A PUBLIC WORLD WITHOUT PUBLIC RELATIONS?

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Abstract

The term "*public relations*" (PR) has long gained currency as meaning the practice of producing a positive public image. This article argues that *public relations* should be released from the prison of "PR" and, instead, reconceptualised as relations which define the public realm much as economic relations define the economy. From this point of view, three main levels of public relations can be distinguished: (1) relations between public institutions, (2) relations between citizens and public institutions, and (3) relations between single citizens who communicate as strangers. Relations on the last level are qualified as "basic public relations" because they are the simplest, reproduce at all levels, do not need institutional mediation, and are the nucleus of all political roles and meanings. Freeing the term "public relations" from its restricted usage to mean "relations in public" makes it possible to discover the common roots of political institutions and the public sphere and to explore the innate kinship between politics and all other segments of public life. The overall effect is a re-conceptualising of politics as quintessentially stemming from public relations and of democracy as the very essence of politics.

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Freeing Public Relations from the Prison of "PR"

The term "*public relations*" (PR) has long gained currency as meaning the practice of producing a positive public image. This image is moulded by selecting arguments, suggestions, and visualisations that fit and/or change a relevant public's attitudes. The aim is to produce the public as a consumer of a particular view. Hence, when PR strategies improve the public image of an entity they confer upon that entity the status of a private subject, even if it is a public institution such as parliament or the presidency. This explains why PR strategies can successfully serve both private and public subjects and why the successful results of these strategies are not necessarily the best choices for society as a whole. Ironically, the general public is the only subject not in a position to establish public relations (PR). General public summarises the entire range of particular interests in a society and therefore cannot yield a single, particular interest that can be articulated, opposed, or favoured as a possible aim of PR strategies. Thus, PR practices can perfectly function at cross purposes with the nature of public (P) and misappropriate "the public" for particularistic interests.

PR practices are also at cross purposes with the nature of "relations" (R). The acronym "PR" is typically used to denote departments and persons who specialise in conducting PR strategies. Expressions such as "I met with the PR of …," "the PR told me," etc., would be unthinkable if we took public relations seriously. Nobody can meet or talk with "public relations." The outright fetishism in this use of the term "public relations" raises a number of counter questions such as, which relations are, in fact, public; how do public relations refer to political relations; or is PR actually public relations?

Such a narrow use of the term "PR" has little to do with the nature of the public realm as whole or with particular relations within this realm. This paper intends to reconceptualise "public relations" as those relations which define the public realm much as economic relations identify the economy. It is in this foundational sense that the term "public relations" is used in the following analysis.

The Nature of Public Relations

A New Approach to the Public

The opposition of public vs. private is perhaps the oldest and most traditional way of *defining the public* and its derivatives. Splichal distinguishes three semantic dimensions of publicness connected with the public-private boundary (Splichal 1999, 17-20). The opposition public-private has various aspects but primarily puts forward arguments about *what is not public* rather than "what is public." This result may well serve ordinary interpretations but is limited in scope theoretically. Childs, whose views are close to the fundamental view of public relations suggested here, affirms that "to define public relations is to define private relations, to draw a line between personal freedom and social responsibility" (Childs 1940, 1). Personal freedom, however, is among the greatest concerns of social responsibility and we turn back to the problems of public-private boundary this definition aimed to solve.

The opposite approach, defining *what is public*, raises the problem of tautology. Some political philosophers counterbalance this definitional uncertainty by offering additional views and ideas. Arendt proclaims that the term "public" "means, first,

that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (Arendt 1989, 50). The cognate terms, "public, " "in public," and "publicity" do not, however, provide better conceptual clearness and Arendt offers a second definition of the "public" as "the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it" (Arendt 1989, 52). Kelman equates "*public* spirit" with "the wish to choose good *public* policy" (my italics) but immediately leaves this vicious circle by specifying that "public spirit" means "evaluating options against a standard of general ideas about right and wrong" and showing "concern for others, not just oneself" (Kelman 1990, 31). John Rawls backs out of the same theoretical pitfalls by arguing in terms of the greater good and fundamental political justice in the larger society or general public:

> *Public reason, then, is public in three ways: as the reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society's conception of political justice, and conducted open to view on that basis* (Rawls 1996, 213).

