CONVERSATIONS IN PRIVATE SPHERES: RECONSTRUCTING

HABERMAS'S UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND IDEAL

SPEECH SITUATION IN *PRIVATE SPHERES*

by

PD CASTEEL

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To my bride for sustaining me,

my children for lifting me,

and Ben Agger for inspiring me.

And to the voices that have haunted my being for so many years: To Woody Allen who first inspired me write. To Ralph Ellison for writing the great American novel. To Robert Pirsig who first offered me a version in genres blurred. To Cornell West who presents academia with orchestrated cadence and melody in his scholarly texts. To Voltaire for having Candide leave El Dorado. To Graham Greene for seeing the beautiful Sanchoist's soul in the misguided hidalgo. To Friedrich Nietzsche for reminding me to dance. And to Gregory Corso who refused to allow me to ignore life's poetry and irony.

ABSTRACT

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Supervising Professor: Dr. Ben Agger

The author makes the argument that "public spheres" do not exist and demonstrates how Habermas's communicative actions, specifically Habermas's concepts of *universal pragmatics* and the *ideal speech situation,* can be reconstructed in *private spheres* to formulate a more viable philosophical methodology for validating truth, constructing self-identities, and sustaining the social.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "language game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life.
Ludwig Wittgenstein
Philosophical Investigations p. 11

I believe that what this essentially local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought.
Michel Foucault
Power/Knowledge p. 81

In April 2005 millions of people gathered in Rome for the funeral of Pope John Paul II, at least 300,000 filled St. Peter's Square, while hundreds of millions of people watched the ceremony on television. In July 2005 thousands ran with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain. Sound bytes of the event flickered across newscasts that evening all over the world. In February 2003 United States' Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the United Nations on the subject of Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction program. The speech was carried internationally on radio, television, and on the Internet. In September 2004 President George W. Bush met Senator John Kerry in a nationally televised debate. The debate was witnessed by reporters and an audience in the hall, seen on television and the internet all over the world, and broadcast on radio, internet, and pod-casts. Earlier this year I sat in a coffee shop with two friends and debated whether the issue of immigration in America is really a debate about race. All

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of these events and discussions were "public" in a very general sense. By this I intend the use of public in the popular sense as seen in what Wittgenstein (1968) termed the family resemblances of such terms as public opinion, public schools, public relations, and a public place. This general understanding of public is shares certain attributes that can also be described as social. However, if we take Habermas's concept of the "public sphere," and specifically how Habermas embeds this concept within his on-going work on open dialogue and the democratic process, and this is exactly the direction I want to take this article, it's clear that these events did not occur in a "public sphere." Furthermore, I argue that no event ever takes place in a "public sphere." This is because a "public sphere" as defined by Habermas and understood as a sphere to fairly and "publicly" arbitrate dialogue does not exist and never has existed.

A historically constructed concept of the "public sphere" is the foundation of Habermas's work on communicative action, legitimacy, and political participation (Borradori 2003, Kellner 2004). John Rawls (1995, p. 140) has concisely defined Habermas's "public sphere" as the place where "citizens discuss how justice as fairness is to be formulated…laid out and whether the principles selected are to be endorsed." The strength of the concept is that it is theorized on the societal, institutional, and communicative levels (Ku 2000). Habermas himself has shown this in his own work and interviews where he has employed the term to define the global, businesses, and conversations in coffee houses. Additionally, Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" can be relatively easily contrasted with spheres, past and present, which he and others define as "private." Habermas initially defines the "private sphere" as within the

home. He traces the concept of "private" back to ancient Greek households when families work together in a blended environment where family and industry overlapped and operated out of the gaze of the "public." In his later writings he begins to use the term "private" to define fragmented sectors of the "public" that have been captured by business, or business interests, and pulled into "private" business sectors. Curiously, the "private" in Habermas's work migrates from the unseen home environment where work in done out of the gaze of the "public" to another unseen "private" place within business and out of the gaze of the "public." In both cases, and this is largely true in most of Habermas's work, the "private" in Habermas's is little more than a contrast to his vitally important concept of "public."

Habermas (1993) writes that his original intent in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was to extract from history an ideal type of the bourgeois "public sphere." He finds the model for this ideal type in the seventeenth century coffee houses and salons of Europe and in the early eighteenth century literate European bourgeois class. It is this constructed ideal type that Habermas uses to critique the social and political discourses of today and proclaim them contradictory and wanting (Kramer 1993). It is also from this ideal type that he is able to construct an ideal model of discourse that presents a utopian solution to our present societal and political failings. Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" has not only served him well in the continued development of his own work, it has also generated much debate and writing across disciplines in academia as other scholars continue to develop their own work.

A close reading of Habermas's work reveals a building tension through the years between his recognition of an increasingly fragmented world and the concept of "public sphere" that he constructed his earliest work. In recent interviews he speaks of a "global public" while acknowledging that West's hermeneutic model breaks down at the borders of culture (Borradori 2003). This apparent contradiction, one that could be read to undermine his arguments that support his concepts of *universal pragmatics* and the *ideal speech situation*, is at the heart of tension in Habermas's later work. With this in mind, my objective is not to state that Habermas has got it wrong. On the contrary, my argument is that Habermas's work on communicative actions is on the mark. The only problem I see is placing his theories within an antiquated context. By reconstructing Habermas's ideas within *private spheres* the apparent contradiction is removed. The fragmented world we observe is reflected of specific cultural forms of reason.

Though the events and conversations listed at the beginning of this article did not occur in a "public sphere," they did occur with the intent of communication in a social context. The communicative, social, and political context of these events and conversations can be understood by leveraging Habermas's theory of communicative actions. Habermas's theory of communicative actions recognizes a *universal pragmatics* in language that allows conversationalists to leverage the intrinsic nature of language to criticize domination and oppression (Kellner 2004) and identify and reconstruct conditions for understanding. Implicit in each one of these events is the concept of the ideal situation. Habermas's *universal pragmatics* takes this implication

one step further and presupposes the *ideal speech situation* (here lays one of the great values of Habermas's "public sphere" - Habermas [1980] credits his work on the "public sphere" for leading to his concept of the *ideal speech situation*). Habermas's *ideal speech situation* operates in the background assumptions of everyday conversations. It is implied in every conversation. It is within these conversations that conversationalists work inter-subjectively to negotiate understanding or agreement.

Habermas has it right with the practical aspects of his concepts of *universal pragmatics* and *ideal speech situation.* The problem is that he has placed his concepts and methodology within a non-existent setting (the "public sphere). By taking Habermas's concepts and placing communicative actions within *private spheres* the production of valid conversations about knowledge, truth, meaning, purpose, and ultimately the construction of society itself are revealed. Additionally, the methodology of divergent conversations, conversation by socially or politically dispossessed groups, are revealed to be constructed, validated, and sustained in the same manner as dominant hierarchical conversations. The difference between dominant conversations and dispossessed conversations, such as multi-cultural, feminists, queer, and critical conversations, is not one of valid and invalid narratives or methodology, but rather a difference in power and the nearly exclusive ability of *predominant private spheres* to broadcast their narratives into non-dominant *private spheres*. That is what each of these events represents, a broadcast of messages from *predominant private spheres* to *private spheres,* or more simply put from a powerful sphere of communication to a less powerful sphere of communication. Perhaps, the most compelling aspects of this

approach to Habermas's communicative actions is that it unearths the existential power of the individual to shoulder the weight of modernity's hegemony and to withstand the daily struggle by bracketing out the broadcasts from *predominant private spheres,* or what Herbert Marcuse (1991) termed the administered society, in order to bear witness to the struggles and conversations of others and have others in one's *private spheres* bear witness to one's own struggles and conversations. It is through these struggles and conversations, through what Thomas Reid's (1863) called power and exertion and what Martin Luther King, Jr. termed perseverance that the individual finds strength to refuse (Marcuse 1991) the messages bombarding their *private spheres* from *predominant private spheres* and take the existential actions (Sartre 1947) required to construct a meaningful and purposeful self-identity from what is "close at hand" (Marx 1996). It is the convergence of these actions that allows something to crystallize (Camus 1969) within one's own inner conversation, what Giddens (1991) referred to as monitoring or what Freud called a "private poem," beneath the daunting weight of modernity. It is these conversations in *private spheres*, not the great "public" events, which constructs the self-identities and creates the life projects that move the masses of people to inter-subjectively create and maintain the social.

