studied and received a doctorate in political economy. Ernst Habermas was descended from the daughter of a wealthy farmer and a clergyman; hence, he was able to see himself as a social climber (Wiggershaus 2004, 7–10). Advancement appears to have been an important motivation in the house of Jürgen Habermas' parents. Against the background of this motivation, the elite-orientation of Habermas' works on the public sphere is already more comprehendible. Although clearly not the sole explaining factor, his theoretical defence of bourgeois society against the uneducated and unpropertied could in part be traced back to this point.

In this context, of greater importance are Habermas' negative childhood experiences with the public because of his cleft palate: he recalls discrimination and not being understood in the schoolyard. In a self-analysis, he refers to this handicap in explaining his scientific interests in language and understanding, "Failures of communication direct attention to the reality of an interstitial world of symbols that otherwise remains unobtrusive" (Habermas 2004, 4). Accordingly, we are able to explain not only Habermas' interest in the philosophy of language, but also the central statements in his ethics of discourse: "It is meant to ensure without compulsion that the better argument wins the day" (Habermas 2004, 5). Only the argument should count, and nothing else. In his youth, Habermas evades members of the underclass. It is reasonable to assume that he was only spared the contumely of his schoolmates once he entered higher school ("Gymnasium"; Wiggershaus 2004, 10–11). With knowledge of such experiences, Habermas' accentuation of the rationalisation-function of the public sphere becomes plausible – not solely theoretical.

A scientific self-image develops in the academic socialisation process. Habermas began his studies at Göttingen in 1949. After a short time in Zurich, he transferred to Bonn in 1950, where his professor was the philosopher and cultural-anthropologist Erich Rothacker. In Habermas' own words, he academically "grew up in a provincial German context, in the world of German philosophy, in the form of a declining Neo-Kantianism, of the German Historical School, of phenomenology, and also philosophical anthropology" (Habermas 1986, 149). His intellectual mentor and friend during this time was Karl-Otto Apel, a doctoral candidate under Rothacker. Apel was already engaged in language philosophy, and argued against non-commitment in the exposure to values (Wiggershaus 2004, 26–27). His influence is clearly seen in the later works of Habermas, not solely because he introduced Habermas to Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Einführung in die Metaphysik*), released in 1953. The book, based on Heidegger's lecture from 1935, inspired Habermas to publish his critical article *Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger denken* (Thinking with Hei-

degger against Heidegger), "The vocabulary of the lectures reflected the idolatry of a nationalist spirit, the defiance of the First World War trenches, the collectivism of solemn yea-saying" (Habermas 2004, 8). Habermas' text caused a sensation and made him known in the philosophy community, prompting Adorno to offer him a postdoctoral assistantship at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt.

The time spent in Frankfurt from 1956 to 1961 was decisive for the theoretical direction of Habermas' work on the public sphere. In the 1980s, he expressed his fascination with the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*) of Horkheimer and Adorno: "At that point philosophical and political things began to come together for the first time" (Habermas 1986, 77). This fascination is evident in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*), where Habermas assumed the "critical-theoretical" understanding of science. In 1961, Habermas moved from Frankfurt to Marburg. Horkheimer was displeased with Habermas' radical-democratic activities in public, and pressured Adorno to remove him from his post (Wiggershaus 2004, 43–49). In Marburg, Habermas finished his professorial dissertation under the guidance of Wolfgang Abendroth, expert in constitutional law, who was known to be a Marxist. Hence, Abendroth's brief influence is also evident, although to a lesser extent compared with the influence of the Frankfurt School. The modus operandi apparent in Habermas' works on the public sphere was mainly influenced by the social position of his parents' house, by his handicap, and by his academic mentors Apel and Adorno.

Noelle-Neumann

Noelle-Neumann is not only older than Habermas, but originates from a completely different milieu. When speaking about her childhood memories, she mentions the huge garden in front of her house – a marvellous mansion in Berlin (Noelle-Neumann 2006, 7). Noelle-Neumann's grandfathers were to be found in Berlin's register of millionaires. Her paternal grandfather was a steel trader; her maternal grandfather (Fritz Schaper) was a famous sculptor who had even worked for the German Emperor Wilhelm II. Ernst Noelle, Noelle-Neumann's father, managed the Tobis film company from 1928. In such a family, she enjoyed a first-class education and was introduced to Berlin's elite at a young age. In one of her anecdotes, she speaks about meeting the head of the Ullstein publishing house as a fifteen-year-old to talk about her plans of becoming a journalist (Noelle-Neumann 2006, 23).