As far back as the1920s, Dewey took a small analytical step that opened a large theoretical horizon, which still remains unexplored. He recognised "the germ of the distinction between the private and the public" in the difference between actions which affect persons "directly engaged in a transaction" and actions which affect persons "beyond those immediately concerned" (Dewey, 1927, 12). Unfortunately, Dewey applied this idea as a ready-for-use concept. It is, however, hard to specify an action between two persons which does not affect anybody else. *The bigger number of people does* not always testify to a public quality though the more people affected by an action, the larger its public potential. Dewey himself acknowledges that public actions cannot necessarily be identified with the social or as socially useful (Dewey 1927, 13-4). Therefore, the primary question – exactly which actions that indirectly affect others are "public" – remains unanswered.

To break new ground in this discussion, it is not enough simply to oppose "public" and "private" or to define "public" in isolation from "private." Rudder alarmingly argues the need of a paradigmatic shift toward a broader category of public policy, "one capacious enough to capture the relevant instances of both private and public-private governance, in addition to actual government decisions" (Rudder 2008, 908). The concept of the "public" can become an important key to many social processes if conceived as a permanent process of the public emerging from the "private" or merging into the "private." As a preliminary step, it will be useful to find the lowest common denominator of all the practical uses of the term "public." For that purpose, I have generated a list of more than 100 phraseological units in English, which contain a subject predicated as "public." This list is not exhaustive but it is enough long to show that analyzing every single case will not lead to a lowest common denominator for all these uses. This task can be carried out only by reconceptualising what basically identifies everything predicated as "public," i.e. by reconceptualising *public relations.* These relations can be differentiated on three levels according to subject. The analysis begins with the most indisputable level, that of the relations between public institutions.

Relations between Public Institutions. Modern history has established public institutions, such as parliament, the presidency, executive government, law courts, and each of their subdivisions, as the most telling and emblematic entities predicated as "public." They have been designed to be consistent with the activity of the general public as the final source of democratic legitimacy and as a final argument in reasoning by state institutions. Thus, it is natural to presuppose that relations between these institutions are, by definition, "public." Public relations on this level are marked by three partly overlapping and complimentary principles – *impartiality*, *neutrality,* and *anonymity*. These principles assure citizens equal access to the services of the state and contribute to the distribution of "fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (Rawls 2001, 7).

Of primary interest here is whether a reciprocal attitude of impartiality, neutrality and anonymity between public institutions is reproduced at the other levels of public relations. If these principles remain valid, then they are principles of public relations as a whole. In looking for the answer, we should consider the next level.

Relations between Public Institutions and Citizens –

Mediated by Political Parties and Other Organisations. Parties attempt to formulate the needs of the general public in a politically relevant way. In return, the public legitimates the parties' claims to political power. However, each party may also emphasise some particular interests that conflict with general public interests. The depth and effects of such conflicts depend upon how parties mediate the political participation of citizens. The longer a party remains in power, the stronger the tendency toward transformation into a "semi-state agency" and the greater "the ascendancy of the party in public office" (Katz and Mair 2002). From that point, parties may enter the frames ascribed to public institutions. This explains a current tendency towards the gradual evaporation of political parties' abilities to construct collective identities and opens room for some "voluntary associations" which address public needs directly to institutions (Della Porta 2004, 29).

Mediated by Other Citizens. An ordinary citizen can also, in exceptional cases, gain a contextual/temporal public relevance as an embodiment of particular attitudes of the general public toward official institutions. A case in point is Joe Wurzelbacher, an unknown plumber before his mention by John McCain in the final presidential debate of 2008 made him the international phenomenon known as "Joe the Plumber." In similar contexts, every ordinary citizen can temporarily play the role of politician or public servant and exert influence on other citizens and even official institutions. This exceptional public role of an ordinary citizen hints at the public potential of the daily roles of ordinary citizens and approaches us to the basic meaning of what is public.

Direct Relations. Here, we put aside the question of initiatives, whether by institutions or by citizens, and any reasons for such initiatives. Our emphasis is upon the founding principle of relations between public institutions and citizens.

The rule of law requires public institutions not to contact single individuals but the publicly relevant groups to which these individuals belong. Literary institu-

tions, of course, daily contact private individuals for things like citizens' needs for state protection and services, special merit cases, citizens' debts, violations of public order, etc. The essence of such practices is a policy of individual rights. In these cases, however, institutional provisions address all the persons of the same kind and in the same manner, i.e. institutions solve the problems of a whole social group in order to solve the problem of a single member of this group.

Hence, when solving the problems of single citizens, a public institution basically abstracts from their identity and biography. This is perfectly embodied in forms of public address, as defined by Warner: "I never speak to you without speaking to a thousand others … any character or trait I depict typifies a whole social stratum" (Warner 2002, 105). Only then an institution could be predicated as "public."