As the reader moves through this text it will become apparent that particular terms and concepts are being leveraged and other terms and concepts being avoided. The first term avoided is "public." When this paper addresses the context or setting of an event, discourse, or institution that has the benefit of including a large number of people I will use the term social. The word "public" will be used only in detailing the

arguments of this paper and the work of Habermas and others on the concept of "public." The next term is *predominant private* sphere. A *predominant private sphere* is a large *private sphere* that encircles parts of or all of many other *private spheres.* Examples of a *predominant private sphere* would be government institutions (or the government itself) and large corporations. A *predominant private sphere* such as a national government wholly encircles many other *private spheres* such as states, cities, neighborhoods, schools, homes, friendships, and individual minds. This concept is meant to contrast Habermas's idea of dominant "public spheres" and Hohendahl's use of "nondominant spheres." *Predominant private spheres* are simply larger and more powerful *private sphere* (detailed in a later section of this paper) exhibiting the aforementioned attributes.

The term dispossessed is used in the place of such words as marginalized, silenced, and oppressed. It is a term used by Ralph Ellison in his classic novel *Invisible Man.* In the book's twelfth chapter the story's protagonist, a young gifted street orator happens across a crowd witnessing the ejection of an elderly couple from their home. When he begins to apply his craft he is shouted down by a man who tells him the couple is being dispossessed. The orator likes the word. He questions just what it is that this old couple is being dispossessed. It surely isn't the "junk" from their home being thrown out on the street. Loss of their meager belongings does not seem to be enough to call them dispossessed. He presents the old couple with nothing of value, a couple who never really possessed anything, and yet they are being dispossessed. So he asks the crowd if it is really us, the onlookers, who are being dispossessed. The orator goes

further and insinuates they were dispossessed long ago. They were dispossessed of their own dream, many dreams, dreams of a Constitution, of Africa, and of Egypt… Dispossession is an on-going process. The dispossessed are constantly being dispossessed again and again. In a later speech the orator comments of the progressive nature of dispossessing stating that eventually the dispossessed will be dispossessed of their own brains. Like Freud and Foucault, Ellison sees the hegemony of society as so powerful as to shape and alter the physical human body. However, the power of the term for this paper doesn't come in its relevance to these narratives. The power of the term relevant to this paper is found in three elements: first is Ellison's suggestion of its on-going progressive nature, second is Ellison's idea that there is no paradox in the continual dispossessing of those already dispossessed, and finally the very term by definition requires that there must have been a time, even it is a time now forgotten, when the dispossessed were indeed possessed. The word conveys how society treats a group of people at the same time it constitutes that at some point in the past the dispossessed possessed the nature and even the wholeness of those doing the dispossessing. Being dispossessed gives a bit more insight into why some are marginalized, silenced, or oppressed.

Finally, the term broadcast. The definition of broadcast as the scattering of seeds is an especially poignant image that illustrates how *predominant private spheres* impregnate *private spheres* with ideas or concepts. This is not a perfect process. Crossing boundaries of *private spheres* and entering into a sphere with a different set of background assumptions causes distortion. In some cases the broadcasted message

cannot survive. The old Christian parable of the farmer scattering seeds (found in Matthew 13: 4-9) offers an excellent example of how broadcast can be properly viewed. "Then he told them many things in parables, saying: 'a farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop–a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Referring to such actions as communication or discourse doesn't reflect the fact that the broadcast only moves in one direction. The benefit of using this particular parable to understand broadcast is to capture the randomness of the action and account for the germination period and impregnation seen in areas where the seeds of a broadcast do take.

Returning to my argument, this paper takes the perspective that any place where a communicative action, such as conversation or presentation of a narrative, someone is excluded. For this reason all spheres are private. Not only is every sphere, but each has its own rules of communication and unchallenged background assumptions. I will show that Habermas and others have already conceded this point. Additionally, I argue that the concept of "public" actually presents a false picture of how conversations on "big issues" are constructed and works to silence or invalidate conversations of dispossessed groups. Finally, I will re-construct Habermas's *universal pragmatics* and *ideal speech situation* within *private spheres* and demonstrate the benefit of such a model.

CHAPTER 2

"PUBLIC SPHERES"

Before outlining the structure of *private spheres* and the dynamics of conversations within *private spheres,* it is necessary to address in some detail the concept of the "public sphere" and Habermas's highly influential work on the subject. My intention here is not to present a literature review, but to show how many of the critiques of Habermas' work can be theoretically reconciled to Habermas' concepts of *universal pragmatics* and *ideal speech situation* by leveraging the concept of *private spheres.* This can only be accomplished by singling out these critiques of Habermas' work on the "public sphere."

The "public sphere" as constructed by Habermas has four generally recognized shortcomings. The first is that his "public sphere" is not public because it is not open to everyone (Boyte 1993, Eley 1993, Fraser 1993, Ku 2000). The second is that it does not address various post-modern critiques (Benhabib 1993, Delanty 1997, Eley 1993, Fraser 1993, Ku 2000, McCarthy 1993 and 2000, Ryan 1993). Third is Habermas's "public sphere" is constructed within the hierarchy of Western culture and philosophy (Benhabib 1993, Cohen 1990, McCarthy 1993). The fourth essentially reiterates something Habermas has already admitted, namely that his concept of the "public sphere" is not real or practical but rather idealized (Delanty 1997, Eley 1993, Kellner 2004, Saccamano 1991, Zaret 1993). To this list I would like to add a fifth.

Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" does not provide a tool that can be used to philosophically explain how a fragmented and multi-cultural world constructs and sustains itself. Though Habermas's concept of communicative actions is a fundamental building block of society, it cannot be utilized within a utopian construct and still address the practical problems of this fragmented world. Kellner (2004) writes that Habermas's has made a shift from a socio-historical concept of "public sphere" in his earlier work to an idealistic philosophically grounded concept in his later writings. This is an important shift in Habermas's effort to imagine new methodologies for creating a more democratic society. However, it is at this point that Habermas's concept becomes too idealistic to be integrated into a comprehensive philosophical perspective, fails to serve in the practical work of constructing self-identities and societies, and fails to be consistent with Habermas's own later work.

The most evident difficulty with Habermas's concept of "public sphere" is the issue of openness. Habermas (2000) writes that an event is "public" when it is open to all. Using the examples in the opening paragraph of this paper it is easy to see that these spheres are not open to all. The funeral of Pope John Paul II may have seemed like a "public" event yet participation was limited to the size of St. Peter's Square and the viewing of the event limited by access to a television showing the funeral. Also, a deep understanding of Catholicism was necessary to participate in the dialectic of Catholic history and imagery. The running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain was not a public event. The confined area of the streets of Pamplona is such that access is limited. Spain geographically is too remote of a geographical destination for all to attend. Brief

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TV news sound bytes do not provide the viewer access to the discursive activities of the event. The address of United States' Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations on the subject of Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction program was not open to the public. In fact, for the speech even to be possible, for one voice to speak to what Habermas (Borradori 2003) has termed the "global public" on behalf of an entire country, millions of voices had to be silenced and denied access to the discourse on Iraq. In the end it isn't even possible to know if Powell presented a discourse to the United Nations that represented the majority of Americans. The September 2004 Presidential debate, involving President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, did not take place in a "public sphere". It took place in a private sphere where only two individuals could participate and the desired effect was focused on the ability of television and radio broadcasts to impregnate *private spheres* with messages. The desired effect was not genuine discourse.

