

# **Applying Habermas' Theory to Public Relations: Potentials and Challenges**

## **Diplomarbeit**

im integrierten Diplomstudiengang Medien-Planung, -Entwicklung und -Beratung

Fachbereich für Sprach-, Literatur- und Medienwissenschaften

Universität Siegen

Vorgelegt von

Alexander Buhmann

## **Betreut durch**

Prof.in Dr. Sigrid Baringhorst, Universität Siegen

Prof.in Dr. Diana Ingenhoff, Universität Fribourg



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2 Preliminary Overview: Research Field and Theory</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1 Public Relations Research</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1.1 Introductory Remarks on the Terminology of Public Relations	8
2.1.2 The Disciplinary Status of Public Relations Research	10
2.1.3 Outlining the Debate on Public Relations Theory	11
2.1.3.1 A Matter of Perspective: Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Theoretical Approaches	11
2.1.3.2 Between Fields of Knowledge: Theory vs. Practice	12
2.1.3.3 Contrasting Positions: Symmetry vs. Asymmetry	13
2.1.4 Deficiencies, Challenges and Perspectives of Public Relations Research	14
<b>2.2 Habermas' Program</b>	<b>15</b>
2.2.1 The Central Concept: Communicative Action	16
2.2.2 The Program of Justification: Formal Pragmatics	18
2.2.3 The Two-Tiered Concept of Society: Lifeworld and System	19
2.2.4 Communicative Action and Moral Consciousness: Discourse Ethics	20
2.2.5 The Public Sphere and its (Conceptual) Transformation	22
<b>3 Applying Habermas' Theory to Public Relations</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3.1 Evaluative Perspective: Analyzing Aspects of Public Relations</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1.1 Analyzing the Transparency of Annual Reports	26
3.1.2 Analyzing Standards for Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting	28
3.1.3 Discussion	30
3.1.3.1 Terminological Misconceptions	30
3.1.3.2 The Challenge of Analyzing Validity Claims	31
3.1.3.3 Challenging Aspects Regarding the Concept of Discourse	32
3.1.3.4 Further Questions	34
<b>3.2 Practical Perspective: Modeling Public Relations Practice</b>	<b>35</b>
3.2.1 Relational Public Relations	35
3.2.2 Consensus-Oriented Public Relations	37
3.2.3 Public Relations as Reputation Management	39
3.2.4 Discussion	43
3.2.4.1 Relational Public Relations: a Normative Application with Marginal Theoretical Guidance	43
3.2.4.2 The COPR Concept: a Situational Complement to Conventional Public Relations	45
3.2.4.3 Public Relations as Reputation Management: Applying Habermas or Weber?	47
<b>3.3 Moral Perspective: Grounding and Enacting Public Relations Ethics</b>	<b>49</b>
3.3.1 An Ethical Imperative for Public Relations	49
3.3.2 Discourse Ethics and Codes of Ethics in Public Relations	53
3.3.3 Five Steps of Enacting Discourse Ethics in Public Relations	54
3.3.4 Discussion	57
3.3.4.1 An Ethical Imperative: Paralleling Public Relations and Ideal Speech	57
3.3.4.2 Codes of Ethics: Between a Procedural Imperative and Substantial Norms	58
3.3.4.3 The Five-Step Model: Challenges of Enacting Discursive Ideals in Public Relations Reality	60

<b>3.4 Societal Perspective: Conceptualizing Public Relations in its Social Context</b>	<b>62</b>
3.4.1 The Concept of the Public Sphere as an Analytical Framework for Public Relations	62
3.4.2 Combining the Concepts of the Public Sphere as well as Lifeworld and System in a Framework for Public Relations	65
3.4.3 Discussion	68
3.4.3.1 Public Sphere Processes of Organizational Legitimacy and Identity	68
3.4.3.2 Beyond the Corporate/Public Perspective	70
<b>4 Intermediate Reflections</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>4.1 Recapitulatory Remarks</b>	<b>74</b>
4.1.1 Different Theoretical Foci, Different Theoretical Complexity	74
4.1.2 The Pivotal Questions	75
<b>4.2 In Search of a Category: The Intersubjective Paradigm</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>4.3 Similarities and Conflicts with the Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>79</b>
4.3.1 Public Relations in Terms of Habermas	79
4.3.1.1 The Changing Functions of the Press and the Primacy of Advertising	79
4.3.1.2 <i>Meinungspflege</i> : From Advertising to Public Relations	81
4.3.1.3 Three Revisions and a Modified Theoretical Framework	83
4.3.2 Theoretical Aporia? Confronting the Applications with Habermas' Terminology	84
<b>5 Further Considerations</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>5.1 On Discourse Ethics and Public Relations</b>	<b>88</b>
5.1.1 The Difficulty of Justifying Substantial Ethical Codes	88
5.1.2 Nature: A Challenging Aspect of Applying Discourse Ethics to Public Relations	89
5.1.2.1 Corporate Conscience and the Natural Environment	89
5.1.2.2 Discourse Ethics and the Question of Moral Responsibility for the Natural Environment	91
5.1.2.3 Are Discourse Ethics Suited to Promote Environmental Consciousness in Public Relations?	93
5.1.3 General Constraints: The Prostration of Discourse Ethics	94
<b>5.2 On the Public Sphere, Public Opinion, Mass Media, and Influence</b>	<b>94</b>
5.2.1 The Public Sphere, Opinion-Formation, and Two Ways for Influence	95
5.2.2 Mass Media, Social Actors, and Different Potentials for Influence	97
5.2.3 Further Parameters of Influence: Reflexivity and Crises Consciousness	99
5.2.4 'Lifeworld Public Relations' as 'Double Politics'?	101
<b>6 Closing Remarks</b>	<b>104</b>
6.1 Summary	104
6.2 Conclusion	107
6.3 Constraints and Future Prospects	109
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>118</b>

## Preface

A brief remark regarding the choice of language: apart from personal preferences, we are inclined to write this thesis in English, primarily because the various applications of Habermas' theory to public relations—the main subject of this thesis—are published almost exclusively in English. When directly referring to Habermas, though, we will mainly do this with regard to the original German text. To, nevertheless, allow for a monolingual reading, longer German citations are accompanied by translations that can be found via endnotes tagged to the reference of the original text in small Roman numerals, for example as in: (Habermas, 1983: 99)<sup>vii</sup>. Furthermore, references to particularly relevant passages in Habermas' texts will lead to both, the original text as well as the respective translation.

Siegen, October 2010

A.B.

# 1 Introduction

Jürgen Habermas' theory is said to have the potential to serve as a “profound theoretical basis from which to reflect on [...] different functions of public relations in society, or different communicative styles of public relations” (Bentele, Wehmeier, 2009: 247), and it is stressed that his concepts provide arguments that are “extremely important for a theory of public relations” (Pearson, 1989c: 73). However when examining the academic discourse we realize that, in spite of this alleged significance, Habermas' concepts, in their entirety, have hardly been utilized for public relations research (cf. Zerfaß, 2010: 62). Moreover, it is quite telling that in a recent and broad edition by Carl Botan and Vincent Hazleton (2006), which is labeled an extensive documentation of current public relations discourse (cf. Szyszka et al., 2009: 37), not a single reference or footnote is reserved for Habermas. Although Karl Nessmann (1995: 153) claims, for instance, that “Habermas' thoughts on the topics of symmetrical communication, discourse, mutual understanding, dialog and consensus” can be seen as “particularly influential in the development of PR theory”, the author fails to substantiate the ‘particularity’ of this ‘influence’.<sup>1</sup> What Nessmann refers to as theory development influenced by Habermas, on the most part, refers to “implicit assumptions behind theory” (Taylor, 2001: 636). It appears that it is not so much Habermas' concepts in particular, but rather the more general status of the topics of communication symmetry, dialog, discourse, etc. as “keywords in modern definitions” of public relations that leads the author to claim an ‘influence’ (Nessmann, 1995: 153). Ultimately, what Nessmann sees as a particular influence may be more correctly depicted as imprecise terminological borrowings that are, in fact, largely void of Habermas' original concepts: a vague utilization of Habermas' terms that is not uncommon within the field of communication studies (cf. Lang, 1993: 214).

On the whole, a relatively select number of scholars in public relations research draws directly on Habermas' concepts. To different extents, some of these applications have already been further addressed in the literature. Especially the popular efforts by Roland Burkart (cf. chap. 3.2.2) and Ron Pearson (cf. chap. 3.3.1) are still subject to public relations discourse and are reviewed in a number of standard works of the field (cf. e.g. Grunig, 1992; Zerfaß, 2010; Bentele et al., 2008; Kunczik, 2010; Röttger, 2009a). Nevertheless, as Rodney Benson (2008) points out, the applications of Habermas' theory to public relations have received scant critical attention,<sup>2</sup> and a comprehensive analysis, also including other, less popular or more recent applications of Habermas' theory, has not been conducted so far. In a 2007 special issue on social theory by *Pub-*

<sup>1</sup> Nessmann's only reference in this regard is to an article in a newsletter of the *European Association of Public Relations Research and Education* (CERP), which reviews a restricted number of papers submitted to this very association.

<sup>2</sup> A noticeable exception is the German-speaking discourse on the aforementioned efforts of Burkart. See especially the editions by Günter Bentele and Tobias Liebert (1995) as well as Walter Hömberg et al. (2010).

*lic Relations Review*, the article “On Jürgen Habermas and public relations” (Burkart, 2007) merely consists of a presentation of the author’s own model, even if the generality of the title may suggest otherwise. In addition, the recently published volume on *Public Relations and Social Theory* by Øyvind Ihlen et al. (2009), which collects a number of different approaches to public relations that draw on prominent social theorists, contains a chapter dedicated to Habermas’ theory (cf. 141–165). Here, once more, Burkart’s application is rearticulated by the author, who only deals with a restricted number of other applications of Habermas’ theory in a cursory manner, and completely neglects to mention the efforts of authors like Shirley Leitch and David Neilson (2001; see chap. 3.4.2), Craig Maier (2005; see chap. 3.2.1), or Mark Eisenegger and Kurt Imhof (2008; see chap. 3.2.3). Concluding the volume at hand, Günter Bentele and Stefan Wehmeier (2009) state in their article that the potential of the social theories discussed in the volume seems “to be even broader than shown so far, and other aspects of these theories, which are not mentioned in the chapters, could further inspire public relations theory building” (358).

As we see it, the concluding remark by Bentele and Wehmeier also calls for a more comprehensive demonstration and discussion of possible applications of Habermas’ theory to public relations. Moreover, it is absolutely vital to the ‘discipline’ of public relations research in general to conduct critical ‘as-is-analyses’ of existing theoretical efforts, elaborate the central lines of discussion and analyze the specific potentials and challenges of different theoretical applications; to Ulrike Röttger, these are the essential preconditions for breaking new ground in public relations theory at present (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 9). In this sense, the thesis presented here makes an effort to respond to these ‘invitations’ found in the current discourse. According to these, the broad question, which stands at the center of our effort is: how can Habermas’ theory be applied to public relations and what are possible challenges that emerge? Attending to this central question we aspire to demonstrate various possible applications, detect and discuss existing challenges, and raise pivotal questions that may widen the spectrum of consideration and stimulate further discussion. It is on this foundation that we then aim to explore some selected aspects in more detail.<sup>3</sup>

We want to approach this effort first by offering an introduction into the terminological and conceptual ‘groundwork’ of public relations research as well as Habermas’ theory (chap. 2). On this basis we then take a comprehensive look at potential applications of Habermas’ theory to public relations (chap. 3). We do this by establishing four different ‘perspectives’ from which the

---

<sup>3</sup> In the following we will only treat applications that *directly* draw on Habermas’ theory. That excludes those efforts that, though sometimes claimed to be “logically derived from [the] work of Habermas” (Vercic, 2008: 272) are for the most part ‘inspired’ by Habermas’ concepts on a fairly general level and not explicit applications of his theory (cf. e.g. Cheney, Christensen, 2001; Heath, 1994; Bains, 2007; Kent, Taylor, 2002; Metzler, 1996, 2001).

---

various applications can be approached, namely the *evaluative perspective* of analyzing particular aspects of public relations, the *practical perspective* of modeling public relations practice, the *moral perspective* of grounding and enacting public relations ethics, and the *societal perspective* of conceptualizing public relations in its social context. Subsequent to the demonstration of possible applications, each of these four ‘perspectives’ is further advanced by a discussion in which we seek to assess salient aspects, elucidate particular challenges and raise further questions regarding the different applications. We then proceed by engaging in some general reflections regarding the totality of applications, i.e. assembling recapitulatory remarks on the performed demonstrations and discussions, reflecting on paradigmatic aspects, and assessing major differences in how the various application relate to Habermas’ theory (chap. 4). Finally we attempt to develop some further considerations regarding selected aspects of the previous debate (chap. 5), before summarizing and concluding our findings and formulating further prospects (chap. 6).