Analogically, citizens resort to the services offered by the state as part of a social group or category to which they belong – voters, taxpayers, owners, etc. On these grounds, rank-and-file citizens might successfully defend their personal interests. What happens, however, when a private person puts aside her/his particular place in the social world and leans argumentation toward belonging to a publicly relevant group or range of cases? – S/he de facto stands for her/his status as a *public* subject.

There is nothing personal within this frame of relations between institutions and individual citizens where both sides communicate/interact as public subjects. This frame is based on legal norms and standards which assume the citizen's group belonging beforehand. These norms and standards reflect permanent political rivalries between competing political parties and social groups they represent and, naturally, treat a large range of societal and group interests.

Therefore, democratic state, by definition, disregards differences in economic status, race, religion, language, sex, age, etc., and typifies vs. individualises the particular social problems to which it responds. Public institutions settle personal problems while treating them the same as all other cases of the same type. The best thing that public institutions/representatives can offer citizens is an unbiased attitude toward each of them and toward the cases they administer. Thus, *abstraction* is the essence of democracy and the most appropriate approach in a theoretical analysis of democracy (Nayden 2007).

In practice, however, communication between public institutions and single individuals could vary depending on factors such as (1) the status of the respective group in which the individual falls, (2) the degree to which the individual's problem is representative of the group, (3) the social distance between ordinary citizens and public leaders/officials, and (4) the degree to which the public official follows institutional norms. In this context, an apparent institutional impartiality might also mask an indifference towards problems of the community-at-large and, at the same time, make room for a public institution's meeting extraordinary interests of particularly favoured groups or individuals.

When elected party members and public officials begin to systematically give personal preferences to particular groups/individuals/cases, i.e. when representatives of public institutions begin to individualise instead of typifying concrete cases, they infringe upon equal access to the state. When they differentiate (favour or tolerate) particular persons, public responsibility shrinks away below a set of interpersonal relations and considerations. This *personification* either injures concrete

individuals in favour of other (casual or selected) citizens, or privileges them. As a result, institutional activities penetrate a non-public zone and may give impetus to conspiracies and/or corrupt practices. If this occurs, official institutions and servants remain "public" *de jure*, but lose their public character *de facto*.

When public institutions lose their public character, citizens still have opportunities to: (1) begin discussing political problems publicly in order to exert pressure on public/political institutions, and/or (2) initiate public protests/actions against official institutions. Through both opportunities, though in different ways, citizens can proclaim themselves public subjects outside of any mediating public institutions. In the first case, citizens assert public opinion, which pressures public institutions to render an open account of their activities and to re-establish their legitimacy (Habermas 1989). In the second case, citizens form a mass public, the bodily presence of which itself explicitly demands political powers to resume their public duties.

Relations between Citizens. As shown in this discussion, democratic public institutions must by definition treat concrete citizens as if each is like everybody else, i.e. consider them as typified members of a society. The last step in defining the public is to analyze opportunities individuals may have to establish public relations without mediation by official institutions, parties or politically emblematic persons. Let's take a familiar example – a tourist generalises about people from a different city, state, culture, or civilisation based upon casual expressions of defiant, surly, cordial, or reverent attitudes by a couple of natives s/he has met. What makes this generalisation possible? In communicating, anonymous citizens may easily go beyond their own individual identities and play the "Other," symbolising their respective cities, states, cultures, etc. Respectively, these casual contacts may turn into encounters between these cities, states, cultures, etc. This cumulative public effect becomes systematic when the anonymous character of interpersonal communication pervades society.

Basic Public Relations. Relations between single citizens who communicate as strangers and symbolically represent relevant categories of people to which they belong, are not simply *public*. These relations are also *basic* because they: (1) are the simplest (associate individuals who are by definition anonymous); (2) do not presuppose mediation by any political institutions or parties, and (3) underpin all levels of the public. These basic public relations epitomise "equal respect for everyone" which "extends to the person of the other in his or her otherness" (Habermas 2001, xxxv). Such equal respect is a primary abstract foundation upon which modern democracy rests. Even vote buying is targeted to this quality of an equality-that-unifies-all-citizens regardless of their status and importance for society.

These qualities make basic public relations an identification code for everything predicated as "public," its *differentia specifica*. Even the state, which presupposes and summarises the activities of all its citizens/publics, is not the final source for determining what is public but, rather, highest reification and emanation of basic public relations. This throws new light on why "civic context matters for the way institutions work" (Putnam 1993, 120) or citizen-centred values are fundamental to effective accountability in public services (Brewer 2007, 554).