By impregnate I intend that media broadcasts can, and often do, impregnate *private spheres* with messages. This is not a discourse. This is an imperfect process of injecting a message into a *private sphere.* All media messages are distorted when they cross the border of a *private sphere.* This is because the *private spheres* have different background assumptions than the *predominant private sphere* broadcasting the message. Considering this in the light of the concept of broadcast it should be clear that not all broadcast discourses take and of the ones that do take not all are interpreted in the same manner. An example of this is an announcement on the television news broadcast of a new law to crack down on illegal drug use. How the message is distorted

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and then reconstructed within each *private sphere* is different in each sphere. Behind the iron gates of an affluent upper class American neighborhood where significant amounts of cocaine and designer drugs are consumed the message is ignored. In a poor African-American apartment complex, where drug arrests occur regularly reflecting the national practice that feeds the statistic that African Americans make up 70% of illegal drug convictions while only consuming 12% of the nations illegal drugs (West 2000), the message is taken as a warning or threat. In police departments the new law is a mandate. Is the broadcast sending a message of no significance, a threat, or a call to action? As the message is incorporated into conversations within *private spheres* will it become the focus of what is good or evil about the American legal system? This all depends of the different background assumptions of each *private sphere.*

Even the conversation I had with friends in a coffee shop, a setting lending itself to Habermas's ideal, was not open to everyone. Additionally, the rules and background assumptions were unique to that place, time, and the people in the conversation. My two friends were not academics. I kept this in mind as I shared my ideas. They were a white middle-class college educated American married couple that I had known for about ten years. Our shared experiences of past conversations and our enculturation into societal norms constructed the unique unchallenged background assumptions of our conversation. It is these rules and background assumptions constructed between conversationalists that make these conversations private.

Finally and ironically, Habermas himself, through his lectures and writing, is not accessible to all. The complexity of his narratives and the deeply indexical language,

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demanding a firm grasp of Western philosophy, sociology, Critical Theory, ethnomethodology, psychology, and literature, limits a reader's ability to assemble meaning from his text and makes his text, by design, not open to all. Habermas's work is read and discussed in *private spheres.*

I should note here that it is understood that Habermas's concept of communicative actions and *ideal speech* is more of a democratic discourse among individuals than a spectacle in a "public" place. It would be wrong to consider an event at the Vatican equivalent to a debate among participants willing to listen and carefully consider the arguments of the other participants. My examples are not intended to address whether these events were true discourses. They are intended to dismiss the possibility of a "public sphere" primarily on the grounds of exclusion.

Habermas's (1993) response to this critique is that exclusion, or lack of openness, actually has a less radical meaning when the structure of communicative action gives rise to the hegemonic "public sphere" also provides the same basis for the construction of additional subcultures and class-specific "public spheres." This is reflective of Habermas's later work that begins to present a multi-dimensional model of discourse in democratic "public spheres" (McCarthy 1993). Though Habermas (1993) begins to construct a "web of overlapping" spheres that properly reflects the discursive spheres observed in the life-world, his response fails to take into account the hegemony that he refers to and how it marginalizes and often silences the other dispossessed "public spheres" which he has made mention. In developing his *ideal speech situation* he proposes that power is bracketed out (Habermas 1987, Ku 2000, Saccamano 1991).

This does not reflect the background assumptions of actual *private spheres.* Background assumptions in *private spheres* take into account power differentials in validating conversations. Habermas's concept of the ideal past (early eighteenth century bourgeois "public sphere") and *ideal speech situation* appears immune to power (Saccamano 1991). This oversight is necessary partly due to Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" and is remedied, as I will show, when conversations are validated within *private spheres.*

The second and third shortcomings of Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" are closely related to the hegemony/power critique. Specifically, Habermas's "public sphere" does not address the various multi-cultural, post-modern, and non-Western critiques (Benhabib 1993, Delanty 1997, Eley 1993, Fraser 1993, Ku 2000, McCarthy 1993, Ryan 1993). It is the hierarchical structure of spheres in the life-world that has long silenced multi-cultural, feminists, and queer narratives. As many more spheres have found ways to broadcast their own messages into *predominant private spheres* the universal values assumed by Habermas and others has seemed increasingly under attack and inefficient at defining acceptable concepts of justice, goodness, and meaning. Habermas's theory promotes historically Western values as superior to non-Western values (Delanty 1997) and neglects the degree to which the institutions that constructed these values were founded on sectionalism, exclusiveness, and repression (Eley 1993). This philosophy originates from Western "forms of life," a concept from African philosophy Godwin Sogolo (1993), or to put it more precisely Western methodologies, as well as, theories and paradigms. Sogolo writes that what is universal

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among thinkers in various cultures, or *private* spheres, is only the human traits of self-reflection and rationality. Yet even these universal traits are unique when expressed within particular *private spheres.* I take this to reveal something more than Sogolo intended, namely that the universal in found in the structure of the brain and is thus biological. The manifestations of the brain's evolved natural working order is contingent, as Sogolo wrote, on intervening cultures or what I would describe as particular *private spheres* and their background assumptions. Instead of embracing a perspective that truth can be validated indigenously, Habermas falls back on his Critical Theory roots and writes that consciousness in the life-world is fragmented and rendered obsolete in its ability to grasp the totality of society. This assumes that without participation in and understanding of the whole of humanity that individuals cannot construct knowledge and truth. Although in his later work Habermas (1981) writes that the core of the individual that works to secure identity no longer needs a world-view showing that he has at least begun to recognize the reflexive nature of the individual and the influence of culture. There is little evidence that he is restating his position on the "public sphere." The problem with his position is that it appears to be for Habermas that the only project that matters is that of modernity as defined in the grand narratives of Western culture. His assumption is that all *private spheres* share the same culture (Delanty 1997) or cannot participate in rationality. Habermas presents his "public sphere" as the normative state for conversations and truth telling (Hohendahl 1979). Although he attempts to give his "public sphere" an inter-subjectivity (Habermas 1987, 1993) (an attribute that can only be found in local or indigenous *private spheres*) the

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dominant institutions and rationality of his "public sphere" exclude *private spheres* and provide the only methodology for validating conversation and construction self-identities and the social. Though Habermas may have assembled a concept which reflects the hegemony of *predominant private spheres* in the life-world, what he has not done is addressed the multi-cultural, feminists, and queer critiques that have withstood the hegemony and found a way to construct new narratives that become grafted within the background assumptions of *private spheres* that validate new conversations, truths, self-identities, and societies indigenously. Additionally, Habermas has ignored other traditions of philosophy and culture that produce different methodologies for constructing truth. There is no consideration for Eastern thought or African Philosophy just to name two. Habermas's "public sphere" is constructed within the historical hierarchy of Western culture and philosophy (Benhabib 1993, Cohen 1990, McCarthy 1993) and pays little attention to new Western voices or voices from other cultures all over the world.

One of the strengths of Habermas's concepts is the ideal model it provides for democratic processes. Habermas's "public sphere" is a goal or ideal that democratic societies can hold up and work to move "toward." Habermas (2000) writes that the acceptance of one "public sphere" has had positive functions in the context of political emancipation. Other scholars argue that it has served as an indispensable concept in political theory and political participation (Fraser 1993, Schudson 1993). However, like "zero defects" in manufacturing, "value-free" discourse in academia, and "world peace" in politics, it is an ideal impossibility. As many scholars (Delanty 1997, Eley 1993,

Kellner 2004, Saccamano 1991, Zaret 1993) and Habermas (1993) himself have written the "public sphere" is idealized, not real, or practical. Part of the problem with this utopian concept is that it is steeped with paradigmatic assumptions of the Enlightenment. This is what Habermas intends. His "public sphere" and communicative actions are a concerted effort to construct a system that addresses how the project of modernity can be pursued. However, it is this pursuit that ignores, or even silences, the myriad of dispossessed narratives within and without Western culture.