## 2 Preliminary Overview: Research Field and Theory

### 2.1 Public Relations Research

In the following we conduct some introductory remarks on the status quo of the ‘disciplinary terrain’ that encompasses this thesis; that is the terminology, outlines and desiderata of public relations research. To allow for surveying insights into the interdisciplinary endeavor of public relations research, we will begin by conducting some clarifying remarks on the enigmatic term ‘public relations’ as such (chap. 2.1.1). We then provide a short evaluation of the current disciplinary status of public relations research from the perspective of the German-speaking discourse (chap. 2.1.2). Furthermore, we assess some basic aspects of theory development in the field (chap. 2.1.3). Therefore we draw a brief outline of the spectrum of public relations theory along the lines of different theoretical foci (micro, meso, macro), the opposing fields of theory and practice, as well as the contrast between the positions of symmetrical and asymmetrical public relations. Following, we will give an assessment of the deficiencies, challenges and perspectives of current public relations research (chap. 2.1.4).

#### 2.1.1 Introductory Remarks on the Terminology of Public Relations

The definition of the term public relations is marked by thorough plurality and ambiguity (cf. Fröhlich, 2008: 95); a circumstance that, in part, reflects the heterogeneous and multidisciplinary discourse on the issue (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 10; see also chap. 2.1.2 below). Adding to this problematic, the term is often used without any definition, presuming that its meaning is universally familiar (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 26).<sup>4</sup> Such enigmatic terminological usage leads to an equivocation that stimulates efforts to systemize existing definitions (cf. Bentele, 1998; Fröhlich, 2008). It also provokes the generation of general and comprehensive definitions. Following a comparison of 472 different definitions of the term, Rex Harlow (1976) sets up a comprehensive definition of public relations that reads as follows:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilize chance, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (36).

This and similarly comprehensive definitions allow an initial insight into the field, but, nevertheless, still have to be criticized as exclusive as well as nontransparent regarding their emphases of several elements (cf. Ronneberger, Rühl, 1992: 28f). Harlow’s ‘convolute’, for instance, disregards

<sup>4</sup> For further factors of the terminological plurality and ambiguity of the field see Romy Fröhlich (2008).

epistemological aspects, marginalizes sociological questions, and fails to mention further functions of public relations like that of reputation management or the building of trust. The positioning of a single comprehensive and adequate definition might in any case be improbable in a multidisciplinary field such as public relations (e.i.). Consequently, Gabriel Vasquez and Maureen Taylor (2000) turn to a more inclusive definition in terms of a ‘least common denominator’: “Many different definitions of public relations have been offered, but it is generally accepted that public relations is strategic communication between an organization and its publics” (324)—this definition constituting the most common one on an international scale (cf. Bentele, 2003: 54).

To some extent, the openness of this definition already illuminates the common problematic of differentiating public relations from important neighboring and overlapping terms like lobbying, advertising, marketing, journalism or propaganda (cf. e.g. Leif, Speth, 2006; Fröhlich, 2008; Kunczik, 2010: 20–64). Furthermore, when approaching current advisory and academic literature on public relations, one often comes across the terms of ‘organizational communication’ and ‘communication management’. In current professional and academic discourse these three terms “coexist, differ, and overlap” (Wehmeier, 2008: 220), and there are also calls to use these terms synonymously (cf. Grunig, 1992: 4; Bentele, 2003: 56).<sup>5</sup> Some slight differences between the terms are e.g. that, unlike the term public relations, the term ‘communication management’ narrows meaning entirely down to the perspective of an organization and is resistant to broader societal questions. As Wehmeier (2008: 226) puts it, the term “might lack something that is crucial: the environment”. The somewhat more holistic term of ‘organizational communication’, assimilates the other two terms in its broad definition as the “communication *of* the organization, *inside* the organization, and *about* the organization” (227; italics in original).<sup>6</sup>

Since the better half of the applications discussed in this thesis uses the term public relations and since furthermore, the applications discussed will range from the individual to the societal level, it seems suitable for us to adhere to this term instead of using e.g. ‘organizational communication’. If not depicting a specific other connotation of the term, as part of the discussions below, we will adhere to the standard inclusive definition of the term as the strategic communication between an organization and its publics.

---

<sup>5</sup> In addition, the German-speaking discourse on the issue has produced the term *Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*, as a synonym for public relations (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 14).

<sup>6</sup> For further differentiation and discussion of these terms see e.g. Kunczik (2010). Here the author also assesses other popular terms of the more recent German debates, like e.g. *Unternehmenskommunikation* or *integrierte Kommunikation*.

### 2.1.2 The Disciplinary Status of Public Relations Research

As Ihlen and Betteke van Ruler (2009) put it, the core questions of public relations research are: “how does public relations work and what does it do in, to, and for organizations, publics or [...] society as a whole” (2). The current status of researching these core questions is assessed in divergent fashions. Some label the current academic field of public relations as “immature” (Wehmeier, 2008: 219), characterize the according theory development as insufficient (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 69–71), and find fault in misleading definitions (cf. Schulz, 2004). Others, like Peter Szyszka et al. (2009: 37), refuse to join in with this common *lamento* and, referring to e.g. Bentele et al. (2008: 91–280) or Röttger (2009a), praise quality and quantity of current discourse, or like Ihlen et al. (2009: 4) speak of the “maturity” of the discipline. Moreover, Botan and Taylor (2004) even claim public relations to be the best researched field in communication studies—a rather disproportionate assumption that may be seen as ‘promotion’ for public relations research (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 19).

Regardless of these conflicting positions, we can safely attest: (a) that we have seen an evident “rise of public relations in the last two centuries” (Heath, 2005: 680), and (b) that the ‘discipline’ is, on the whole, still in its early stages (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 19). Strictly speaking, public relations research can hardly be referred to as a discipline in the strong sense of the word. A subject of research from different perspectives, with different methodologies, and different scientific interests, it “appears like a multidisciplinary field where approaches of different disciplines are used in an unrelated manner” (Wehmeier, 2008: 223). Consequently, public relations research may be more correctly referred to as a specific ‘interdisciplinary endeavor’ than as a discipline in its own right (cf. Bentele, 2003: 56). The disciplines most relevant to the research in public relations are communication studies, sociology, business and psychology (cf. Wehmeier, 2008; Bentele et al., 2008: 17–90). Based on the theories common within these disciplines, we have seen a noticeable diversification of academic public relations literature in the 1990s, equally elaborating on societal, organizational, and action-oriented approaches (cf. Szyszka et al., 2009: 38). Whilst especially early German-speaking research focused more on the functions and impacts of public relations in the context of democratic societies, the more recent efforts are predominantly concerned with public relations in the context of organizations (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 17). Furthermore, it must be stated that even though the German-speaking discourse has increased and intensified debate on public relations theory in recent years (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 70), the discourse was and

still is strongly influenced by U.S.-American approaches (cf. Nessmann, 1995: 152; Bentele, 2004: 487; Jarren, Röttger, 2008: 20).<sup>7</sup>

Linked to some general remarks on the interdisciplinary endeavor of public relations research, Bentele (2003) roughly distinguishes between three fields: research on the terminological and theoretical level, research regarding public relations history, and research that is concerned with the professional field. Within this coarsely mashed 'grid', our following efforts are merely concentrated on the terminological and theoretical level.

### **2.1.3 Outlining the Debate on Public Relations Theory**

#### **2.1.3.1 A Matter of Perspective: Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Theoretical Approaches**

When generating a systematic outline of current public relations theory, scholars often use the established distinction between micro-, meso-, and macro-theories to differentiate and classify the various approaches (cf. e.g. Röttger, 2000; Merten, 2009; Kunczik, 2010; Szyszka, 2008). Whilst micro-theories are conceptualized on the (inter-)subjective level of individual (inter-)actions, meso-theories refer to the level of organizations and associations, and macro-theories are conceptualized on the abstract level of societal structures.

From the micro-perspective, public relations can be seen as a practical instrument for action. This perspective focuses on practicable and effective realization of public relations activities (cf. Szyszka, 2008: 161f). Public relations concepts on the micro-level approach concrete communicative forms and assess questions like: what are effective practices in light of a certain context of action? As such, efforts on the micro-perspective may serve as guidelines for the work of practitioners. An example for a micro-level approach to public relations is the model of consensus-oriented public relations, which is grounded in Habermas' theory and thus also discussed in this thesis (cf. chap. 3.2, 4 and 5.3).

From the meso-perspective public relations can be seen as a function of organizational management or as an organizational subsystem (cf. Wehmeier, 2008: 224). This perspective focuses on an organization's need for action fulfilled by means of public relations practices (cf. Szyszka, 2008: 161). Hence, the meso-perspective allows for questions like: what functions does public relations realize for an organization, how do public relations practices of an organization work, how are certain issues dealt with, and how can public relations be improved in light of the goals of an organization? As mentioned above, more recent efforts in German-speaking research are predominantly concerned with public relations in the context of organizations. This tendency

---

<sup>7</sup> Though Nessmann (1995) also succeeds in demonstrating some influences on the discourse in the United States by particular theoretical schools and traditions from the German-speaking debates.

toward meso-theoretical approaches of the organizational perspective may be seen as a general trend in the field: indeed also Ihlen and van Ruler (2009: 6) point out that most of current public relations research is “concerned with the relationship between an organization and its publics and not so much with the problem of how an organization relates itself to the public arena and to society in large”. Meso-theoretical efforts in the field of public relations are conducted by James Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984), Anna Theis (1992), or Scott Cutlip et al. (2006) for instance.

From the macro-perspective public relations can be assessed as a functional system of society (cf. Wehmeier, 2008: 225). Though this perspective does acknowledge that public relations activities are based on an organization’s need for action, its primary focus consists of the functions and consequences of public relations in and for society (cf. Szyszka, 2008: 161). This allows for questions like: how can public relations be described in its societal context, and what functions does public relations hold in society? Considerations regarding the societal level are dominated by non-normative approaches based on systems theory (cf. Wehmeier, 2008: 225). Theoreticians on the macro-level include Franz Ronneberger (1977), Ulrich Saxer (1991), Vincent Hazleton (1992), Ronneberger and Manfred Rühl (1992), or Klaus Merten and Joachim Westerbarkey (1994).

### 2.1.3.2 Between Fields of Knowledge: Theory vs. Practice

When facing the question of the relation of the aforementioned theoretical efforts with the practice of public relations—a question which has just recently been addressed in much diversity (see e.g. Kocks, 2009; Kunczik, 2009; Rühl, 2009; Femers, 2009)—we can, analogous to the multidisciplinary of the research, identify thoroughly differing standpoints: whilst some conduct their theoretical efforts substantially removed from empirical reality (e.g. Mickey, 2003; Rühl, 2009), some primarily adhere to the field of experience (e.g. Rolke, 2009)<sup>8</sup> or even denounce pure theoretical research that resists empirical verification as mere wordplay (e.g. Kunczik, 2010). Yet others emphasize the need to further mediate the interdependency of theory and practice in public relations research (e.g. Röttger, 2009b). When addressing the relationship between theory and practice, Röttger makes the following recapitulatory remarks (cf. 20f): (a) there is no direct or linear relationship between contemporary public relations research and professional public relations practice; (b) public relations theory cannot directly solve practical problems; and (c) not every single phenomenon of public relations practice allows for translation into theory. Hence, allowance for and acceptance of the different rules and logics of theoretical research on the one

---

<sup>8</sup> In contrast to these assumptions, Lothar Rolke’s (1999) efforts on the basis of systems theory, just like those of Ronneberger and Rühl (1992), resist a verifiable, empirical connection to practical public relations (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 75).

hand, and practice on the other are labeled preconditions for ‘productive animations’ between both fields of knowledge (cf. 20).

### 2.1.3.3 Contrasting Positions: Symmetry vs. Asymmetry

We can generally identify and distinguish two contrasting positions on how the function of public relations is conceived. On the one hand, public relations is conceived as persuasion and manipulation of public opinion (cf. e.g. Kunczik, 2010; Faulstich, 2000). Advocates of this position view public relations asymmetrically and strategically, as “spinning the truth to selfish interests of some organization, issue advocate, person, or viewpoint” (Heath, 2005: 679). The contrasting position on the other hand, views public relations as being “dedicated to fostering effective two-way communication between some organization or entity, such as an industry and persons whose opinions can make or break future success of the sponsor” (ibid.). Accordingly, advocates of this position view public relations as mediating the interests between a sponsor (employer/client) on the one hand and its publics on the other (cf. e.g. Grunig, Hunt, 1984; Cutlip et al., 2006; Kent, Taylor, 2002). Following, public relations’ core function is seen in the management of conflicts on the basis of symmetrical communication (or dialog) and consent, whilst forms of persuasion are denounced as unethical (cf. Botan, 1997).