As an identification code for what is public, basic public relations are the nucleus of all political roles and meanings. Historically, basic public relations (under the

shape of bourgeois public sphere) engender civil rights before they engender political rights. Marshall assigns the formative period of civil rights to the eighteenth century and the formative period of political rights to the nineteenth century (Marshall 1964, 74). Turner deepens Marshall's theory by putting "a particular emphasis on the notion of social struggles as the central motor of the drive for citizenship." It is violence or threats of violence that bring the state "into the social arena as a stabiliser of the social system" (Turner 1990, 193-4).

Indirectly, Turner supports our view of the spread of the basic public relations by discriminating between active vs. passive citizenship depending on whether citizenship has grown from above or from below (Turner 1990, 206-7). When citizenship grows from above, this is due to the actions of the publics at an earlier stage of history. If, in a certain moment, the state and its apparatus follow citizens' attitudes, this means the state has already adopted these same attitudes under citizens' pressure at an earlier stage and/or is adopting these attitudes at present. If all concerns for citizens' rights were entrusted entirely to the state, it would not take long for democracy to become a meaningless word.

Seemingly, the concept of basic public relations disconnects people in the public from their particular situations, interests, and perspectives in the world and, in so doing, could block efforts to tackle the problems of unprivileged groups such as women, blacks, etc. This is a wrong conclusion both historically and theoretically. The emancipation of women, blacks and others began precisely when the universal disconnection of people from particular situations of dependency and/or inferior status began to occur both in widespread practice and theory. Critics of universalistic concepts such as "basic public relations" from an emancipative point of view would be a contradiction in terms since these concepts, by emphasising what is common among people, represent the very foundation of emancipation.

Self-Abstraction

With the principles laid by discussion of basic public relations, we can now see how basic public relations are generated by a process of self-abstraction.

Definition

The concept of basic public relations joins the observations of many perceptive explorers of the public realm. As shown for Dewey, public actions affect persons "beyond those immediately concerned." Sennett differentiates two aspects of public behaviour: (1) action "at a distance from the self, from its immediate history, circumstances, and needs," and (2) an "experiencing of diversity" (Sennett 1996, 87). For Kelman "public-spirited behavior shows concern for others, not just oneself" (Kelman 1990, 31). Warner characterises the moment of apprehending something as public as one in which we imagine, however imperfectly, indifference to our own particularities of culture, race, gender, or class. "We adopt the attitude of the public subject, marking to ourselves its nonidentity with ourselves" (Warner 1992, 377). Warner also points out a principle of negativity axiomatic in the bourgeois public sphere, such that "what you say will carry force not because of who you are but despite who you are. Implicit in this principle is a utopian universality that would allow people to transcend the given realities of their bodies and their status" (Warner 1992, 382).

All these observations testify that the public draws its strength from the sacrifice of individual identity at the altar of a relevant group, society, culture, or civilisation. Hannah Arendt stands with the best of this public-spirited tradition in accepting the Lessing Prize:

> *In awards, the world speaks out, and if we accept the award and express our gratitude for it, we can do so only by ignoring ourselves and acting entirely within the framework of our attitude toward the world, toward a world and public to which we owe the space into which we speak and in which we are heard* (Arendt 1970, 3).

The question arises, however, of whether self-abstraction is devoted to the general good or serves private interests of the individual including male dominance, race inequalities etc. The answer can be complicated and presupposes a theoretical reconstruction of primary public structures and practices based on self-abstraction, as we shall see below.

Historical Prerequisites of Self-Abstraction

The process of self-abstraction underpins interpersonal communication in bourgeois society as a result of two fundamental historical changes: (1) the abolishment of feudal dependencies, and (2) the rise of market relations. The first change gives way to social mobility and migration. The second makes this migration possible by providing goods for the masses of people concentrated in limited territories. World city centres spring up. An increasing number of people start depending upon the anonymous hand of the market and upon no one particular person. "The historical development of citizenship requires certain universalistic notions of the subject, the erosion of particularistic kinship systems in favour of an urban environment which can probably only flourish in the context, initially, of the autonomous city" (Turner 1990, 194).