Habermas (1987) does concede in his later work that idealistic thinking has become obsolete in our ever increasingly complex world. The complexity that Habermas refers to is an interesting matter. Technology does not sufficiently account for all the increased complexity related to communicative actions. The fragmentation of the "public" and the rise of other narratives within the "global public" are other reasons Habermas writes that account for this complexity. However, a clear understanding of this form of complexity is needed. Habermas clearly outlines in an interview in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (Borradori 2003) that the rise of an Islamic voice on the world stage has created some difficulty. This is a good example of what this complexity might mean to a Western mind like Habermas's. The question I'm interested in is whether communicative actions are indeed becoming more complex. Considering the rapidly increasing extinction of languages and cultures throughout the world and the middling of knowledge and interest conditioned by the international broadcast media, it would appear that concerning communicative actions that the world

has become less complex. It seems more plausible that Habermas's complexity can be understood to be saying that complexity arises from a greater awareness by *predominant private spheres* of previously dispossessed narratives and not from any growing or increasing complexity due to the greater diversity in communicative actions.

In summation, the story of how society is constructed, how individuals reflexively validate conversations and truth narratives, and how individuals assemble self-identities is best told by discarding a non-existent ideal "public sphere." In its place an authentic location for dialogue must be utilized if we are to continue to leverage the valuable tools of *universal pragmatics* and the *idea speech situation* that Habermas crafted. This location must provide a context that can be used to philosophically and sociologically explain how our complex world has been constructed and how it is maintained on the societal, institutional, and communicative levels.

CHAPTER 3

PRIVATE SPHERES

The presumption that society as a whole can be conceived as an association writ large, directing itself via the media of law and political power, has become entirely implausible in view of functionally differentiated societies.
Jurgen Habermas
"Further reflections on the Public Sphere"
Habermas and the Public Sphere p. 443

The idea of multiple spheres or sectors in society isn't new. Habermas himself has written about bourgeois "public spheres", private spheres, literary "public spheres", political "public spheres", business sectors, politically privileged spheres, spheres of commodity exchange, spheres of civil society, plebian spheres, and the global public to name a few. The idea that these many spheres overlap is found in the writings Habermas's (1993) and others (Baker 1993, Boyte 1993, Cantril 2002, Casteel 2005, Eley 1993, Fraser 1993, Garnham 1993, Jordan 2002, Kellner 2004). What is new is to define these spheres as solely private. Given that every sphere denies someone access either to the sphere, the conversations within that sphere, or to meaning by the nature of the signs, symbols, and background assumptions that "anyone like us necessarily knows" (Garfinkel 1967) it is not possible for any sphere to be considered anything but private. The difference in private spheres themselves is a matter of degrees. All discursive spheres are private, yet it is safe to say that some are more private than others and some are more social than others.

Private spheres are networks, localities, or relationships where language is leveraged in conversations and truth is constructed and validated. The concept is anthropological in nature and similar to C. Wright Mills' (1978) "local environments," Richard Wright's (1941) "a world of his own," Lyotard's (2002) "institution," Pierce's (1877) "community," Schutz' (1970) "communicative common environment," Goffman's (1967) "arenas of interaction," and Masolo's (2003) "indigenous." For all of these authors the *private sphere* serves as a local environment for validating truth and constructing self-identities. This is a concept that has a rich intellectual heritage despite that historically it has carried many other names. The concept also serves as a model of how societies are constructed and sustained. Every society is a web of overlapping and merging *private spheres.* These are family, friends, people who work together, school boards, city governments, churches, blog web sites, associations, international corporations, nation-states, and various world alliances. The human psyche is also a *private sphere:* a local environment rich with background assumptions and daily inner discourse. Every *private sphere* constructs truth for "anyone like us necessarily knows." Finally, *private spheres* provide a powerful model of how discourses migrate between spheres and in some cases become elevated into *predominant private spheres.*

C. Wright Mills' take on *private spheres* – he uses the term local environments - is largely a negative read on the "ordinary." In Mills' classic text *The Sociological Imagination* (1978) the "ordinary" person does not have the mental capacity to grasp the interplay of their local environments with the social. The pace of history exceeds

that of the "ordinary" to intellectually keep up. Mill's suggest a Kierkegaardian crisis

where the "ordinary" must bracket out mammoth social structures, step out of the march

of history which they might take part, and retreat into local environments inhabited by

private persons seeking to hold onto some vestige of their own values and selfhood.

What Mills recommends is the sociological imagination – an ability to take in the

complexity of the historical scene and the social and to bring it all back into local

environments and inner life of the "ordinary." Mills is attempting to redesign sociology

as a craft. However, it is his discussion of the "ordinary" and their local environments

that makes it clear that any sociological understanding by social scientists of the

"ordinary," and any existential understanding of the "ordinary" by the "ordinary,"

begins with locating the "ordinary" in his circumstances. It is true that Mills embedded

the "ordinary," circumstances, and even values into local environment, but set aside

"issues," the focus of the work of social scientists, as transcendent to local

environments. I maintain that Mills is inflating an aspect of the social so it can be

brought out of the anthropological and brought into the *private sphere* of the discipline

of sociology. Mills' stance on "issues" and even the "public" in no way takes away

from the anthropological concept of local environments, or *private spheres,* that he

constructs.

In Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (2002) the concept of "institution" and

its conversations is contrasted with conversations in general. Institutions, according to

Lyotard, require supplementary constraints for statements to be admissible within it

bounds. These constraints serve as filters that priviledge certain classes of statements.

Simply put there are things that should be said and there are appropriate ways to says

them. Lyotard presents an army, church, business, school, and family as examples of

institutions. Additionally, Lyotard sees institutions under attack and like Habermas

writes of the breaking up or fragmentation of traditional spheres like nation-states,

parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions. As this fragmentation occurs

there remains a minimal requirement for the social and society to exist and that is the

Wittgensteinian language games found in conversations.

     "Community" is a concept found in an 1877 article by Charles Pierce published

in *Popular Science Monthly.* Pierce shows his pragmatic stripes when he addresses the

issue of how beliefs are constructed. The process begins with the conviction of a single

mind. Pierce calls the process that follows "method of tenacity." The individual stands

up to the social impulse against him and espouses his belief. In most cases the social

impulse against his belief will be enough to change his mind. The interaction within a

community has a normative effect of keeping the existing norms in place. Additionally,

the threat of punishment from the authority is enough to expel those who will not

conform. To this historical problem of communal authority Pierce offers a new

methodology. Pierce offers the scientific method. The benefit of Pierce's article for

this paper is not found in his new methodology, but in his adept description of the

communicative process in fixing beliefs within *private spheres.* The scientific method

cannot fix beliefs in the area of political leanings, morality, or religion. These

conversations still occur in the manner he describe and are subject to the power at play within the local community.

Schutz' work *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (1970) is an extremely influential work that Habermas addresses directly in his *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalization of Society*, Vol. 1 and Garfinkel uses as a foundation to his work *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967). It is Garfinkel's work that this paper draws most heavily in reconstructing Habermas's universal ideas in the everyday. Schutz concept of "communicative common environment" has a few of the same traits used in this papers concept of *private spheres.* First, Schutz presents communicative common environments as numerous and bordering on other communicative common environments. Additionally, Schutz anchors conversations and the immediate experience of others as actions within communicative common environment and subject to standard experience, formulations, mutual understanding, and consent within the communicative common environment. Schutz offers a powerful analogy of how conversationalists "tune-in" to each other according to the intrinsic relevance, or background assumptions, that they have in common. Schutz uses the analogy of a music performer and listener. The "tuning in" can only happen among contemporaries with standard common experiences and mutual understanding within a communicative common environment. For Schutz the concept of communication and communicative common environments are constructed within space-time - thus the importance of his term contemporaries.

Goffman's (1967) "arenas of interaction" is a social field where actors come together and interactively shape other actors and their conversations. In these arenas central beliefs are reaffirmed and revealed (the idea that central beliefs are revealed is similar to the concepts that lead to the concept of bewilderment as defined in the research and writings of Garfinkel). The self is situated in these arenas and participates in maintaining social rituals as well as shaping it through face-to-face interaction. The power of Goffman's concepts are that he includes power differentials among actors, or conversationalists, the employment of existential actors, and the use of the word social which can be leveraged instead of the word public.