Most German-speaking academic literature appears to reflect the position of public relations as primarily asymmetrical or strategic communication and labels the opposing dialogical models as utopian distortions and mere ideology (cf. e.g. Kunczik, 2010; Merten, Westerbarkey, 1994; Faulstich, 2000; Bentele et al., 2008; Ronneberger, Rühl, 1992; Saxer, 1994).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, recent U.S.-American literature reveals that symmetry-based theories have accumulated the leading body of knowledge in the field and have “probably done more to develop public relations theory and scholarship than any other single school of thought” (Botan, Hazleton, 2006: 6). Looking at the practical implementation of the contrasting positions, i.e. at factual public relations campaigns, we can identify a clear preference for the uni-directional and asymmetrical conceptions over the enacting of symmetrical public relations (cf. Baerns, 2005). Empirical evidence suggests that “few employers are willing to pay practitioners to perform as negotiators for equally empowered conflicting publics” (Curtin, Boynton, 2001: 418f). Correspondingly, leading public relations agencies self-evidently claim that they “effectively influence attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes in the public sphere” (Troup, 2009: 441). Faced with this rather unambiguous tendency of real public relations, advocates of the two-way symmetrical model explain that the symmetrical

---

<sup>9</sup> Some of the few exceptions are e.g. Wolfgang Langenbucher (1991) and Burkart (1993); for the latter see also chapter 3.2 below.

model is incompatible with the general worldview of most organizations and presupposes an amount of personnel that organizations generally lack (cf. Grunig, Grunig, 1989).

#### **2.1.4 Deficiencies, Challenges and Perspectives of Public Relations Research**

Above we have depicted some general outlines of current theory and research in public relations. Taking a comprehensive look at these general aspects of the debate, one might ask: what are the core deficiencies, challenges, and perspectives in public relations research presently?

In providing an up-dated summary of the major deficiencies of the field, Röttger (2009b: 12f) alludes to four core aspects: (a) lack of basic research, (b) lack of general efforts on the level of organizational and societal public relations theory, (c) lack of interconnection between public relations theory and general theories of society and the public sphere, and (d) lack of theoretical considerations regarding the level of actions as well as the duality of structures and actions. Michael Kunczik (2010: 506), moreover, alludes to the general deficiency that public relations research too often builds on positivist and naïve epistemological assumptions, and Bentele (2003: 71) sees research deficiencies specifically in the areas of public relations ethics and public relations history. We can also attest a common neglectfulness of questions regarding the reception of public relations practices, like the frequently presumed yet seldom empirically examined demand for dialog (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 14). Furthermore, due to the strong influence of research on journalism in the field, public relations is widely researched in terms of a ‘dangerous influence’ on publicist organs. This in turn also leads to public relations’ reduction to ‘mere press work’—a perspective that cannot do justice to the complexity of real public relations practices (cf. *ibid.*).

In turning to the challenges in the field, we may begin by alluding to the ‘cultural lag’ as a general and underlying challenge of public relations research and theory-building (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 510f). ‘Cultural lag’ refers to the lag of delayed social theories trying to explain rapidly evolving technological and economical circumstances. Though much to the point, the remark regarding this ‘cultural lag’, which originally stems from William Ogburn (1969), is actually directed at an underlying challenge of social theory in general, rather than at a challenge of public relations theory in particular. Another challenging aspect, more specific to the field, is the aforementioned multidisciplinary character of research. The fact that the previously mentioned disciplines relevant for public relations are necessarily bound to their specific perspective leads to characteristic shortcomings in the according applications (cf. Röttger, 2000: 25–62). The majority of business-based approaches, for instance, disregard pivotal questions and findings relevant in communication studies (leading e.g. to an often narrow focus on marketing functions) (cf. *ibid.*), whilst approaches based on communication studies and sociology often lack sufficient attention to questions assessed in organizational theory and business (leading e.g. to a disregard of correla-

tions between public relations and company value). Ultimately, just like the term public relations itself (e.s.), the field of public relations theory and research is marked by thorough plurality and ambiguity. This circumstance can be interpreted as both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, the lack of terminological and theoretical coherency is problematic for the field, because it prevents the cumulation of a public relations body of knowledge (cf. Raupp, 2006: 33)—one possible reason as to why John Ledingham (2003), for example, may feel the need to call for a general theory of public relations. On the other hand, plurality and ambiguity of course are not necessarily disadvantageous, since they generally allow for diverse inquiry into and description of reality (cf. Kunczik, 2010: 512). In embarking on this position, Ihlen and Piet Verhoeven (2009: 337) reject the endeavor for a general theory of public relations and argue for a “diversity of methodologies in the widest sense”.

To Bentele and Wehmeier (2009), the aforementioned diversity of the field constitutes one of its major potentials, and efforts to “compare the different approaches and to analyze where they do in fact have commonalities and incommensurabilities” are stated to be both “necessary and fruitful” (341). A similar postulate for such extension of comparative interchange is also aimed at the possible interrelations between public relations theory and public relations practice (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 18). As mentioned above, further connecting these fundamentally different logics is said to produce a promising ‘animation’ between both fields of knowledge. Furthermore, social theory is increasingly claimed to be “necessary to understand the practice of public relations and to raise important empirical questions about it” (Ihlen, Verhoeven, 2009: 323). Currently, it is especially the link between organizational-level research on the one hand and societal considerations on the other that promises illuminating perspectives in the field (cf. Bentele, Wehmeier, 2009; Röttger, 2009b; Ihlen, Verhoeven, 2009). Ihlen and van Ruler (2009) argue that “the instrumental and administrative approaches that currently prevail must be supplemented with societal approaches that expose what public relations is in society today, rather than only what it should be at the organizational level” (5). In this respect, research should develop more independently from the broadly discussed subject of the economic organization and start taking into account other forms of organizations (cf. Röttger, 2009b: 21). In addition the introduction of different contexts of public relations, like the rarely addressed form of strategic and external consulting, could close existing gaps in present research (cf. *ibid.*).

## 2.2 Habermas’ Program

Having determined the general grounds and facets of current public relations research (e.s.), we here turn to the particular theoretical ‘groundwork’ underlying the concepts focused on in this thesis. The aspired demonstration and discussion of applications of Habermas’ theory to public



relations *eo ipso* demands a comprehensive introduction to Habermas' program. In the following we commence with the terminological centerpiece of Habermas' theory, namely the concept of communicative action (chap. 2.2.1), to then introduce the theoretical program on the basis of which this concept is substantiated (chap. 2.2.2). Subsequently we present Habermas' draft of society as both system and lifeworld (chap. 2.2.3). Furthermore we embark on Habermas' moral-philosophical endeavor to introduce the concept of discourse, the universalization principle and the ideal speech situation (chap. 2.2.4). Finally we illustrate Habermas' socio-historical concept of the public sphere and its structural transformations as well as the author's later conceptual revisions regarding this concept (chap. 2.2.5).

### 2.2.1 The Central Concept: Communicative Action

To depict Habermas' core concept of communicative action one can start by pointing out its major difference to other social concepts of action.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the concepts of teleological action (which applies to realization of goals), normative action (which applies to adherence to shared values within groups), and dramaturgical action (which applies to self-expression vis-à-vis a public), one realizes that each of these three refers to either the objective, the social or the subjective world (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 126–141; 1984: 84–94). Compared to these, communicative action can be referred to as the underlying and comprehensive concept of action that generally applies to understanding and only indirectly (or more precise: reflexively) refers to the objective, the social, and the subjective world.

Für das kommunikative Handlungsmodell ist Sprache allein unter dem pragmatischen Gesichtspunkt relevant, daß Sprecher, indem sie Sätze verständigungsorientiert verwenden, Weltbezüge aufnehmen, und dies nicht nur wie im teleologischen, normengeleiteten oder dramaturgischen Handeln direkt, sondern auf reflexive Weise. [...] Sie nehmen nicht mehr *geradehin* auf etwas in der objektiven, sozialen oder subjektiven Welt Bezug, sondern relativieren ihre Äußerung an der Möglichkeit, daß deren Geltung von anderen Akteuren bestritten wird (Habermas, 1981a: 148, italics in original).<sup>i</sup>

The reflexive world relation and the readiness to relativize utterances refers to other's abilities to either accept or object to what has been said. This means that any actor who is oriented toward understanding inevitably raises at least three validity claims (*Geltungsansprüche*) with an utterance: he or she must claim that what has been said is (a) objectively *true* (with respect to the objective world as the totality of entities about which true statements are possible), (b) normatively *right* (with respect to the social world as the totality of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations), and (c) expressively *truthful* (with respect to the subjective world as the totality of personal or in-

<sup>10</sup> Herein we follow an introduction into Habermas' seminal work, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981a, 1981b) as presented by Walter Reese-Schäfer (2001).

dividual inner experiences).<sup>11</sup> Of course an actor may not be oriented toward understanding but follow egocentric calculations of individual success; in this case Habermas speaks of strategic action (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 381–397; 1984a: 282–295). Here the validity claims are obviously undermined, but the strategic actor would, nevertheless, raise them in need to pretend that the presuppositions of communicative action are satisfied (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 445f; 1984a: 332f).<sup>12</sup> Because we inevitably raise these validity claims in action, oriented toward reaching understanding, we are led to acknowledge that others raise them as well, and by acknowledging this, we subsequently ‘attribute’ rationality.<sup>13</sup> This is why Habermas claims that communicative action has a ‘rational internal structure’ (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 198; 1984: 138).<sup>14</sup>

Ein Sprecher kann einen Hörer zur Annahme eines Sprechaktangebotes [...] *rational motivieren*, weil er aufgrund eines internen Zusammenhangs zwischen Gültigkeit, Geltungsanspruch und Einlösung des Geltungsanspruches die *Gewähr* dafür übernehmen kann, erforderlichenfalls überzeugende Gründe anzugeben, die einer Kritik des Hörers am Geltungsanspruch standhalten (Habermas, 1981a: 406, italics in original).<sup>ii</sup>

The fact that one has to attribute rationality to a speaker first, before being able to coherently discuss the truth, rightness, and truthfulness of his or her utterances, leads Habermas to his claim of the universality of communicative rationality which is central to his concept of society (cf. Habermas, 1981a, 1984a). The substantiation of this far-reaching claim constitutes the essential challenge to Habermas’ theoretical efforts (cf. Habermas, 1984b: 605). The according program of justification builds on the philosophy of language and speech act theory<sup>15</sup> so as to demonstrate

<sup>11</sup> These validity claims are sometimes incoherently, sometimes incorrectly used in the terminology of the applications of Habermas’ theory to public relations (cf. e.g. chap. 3.1). Whereas we will literally depict the individual terminology when explaining possible applications demonstrated by different authors, we will preferably use Habermas’ original terminology in the discussions. To prevent the misconception of subsequent passages, however, we will briefly allude to these terminological difficulties here and revisit and emphasize them, where necessary, in the subsequent discussion. Often rightness is referred to as ‘legitimacy’ or ‘morality’ and truthfulness as ‘sincerity’; the use of these synonyms is not uncommon and, for the most part, unproblematic. It happens, though, that truth is referred to as ‘truthfulness’, which is incorrect because both terms—truth and truthfulness—are related to distinctly different world relations within Habermas’ concept (e.s.). Furthermore, in some of the possible applications of Habermas theory to public relations we note the depiction of a fourth validity claim: comprehensibility (*Verständlichkeit*). Comprehensibility (by some also referred to as ‘intelligibility’ or ‘understandability’), however, does not constitute one of the validity claims—inevitably raised in communications—but is a *precondition* of communication in general (cf. Habermas, 1981a, 1984a).

<sup>12</sup> An obvious exception is openly strategic action. But in this case the actor needs to substitute the rational binding force of the validity claims with claims to power in order to be successful (cf. Habermas, 1988: 74).

<sup>13</sup> It is this, in general terms, ‘attribution’ of rationality that is subject to Habermas’ formal-pragmatic program of justification (cf. chap. 2.2.2 below).

<sup>14</sup> And this is also the notion through which validity claims can clearly be distinguished from power claims: on the one hand, the former is always connected with reasons and thus has a rationally motivating force, the latter, on the other hand, has to be covered by a potential for sanction in order to be successful (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 408; 1984: 302).