The abolishment of feudal dependencies and the rise of self-abstraction are mutually interdependent processes. The self-abstraction of a dependent person is a contradiction in terms – one cannot abstract from an identity or self which already depends upon another. Certain level of personal independence presupposes the formulation and realisation of the political goal of abolishing feudal dependency. This profoundly changes the social parameters of the human environment. As an axiomatic principle of bourgeois society, self-abstraction expands public relations from the bottom to the top of society as a whole. This expansion starts from the way citizens address each other:

> *In its Jacobin phase, the revolution is best understood as an effort to establish citizenship as the dominant identity of every Frenchman - against the alternative identities of religion, estate, family, and region. The replacement of the still honorific title "Monsieur" with the fully universal "citoyen" (and also, though less significantly, "citoyenne") symbolizes that effort* (Walzer 1989, 211).

One of the first visible signs of progress in the rise of public relations was that "ruling elites grew beyond the size of personal retinues and extended households" (Johnston 1996, 327). Subsequently, the plebeian culture ceased being "a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt

of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines" (Habermas 1992, 427). Specifically, "the language of courtly behaviour and refinement, though initially applied merely to the English court, was transferred in the late seventeenth century to the English gentlemen … and other cultural matrices (most notably, the West End of London) were becoming dominant" (Klein 1989, 585).

These and similar changes are reinforced by a rising market that radically enhances productivity, enlarges spare time, and loosens the constraints of daily concerns. Individuals are allowed to develop intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and political interests and relations. These new interests/relations in turn are conducive to the positive reception, easy politicisation, and internationalisation of ideas of freedom, equality, and human rights.

Thus, a revolution in the very geography of a population brings about deep social changes in a communication environment with the following far-reaching consequences: (1) the anonymous individual becomes the main personage in social communication; (2) human masses become the basic communicative environment; (3) communication among strangers begins to predominate; (4) differentiation of individual positions multiplies reasons for communicating among strangers; and (5) a single individual distributes her/his attention among multiple concrete individuals while devoting less attention to each.

As a result, private problems are more easily recognised as problems of groups who may look for public legitimacy and solutions. Neglecting individual identity turns from a possible into a necessary communicative strategy. As Habermas observes, "Here inclusion does not imply locking members into a community that closes itself off from others. The 'inclusion of the other' means rather that the boundaries of the community are open for all, also and most especially for those who are strangers to one another and want to remain strangers" (Habermas 2001, xxxvi).

These changes are comparable to what Arendt calls "the rise of the social" but cannot be treated as a decline of the public sphere. Instead, these new processes illustrate the rise of basic public relations, which change the shape of society. Such change occurs when identification of the general public with certain institutions and public personages has been denied and opened to discussion in the public sphere.

In conclusion, *communication between anonymous individuals* in urban areas arises as an inexhaustible source of basic public relations and multiplies opportunities to render aspects of the social space indeed "public." This is the context in which the claim that "public-relations problems are essentially public-opinion problems" (Childs 1940, v) can be justified. The reproduction of this communicative context increases the need for democratic political changes by (1) loosing the personal dependencies, (2) deepening the need for an impartial government, and (3) hinting at how such a government may be established. Significantly, the term "citizen," as an inhabitant of a city, becomes an identifier for members of modern states entitled to civil rights and civic responsibilities. In this way, the early bourgeois city is truly the cradle of modern democracy. This is not an idealisation of urban settings but emphasis on the most influential changes in modern society which puts aside the asylums of social structures from the past.

Self-Abstraction and Public Culture

The dynamic and relatively free populations of cities include many overlapping one-dimensional groups – such as citizens, voters, taxpayers, owners, etc. – based on separate, one-dimensional characteristics. Each group equalises its members from an abstract point of view and puts everybody into the role of the others. The person as a unique individual is obscured. Hence, the "trace of strangeness" so penetratingly described by Simmel (1950, 402-8).

This kind of equalisation begins to pervade relations between citizens and politicians with a moral cast that encourages interpreting political behaviour in terms of truth and fairness. The process is twofold. On the one hand, a new way of responding to the public behaviour of politicians appeared and was first "strikingly manifest in the revolutions of 1848. What was perceived when people watched someone behave in public was his intention, his character, so that the truth of what he said appeared to depend on what kind of person he was" (Sennett 1996, 25). On the other hand, people often used defence mechanisms "against their own belief in involuntary disclosure of character and against the superimposition of public and private imagery. By an odd route, these defences came to encourage people to elevate artistic performers to the special status as public figures which they occupy today" (Sennett 1996, 26).