Masolo's use of the term "indigenous" reflects an attempt to remove African conversations from the onslaught of Western philosophical hegemony. The term champions the local not only because Masolo believes that Africans construct their own truth, but also because he fears that these conversations are being silenced and eventually lost due to the Western philosophical logocentricism. In his book *African Philosophy in search of Identity* Masolo extends his arguments for the authentically indigenous to the discipline of African academic philosophy. Masolo calls for a philosophical return to the native land for African philosophy. This includes a rejection of Western concepts of what African philosophy ought to be, what methods of reasoning are valid, and what standards of truth are acceptable. African's must work on uniquely African narratives, including the tension between the universal and the contextual and the scientific objective and culturally subjective, not with the language

of those who stereotype African as "savage," but in their own languages. Masolo's determination is that Africans will decide what philosophy is and what philosophy is not by their own methods and standards of truth.

All of these concepts, and some discussed later in the paper, are similar, in various ways, to this paper's concept of *private spheres*. What they show is a general awareness across disciplines and cultures of the existence of these networks, localities, or relationships where language is leveraged in conversations and truth is constructed and validated.

All conversations take place and are validated in *private spheres*. In *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) Harold Garfinkel theorizes that everyday conversations are the creative processes individuals employ to create a sense of order. I use the word conversations instead of narrative because the term leaves open the possibility of an on-going practice of people telling and retelling their stories to others in order to refine the story and to continually recreate what Winnecott (1965) called the "ongoing being." A conversation may also serve as a dialectic with past conversations, literatures, and broadcasts, as well as everyday activities. Understood in this context conversations in *private spheres* do not elevate academic discourse over that of common folks. It recognizes each type of discourse as valid based on the background assumptions within its own *private spheres*. I take conversations and *private spheres* to be very egalitarian terms.

Truth is constructed within *private spheres* when background assumptions and other conversationalists (who know what "anyone like us necessarily knows") agree with a statement and bear witness to the statement as presented. This is very close to what Habermas (1981) writes, that validity is embedded in the life-world; the same life-world that he describes as complex and fragmented (1987, 1993). Essentially conversations do their work by the light of local knowledge (Geertz 1983). This is true at the law firm, in the pulpit, and on the playground. Furthermore, Foucault (1972) refers to *private spheres* as "the field of discursive events" and argues that such fields exclude certain statements. This is true of *private spheres*. Many questions routinely asked by children on a playground would only cause bewilderment if presented at a meeting at law firm.

Garfinkel maintains that when a statement or act is introduced into a sphere that does not correspond to the background assumptions of a given *private sphere*, members of that sphere fall into bewilderment. That is they become disoriented because what is assumed or taken for granted is destabilized and their ability to bracket out anxiety is challenged. Garfinkel conducted a series of experiments to show how a disruption in everyday conversations could reveal previously unchallenged background assumptions. In one experiment Garfinkel has students to act as visitors in their own homes. The students recorded the reactions and general bewilderment of their parents, who had been operating under the unchallenged background assumptions of the home *private sphere,* and reported these findings to Garfinkel. This bewilderment breaks down the

bracketing in play and reveals previously unseen background assumptions that the students and their parents had been operating under. This is seen when parents started to ask why a son or daughter was not acting as expected. It was the contrast of the child's behavior with this previously unseen and unchallenged assumption of what is expected that Garfinkel theorizes brought on the bewilderment.

Another concept important in *private spheres* is that of bearing witness. The aspect of bearing witness to conversations suggests an inter-subjectivity that constructs the foundation for theory. By theory I specifically mean to employ the ancient Greek concept of theoria meaning "to witness." Gadamer (2003) wrote in Truth and Method that theory is the "highest form of being human." It is Gadamer (1998) who associated this idea of theory with the ancient Greek function of witnessing ceremonial acts in order to validate them. Theory is therefore inter-subjective firsthand experience that allows conversationalists to inter-subjectively, by witnessing and being witnessed, construct knowledge and truth within shared background assumptions. Conversations, especially the telling and retelling of life stories, possess a "synthetic power" (Bertaux and Kohli 1984) that enables people to construct meaning and purpose that is critical to the task of creating self-identities. How these conversations occur and how they are retold, refined, and leveraged to reflexively negotiate meaning, bracket out anxiety (Heidegger 1962) and bewilderment through what Peggy Miller (1990) calls a "three-way-intersection" of self, narrative, and face-to-face interaction.

William James' (1997) pragmatic method also plays a critical role in conversations that are validated within *private spheres.* James writes that the pragmatic method holds that if no practical difference whatever can be traced between a mean and its alternatives then all means are practically the same thing, and all disputes are idle. This holds true for conversations in *private spheres.* The rationale for differentiating these means is found in the unchallenged, taken-for-granted, background assumptions of each sphere. An example of this pragmatic method can be found in conversations of streetcorner men in Elliott Leibow's (1967) study *Tally's Corner.* When evaluating work opportunities, men who desire to be persons in their own right do not see in a lowly poor paying job any practical difference made in their existential project of constructing self-identities. Given that the work itself is practically the same thing as not working to these men they often choose not to take a job or often quit the job after only a couple of days. These types of actions, or conversations, in other *private spheres* seem illogical. But among the men on the streetcorner, men who know what anyone like them necessarily knows, these actions are understood and do not have to be explained. These conversations are witnessed, validated, and continuously reflexively integrated into the on-going maintenance of the background assumptions of their *private sphere.*

The reason such conversations are not easily understood in other *private spheres* is because when a conversation migrates across the boundary of a *private sphere* it becomes distorted. This distortion is due to the different background

assumptions in each sphere. It is these boundaries that Habermas (Borradori 2003) is referring to when he questions why the hermeneutic model breaks down when it crosses the boundaries of our culture. It is these background assumptions that Coulan (1995) suggests is not immediately available to a stranger. A more personal example is when we take our own inner conversation (one that takes place in an individual's thoughts) and present it to a friend or family member. If we are not careful to translate the thought into language and concepts that are "in play" or follow "the rules" of the specific *private sphere* we are participating in then the conversation may cause bewilderment as what the other conversationalist has taken for granted has become destabilized. This is also common as conversationalists migrate from one *private sphere* to another. Jargon used at work may only cause confusion when utilized at home. These are common situations that all conversationalists are aware of and have mastered making the subtle adaptations needed as they migrate between *private spheres*. Pierce (1877) theorized the inter-subjective nature of this migration between *private spheres* and *predominant private spheres* in his article *The Fixation of Belief.*

The essential unit of conversations is the *password concept*. By *password concept* I mean something similar to Deleuze's and Guattari's definition of concept and Bauderllaird's term password; specifically a *password concept* is relative to its own parts, to other concepts, to the background assumptions of private *sphere* in which it is defined, and to the problems it is supposed to resolve. It is also something absolute in the place it occupies - within a given in *private sphere. Password Concepts* are ever

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evolving passwords (Bauderllaird 2003) that perform as vehicles or passers of ideas. These *password concepts* carry the etymological heritage of ideas, words, and concepts evolving out of Wittgenstein's ancient city of language and carry a record of each password's migrations and mutations as well as the heritage of the people within a given *private sphere* who take many aspects of such concepts for granted.

Password concepts provide language tools[1] that can be leveraged to bring into conversations the discerning background assumptions of the particular *private sphere*, negotiate the terrain between what is private and what is social, and to allow the conversationalist to reflexively construct a meaningful and purposeful self-identity and place within a *private sphere*. It is the richness of *password concepts* indigenously absolute and valid that empowers the multi-cultural, multi-racial, feminist, and queer critiques and narratives that have evolved from conversations within *private spheres* and impregnated *predominate private spheres* to give rise to new crisis of legitimation. As more voices are heard within *predominant private spheres,* especially once dispossessed voices and even if the voices are distorted, a greater erosion of legitimation occurs. This is the post-modern dilemma. Bewilderment runs rampant when *predominant private spheres* can no longer silence new voices from non-dominant *private spheres* and the background assumptions of the *predominant private*

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[1] By language tool I mean to refer to the use of language to accomplish certain philosophical tasks; both private and social. For more on this see Rorty, Richard, Contingency, irony, and solidarity: Cambridge University Press, 1989 and Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Philosophical Investigations: MacMillian Publishing, New York, 1968.

spheres fail to equip the conversationalists within with the taken for granted knowledge needed to interpret the distorted messages impregnating their once sterile environment.