<sup>15</sup> In this regard Karl Bühler (1934), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1967), John Austin (1962), and John Searle (1969), are to be mentioned as important ‘theoretical resources’ for Habermas’ concepts (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 369–452; 1984: 273–337).

how human communication necessarily presupposes rationality (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 369–452; 1984a: 273–337), and is referred to as formal pragmatics (see chap. 2.2.2 below).<sup>16</sup>

[...] kommunikative Vernunft [findet] nicht einfach den Bestand eines Subjekts oder eines Systems vor, sondern hat Teil an der Strukturierung dessen, was erhalten werden soll. Die utopische Perspektive von Versöhnung und Freiheit ist [...] in den sprachlichen Reproduktionsmechanismus der Gattung schon eingebaut (Habermas, 1981a: 533).<sup>iii</sup>

As long as this central concept of reaching understanding as the inherent telos of human speech and the rationality of communicative action can be successfully justified, Habermas possesses a *punctum archimedis* for a broad critique of society.

### 2.2.2 The Program of Justification: Formal Pragmatics

It is the aim of formal pragmatics to trace the structural properties of processes of reaching understanding from which general pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action can be derived (cf. Habermas, 1976, 1979, 1981a: 385–410). Other forms of social action (for instance, competition, conflict, or strategic action in general) are seen as derivatives of action, oriented toward reaching understanding. And since language can furthermore be viewed as the specific medium of reaching understanding, it is by means of rational reconstruction of intuitive linguistic know-how, that the justification of rationality is approached. The essential aspect in this regard is the double structure of speech, i.e. its inherent reflexivity. This inherent reflexivity is rooted in the fact that the propositional and the illocutionary elements of an utterance can vary independently of each other: in a conversation, people combine communication of a particular content with communication about the role in which the content is used (cf. Habermas, 1984b: 407). This structure illuminates the process by which Habermas devises the idea of an internal connection between speech and rationality: altering the perspective (propositional/illocutionary) allows for reactions in situations of dissent without the necessity of constraint. An essential aspect of the illocutionary element of this double structure is the inevitable raising of validity claims (e.s.). What we have rather rudimentarily labeled an ‘attribution’ of rationality above (cf. chap. 2.2.1), Habermas sees as constitutive to the raising of validity claims; to him there exists a rational foundation to the ‘illocutionary binding force’ of an utterance (cf. Habermas, 1979: 59–65; 1984b: 428–436).

[Actors] cannot but mutually raise validity claims for their utterances and claim that what they say should be assumed—and, if necessary, could be proved—to be true or right or sincere, and at any rate

<sup>16</sup> Habermas referred to his central program of justification first as universal pragmatics (*Universalpragmatik*) (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1976, 1979) and later as formal pragmatics (*Formalpragmatik*) (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1981a, 1983, 1984a, 1991). This shift in terminology also signals the shift in his philosophy from an early consensus theory of truth (cf. Habermas, 1973) with a transcendental idea of rationality to pragmatism (cf. Habermas, 1999, 2003) and a ‘detranscendentalized’ idea of rationality (cf. Habermas, 2001).

rational. An implicit reference to rational discourse—or the competition for better reasons—is built into communicative actions as an omnipresent alternative to routine behavior (Habermas, 2006: 413).

To Habermas rationality, which is proper to the communicative practice of everyday life, seems to point “to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal” (Habermas, 1984a: 17). This is the case because, corresponding to each of the validity claims, an utterance entails certain obligations on the side of the speaker: constative speech acts (referring to truth, i.e. the objective world) entail the obligation to provide reasons; regulative speech acts (referring to rightness, i.e. the social world) entail the obligation to provide justification; and expressive speech acts (referring to truthfulness, i.e. the subjective world) entail the obligation to prove trustworthy (cf. Habermas, 1979: 63f; 1984b: 433f). It is these speech-act-typical obligations of a speaker that constitute an illocutionary force within an acceptable speech act. In principle the decision, whether or not to accept the validity claims raised by a speaker, remains a rational one. This formal-pragmatic reconstruction of speech acts helps to clearly differentiate between the different forms of action (or speech acts), attributing to them certain types of rationality, and also distinguishing communicative action as the comprehensive concept of action.

### 2.2.3 The Two-Tiered Concept of Society: Lifeworld and System

When Habermas shifts the focus from the formal-pragmatic level of analysis to empirical pragmatics and therefore to the context-dependent meanings of speech, the need to complete the concept of communicative action through a concept of a common stock of cultural knowledge becomes apparent (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 440–452; 1984a: 328–337). The latter adverts to a historically structured and implicit type of knowledge that does not stand at our disposition, thus having to be characterized as fundamental background knowledge, referred to as the *lifeworld* (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 182–223; 1987: 119–148).<sup>17</sup> But a description of society as wholly absorbed into the lifeworld would lead to the problem that subsequent investigations of society will be carried out in terms of self-interpretation: an internal perspective that is entirely indifferent to external sociocultural effects on the lifeworld (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 223f; 1984a: 148f). If society is identified with the lifeworld alone, it appears as a network of communicatively mediated cooperation, and the integration of society is seen as taking place only on the premises of communicative action.

Tatsächlich werden aber [...] zielgerichtete Handlungen nicht nur über Prozesse der Verständigung koordiniert, sondern auch über funktionale Zusammenhänge, die [...] nicht intendiert sind und inner-

<sup>17</sup> To affiliate the concept as a complement to the concept of communicative action, Habermas turns to Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1979) who stress three central moments of the lifeworld: (a) the naïve familiarity with which one accepts it, (b) its intersubjective validity, and (c) its delimiting character (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 198–205; 1987: 130–135).

halb des Horizonts der Alltagspraxis meist auch nicht wahrgenommen werden (Habermas, 1981b: 225f).<sup>iv</sup>

To also open his investigations to the “counterintuitive aspects of the nexus of social reproduction” (Habermas, 1987: 151), the concept of the lifeworld is complemented by the concept of the *system* (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 171–293; 1987: 113–197):<sup>18</sup> the system serves the material reproduction of the lifeworld through the mechanisms of state and economy that mediate action by means of power and money (symbolic media). Habermas suggests to conceive of societies as both system and lifeworld: in this perspective society is seen as an entity that is differentiated simultaneously, as a lifeworld and as a system, during the course of social evolution; systematic evolution on the one hand “is measured by the increase in a society’s steering capacity”, whereas lifeworld evolution on the other hand “is indicated by the separation of culture, society, and personality” (Habermas, 1987: 152). This clear distinction between the concepts of lifeworld and system is the basis on which Habermas then grasps the pathologies of modernity (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 445–593; 1987: 301–403).<sup>19</sup>

### 2.2.4 Communicative Action and Moral Consciousness: Discourse Ethics

To depict Habermas’ account of discourse ethics one might begin with the fundamental principle that Habermas aims to justify in his program, namely the universalization principle. This principle formulates the necessary conditions under which it is possible to define a practical question as true:

[...] die Folgen und Nebenwirkungen, die sich aus einer *allgemeinen* Befolgung der strittigen Norm für die Befriedigung der Interessen eines *jeden Einzelnen* voraussichtlich ergeben, [müssen] von allen *zwanglos* akzeptiert werden können (Habermas, 1983: 103, italics in original).<sup>v</sup>

This principle entails a cognitivist moral philosophy on the basis of which Habermas aims to maintain that practical questions admit of truth.<sup>20</sup> In his program of moral justification (cf.

<sup>18</sup> This concept enters Habermas’ theoretical framework primarily as a result of debate and critique regarding the works of Parsons and Luhmann (cf. Habermas, 1981b, 1987). Other than these authors, Habermas is of the opinion that the integration of highly complex societies cannot, as systems theory suggests, be carried out by bypassing the communicative power of the public of citizens. To him the paradigm of systems theory can coherently only refer to the economy and the state, but misses aspects of communicative integration apparent beyond the horizon of large organizations or networks. In Habermas’ concept, different components of a differentiated lifeworld interpret one another by means of ordinary language, which is the medium of communicative action. (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1992a: 415–435; 1996: 341–359).

<sup>19</sup> It is Habermas’ central point of critique regarding Parsons, that the latter’s terminology forbids a clear distinction between lifeworld and system to the effect that the rationalization of the lifeworld is conceptually ‘harmonized’ with the increasing complexity of the social system (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 352–444; 1987: 235–299).

<sup>20</sup> This strong claim of moral truth has meanwhile clearly been abrogated by Habermas (cf. 1985a: 207) and he has explicitly distanced himself from authors like Karl-Otto Apel, who in Habermas’ opinion overextend the normative approach of discourse ethics (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 10). For a summary of this ‘withdrawal’ and its implications for Habermas’ theory see e.g. Andreas Koller (2004: 81–90). An updated account of Habermas’ (pragmatic) stance on the issue of truth can be found in e.g. Habermas (1998, 1999, 2003).

Habermas, 1983, 1991, 1990a, 1993) he starts defending this cognitivist position by demonstrating how moral attitudes and feelings are inevitably bound to the horizon of everyday practices in which one engages performatively (cf. Habermas, 1983: 53–67). Especially in reviewing Peter Strawson (1974) and Stephen Toulmin (1970), Habermas stresses: “Die *Wahrheit* von Sätzen bedeutet auf ähnliche Weise die *Existenz* von Sachverhalten wie die *Richtigkeit* von Handlungen die *Erfüllung* von Normen“ (Habermas, 1983: 69, italics in original).<sup>vi</sup> The pivotal question of *how* practical questions can be answered in an equivalent fashion to questions regarding the existence of states of affairs is addressed by pointing to the *mode* in which normative propositions are justified (cf. Habermas, 1983: 67–86).<sup>21</sup> At this point Habermas faces the challenge that the universalization principle itself requires a sufficiently justified framework. For such substantiation he resorts to the program of formal pragmatics (cf. chap. 2.2.2): to further employ this program of justification for questions of moral truth, Habermas focuses on the process that allows for the reestablishment of consensus after validity claims have been challenged (cf. Habermas, 1973). To debate validity claims that have been challenged, the interaction needs to shift from the instrumental mode of everyday communication (that e.g. also involves gestures, mimic, etc.) to the reflexive mode of discourse, where only the persuasive force of the better argument is allowed (cf. Habermas, 1984b: 159–174). Only this mode of discourse that dispenses of anything but the force of the better argument enables what Habermas refers to as ‘pure communicative action’ (*reines kommunikatives Handeln*) (cf. 178), and can therefore produce ‘true’ consensus.<sup>22</sup> The question whether discursive argumentation leads to ‘true’ or ‘false’ consensus can be answered by reviewing whether the foregone discourse situation allowed for all participants to argue without any external or internal coercion, i.e. whether it meets the conditions of the ideal speech situation (cf. Habermas, 1984b: 176; 1990a: 86–94). These conditions are summarized by Habermas as follows:<sup>23</sup>

(3.1) Jedes sprach- und handlungsfähige Subjekt darf an Diskursen teilnehmen. (3.2) Jeder darf jede Behauptung problematisieren [...], jede Behauptung in den Diskurs einführen [...] und] seine Einstellungen, Wünsche und Bedürfnisse äußern. (3.3) Kein Sprecher darf durch innerhalb oder außerhalb des Diskurses herrschenden Zwang daran gehindert werden, seine in (3.1) und (3.2) festgelegten Rechte wahrzunehmen (Habermas, 1983: 99).<sup>vii</sup>

The practical realization of these ideal conditions is, of course, highly unlikely; most obviously due to physical limitations of discourse participants and obvious spatiotemporal constraints.

<sup>21</sup> This focus on the mode of argumentation is explicitly reflected in the aforementioned universalization principle as an ethical rule for argument.

<sup>22</sup> To be precise, only the validity claims to truth and rightness can be subject to discourse since one cannot *argue* for truthfulness but has to prove it through consistent behavior (cf. Habermas, 1984: 139).

<sup>23</sup> Here Habermas draws on a summary of ‘rules for discourse’ by Robert Alexy (1978). For a more detailed account of the ideal conditions for discourse see Habermas (1984b: 177f).