Communication in crowded urban settings takes increasingly place *in front of* a public, *with* a public, and *on behalf* of a public. Relations that structure communication in anonymous publics allow particular individuals to gain distinction and begin to represent others. In this way, self-abstraction results in what I call a "genealogy of the public forum" and a "genealogy of the public representative" seen as the structural result of communication between unlimited masses of anonymous individuals (Nayden 2008). Abstract equality within one-dimensional groups, however, might facilitate raising particular claims based on group membership and these same claims can be imposed in the name of equality. Equality and particularistic claims cross each other in public speech and adumbrate the space for the future democratic collisions.

Self-Abstraction, the Public Sphere, and Public Institutions

For a long time, the process of self-abstraction has gained academic acceptance in terms of the bourgeois public sphere. This process has influenced politics by (1) formulating the most urgent political issues and suggesting the most popular decisions, (2) putting into question the legitimacy of official institutions, and (3) encouraging citizens' political participation.

Public opinion, as the main weapon of the bourgeois public sphere, originates from the medieval English practice of writing petitions (Zaret 2000). During the English Revolution, printing pushed petitioning and other traditional communicative practices in new directions that altered the *content* as well as the *scope* of political communication. Petitioning appealed to an anonymous body of opinion, a public that was both a nominal object of discourse and a collection of writers, readers, printers, and petitioners engaged in political debates (Zaret 2000, 1996, 1498).

Public opinion played different roles in the French and American revolutions. According to Arendt, this was the difference between the "potential unanimity of all" (the French case) vs. the "multitude of voices and interests" (the American case)

(Arendt 1968, 88-9). This difference does not, however, change the role of public discussions (public relations) in the political constitution of bourgeois society. The primary contribution of the public sphere is to refresh recognition of existing political representatives and, more importantly, to allow some political representatives to be recognised by, or even to emerge from, the citizenry. In this way, the public sphere advances basic public relations to prominence from street talk all the way to institutional representation.

The process of self-abstraction results not only in the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere but also in the parallel changes in official institutions. "Explicitly public roles endowed with limited powers and bound by impersonal obligations" (Johnston 1996, 327-9) have been developed. The office holders cease identifying their office with either the personality of the sovereign (president, parliament, party) or with their own personality. The result is a universal accessibility of services offered by the state.

Thus, the emergence of the early bourgeois public sphere progresses alongside the transformation of public institutions. The causes and spirit of these changes are similar and determine the shape and level of democratisation in modern society. The very nature of the changes testifies to the public having conquered society and to society permanently generating multiple points of departure whereby each citizen can play the role of a public subject.

This is precisely the missing part of Habermas's work where it is concerned with the genesis/impact of the bourgeois public sphere but takes for granted the public nature of official institutions. By contrast, the concept of public relations, as a general identifier of the public realm, explains the affinity of the public sphere with public institutions, the similarity of their historical changes, and the strivings of each to monopolise the other. This new concept of public relations opens the door to a unifying interpretation of all of the processes in the public realm, including the dominant process of political representation.

Political Representation – Norms and Pathology

A person who speaks in front of a public gains a new identity based on her/his abstract community with all of the participants in that public. When this new identity adheres to a speaker's profile, this heralds the transmutation of a stranger from the modern city into a new type of personage – a public/political representative. A public representative embodies the face and the body of all the faceless and bodiless participants in the relevant public. According to Bourdieu, functionary depersonalises ("the ordinary individual should die") in the name of universal values such as God, Truth, Freedom, etc. in order to speak on their behalf (Bourdieu 1987, 193, 200). The entire transition from public discussion to political representation is the essence of what Tönnies calls transition from gaseous to fluid and solid "aggregate states" of public opinion (Splichal and Hardt 2000 137-138).

As a side effect, the human body disappears in its function as a main target of punitive force in bourgeois society (Foucault 1975). This looks opposite to Warner's assertion that:

> *now public body images are everywhere on display, in virtually all media contexts. Where printed public discourse formerly relied on a rhetoric of abstract disembodiment, visual media, including print, now display bodies*

for a range of purposes: admiration, identification, appropriation, scandal, etc. (Warner 1992, 385-6).

This is not, however, a triumph of personification, but an extreme degree of depersonalisation, where the body now functions as a symbol of the mass of bodies and denotes an inaccessible and elite circle of people and goods.

These transformations exemplify an emerging complicated interplay between what is concrete and what is anonymous. Anonymity (remoteness) in mass publics creates a deeper need for closeness among individuals. Closeness, however, is possible only through the symbolic representation of anonymous members of society by concrete individuals. This psychological need for closeness among members of the mass or general public allows politicians to refresh their political image on the eve of elections, by reaching down and mingling with the public. During the period between elections, politicians can more formally represent and personify anonymous others because past accumulations of public energy allow them not only to speak, but also to live, "in the name of" and even "instead of" the others. Anonymous masses get used to being brought under the sway of impersonal powers and, in some historical circumstances, grow to accept an alien "I" to a degree tantamount to "escape from freedom" (Fromm 1994).