At the end of Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*, (1940) the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, delves within to search out the words to defy the identity heaped upon him from a web of entwined, overlapping, and merging institutions, and organizations. He tells his legal defender, "I didn't mean to do what I did. I was trying to do something else."[2] What Bigger has done is allowed his black hands to take the life of a young white woman. Wright titled this part of his book *Fate.* His intention is clear. For Bigger Thomas there never was a "something else." The hegemony of power and taxonomies of identity seeped (Foucault 1979) into Bigger's inner conversation and worked to separate him from his own on-going project of constructing a meaningful and purposeful self-identity. Freud (1989) identifies this seeping hegemony as civilization itself. Freud believes civilization creates an agency within that keeps watch over one's actions and intentions. Foucault (1979) believes the institutions of modernity create a discipline within that takes a hold on the body - training it and forcing it to carry out tasks. Critical Theorists identified this seeping hegemony as the "Cultural Industry" (Adorno/Horkheimer 1972) and believe that it separates the individual from the self and

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[2] Wright, Richard, *Native Son:* Harper and Row, New York, 1940, p. 388.

yokes them with false needs (Marcuse 1991). Wright's depiction of Bigger takes into account the structural flaws of modernity and the dehumanizing plight of a black man in 1930's America. Wright personally felt estranged from civilization and sought to create in Bigger a character that could elicit the sympathies and loyalties of millions.[3] However, I argue that Wright did not see the hegemony as complete. Although he describes Bigger as an organism in an environment that is constantly bearing on him,[4] he also allows the reader to climb into the mind of Bigger and witness the protagonist's effort to find the words to create a new world - his world, a world that could prove "them" wrong.[5] This fundamental act is at the very foundation of negotiating meaning and constructing a self-identity.

Part of the brilliance of Wright's work is that he never allows Bigger to actually grab a hold of the words that can help him begin the process of creating order and meaning. Wright clearly states this in the introduction titled *How "Bigger" Was Born."* The fact that Bigger fails emphasizes Wright's point about civilization and makes the hegemony appear complete. This would be troubling if it were not for a final insight Wright gives at the end of the novel. Bigger thanks his legal defender for actually questioning him, in preparation for trial, about his mindset and motives before, during, and after he committed his crime. This questioning was something new for Bigger. Bigger said it made him feel like a man because it was the first time anyone had ever

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[3] Wright, Richard, *Native Son:* Harper and Row, New York, 1940, p. xix.
[4] Ibid, p. xxix
[5] Ibid, p. 275.

asked him questions like that before.[6] What Wright has done in order to show the oppression of Bigger Thomas as complete is present a Bigger who was not a complete man within his own *private spheres.* Bigger was missing a lifetime of self-creating, existential, descriptive and re-descriptive, on-going conversations. Bigger didn't feel like a man because he never engaged in the fundamental process of defining himself and his relationship with others through conversations that bear witness to himself and those in which he engaged.

The hegemony that Wright, Freud, Foucault, and Critical Theorists describe is an essential factor in understanding modernity. However, a problem arises when it's assumed that this hegemony is complete. Yes the world is repressive, it is cruel, and it is what Cornel West (1999) calls an "unrelenting assault." Yet beneath this great weight of hegemony a quiet conversation, intrinsic to language and human nature, remains - an act of agency beneath the unrelenting tide of domination in the everyday. Foucault (1980) put it concisely; the relationship between the global and the local has a certain correlation that is not an absolute one.

Anthony Giddens (1991) attributes to everyday activities, such as conversations, the ability to bracket out existential dread. This is not a denial of what is bracketed out. Rather it is necessary methodology that allows conversationalists to focus on the existential act at hand. Communicative actions, as Habermas has written, bring out the rational potential intrinsic in everyday activities (1979). Habermas (McCarthy 2000) is constructing   the   conditions   in   which   self-identity   can   be   realized   within

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[6] Wright, Richard, *Native Son:* Harper and Row, New York, 1940, p. 387.

communicatively shared inter-subjectivity. Habermas (1981) assumes that the human

species sustains itself and society through coordinated activities, which in turn are put in

place and maintained through communicative actions. Conversationalists are aware of

messages and objects that exist in *predominate private spheres.* They cannot avoid how

the media bombards their *private spheres* with images and sounds that impregnate their

private spheres with distorted messages that continually bend the inter-subjective

existential give/take/make of conversations. They cannot avoid the hegemony of

racism, classism, and chauvinism. Conversationalists must be able to focus on everyday

activities, like conversations, in order to block out anxiety and participate in their inter-

subjective roles of sustaining self-identities and social structures. Giddens writes in the

vein of Wittgenstein when he attributes a constant vigilance to how these activities and

conversations are carried out in the everyday. In a very real sense conversationalists

choose to tend to their own gardens (Voltaire 1990) and in doing so build a bulwark

against threatening anxieties. By intuitively working to tell and retell life stories,

conversating about what ought to be, and ultimately constructing from the conversations

at hand[7] a self-identity. This bracketing employs what I term a *Sanchoists' perspective.*

The *Sanchoists' perspective* constructs knowledge, truth, meaning, and purpose within

their own *private spheres* while bracketing out the destructive grand narratives of

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[7] The "conversation at hand" is as a concept derived from Marx. For more on this concept see the opening chapter of Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonapart:* The Gutenberg Project, 1998.

Western culture, filtering the onslaught of *flash-debates*[8] emitted by the media, and dismissing the unquestioned background assumptions, paradigms, and hierarchy of the un-embraced *predominant private spheres.*

The *Sanchoist's perspective* is rooted in the everyday within the conversations of common people. In Cervantes's story of Don Quixote a servant by the name of Sancho Panza is promised an *insula.* To Sancho this promise of land and the opportunity to rule is a chance to share in the gentlemen's class and status. Sancho never really believes such a promise can come true and yet he is drawn to it. In the same manner Sanchoists today do not believe that the "American Dream" is something in which they can participate in and yet they are drawn to it. It is a paradox that has existed at least since the time of Cervantes. It is a paradox powerfully bolstered by the "Culture Industry" (Adorno/Horkheimer 1972). Also the concept of "windmill tipping" is important in the *Sanchoist's* perspective. Windmill tipping refers to Don Quixote's battle with "giants." Of course Quixote only imagines he is fighting "giants." He is actually "fighting" his way past a number of windmills. Sancho knows Quixote is deluded and sees the battle for what it is; an absurd act by someone whose reality has little to do with the world, or private spheres, of *Sanchoists.* Graham Green (1982) picks up on this theme in *Monsignor Quixote* when he has a bishop speak disparagingly

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[8] *Flash-debate* synthesizes the dialectic not by combining of two theses but rather by silencing the counter-thesis. It closes the argument and leaves its own assumptions hidden within the provocative sound byte, suggestive images, and culture defining vignettes. *Flash-debates* are not a dialectic or discourse. There is no reflexive or inter-subjective activity within the *private spheres* it impregnates. Additionally *flash-debates* are distorted differently within each *private sphere* based on the background assumptions within each *private sphere* and that sphere's conversationalist (actors, participants).

about the protagonists calling him a peasant and saying that people like that do not have ancestors. The idea that *Sanchoists* are dispossessed ahistorical creatures with no roots or footing in America is reflected in their invisibility (Ellison 1952, Shipler 2003) and in critiques from within (Malcolm X 1966) and without (Marcuse 1991) the private spheres of *Sanchoists*. However, the *Sanchoists'* perspective makes evident the windmill tipping, or what Rorty (1989) has termed as irony in his pursuit of a final vocabulary, and perhaps more importantly can bracket out (Husserl 1962) the anxiety and hegemony of empty promises, subjugation, marginalization, and the windmill tipping of the egocentric/ethnocentric powerful elite of *predominant private spheres.*