Habermas, however, shows in his formal-pragmatic analysis that every competent speaker who engages in argumentation must necessarily presuppose these general symmetry conditions (cf. Habermas, 1983: 93–119; 1990a: 83–109). The ideal conditions thus claim the status of counterfactual presuppositions that can develop “factual force” (Habermas, 1990a: 203). They are ‘merged’ into the aforementioned universalization principle that is ultimately only concerned with the process of justifying claims, wholly unrelated to the generation of substantive norms (cf. Habermas, 1991: 30; 1990a: 221). This principle can then be defended by merely pointing toward its necessary presupposition and the subsequent performative contradictions of anyone who tries to reject it by means of argumentation (cf. Habermas, 1983: 104–108; 1990a: 94–98). Since Habermas’ project merely aims to reveal this moral point of view, discourse ethics have to be understood as a principle for justification rather than a maxim of action (cf. Habermas, 1983: 130–133). This moral point of view, however, also reveals Habermas’ high demands of human rationality, because it requires that maxims and contested interests are generalized by discourse participants. And this generalization compels the competent speakers to transcend their own socio-historical context, their own particular community and form of life, and adopt the multiple perspectives of all those possibly affected.

### 2.2.5 The Public Sphere and its (Conceptual) Transformation

In his postdoctoral thesis *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit – Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962), Habermas describes the history of bourgeois society in terms of a ‘decay’ of classical liberalism and its idea of inclusive, rational and critical debate. He sees civil society as the realm of social labor and commodity exchange, an area opposed to the public authority of the state (cf. Habermas, 1962: 40–44; 1989: 27–31). When private people of the civil society come together to form a public, Habermas speaks of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*):

Bürgerliche Gesellschaft läßt sich vorerst als die Sphäre der zum Publikum versammelten Privatleute begreifen; diese beanspruchen die obrigkeitlich reglementierte Öffentlichkeit alsbald gegen die öffentliche Gewalt selbst, um sich mit dieser über die allgemeinen Regeln des Verkehrs in der grundsätzlich privatisierten, aber öffentlich relevanten Sphäre des Warenverkehrs und der gesellschaftlichen Arbeit auseinanderzusetzen (Habermas, 1962: 40).<sup>viii</sup>

Thus the public sphere is a sphere of ‘mediation’ between the realms of civil society and the state, or as one introduction tersely puts it: The public sphere is private in its constitution but political in its function (cf. Reese-Schäfer, 2001: 38). Furthermore, Habermas distinguishes the political public sphere from the literary one “when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state” (Habermas, 1974: 49).<sup>24</sup> To briefly summarize the meaning of the term one

<sup>24</sup> Habermas (1962, 1989) distinguishes between two important processes that constitute the public sphere: (a) in the *literary* public sphere processes, a variety of texts (literature, drama, art, etc.) is intersubjectively made available by

might define the public sphere as the realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*) can be formed (cf. Habermas, 1964: 220). This corresponding term of public opinion then refers to the central task of a public body: the practicing of criticism and control vis-à-vis the ruling structure, i.e. the state (cf. *ibid.*).

This kind of public sphere that allows for critical and institutionally guaranteed discussions has “not always existed” but “grew out of a specific phase of bourgeois society” (Habermas, 1974: 50). It developed historically under the subversive circumstances of early capitalism: the development of traffic in commodities and news as well as a free press due and parallel to early capitalist long-distance trade catalyzed the transformation from a representative publicity (*repräsentative Öffentlichkeit*) of feudal power to a liberal bourgeois publicity (cf. Habermas, 1962: 26–39; 1989: 14–26).<sup>25</sup> However different the actual venues in which private people come together as a public,<sup>26</sup> they can be characterized by the common formal criteria of: (a) the authority of the best argument, (b) no restraints on topics, and (c) an open end to discussion (cf. Habermas, 1962: 49–51; 1989: 36f). Under these formal conditions, what Habermas refers to as *Räsonnement*, becomes possible: a form of inclusive, rational and critical discussion or reasoning.<sup>27</sup> The normative precondition to the liberal public sphere is a great number of equally small and privately owned enterprises that limits the concentration of power and thus serves a central role in the bourgeois constitutional state: “Die ‚Herrschaft‘ der Öffentlichkeit ist ihrer eigenen Idee zufolge eine Ordnung, in der sich Herrschaft überhaupt auflöst” (Habermas, 1962: 97).<sup>ix</sup> This kind of public does not itself strive for domination; it serves as an ‘emancipatory force’ that is constitutionally protected<sup>28</sup> and prepositions the logic for organizing the constitutional state (cf. Habermas, 1962: 94–103; 1989: 79–88).

Such an account of a public, of course, remains an ambiguous concept between ideal and ideology since its formal criteria and socio-economic preconditions have never been fully real-

---

different agents and serves as a source for ‘vicarious living’ that becomes part of the reflexive development of a person’s own identity and its concepts of others; (b) In the *political* public sphere processes, societal problems are identified, exposed and discussed in light of common interest, so as to produce legitimacy to governmental decisions.

<sup>25</sup> These circumstances were subversive because they stabilized the existing power structure of a society organized in estates on the one hand, and produced the very elements which served for a dissolving of this structure on the other.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas discusses the venues of the German *Tischgesellschaft*, the British *coffee house*, and the French *salon* (cf. Habermas, 1962: 44–57; 1989: 31–43).

<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately this term is often translated into English as mere ‘discussion’. Such a translation, however, misses the important connotation of the rationality of liberal argumentation, which is implied in the word *Räsonnement*. It could and should thus more accurately be referred to as ‘liberal and critical reasoning’. To coherently adhere to the original connotation of the word, we will henceforth use the suggested alternative or use to the German term *Räsonnement*.

<sup>28</sup> Efforts to protect the public sphere are manifested and institutionalized in fundamental rights such as: freedom of speech, opinion, press, and assembly, the right of petition and equal voting rights, as well as the protection of personal freedom, privacy, and property, or equality before the law (cf. Habermas, 1962: 96–103; 1989: 82–88).



ized. Habermas, however, postulates that this ideal liberal concept has at least been partially realized during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so that he traces its ‘decay’ thenceforth (cf. Habermas, 1962: 158–199; 1989: 141–180): Liberal mercantilist trade is gradually replaced by protectionism, big cartels and unions are formed and the structural dissociation of the private and the public realm is undermined. The practice of *Raisonnement* is ousted by consumption, public debates consist of propaganda, advertising and public relations campaigns conducted by large organizations and Habermas speaks of a refeudalization (*Refeudalisierung*) of the public sphere (cf. Habermas, 1962: 200–255; 1989: 181–136). Figuratively speaking, the public sphere is transformed back into an atrium of feudal estate where a spectacle for prestige is demonstrated in front of an obedient audience (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 299). Correspondingly Habermas talks of nonpublic and quasi-public opinion (as distinguished from ‘real’ or ‘rational’ public opinion) and of an accordingly ‘manipulative publicity’ (cf. Habermas, 1962: 264–270; 1989: 244–250).

Öffentliche Meinung bleibt Gegenstand der Herrschaft auch da, wo sie diese zu Konzessionen oder Reorientierungen zwingt; sie ist weder an Regeln öffentlicher Diskussion oder überhaupt an Formen der Verbalisierung gebunden, noch muß sie mit politischen Problemen befaßt oder gar an politische Instanzen adressiert sein (Habermas, 1962: 264).<sup>x</sup>

Today Habermas’ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) must be seen in a new context because the author has meanwhile acknowledged a number of reductions and misconceptions on his account (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 11–50; 1992).<sup>29</sup> These deficiencies have ultimately led Habermas to a disproportionately drastic contrast between an early, idealistically glorified political public sphere and a present public sphere of mass-democratic social-welfare states (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 21).

[...] meine Diagnose einer gradlinigen Entwicklung vom politisch aktiven zum privatistischen, ‚vom kulturräsonierenden zum kulturkonsumierenden Publikum‘ greift zu kurz. Die Resistenzfähigkeit und vor allem das kritische Potential eines in seinen kulturellen Gewohnheiten aus Klassenschranken hervortretenden, pluralistischen, nach innen weit differenzierten Massenpublikums habe ich seinerzeit zu pessimistisch beurteilt (30).<sup>xi</sup>

Moreover, Habermas’ general theoretical efforts have developed significantly; albeit not so much in its fundamentals as in its complexity.<sup>30</sup> This has led Habermas to make some efforts to embed

<sup>29</sup> The author now acknowledges that his post-doctoral thesis contains an overly stylized depiction of the bourgeois public sphere (leading e.g. to an overdrawn emphasis on the rational aspects of public communication) and a too simplistic understanding that overlooks the coexistence of competing public spheres (leading e.g. to a disregard of the inner dynamics of plebeian culture) (cf. Habermas, 1990a: 15).

<sup>30</sup> In the differentiation between a rational and critical ‘real’ public opinion (that corresponds with the concept of liberal bourgeoisie and *Raisonnement*) on the one hand and a non-public or quasi-public and manipulative opinion on the other (e.s.), one can already identify the distinction between lifeworld and system, between communicative action and strategic action (cf. chap. 2.2.1–2.2.4). But as demonstrated above, Habermas, in his current theoretical framework, finds the normative foundations for his theory in the rational potential, intrinsic in everyday communicative practices, which he brings into the open via the program of formal pragmatics (cf. chap. 2.2.2); consequently he now distances himself from his early ideology-critical approach (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 33f). Furthermore Habermas no longer conceives of society holistically as an association writ large, but as a two-tiered construct of lifeworld and system (cf. chap. 2.2.3). As demonstrated in the above chapters, the concept of communicative ac-

his early considerations into his current theoretical framework (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 33–50, 1992b: 441–457, 1992a). The revisions and the alignment in a new framework produced a re-viewed, much differentiated understanding of the public sphere.

In komplexen Gesellschaften bildet die Öffentlichkeit eine intermediäre Struktur, die zwischen dem politischen System einerseits, den privaten Sektoren der Lebenswelt und funktional spezifizierten Handlungssystemen andererseits vermittelt. Sie stellt ein hochkomplexes Netzwerk dar, das sich räumlich in eine Vielzahl von überlappenden internationalen, nationalen, regionalen, kommunalen, subkulturellen Arenen verzweigt; das sich sachlich nach funktionalen Gesichtspunkten, Themenschwerpunkten, Politikbereichen usw. in mehr oder weniger spezialisierte, aber für ein Laienpublikum noch zugängliche Öffentlichkeiten (z. B. in populärwissenschaftliche und literarische, kirchlich und künstlerische, feministische und ‚alternative‘, gesundheits-, sozial-, oder wissenschaftspolitische Öffentlichkeiten) gliedert; und das sich nach Kommunikationsdichte, Organisationskomplexität und Reichweite nach Ebenen differenziert – von der *episodischen* Kneipen-, Kaffeehaus-, oder Straßenöffentlichkeit über die *veranstaltete* Präsenzöffentlichkeit von Theateraufführungen, Elternabenden, Rockkonzerten, Parteiversammlungen oder Kirchentagen bis zu der *abstrakten*, über Massenmedien hergestellten Öffentlichkeit von vereinzelt und global verstreuten Lesern, Zuhörern und Zuschauern (Habermas, 1992a: 451f; italics in original).<sup>xiii</sup>

Ultimately, this ‘new’ public sphere constitutes a much differentiated network for communicating information and opinions that is reproduced by means of communicative action (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 436).

---

tion, which is complementary to the concept of the lifeworld, is assessed as the social integrative power that—via processes structured according to its inherent and ideal procedural conditions—serves as a rational source for legitimacy in political and moral questions (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 36–41).

### 3 Applying Habermas' Theory to Public Relations

On the basis of the established introductions into the field of public relations research as well as into the terminology of Habermas' program (e.s.), we can now take a comprehensive look at potential applications of Habermas' theory to public relations, discuss important challenges that these entail, and raise further questions on the basis of these considerations. In structuring this investigation, we choose to prescribe four different 'perspectives' from which the various applications can be approached according to their distinct characteristics, namely the evaluative, the practical, the moral, and the societal 'perspective'.<sup>31</sup> We commence with a focus on applying Habermas' theory to analyses of aspects of practical public relations (chap. 3.1). The applications demonstrated here draw directly on Habermas' concepts without engaging in an effort of theoretical or terminological modeling. We then demonstrate how Habermas' theory can be applied to model public relations practice (chap. 3.2). Third, we embark on the 'moral perspective' to demonstrate potentials of Habermas' framework for the grounding and enacting of public relations ethics (chap. 3.3). Here, as well as in the previous 'perspective', we also selectively show how the different applications may be drawn upon to analyze or plan public relations practice. Finally, we demonstrate how Habermas' theory can be applied to reflect on public relations in a macro-societal context (chap. 3.4). Subsequent to the demonstration of potential applications of Habermas' theory, each of these four 'perspectives' leads to a discussion in which we want to critically elucidate and evaluate important aspects and particular challenges of the different applications. In finishing each of these discussions, moreover, we raise pivotal further questions that emerge from the individual efforts to apply Habermas' theory to public relations.