The Public as Community and Modern Democracy

In pre-modern history, people formed a public and gained collective strength mainly in connection with territorial rivalries. Field superiority required the support of armed forces. This indicates that military organisation was a general frame for pre-modern publics, even when the aim was primarily religious in nature. In the Middle Ages, the permanently active "public" is the army. Actions against feudal aristocracies and their armies reproduced the form of military actions, and publics subsequently took the shape of military organisation. Only armed publics (solders or rebels) could intimidate and influence the institutional hierarchy. For this reason, Warner ascribes the term "public" only to modern society:

> *Strangers in the ancient sense – foreign, alien, misplaced – might of course be placed to a degree by Christendom, the ummah, a guild, or an army, affiliations one might share with strangers, making them a bit less strange. Strangers placed by means of these affiliations are on a path to commonality. Publics orient us to strangers in a different way. They are no longer merely people whom one does not yet know; rather, an environment of stranger-hood is the necessary premise of some of our most prized ways of being* (Warner 2002, 75).

The public, in this last sense of an environment of strangers, plays a dominant role in structuring the public realm in bourgeois society. For decades, however, this role has escaped the theoretical attention it deserves. As early as the 1920s, Lippmann qualifies as "indisputable" the need in the Great Society for "uninterrupted publicity" but ascertains that state machine and media have restricted the public to the role of "bystander" or "phantom," ready for political uses and misuses (Lippmann 1927). Dewey acknowledges this unenviable political position of the public but, nevertheless, conceptualises the public as a key concept in interpreting the state (Dewey 1927). Unfortunately, he considers the public and the state to be

two sides of the same coin and, worse, treats the public as a self-organisation of the state. As a result, Dewey's public plays the same role theoretically that Lippmann's public plays in practice. This observation explains (1) the recent revelation that Lippmann and Dewey were not originally adversaries in the great debate about "the vitality of participatory democracy," and (2) why their dialogue was reframed as such a debate much later, mainly in the 1990s" (Janson, 2009, 226, 230). The 1990s were a time of full-blown debate about the bourgeois public sphere which has renewed an interest in the political role of the public.

Generally, every public is cantered on a particular event. In traditional societies, natural cataclysms and exceptional social needs form publics *incidentally* while, in modern societies, the social environment of anonymous individuals is a permanent source of publicly relevant events. The life of the modern citizen is led, literally and allegorically, in front of an unlimited multitude of real and imaginary publics which determine individual fortunes. For the anonymous mass in bourgeois society, to form a public is as natural as for primitive man to organise a tribal rite, or for a totalitarian citizen to take part in the ideological construction of society. This allows modern publics to exert *systematic* influences upon political institutions and officials, i.e. anonymous masses to gain political effectiveness.

The unique social status of the public was felt as early as during the time of the first taverns, coffeehouses, and the like. The Earl of Clarendon disapprovingly confided that visitors in coffeehouses "had charter of privilege to speak what they would without being in danger to be called in question" (Hyde 1760 cited in Pincus 1995, 832). The political importance of this unprecedented phenomenon is summarised by Warner in the following manner:

> *Speaking, writing and thinking involve us – actively and immediately – in a public, and thus in the being of the sovereign. Imagine how powerless people would feel if their commonality and participation were simply defined by pre-given frameworks, by institutions and laws, as in other social contexts they are through kinship. … Such is the image of totalitarianism: non-kin society organized by bureaucracy and law* (Warner 2002, 69).

To paraphrase the opening line of Marx's *Capital*, the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears both as an "immense collection of commodities" and as "collection of people" – i.e., masses, crowds, publics, groups, etc. These "heaps of people" are not a mere passive echo of the collection of commodities but are generated by a set of public relations which define the political shape of society. The interpretation of the public realm as a mere function of commodity relations obscures the internal logic of the public/political realm. For example, all aspects of freedom in bourgeois society are treated in the conditionality of capital production and, therefore, as limited in scope and functions. Hence, the "eclectic ideas" of Marx about freedom of the press and the lack of discussion on that subject in his principal works (Splichal 2002, 113). Missing the concept of public relations, Marxism subsequently encountered unsolvable theoretical and practical difficulties.