When Ann T. Jordan (2002) applies the anthropological perspective to the *private sphere* of a business organization she maps a diagram that shows overlapping, nested, and crosscutting cultures. This model (Figure 1) shows a *predominant private sphere*, the business organization, and the many private spheres within. Jordan assumes that the *predominant private sphere* has its own cultural components in the traditional anthropological sense. Jordan identifies these components are patterns of subsistence (technology and division of labor), religion or magic (company values, goals, ceremonies, myths), economic system (reward system), political system (hierarchy), form of communication, social structure (group formations other than formal organization), and art (dress code, business' logos and buildings). More importantly she presents a number of *private spheres*, many informal, within the organization and presents scenarios where different *private spheres* can have different components or background assumptions in play. In one scenario employees of a company that has

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recently been taken over by another company get caught between working in a *private sphere* where a management embraces components from the previously independent company and the new expectations contained in the components of the take-over company (the new *predominant private sphere*). This model contains the essential elements of how companies are constructed and how society on the whole is constructed. It takes into consideration various background assumptions, many of the relationships that exist between *private spheres,* and it recognizes power differentials within the background assumptions of each *private sphere.*
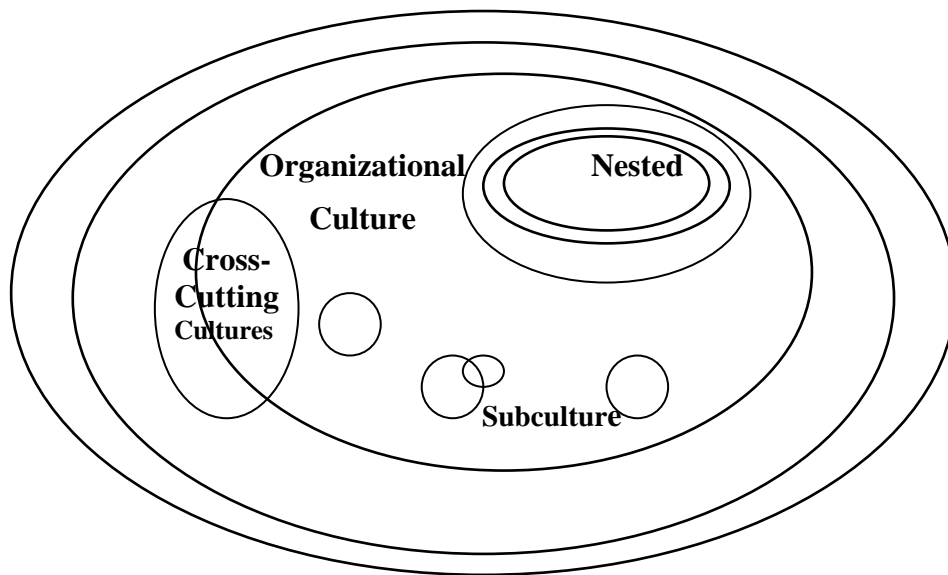

Figure 1
Jordan's Anthropological Spheres in the Workplace

What is not seen in Jordan's model is how individuals migrate between spheres. An individual may move between many of these spheres during a single day at work. She may find herself in a sphere where she understands the components or may find

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herself in a sphere where the components are foreign. Also not represented is what happens when an individual leaves work and goes to other spheres. At an employee's home another network of complex adjacent, overlapping, and engulfing *private spheres* exists. A phone call from the office can stretch a *private sphere* that cuts across two engulfing spheres that otherwise rarely come in contact. An individual belongs to numerous *predominant private spheres* and *private spheres.* New spheres are created and cease to exist daily. Some *private spheres* are exceptionally stable lasting many years while going through the constant inter-subjective evolution dictated by the give/take/make nature of communicative actions. Conversations not only shape the conversationalist but also renew the *private sphere* through what Adler (1987) termed concept shaped interaction.

As conversationalists move between *private spheres* they learn to translate their conversations into the background assumptions of each *private sphere.* These translators are carriers of concepts. Unlike media broadcasts, which can only send distorted messages, a carrier can carry a concept and translate it into a new *private sphere.* Carriers do not perfectly translate concepts into their new *private spheres,* but they can do a better job than the media of translating by leveraging conversations. The Civil Rights Movement in the Sixties provides a good example of how broadcasts and conversations changed background assumptions within various *private spheres* differently. Television broadcasts of bus boycotts in the Fifties impregnated *private spheres* all over America. The resulting changes in background assumptions and the resulting actions people took were different throughout America. In Greensboro black

college students protested by sitting at a white's only lunch counter. On college campuses the New Left was born. In the cities of the Northeast the Nation of Islam became prominent. In some white communities people felt sympathy and in others people felt outrage and hate. The media impregnated *private spheres* all over America and new conversations, taking for granted certain background assumptions, began the process of give/take/make that would change the conversationalists and the background assumptions. The results differed everywhere depending on the existing background assumptions, the conversations, and the role of carriers. During the same period carriers moved all over the country translating concepts into various *private spheres*. The black churches provided private places where ministers acted as carriers of concepts. Places of worship became places where new conversations lowered the distortion of the media and carried the vital *password concepts* of the Civil Rights Movement throughout the South. Carriers from the New Left met with carriers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and began to have conversations that significantly lowered the levels of distortion and began a cooperation that brought new *password concepts* into *private spheres*. Together with the work being done in the network of black churches these conversations eventually led to changes in the background assumptions of many of America's *predominant private spheres*. This very brief description of the Civil Rights Movement shows the critical difference in broadcasts and the conversations of carriers. It also shows some of the ways ideas, moral concepts, histories, and visions migrate from one *private sphere* to another and in some cases to many *private spheres and predominant private spheres.*

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION:
UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION IN
PRIVATE SPHERES

To reconstruct Habermas's communicative actions within *private spheres* language must provide conversationalists with two additional dialectics: one with the past and one with the imagined future. The dialectic with the past must include a heritage of normative rules for the use of language. These rules must also have been originally indigenously constructed. That is to say that rules of languages which are entwined with language itself, and for this reason often taken for granted, must first be constructed in a conversation within a *private sphere* before they can migrate to other spheres, including *predominant private spheres,* and perform a normative function across many *private spheres.* This dialectic with the past also gives the conversationalist knowledge of what is possible (Malcolm X 1965) and the processes required to resist oppression (Marcuse 1991). The dialectic with the imagined future must serve as a motivation for conversationalists to seek the "ought" or the ideal. Both of these dialectics are found in Habermas's communicative actions and both operate within *private spheres.*

Habermas's dialectic with the past is found in his concept of *universal pragmatics.* Habermas (1987) argues that his *universal pragmatics,* a detailed outline

of presuppositions inherent in language, specifically conversations, provides communicative actions with a non-foundational universalism. This argument seems to be directed at claims of "first philosophy" or the philosophical concept of *a priori* (Meadwell 1994). With this concept Habermas locates reason in language as opposed to history such as Marx and Hegel or in the mind as Kant (Alfred 1996). He writes that presupposed in conversations is the conditions necessary to bring about understanding. Conversations contain the norms to criticize oppression and promote societal democratization (Kellner 2004). Even competition, conflict, and strategic actions are efforts to reach an understanding (Habermas 1979). Also all conversations, even intentionally deceptive speech, no matter how distorted the inter-subjectivity of mutual understanding becomes, necessarily implies the *ideal speech situation* (Habermas 1970). This gives language an intrinsic emancipator possibility and ultimately locates reason in the conversating and/or writing self. This inverts Heidegger's phrase that language is a house of being.