#### 3.1 Evaluative Perspective: Analyzing Aspects of Public Relations<sup>32</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Analyzing the Transparency of Annual Reports

Annual reports play an important role in public relations because they are a significant source of information for stakeholders and thus affect the overall evaluation of corporations (cf. e.g.

---

<sup>31</sup> Of course the four 'perspectives' that we have chosen to structure our efforts are everything but mutually exclusive categories—an approach demonstrated in one 'perspective' may thus partially extend into others. We are, nevertheless, convinced that the benefit from the structured insights that can be facilitated through the established 'perspectives' positively overcompensates some inescapable 'blind spots' resulting from the inevitable rigidity of such a classification.

<sup>32</sup> Different to the following three 'perspectives', which encompass a relatively select number of applications, this 'perspective' opens up to a broad spectrum of case studies regarding different aspects of practical public relations, in certain campaigns, certain industries, etc. conducted on the basis of Habermas' critical theory; see for instance the recent efforts of Rachel McLean and David Wainwright (2009), as well as Meisenbach and Sarah Feldner (2007), or the critical analyses of public relations messages collected in Elwood (1995). The analyses that we chose to demonstrate seem appropriate in our context, because they are fairly current and furthermore quite comparable, so that they are passable for our aspired further considerations in a joined discussion.

Esrock, Leichty, 1998).<sup>33</sup> Providing information for investors, competitors, employees and other stakeholders of a corporate organization, these reports may serve as a means for both 'distorted' and 'legitimate' communication (cf. e.g. D'Aveni, MacMillan, 1990). Kristi Yuthas et al. (2002) argue that annual reports are (a) the only element of corporate communications that is thoroughly monitored by independent agencies, are (b) addressed to all stakeholders, and should thus be valued more highly than other elements of corporate communication (cf. 142). Against this backdrop the authors criticize that annual reports are mostly analyzed only in their relevance to investors (cf. *ibid.*). What has accordingly been omitted from debate so far is the question of how these reports fulfill their purpose with regard to the greater spectrum of stakeholders. This is where Yuthas et al. see the potential for applying Habermas' theory: to further explore these aspects, the authors use Habermas' theory as a framework for analyzing corporate annual reports<sup>34</sup> in respect to their general transparency.<sup>35</sup> In so doing, the researchers "develop a method to operationalize [Habermas'] communicative action norms and apply them in a rhetorical analysis" (142). Subject to this effort are the annual reports of a sample of firms "that were expecting first quarter earnings to be significantly lower than analysts' forecast" (154). In their analysis of these reports, Yuthas et al. use a software that searches texts for certain semantic variables by passing them through a variety of digital dictionaries, and then cluster them into five composite dimensions and altogether 36 individual dimensions. These dimensions are then individually related to one or more of the validity claims differentiated by Habermas (cf. chap. 2.2.1), namely comprehensibility, truthfulness, legitimacy, and sincerity (cf. Yuthas et al., 2002: 146–154).<sup>36</sup> Comprehensibility, for instance, is measured by the quotient of the use of general and picturable verbs, negations, or reference to tangible, everyday matters, because it is assumed that this indicates rhetoric that is tangible and familiar to the reader. Truthfulness is tested by comparing the narrative statements to the financial report (regarding completeness, correctness, and verifiability), and analyzing the quotient of present tense verbs, because it is assumed that a high degree of present tense verbs implies a disregard of the facts of last year's performance. To identify the legitimacy of the texts, Yuthas et al. (2002) inquire about whether the rhetoric of the reports is appropriate

---

<sup>33</sup> Generally corporate organizations that trade their stock publicly are required to produce audited annual reports so as to allow an evaluation of the company's performance. Key elements of these reports are detailed financial information as well as narrative texts that are supplied by the company's management, which provide a discussion and interpretation of the financial statements.

<sup>34</sup> In their analysis, Yuthas et al. (2002) mainly focus on the aforementioned, narrative portions of annual reports.

<sup>35</sup> What exactly is meant by 'transparency' is not clearly defined by the authors. Their subsequent case study indicates, however, that they are referring to the general degree to which these annual reports promote understanding in Habermas' sense (cf. chap. 2.2.1).

<sup>36</sup> As we have signaled before (cf. chap. 2.2.1), one notes here that the terminology of the validity claims differs somewhat from Habermas' original concept. To some extent this also holds true for the following application (cf. chap. 3.1.2). We will revisit this in the discussion below (cf. chap. 3.1.3).

for the context by looking at the scores on embellishment, variety and blame. Finally, sincerity is associated to the degree of accurateness to which perceptions, interests, and objectives are represented. It is thus related to the manner in which the text is presented (rather than its content). In other words: sincerity is measured by the degree to which the rhetoric differs from the factual performance. A firm that has had negative performances in the past and uses optimistic terminology in a subsequent report would accordingly be labeled as being less sincere.

Yuthas et al. see their applications as an attempt “to integrate an abstract ethical framework, discourse ethics, with the practical world of the public dissemination and communication of business information” (154). Although the researchers initially expected that firms with negative performances would show strategic efforts to obscure or hide information (cf. 141), they found that generally “both the positive and the negative companies generally were seen as more communicative than strategic in their communications” (154f).

### 3.1.2 Analyzing Standards for Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting

In a recent study Mary-Ann Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) examine voluntary corporate responsibility reporting “as a form of moral discourse” (47). Their analysis consists of two pivotal parts that each rely on different ‘portions’ of Habermas’ theory: the first part draws on the differentiation of validity claims (cf. chap. 2.2.1) and examines how conditions for basic communicative understanding are addressed in various frameworks of corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 48–56).<sup>37</sup> The second part draws on discourse ethics (cf. chap. 2.2.4) and provides a normative critique of these frameworks, examining the extent to which corporate communication can reflect moral discourse (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 56–62).

By considering the validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, legitimacy, and sincerity in association with corporate social responsibility reporting, Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) find that “the reporting frameworks address all of Habermas’ validity claims” (54).<sup>38</sup> The issue of comprehensibility to stakeholders is explicitly addressed by “providing means for standardization of metrics and reports”, and the legitimacy of the reports is enhanced by setting up guidelines to “ensure that information relevant to stakeholders is included” (55). To promote the aspect of truth in these reports, the different frameworks recommend or incorporate methods for auditing and validating, designed to “guarantee the credibility of reported information” (ibid.). Furthermore

---

<sup>37</sup> These frameworks represent different standards that have been developed to provide guidance to corporations concerning the content and format of corporate social responsibility reports. The standards aim at ensuring a certain degree of transparency and understandability of the reports for the stakeholders they are addressed at. The particular frameworks dealt with by Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) are: *EMAS*, *ISO 14001*, *SA 8000*, *AA1000*, *Copenhagen Charter*, and *GRI 2000*. For a detailed depiction of the former see Reynolds and Yuthas (2008: 50–53).

<sup>38</sup> Here, we once more notice some terminological incoherencies regarding Habermas’ concept of validity claims (cf. chap. 2.2.1 and 3.1.1). See the discussion below for further treatment of this aspect (cf. chap. 3.1.3).

the frameworks entail feedback components to check whether the “goal of improved environmental performance is embedded into [...] strategy, structures, and process” to ensure that firms are “sincere about improving social performance” (56).

Moving to the normative critique, Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) draw on Michael Kettner's (1993) account of Habermas' concept of ideal speech. The latter reduces this concept to five laconic propositions: generality, autonomous evaluation, role-taking, transparency, and power neutrality (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 57). These are then applied within the context of the aforementioned frameworks to “explore the discursive processes” inherent in the standards for corporate social responsibility reporting and “examine the degree to which [...] the models satisfy the principles of discourse ethics” (58). The proposition of generality suggests that stakeholders (or according to Kettner (1993: 137): “all parties interested”) must be included in the dialog. Reynolds and Yuthas also “include ‘the natural environment’ as a stakeholder, and do not eliminate from consideration non-human species and future generations” (Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 58). Regarding this proposition the researchers found that “[each] of the frameworks requires organizations to identify relevant stakeholders, and recognizes that understanding and addressing the interests of these stakeholder groups is a necessary condition for effective social reporting” (ibid.). In addition the proposition of role-taking, which suggests that all parties involved in discourse must make an attempt to understand each others' points of view, is addressed by all the frameworks, as they “require companies to identify those issues that concern stakeholders” (59). Autonomous evaluation, in contrast, which requires for all stakeholders participating in discourse, to be allowed to express opinions, raise and question claims, make proposals, and be allowed all means necessary to move toward consensus, is largely ignored by the frameworks: they indeed require corporations to accommodate stakeholder interests in decision-making, but they “[fall] short of prescribing stakeholder engagement processes” (60). Furthermore the transparency condition, which requires making interests publicly known to others, is only rudimentarily included in the frameworks by more or less strict requirements for public reporting (cf. ibid.). This, however, “cannot guarantee that the full range of corporate interests is exposed” (ibid.). Finally, the principle of power neutrality, which implies that all parties have equal access to decisions, and equal participation in these decisions, is the “most critical”, and in the context of corporate social responsibility reporting the “most problematic” or “illusory” of the ideal propositions (61). Reynolds and Yuthas even go on to state that due “to the legal corporate form, the Western world privileges management's fiduciary responsibility to shareholders above responsibilities to other stakeholders, it may even be legally impossible to engage in processes that allow stakeholders equal power in corporate decision-making” (ibid.).

The researchers conclude that even though “there is a trend to move [...] toward an effort to communicate with stakeholders in a more interactive way”, and the reporting frameworks “incorporate some [discursive] aspects”, it is evident that all the standards for corporate social responsibility reporting ultimately “fall short when it comes to fully engaging stakeholders by adopting all key principles of moral discourse” (62).

### 3.1.3 Discussion

#### 3.1.3.1 Terminological Misconceptions

In both applications of Habermas' theory depicted above we see that the researchers, unlike Habermas, speak of *four* validity claims: along with truth, rightness, and truthfulness both analyses refer to comprehensibility as a validity claim. This however, as we indicate in chapter 2.2.1, is a misconception, since Habermas only refers to three validity claims (cf. Habermas, 1981: 410–427; 1984: 305–319). What clearly differentiates comprehensibility from truth, rightness, or truthfulness, and furthermore disqualifies it as a validity claim as such, is the fact that it is not associated with what Habermas depicts as an illocutionary binding force (cf. chap. 2.2.2).

Verständlichkeit stellt [...], solange eine Kommunikation überhaupt ungestört verläuft, einen faktisch schon eingelösten Anspruch dar; sie ist nicht bloß ein Versprechen. Daher möchte ich ‚Verständlichkeit‘ zu den *Bedingungen* der Kommunikation rechnen und nicht zu den *in* der Kommunikation erhobenen, sei es diskursiven oder nichtdiskursiven Geltungsansprüchen (Habermas, 1984b: 139, italics in original).<sup>xiii</sup>

Comprehensibility is something that *precedes* communication; it is not a validity claim we raise *in* communication. Comprehensibility thus relates to the validity claims in a hierarchical order in which the former preconditions the latter. Other than constative, regulative, or expressive speech acts—i.e. speech acts that each reflexively relate to either the objective, the social, or the subjective world—communicative speech acts simultaneously relate to *all* three worlds.

More momentous than this misconception of the difference between communicative preconditions and validity claims is the misleading use of the term ‘truthfulness’ when speaking of the “four Habermasian principles” of “comprehensibility, truthfulness, legitimacy, and sincerity” (Yuthas et al., 2002: 148). In this ‘tetralogy’ the term truthfulness obviously refers to the objective world, since legitimacy is associated with the social world, sincerity with the subjective world, and comprehensibility with all three worlds. Thus, what is referred to here with the term truthfulness refers to the validity claim Habermas actually calls *truth* (cf. chap. 2.2.1). Furthermore the terminology applied in the analysis of Yuthas et al. (2002) is especially misleading because in Habermas' concept the term truthfulness is synonymous to what Yuthas et al. call sincerity, and thus refers to a different world relation all together. In other words, where Yuthas et al. obviously

want to refer to the objective world, they apply the term that *de facto* refers to the subjective world.