However misguided it may be to equate them, the parallel between a collection of commodities and a collection of people is more than significant. Both determine and produce each other and depend equally upon the same historical factors – the

abolishment of feudal dependencies, population growth, new modes of settlement, and progress in industry, transport, communications, science, and so forth. Warner points out one important aspect of this parallel:

> *Public discourse and the market were mutually clarifying, then, in both their positive and negative characters: positive, because both public and market were metonymically realized in printed, mass-produced artifacts; negative, because the private subject finds his relation to both. … only by negating the given reality of himself, thereby considering himself the abstract subject of the universal (political or economical) discourse* (Warner 1990, 63).

Access to a public is principally open to all, regardless of their individual identities. The systematic political influence of modern publics carries the principle of open access into politics and explains why the equal rights and duties of modern citizenship are, "by definition, national" (Marshall 1964, 72). Open access to public discussions heralds a new social and political organisation by (1) making the process of self-abstraction immanent for the early bourgeois public sphere, (2) attaching a symbolic representative character to the public sphere, and, hence, (3) crystallising into democratic structures of power. Ultimately, democratic representation is a political function of the principle of open access.

Political representation depends upon the activities of a variety of publics in various ways. Political changes since early modern times have always been preceded or initiated by impressive public actions, under strong public pressures, and/or have occurred in the context of multiple public addresses to an undefined public. The less people's discontents take the shape of public discontent, the more probably official institutions neglect their public responsibilities and the easier private interests become a dominant inspiration and criteria for effectiveness of these institutions. Those institutions and organisations which adopt the principles and aims of the relevant public accumulate the public's energy and, as a result, gain the power/legitimacy to use that energy. In fact, protests by affected publics addressed to official institutions often represent a clash between the energy of institutions (provided by publics of previous generations) and the living energy of present publics. This approach throws new light upon the basis of democratic leadership and denounces the myths of exceptional personal/political capabilities ascribed to some, mainly totalitarian, leaders.

Conclusion

I have argued that the time is ripe for a new and all-inclusive interpretation of the term "public relations" as relations which define the public realm in the same manner as economic relations define the economy. What is now known as "public relations" (PR) is relations *with* the public (RP) organised and carried out by various private and public institutions, profit and non-profit organisations, celebrities, and legal entities. I do not question the need for this practice represented by the acronym "PR." However, public relations are far more than merely a means for influential public and private subjects to improve their image. That is why public relations should be released from the prison of "PR," i.e., freed from limitations of prior understandings to make room for a more comprehensive concept. This new concept of public relations indicates how the predicate "public" and the subject "relations" are best suited to their historical precedents and potentials.

The internal logic of public/political interactions differentiates three levels of public relations: (1) relations among public institutions themselves; (2) relations between citizens and public institutions, directly or indirectly mediated by collective entities – parties and other organisations; and (3) relations between single individuals who communicate as strangers, where everyone plays the role of the Other as a personification of a particular region, group, culture, or civilisation.

I called relations on the third level "basic public relations" because they are the simplest, reproduce themselves at all levels and do not need any institutional mediation. Basic public relations are, the lowest common denominator of all relations predicated as "public" and the nucleus of all political roles and meanings in democratic societies. This "common denominator" has been established in society through the rise of publics since the dawn of modernity – a process that has determined both the appearance of the bourgeois public sphere and the democratisation of public institutions.

It is possible to find instances of basic public relations in pre-modern societies, but these were exceptional cases of general social upheavals as, for example, when political intrigues overflowed the king's court. By contrast, in modernity, the process of self-abstraction becomes all-embracing and public affairs turn into a question of everyone. In this context, verbal and nonverbal individual behaviours acquire public importance and aspects of physical space turn into public space.

Freeing the term "public relations" makes possible (1) discovering the common roots of both public (political) institutions and the public sphere as open spaces for discussion, and (2) exploring the innate kinship between politics and other segments of public life. In this way, we can reach a deeper understanding of the strong, sometimes dramatic influence of politics on all kinds of public entertainment and, conversely, the hidden erosion of undemocratic political systems through subterranean influences such as music, cinema, theatre, and literature.

This paradigmatic shift toward a new concept of "public relations" requires a new introduction to politics based on the move from public to political. Public activities are easily transformed into political activities; public figures and celebrities provide a ready source for recruitment of new politicians; public discourse exerts pressures upon politics; and, mostly, basic public relations are the nucleus of all political roles and meanings. The overall effect of this introduction is a reconceptualisation of politics as quintessentially stemming from public relations and of democracy as the very essence of politics.

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