Habermas's dialectic with the imagined future is found in his concept of the *ideal speech situation*. Habermas (1980) defines the *ideal speech situation* as a conversation where every conversationalist that is competent to speak and act is allowed to participate and every conversationalist is allowed to question any assertion, introduce any assertion into the conversation, and articulate feelings, desires, and needs. Furthermore, no conversationalists can be prevented by coercion or power differentials from participating fully in accordance with their competence and desire to participate. This definition assumes the existence of a "public sphere" closed to "incompetent"

speakers. Like the hierarchy created in Plato's *Republic*, Habermas has constructed an

ideal world and communicative events that elevates the very few as competent

philosopher kings of rationality. However, conversations that imply the *ideal speech*

situation are found in the life-world within *private spheres.* It is the local conversations

among people, who have obtained the intuitive knowledge of a particular *private*

sphere's background assumptions and have become one who knows what "anyone like

us necessarily knows," that implies the *ideal.* Other conversationalists recognize a

particular conversationalist as "like us" because of tenure, personal experience within

the *private sphere,* the taken for granted assumptions implied in the conversationalist's

behavior, and mastery of *password concepts.* Additionally, competent

conversationalists understand the nature and structure of coercion and power that exist

in their *private sphere.* This understanding is taken for granted and is a part of the

background assumptions. There does not exist in these competent conversations a naïve

assumption about the absence of power. Instead power bends truth telling in *private*

spheres. Conversationalists learn to bend truth telling in order to adhere to the local

background assumptions of power while the language they use still implies the *ideal*

speech situation. Among conversationalists to assume the absence of power would be

to distort truth to such a degree as to render the conversation and conversationalist naïve

and not competent. Essentially it is understood that not every competent

conversationalist speaks as an equal. Often the conversationalists dispossessed of

power must make a far more compelling argument within the *private sphere* than their

more influential counterpart in order to establish a mutually understood or agreed upon

truth statement. This can be seen in conversations of bosses and employees. In these conversations it is not enough to have the strongest argument. Built into the background assumptions is a taken for granted calculus that factors in the power differential between conversationalists and requires the conversationalist dispossessed of power to go well beyond establishing the strongest argument in order to reach a mutual understanding. In many conversations the weaker argument is held to be true until such time that the stronger argument can be further strengthened and the on-going conversation reaches a tipping point at which time the stronger argument is embraced. What remains striking in these conversations is that the *ideal speech situation* is still implied. The conversationalists remain competent in the eyes of other by adhering to the background assumptions of power while still being motivated by the ideal of truly power-free egalitarian conversations.

A problem arises in Habermas's work on the strongest argument when applied to morality. Habermas's general concept appeals to universal ideals for justifications but Habermas's changes this for morality and validates the moral at the local level within the life-word. Where ideal speech seeks agreement from both conversationalists when the strongest argument is presented, and Habermas's strongest argument is deeply embedded into a hierarchy of Western Culture that includes various Kantian and Platonic universal assumptions, Habermas's (1990) moral test is located in the life-world's particular complexes of experience. The contradiction comes about because Habermas first constructed ideal speech in a "public sphere" and in his later writing he formulates his concept of universal pragmatics incorporating the increasing complexity

of modernity that many critics claimed he left out of his earlier work. This contradiction is resolved by placing Habermas's universal pragmatics within private spheres. The strongest argument is then validated by competent conversationalists and the private sphere's background assumptions. Additionally, morality is witnessed and validated locally and may eventually migrate or remain dormant. With this contradiction resolved universal pragmatics serve as a powerful model of understanding (agreement) and moral justification.

These conversations, that imply an *ideal speech situation* in *private spheres,* are the building blocks of self-identities, *private spheres,* and ultimately society as a whole. They provide the reflexive tools that individuals need to negotiate the ever-changing landscape as they migrate between *private spheres.* They bracket out the anxiety brought on by the hegemony of *predominant private spheres* and allow every individual to participate in their own on-going life projects of constructing self-identities within their own *private spheres.*

Finally, it is always wise to address the charge of "so-what." You may ask (and should ask), so what if there is no "public sphere." How does doing away with the "public sphere" change anything? It changes everything. Too often the "public" good is used as an argument to do the good for a few. This idea of the "public" is held out as something more important than the conversations that "anyone like us" with the needs that people like "anyone like us" have. In the name of the "public good" is used to silence the masses and allow the powerful few to push their agenda. In an Orwellian sense the "public" good is used to dismiss the conversations and truth narratives of the

many people who make up the "public." Additionally, as Habermas has pointed out, the concept of the "public sphere" assumes no power differential is in play between competing conversations trying to capture "public" attention. This simply isn't true. The "public" also silences the question of who is being left out of the conversation. As pointed out earlier there is not a sphere that provides access to all. Use of the concept "public" in these settings quells the question of who is being left out. On the other hand, *private spheres* and *predominant private spheres* by definition makes evident that there is someone being left. The concept of *private spheres* begs the questions whom is being left out and what power differentials are in play between conversationalists. This changes how a society approaches social discussions of the "big issues."

Another benefit of displacing "public spheres" with an understanding that all spheres are private comes in the very practical misuse of the term "public" by institutions. Institutions co-opt language and, as Lyotard has written, determine what conversations are allowed. The manipulation of "public" has been used to validate what are truly private conversations and often secret conversations. A "public" meeting or hearing called with the intention of no one outside the institution attending so that decisions can be cloaked in the authority of a "public" blessing is a common practice by institutions. Later criticism of such private and secretive meetings can be dismissed by the institution with the claim that any objections should have been brought up in the "public" event held earlier. Should these meetings and hearings be considered private the question then becomes who was specifically invited and who was not invited. Additionally the question of who was in attendance and who was not in attendance must

be asked. In other words the issue of participation and representation is brought up. These are the very democratic ideals that Habermas's is seeking to employ in such discursive events and it is the concept of the *private spheres* that enables these Habermas's communicative actions and the democratic communicative processes he champions.

If there is no "public sphere" and only *private spheres* than truth can only be validated within *private spheres.* This means that although there may be power differentials between various discourses there is no disparity in truth claims. This means the truth claims of the poor is equally as valid, and should be heard as valid, as the truth claims of the wealthy. This means feminist theorists who have their work reviewed and validated by other feminist theorists sharing similar background assumptions can stake claim to rationality just as "conventional" theorists have done for years. If there is no "public sphere" and conversations are re-conceived in *private spheres* then the power at play between competing discourses can be made evident and subjected to the democratic discourse that Habermas envisioned. Discourses originating from *predominant private spheres* have long enjoyed a truth claim derived from "public" position of power that has historically silenced other discourses and hid the power at play. Dominant discourses, particularly political and business, have not only claimed validity of their own discourses, based on their *predominant private spheres'* background assumptions and position of power, but then claimed that other discourses are invalid or unreasonable when they failed the test of the *predominant private spheres'* background assumptions. This dismissal of competing truth narratives

has been guised in a rational or logical process of subjecting marginalized discourses to the background assumptions of the *predominant private sphere* and it hides the fact that power is at play. The argument is won and the competing discourse dismissed as soon as the more powerful sphere is able to turn a blind-eye to the background assumptions of the other *private spheres* and subject these dispossessed discourses to assumptions constructed to serve the *predominant private sphere.* Recasting all truth claims into locally validated discourses and presenting various validated truth narratives as competing truths, with their own unique background assumptions, gives a voice to those that have been previously silenced. It will not change the hegemony of power. But it can make this hegemony more apparent. Doing away with the "public sphere" changes the lens we see through when we conceive the world. Establishing the concept of society being constructed solely of *private spheres* gives us an anthropological perspective on our own world and conversations and truth narratives of others. This approach embraces one of the primary concerns in Habermas's work – how do we create a more democratic society. Constructing a model of society through the lens of *private spheres* is a positive step in the direction that Habermas has guided his work.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Pd Casteel is a Dallas area scholar, author and business executive. His published work has appeared in *Enculturation, Fiction International, Lynx Eye,* and *Aethlon*. His novel *Intentional Pass* is available from UP Press. He is working on his PhD in the humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas. He is a regular guest lecturer on the subject of writing at DFW area colleges.