### 3.1.3.2 The Challenge of Analyzing Validity Claims

As we have demonstrated above, in the analysis by Yuthas et al. (2002), Habermas' theory is applied by means of a software tool (*Diction 5.0*) that detects certain semantic characteristics in different annual reports. Concluding their efforts, the researchers rightly acknowledge that the use of a standard software not specifically designed for measuring the claims of comprehensibility, truth, legitimacy, and sincerity means that the "translation between Diction dimensions and the communicative action dimensions [is] not self-evident" (155). There is one dimension, however, in which such a 'translation' is not merely 'not self-evident' but self-evidently wrong. We are referring, of course, to the dimension of sincerity (or truthfulness). By focusing on this dimension it becomes clear that Yuthas et al. indeed acknowledge that it is the "most important [factor] in evaluating the degree to which discourse in this genre is communicative or strategic" (151). Nevertheless it is evident that the researchers have difficulty acknowledging that sincerity refers to the *inner* world of an actor and cannot be evaluated simply by looking at annual reports: as we explain above, Yuthas et al. (2002) analyze sincerity by detecting the degree to which the rhetoric of an annual report differs from factual past performances. Accordingly, a firm with negative past performances that uses optimistic rhetoric in the annual report is labeled insincere. This 'translation', however, appears to be illegitimate, because it cannot be ascertained that a firm with negative financial performances in past accounting periods, is not, on the whole, actually anticipating positive earnings (for future accounting periods) and thus sincerely uses optimistic rhetoric. Furthermore, by applying Habermas' concept of truthfulness as such, Yuthas et al. (2002) assimilate the subjective world to the objective world: when analyzing the degree of truthfulness by comparing the rhetoric of the report with its financial information, they are in fact comparing utterances with objective data. Truthfulness, however, refers exclusively to the subjective world (cf. chap. 2.2.1), and can only be evaluated with reference to the constancy of behavior (for instance by comparing past statements with subsequent behavior). Yuthas et al. (2002), however, deal with the claim of sincerity as if it were similar to the claim of truth by cross-referencing it with the factual past performances of a firm. They would most likely find it difficult to define the difference between sincerity on the one hand and truth on the other, thereby conflating the two terms. Moreover, by using the term truthfulness instead of truth (e.s.) they succumb to the same fallacy.

When focusing on Reynolds and Yuthas' (2008) more recent analyses one garners the impression that the analysis regarding the claim of sincerity is—compared to that of Yuthas et al. (2002)—somewhat more differentiated, since the authors explicitly allude to the fact that "sincerity focuses on the subjective beliefs" and, among the validity claims, is "perhaps the most difficult



to evaluate” (Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 55). When describing the accordant implications of these difficulties, however, they state that “it would be possible to have a report that is factually correct, but paints an inaccurate picture of performance” (ibid.). If what is meant by ‘performance’ is the actual *past* conduct of a firm (which seems evident), the authors are again *not* referring to subjective beliefs, but to statements that are inaccurate with regard to something *objective* (past performance).

When further focusing on the claim of legitimacy we find that the manner in which both applications evaluate this dimension does not really do justice to the social context, because the latter is either prescribed by the researchers or simply not included in the analysis. Whereas truth, for instance, is rightly cross-referenced with objective data (annual reports) or the directive to supply it (standards for CSR reporting), legitimacy is cross-referenced solely with the rhetoric of the subject firm (annual reports) or with the unsubstantial directive to supply ‘information relevant to the stakeholders’ (standards for CSR reporting). This shows how, in both cases, the researchers do not properly turn to the social world for their evaluation. They do not question: (a) whether the ‘embellishing’ rhetoric of a specific firm is in fact experienced as illegitimate in light of specific social, economic, and political circumstances external to the textual reality of the annual report; or (b) what can substantially be seen as ‘relevant information’ in light of a certain social context. We suggest here that interviews with reference groups could potentially provide greater insight on legitimacy in both cases.

### 3.1.3.3 Challenging Aspects Regarding the Concept of Discourse

The application of Habermas’ theory, conducted by Yuthas et al. (2002) appears most problematic regarding the concept of discourse ethics, because the authors (a) only analyze annual reports, i.e. one-way written statements, and (b), furthermore, do so without ever turning to the concept of the ideal speech situation. The researchers allegedly “apply Habermas’ principles of discourse ethics” (154), but do so without ever looking at neither the *process* of communication nor the degree to which *ideal* conditions are met; both being considerable elements of discourse ethics (cf. chap. 2.2.4). One must thus question whether this kind of research really operationalizes, as it is stated, “the core of Habermas’ discourse ethics” (Yuthas et al., 2002: 155).<sup>39</sup> Moreover Yuthas et al. (2002) confound validity claims and the ideal conditions for communication. This manifests itself most blatantly when they erroneously claim: “Habermas recognizes that the validity claims are commonly violated in practical discourse. Nonetheless, he suggests that they

---

<sup>39</sup> At least the disregard of the process of communication in the analysis is acknowledged by the researchers as a limitation: “if the topic of interest is ethical corporate discourse, limiting the analysis to annual reports may be restrictive” (Yuthas et al., 2002: 155).

can be used as counterfactual ideals against which ordinary communication can be judged" (144). As we demonstrate in chapter 2.2, validity claims that are inevitably raised in communication oriented toward understanding and the counterfactual ideal speech situation are in fact two separate things.

Compared to the aforementioned, the more recent analysis of standards for corporate social responsibility reporting (cf. chap. 3.1.2), seems to be a much improved application in regard to the concept of discourse. Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) acknowledge that "communication [which] is only one-way" is insufficient to discuss the "means through which firms can establish moral discourse" (56). By thus considering the aspect of a communication process, they make the important finding that, in fact, most of the standards fall short regarding the discursive engagement of stakeholders (e.s.).<sup>40</sup> Not only the procedural aspect of discourse, but also the concept of the ideal speech situation are incorporated in the analysis of Reynolds and Yuthas. The authors allude to the fact that in order to be ethical, "discourse must be inclusive, democratic, and free of asymmetries" (47f). The only problematic aspect here is that the author do not directly consult Habermas' texts but draw on an account of Habermas concept of ideal speech given by Michael Kettner (1993). This is unfortunate because it hinders the application of Habermas' theory to a greater extent than it can advance it: whereas Habermas solely speaks of including those potentially affected by the outcome of a certain discourse situation (cf. chap. 2.2.4), Kettner wants to include everyone who takes a mere interest in what will be debated (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 57). Whilst Habermas' counterfactual requirements for ethical discourse can already be expected to entail certain limits to the application in 'organizational reality' (see chap. 3.3), Kettner's inclusion of everyone interested only adds to this problematic: it poses the evident practical question of how an organization can allow for everyone interested to engage in its communication processes. Embarking on this extended idea of Habermas' concept, we find that Reynolds and Yuthas have difficulty in applying these challenging conditions: when they present their findings they draw back to the more restrictive idea of a 'stakeholder' that more closely resembles Habermas' concept of 'those potentially affected' (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 58). Hence, the circle of participants of the discursive process is reduced from all those interested, to those for whom something is actually 'at stake'. Then again we can see that Reynolds and Yuthas, in aiming to be con-

---

<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) make no effort to further interpret this finding. Thus we would like to note here that one possible explanation for this becomes evident, when we bring to mind that autonomous evaluation, compared to e.g. role-taking or transparency, cannot be acted out by mere 'lip service', but is either verifiably practiced or not practiced at all. It is furthermore evident, that these standards are directed at reports, and that reports as such are somewhat restrictive as discursive forms of communication. Of course the standards themselves may be analyzed regarding the degree to which they promote ideals of ethical communication, but the substantial form of communication they are directed at is, nonetheless, quintessentially unidirectional, mediated and thus non-discursive.

sistent with recent considerations on ethics and stakeholder management, once more enlarge this circle of potential stakeholders by including "the natural environment", "non-human species" as well as "future generations" (57). Looking at Habermas' rather anthropocentric concept that can only allow rational subjects with the competence to speak and act to participate in discourse (cf. chap. 2.2.4), the impression arises that Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) may unsuitably overextend their theoretical framework.

#### 3.1.3.4 Further Questions

Yuthas et al. (2002) claim that Habermas' ideals of communication may be counterfactual and are thus *de facto* generally violated, but can, nevertheless, be used to evaluate and judge ordinary communication (cf. 144)—a claim Habermas also makes regarding his framework:

Der diskursethische Ansatz hat den Vorzug, die Kommunikationsvoraussetzungen spezifizieren zu können, die in den verschiedenen Formen der Argumentation gegeben sein müssen, wenn die Ergebnisse solcher Diskurse die Vermutung der Vernünftigkeit für sich haben sollen. Damit eröffnet er den normativen Überlegungen empirisch-soziologische Anschlussmöglichkeiten (Habermas, 1990b: 40f).<sup>xiv</sup>

This is exactly the spirit in which the two analyses discussed above aim to apply Habermas' theory to public relations research: both applications try to utilize these empirical sociological links. As we point out above, however, some notable challenges emerge from this effort. Regarding both analyses, one must conclude that—besides the manifest misconceptions within the analysis of the annual reports—the major challenge comes with evaluating the validity claim of sincerity. Whereas truth and comprehensibility appear to be dimensions that can be evaluated by the applied methods remaining largely coherent within the theoretical framework, our demonstrations above show that sincerity can only be sensibly evaluated in an analysis that takes (past) statements about prospective conduct as a starting point and focuses on according subsequent behavior. Furthermore the dimension of legitimacy might be better illuminated by conducting interviews with relevant reference groups instead of focusing exclusively on the 'internal reality' of an annual report or simply prescribing what kind of information can possibly be relevant to stakeholders. In addition the above discussion of the applications in the 'evaluative perspective' reveals that a pivotal question remains regarding the concrete practices of public relations (in this case business reports or corporate social responsibility reports) that can coherently be analyzed in terms of a symmetrical communication process and can furthermore possibly be referred to as dialogical, or even discursive. Furthermore we have seen that it is not only the means of communication, but also the suggested participants (e.g. non-human species) of an allegedly discursive communication process that could be in conflict with the theoretical frame of reference. In the big picture, of course, these significant questions about communicative practices and participants also lead to a

controversy about the degree to which public relations can *at all* be described as dialogical and, moreover, discursive in terms of Habermas' theory.<sup>41</sup>

## 3.2 Practical Perspective: Modeling Public Relations Practice

### 3.2.1 Relational Public Relations

Maier (2005) applies Habermas' concept of the public sphere (cf. chap. 2.2.5) and Gerard Hauser's (1999) more recent account of the rhetoric of publics and public spheres (in contention with Habermas' view to some degree) to public relations practice. Following an analysis of public relations practices during the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal in the USA between the years 2002 and 2003, he ultimately suggests "a new perspective on public relations" that could help institutions better cope with and improve their response to crises (cf. Maier, 2005: 219f).

In his brief analysis of the aforementioned sexual abuse scandal Maier shows that, by looking at the case, Habermas' account of the public sphere could both be confirmed and disavowed (cf. 221f). On the one hand, the scandal "awakened a variety of critical publics and intellectuals from all sides of the ideological spectrum" and the church, on the other hand, "played the role of the reluctant institution, relinquishing its secret files only when the public outcry was so loud it could not be avoided" (221). This negative publicity ultimately forced the church to adopt new policies and thus "the public sphere worked as Habermas suggested it should" (ibid.). Yet Maier needs to constrain this ideally-sounding conclusion since the church mostly did not respond directly to critical publics and aimed to firmly control the agenda. Thus he admits that the "direct, critical debate Habermas' model requires was absent" (ibid.). Ultimately Maier concludes that "Habermas' critical publics and public relations professionals are playing the same game from opposite sides: One demands a public sphere of agnostic critical publicity, while the other uses public relations techniques to evade that critical publicity" (222). Such situations can lead to "trench warfare" in which an organization is opposed by an angry, critical public (ibid.). At this point the author shifts to Hauser's (1999) account of the public sphere, who "speaks to this problem by suggesting that both Habermas and public relations professionals rely on a simplistic understanding of what a public is and how it participates in public discourse" (Maier, 2005: 222). The central point that Hauser makes is that publics are far more complex and speak with considerably more subtle voices than originally assumed by Habermas (cf. Hauser, 1999: 37–56). To Hauser, Habermas' account of the public sphere "excludes many arenas in which public dialogue

---

<sup>41</sup> For further considerations see e.g. chapter 5.1.2 (on the question regarding discourse participants) or chapter 4.3 (on the question regarding coherency with Habermas' theory).

occurs" (39). Thus he formulates the concept of a reticulate public sphere (cf. 57–81) that incorporates Habermas' formal debate and rational-critical publicity into a much larger conversation, the "vernacular discourse", which is "naturally occurring" and therefore "public conversations are naturally occurring as well" (Maier, 2005: 223). Maier stresses that his concept of Hauser's, different from that of Habermas', leads to the more encouraging conclusion that "publics are not dead" (ibid.). Maier sees Habermas' account of the social transformation of the public sphere as merely "bemoaning the death of rational-critical publics" whereas Hauser shows that public conversation and reasoning can at present be witnessed in 'vernacular discourse' (ibid.).