Whereas Habermas' career was restricted to the academic sector, Noelle-Neumann studied *Zeitungswissenschaft* to become a journalist. In 1937/38 she received a scholarship to the Missouri School of Journalism. Once in the USA, she encountered the methods of opinion research and was deeply impressed. In 1940, she obtained her doctor's degree in Berlin for a dissertation on opinion research, with Emil Dovifat as her supervisor. Afterwards, she worked as a journalist until the end of the Third Reich. In 1947, Noelle-Neumann founded the *Institut für Demoskopie* (polling institute) in Allensbach, where she paved the way for opinion research in Germany. She regarded her institute as a bridge between commercial and academic research; indeed, Allensbach has gained an exceptional position among survey research firms, and her textbook on the methods of opinion research (Noelle-Neumann 1963) has been translated into several languages. In 1964, Noelle-Neumann was offered the newly-created chair of *Publizistik* at the University of Mainz.

Noelle-Neumann's career as a journalist under Hitler and Goebbels led to intensive attacks regarding the origin of her job-related success (e.g. Simpson 1996; Kepplinger 1997). The question of how deeply she was affected by these accusations of Nazism and her ongoing confrontations with the past can only be answered with reference to the space dedicated to the topic in her autobiographic works (Noelle-Neumann 1997; 1998; 2006). In these works, Noelle-Neumann's journalistic career during the Third Reich is described as an "odyssey" that always ended with explosive encounters between her and the Ministry of Propaganda. Over the years, Noelle-Neumann has provided evidence of her oppositional opinion: for example, she refused to allow changes to the text of her dissertation, which made a second edition impossible.

Knowing of Noelle-Neumann's past, the "spiral of silence" could be seen as an attempt to deal with her own biography on a scientific level. In her theory, she describes how the individual is influenced by the "climate of opinion" – a term surely not chosen by chance. Nobody can escape this climate: everybody is affected by social control (Noelle-Neumann 1992, 292).

In dictatorships, the social-psychological mechanism is not cancelled; nevertheless, Noelle-Neumann notes the "new rules" derived from this form of government, where the ruler is able to control the public – this specific place in which public opinion is shaped and voiced. Knowledge of the climate of opinion, from which nobody could escape, was later forgotten. Only in this context could one search for quotations taken from texts of this time to prove the "Nazi-attitude of the authors" (Noelle-Neumann 1998, 28–30).

Compared with the upward-climber Habermas, who experienced his adolescence years in the newly founded Federal Republic of Germany, Noelle-Neumann had different personal experiences with the public as a member of the elite, a young adult and journalist in the Third Reich, and as an attractive woman. In her *Memories*, she refers on several occasions to her former beauty and the inner turmoil she caused in the men she met. Whereas Habermas despised public entrances, Noelle-Neumann was admired by the audience. It is also possible that sex-specific differences played a role in accenting the metaphor of a "public eye." Compared with today, women in the 1950s and 1960s behaved differently in public and were perceived differently by men.

Influence of Generation on Scientific Motivation

The above discrepancies in heritage, academic socialization and experiences in public are minor compared with the generational differences of the two. For all German theorists of the public sphere in the 1960s, the most affecting incidence was the break of 1945. Habermas himself talked about his "luck to be born late": "The German phrase 'Gnade der späten Geburt' means that I was old enough to have witnessed the fundamental changes the end of the Third Reich brought with it at a morally impressionable age, and yet young enough not to have participated in the dubious practices of the Nazi past" (Habermas 2004, 6). He experienced the changes of 1945 as a boy of 15: "Overnight, as it were, the society in which we had led what had seemed to be a halfway normal everyday life, and the regime governing it, were exposed as pathological and criminal" (Habermas 2004, 6). In an interview, he characterised himself as a product of "re-education" (Habermas

1986, 75). The four years that passed until the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany were for Habermas "four years of an adolescence spent with open eyes and ears" (Habermas 2004, 6). Everything new was eagerly absorbed, including the fundaments of Western Democracy and books from the Marxism-Leninism-Library, available in the communist bookstore (Habermas 1986, 74). If Habermas followed his father in the push to climb the social ladder, he disagreed with him on political issues. Before the Nazis came to power, Ernst Habermas was involved with the national-conservative party; after World War II he sympathised with the Christian Democrats (Wiggershaus 2004, 10).

Jürgen Habermas belongs to the generation of critical intellectuals who were dissatisfied with the political situation in the early Federal Republic of Germany: "The continuity of social elites and cultural prejudices was paralysing. There had been no break with the past, no new beginning in terms of personnel, no change in mentality – there had been neither moral renewal nor a visible reversal in political mindset" (Habermas 2004, 7). Against the background of his normative ideals, he perceived in this continuity a threat to the achievements guaranteed by constitutional law: "In the late 50s the political culture in Germany had by no means taken firm roots. It was not certain that the principles of a democratic order that had been imposed from without, as it were, would become firmly lodged in the hearts and minds of German citizens" (Habermas 2004, 9). Among other things, he wanted to face these emerging dangers via his theoretical work: "Right through into the 1980s the fear of a political relapse continued to spur my scholarly work, while I had begun in the late 1950s with my study of the 'Structural Change of the Public Sphere'" (Habermas 2004, 9; 1986, 78).

In 1933, the year of Hitler's rise to power, Noelle-Neumann was the same age as Habermas in 1945. With the end of World War II, she experienced a second social break, and, among other things, may therefore have been cynical about demands for radical change. In contrast to Habermas, Noelle-Neumann has a positive remembrance of the 1950s, and she shares this view with her contemporaries. An "atmosphere of departure" and the "ascending prosperity" are the basis for this perception. In Noelle-Neumann's view, it was an optimistic and politically exciting time (Noelle-Neumann 2006, 186), and a period of great personal success. In 1957, the leading German news magazine *Der Spiegel* nominated her in a cover story as "Herrin der öffentlichen Meinung" ("Mistress of the Public Opinion"). Given the hostility she later encountered, this would hardly have been imaginable several years later. Hence, as with Habermas, Noelle-Neumann has had reason to fear a relapse to worse times; however, unlike Habermas, in her perception the danger lay in the radical demands of the student movement and the shift in values that occurred in the 1960s. Such a view leads to a habitus as modus operandi that modulates the aim of science in the desire to create orientation rather than generating uncertainty and irritation. At least for theorists of the public sphere, belonging to a certain generation seems to have an impact on the motivation to theorise, and leads to a bias in the direction of argumentation.

Theory of the Public Sphere/Opinion in Context

Habermas' theory of the public sphere, as well as Noelle-Neumann's concept of public opinion, are coherent, meaning that the differences identified between

the two approaches can of course be discussed theoretically and explained by differences in the literature, their authors have read by themselves. Indeed, this is a common approach in dealing with theory texts. This article argued in support of the plausibility of subjective impacts on scientific decisions, in addition to the traditional approach rather than in contrast. Theory texts are and should be components of theory discourses; however, we regard it as also being worthwhile to consider the social contexts of their "genesis." This was the aim of our study: to explore the subjective constraints of social scientific practice. We used a category system based mainly on the habitus-concept of Bourdieu and complemented by the generation-approaches of the sociology of knowledge, and noted the strong connection between life experience and theoretical construction of the public sphere based on the examples of Habermas and Noelle-Neumann.

Differences in theory between the two authors can be understood in terms of differences in their milieu of origin and their academic socialisation: a bourgeois son and critical theoretic philosopher meets the daughter of a wealthy family engaged in opinion poll research. Ultimately, even more important were the oppositional experiences of the authors with the public on the one hand and the generational gap between them on the other. The media environment, determining possible imaginations of the present public sphere at any moment in time, was the same for both of the theories considered in this study. Von Hodenberg has characterised the theoretical processing of the public sphere in the 1960s as "almost obsessive" (2006, 31), a time in which the German media landscape was in a state of flux. Obviously, medial change in this and other historical situations stimulated the preoccupation with the phenomenon. Since theories of the public sphere legitimise the idea of democracy and thereby represent an important fundament of modern western self-images, it is an interesting coherency – especially for those who postulate universalism of norms and values – that these theories seem to depend on social contexts as well as other findings of social science research.

However, it is not only the constructing of theories that underlies social constraints: such influences are also observable in their reception. Noelle-Neumann argued with the self-image of intellectuals as free and self-determined individuals to explain the dominant position of Habermas' view on public opinion in the scientific discourse (1992). Habermas' thoughts were more similar to the ideas of the 1968 student movement. In this way, he hit a nerve in the succeeding generation, not only those with university careers. Looking beyond this time, many of the once protesting students became Feuilleton-Journalists and other members of cultural and political elites. The similar life-experiences of such elites could lead to the establishment of stable reception-patterns concerning theoretical offers that explain social phenomena.

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