In foregrounding meaning and interaction, Hauser suggests a theory of public relations that emphasizes the management of ambiguity and meaning, as opposed to control, power, and brand identity. Such a perspective seems particularly useful in public relations situations where ambiguity is considerable and stakes are high (ibid.).

Referring to Hauser, Maier claims that public relations practitioners would be well-advised to "attempt to understand and interact with their publics" instead of attempting to "avoid or control the discourse" as he reflects in his analysis of the public relations practices of the Roman Catholic Church (223f). From this general perspective Maier deduces three central aspects to enable public relations practice in establishing successful relationships with publics, especially in response to crises (cf. 224f): The first of these aspects is *openness* to conversation and challenge. This may include reducing efforts to control the agenda and outcome in order to promote "true conversation" (224). The second is *attentiveness* to the discourse and activities of publics, their movements as well as their complexity. "True attentiveness" is not mere "listening" but requires a "thickness of description" that "cannot be found in the opinion polls and other quantitative metrics that are often the stock and trade of traditional public relations" (225). In practice this means that attentiveness requires less statistical analysis but rather a focus on ethnography and hermeneutics—public discourse is seen as a "social text" (ibid.). The final aspect of successful public relations, according to Maier is *responsiveness*; not "in formal terms as direct answers to the challenges" but in the same vernacular sense in that issues are raised within a reticulate public sphere (ibid.).

These three aspects allow to apply Hauser's expanded understanding of Habermas' account of the public sphere to public relations by drawing on (a) the concept of a reticulate public sphere and (b) the interactional ideal founded within it. Referring once again to the case of the church's sex scandal, Maier concludes that although "no amount of public relations could have avoided or hidden the crisis" one may assume that "more *relational* public relations could have helped to negotiate the conflict [...] better" (226, italics added).

### 3.2.2 Consensus-Oriented Public Relations

A first and basic draft of the concept of consensus-oriented public relations (COPR) was published by Burkart (1991) in the Journal *Publizistik*. It has since been further developed as an instrument for the planning and evaluation of public relations (cf. Burkart, 1993, 1994, 1996), and is currently still part of public relations discourse (cf. Burkart, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). Briefly summarized the aim of Burkart's approach is to "gain suggestions for the analysis of real public relations communication from the perspective of Habermas's concept of understanding", especially focusing on the "relation between public relations experts offering information and members of target groups who receive this information" (Burkart, 2007: 250). The author parallels public relations with mutual understanding as described by Habermas. The concept of communicative action (cf. chap. 2.2.1) and Habermas' program of formal pragmatics (cf. chap. 2.2.2) are utilized by Burkart so as to systematically differentiate and analyze communicative claims relevant to public relations practice, and to conceptualize public relations practice. Analogous to Habermas' concept of world-relations and validity claims, Burkart begins with the ascertainment that public relations managers will have to expect criticism regarding their utterances on three levels:

Members of the public will offer their doubts about the *truth* of presented public relations information, especially when confronted with numbers, other data and facts. They will question the *trustworthiness* of the company and its communicators as well as the *legitimacy* of the company's interests (Burkart, 2007: 251f, italics added).

Thus it should be the aim of public relations practitioners to use this concept based on pragmatics to eliminate ex post or (even better) prevent a critical challenging of the relevant information communicated ex ante (cf. 252). Especially in situations that hold a high chance of conflict, planning and evaluation of public relations practice should consider these communicative principles of mutual understanding (cf. e.g. Burkart, 2004, 2007).<sup>42</sup> The overall aim of public relations practice using the COPR model can therefore be described as enabling an undisturbed communication process. Disturbances can be avoided as long as public relations practitioners can manage their conduct and utterances in ways that prevent the public from doubting one or more of the validity claims. But in a case where the background consensus of everyday communication is challenged by doubts, Burkart's model—analogue to Habermas concept (cf. chap. 2.2.4)—suggests the mode of regular communicative action be changed to discourse in order to resolve the issue. The central task of consensus-oriented public relations is therefore to render this 're-

---

<sup>42</sup> In respect to this position, Burkart aligns his concept with Grunig and Hunt (1984), who—in the field of public relations inquiry—reject theories of persuasion in favor of a focus on understanding (cf. 22); Habermas' communicative principles allegedly match this position (cf. Burkart, 2004: 459).

pair-mechanism' possible (cf. Burkart, 2010: 25f). In his effort to apply Habermas' theory to public relations, Burkart models a process of four subsequent stages (or 'sub-ordinate targets') of public relations practice that can each be planned, analyzed and evaluated on the basis of Habermas' concept (cf. Burkart, 2008: 231–236):

First, public relations has to communicate relevant *information* to a relevant segmented public, since one major pre-condition to rational judgment is knowledge of facts. Of course 'quality of information' in the broader sense becomes the critical criterion in this stage, which should accordingly be evaluated on three pivotal levels: (a) on the level of first hand information dispersed by an organization through content analysis, (b) on the level of second hand information in the media through media response analysis, and (c) on the level of individual knowledge on the relevant issue among members of a segmented public through representative interviews (cf. 232). The findings from this evaluation then become relevant to decide whether to enter from the first stage onto the next.

Second—if an issue provokes controversial response—public relations has to enable *discussion*. This means inducing public debate through 'classic' media relations practices as well as through more direct forms of interaction, e.g. face-to-face communication or 'online-dialog'.<sup>43</sup> In order to conveniently address emerging criticism, an organization may for instance, systematically engage in the negotiation of an issue in the media, establish a website that contains a forum for discussion or arrange public expert hearings (cf. Burkart, 2008: 233). Again, the results of this stage should be evaluated through content analysis, media response analysis, interviews, or participatory observation.

If the phase of discussion does not sufficiently resolve an issue—i.e. if validity claims are still significantly challenged—the organization subsequently needs to engage in the third stage: *discourse*. This stage is concerned with questions of objective truth and normative rightness: The aim is mainly to promote what Burkart calls 'virtual discourse', a reflection and debate between experts on facts and norms, through different media formats, in order to reduce doubts regarding truth and legitimacy to a minimum (cf. Burkart, 2010: 28f). A subsequent or accompanying evaluation by means of the aforementioned methods (e.s.) is again suggested to measure the degree of dissent.

Eventually, the final stage is concerned with the *definition of the situation* and includes the monitoring of the status quo of the achieved degree of understanding (cf. Burkart, 2008: 235f). This last stage can therefore be described as a final, summative evaluation of the whole process,

---

<sup>43</sup> For an inquiry into the potentials of 'online dialog' for public relations see e.g. Michael Kent and Taylor (1998) or Burkart (2000).

wherein the respective results must finally be communicated. This in turn means that if the whole process does not lead to (the unlikely event of) consensus and, and possibly even drifts into dissent, it's the diverse points of contention that will be subject to the communication in the last stage.

Looking at the above concept, the interwoven connection of the four stages (information, discussion, discourse, definition of the situation) and Habermas' program of formal pragmatics becomes obvious: the central question that is addressed and analyzed in all four stages is the question whether validity claims are being challenged, and if so, which ones and to what extent? By posing this pragmatic question, the model gains an 'Ariadne's thread' for planning, analyzing and evaluating public relations practice with regard to understanding.

### 3.2.3 Public Relations as Reputation Management

Eisenegger and Imhof (2008) begin their application of Habermas' theory to public relations with a critique regarding a 'weak point' of contemporary public relations discourse:

[...] the topics covered by the [public relations] discourse in particular have so far referred much too exclusively to private business and the debate on reputation pursued in professional circles consequently suffers from a corporate bias (125).

Thus the authors intend to apply Habermas' theory for the development of a theory-based definition of reputation that remains applicable for both commercial and non-commercial organizations. According to Eisenegger and Imhof an interdisciplinary definition is needed; especially since previous attempts are either too broad<sup>44</sup>—and therefore partly resist operationability and a breaking down into subcategories—or too specific<sup>45</sup> in that they would only apply to the commercial sector (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2009: 244f). Though also solely concerned with commercial organizations, the approach by Manfred Schwaiger (cf. e.g. Schwaiger, 2004; Eberl, Schwaiger, 2005) seems to be an exception:

[...] based on a theory-led definition that makes a distinction between cognitive and affective dimensions [...] reputation is treated here as a two-dimensional construct. This reputation concept was also refined with reference to business organizations as its object. The approach is nevertheless interesting because [it] can in principle also be transferred to non-economic reputation bearers (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 126f).

The efforts by Schwaiger partially meet the holistic requirements of Eisenegger and Imhof since they lead to the definition of two fairly broad components of reputation: the *cognitive* (the assessment of organizational competence) and the *affective* (the assessment of sympathy for a company)

<sup>44</sup> Here Eisenegger and Imhof primarily refer to attempts with a sociological background like e.g. Hayagreeva Rao (1994) or Wesley Shrum and Robert Wuthnow (1988).

<sup>45</sup> This concerns mainly definitions coming from public relations and marketing research; Charles Fombrun (1996) is a representative example.



(cf. Schwaiger, 2004: 842). However, from Eisenegger and Imhof's point of view, this bipartite concept lacks a component to cover the assessment of the organizational conduct with regard to social norms (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 127).<sup>46</sup> Hence Eisenegger and Imhof aim for a three dimensional model. The authors view reputation as "a phenomenon whose characteristic features can be observed exclusively in modern achievement-oriented societies", a social-evolutionary view which allows them to develop modern reputation as "a parameter that is attributed or withheld in all the function systems of differentiated modern societies based on the same fundamental logic" (ibid.). It is this reference to a 'fundamental logic' that establishes the connection to Habermas' theory: The specific reference here is to Habermas' system of world relations; i.e. the differentiation of an objective, a social, and a subjective world that constitutes a 'grid' for social interactions (cf. chap. 2.2.1 or Habermas, 1981a: 114–151). To show how this concept may be utilized to theoretically model the (three dimensional) constitution of reputation, Eisenegger and Imhof allot a certain type of reputation to each of the world relations (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 128–130).<sup>47</sup>

The objective world, in which agents are judged according to cause-effect relationships in a specific context, matches with the so-called *functional reputation* (cf. 128).

[...] political parties acquire functional reputation by measurably increasing voter shares. Journalists appear worthy of recognition when they boost viewer ratings or circulation figures. Finally, managers and companies enhance their functional reputation when they increase their profits or share values (ibid.).

The respective verifying criterion that corresponds to the objective world is instrumental rationality: in the dimension of functional reputation, agents are judged according to their use of appropriate means and achievement of particular aims (cf. ibid.). Thus functional reputation can be seen as "an indicator of subsystem-specific success" as well as "technical competence" (ibid.). Predominantly assigned to this category are agents with a cognitive world reference like experts, analysts, scientists, etc. that may appear as reputation intermediaries. These agents are the "driving authorities who judge and decide upon the functional reputation of those who act as reputation bearers" (ibid.).

The social world, in which conduct is judged according to social standards and values, is matched with the so-called *social reputation* (cf. ibid.). Here the respective verifying criterion is rationality of value and the group of possible reputation intermediaries consists of agents with a

---

<sup>46</sup> In fact this is a factor that has been considered by Schwaiger (2004). Though he has not included it "directly in the reputation construct" and only "considered [it] as an independent variable" (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 127).

<sup>47</sup> This allocation can be seen as rudimentarily analog to the allocation of certain aspects of rationality of action to the respective worlds as performed by Habermas—rudimentary because, as we clarify in the subsequent discussion (cf. chap. 3.2.4.3), the allocation takes different presuppositions into account, leading to different consequences.

normative world reference, like for instance, religious groups, civil-society agents or intellectuals. Whereas the functional dimension is linked to the logic of different functional systems, this type of reputation claims to be applicable to society as a whole. "That is why we expect politicians to shun dishonest methods and managers to include social and ecological standards in their calculations" (ibid.). Here Eisenegger and Imhof advert the interdependency between both of the modeled dimensions: Actions that are oriented toward certain performance targets (first dimension) will simultaneously be judged according to social norms (second dimension). Beyond that the 'scope' of the social reputation is much wider than that of the first dimension, because the spectrum of those who are able to verify or judge moral conduct of a reputation bearer, consists in principle of the sum of agents who know of the former; whereas such a spectrum in respect to purpose oriented conduct will be limited to those with specific knowledge regarding these purposes (cf. 128f).

The subjective world, in which agents are judged according to their emotional attractiveness, is matched with the so-called *expressive reputation* (cf. 129). Compared to the remaining two, this dimension differs significantly regarding the relation of object and subject:

The objective and social worlds confront reputation bearers as outer worlds with expectations of cognitive-functional performance or ethical-normative demands. In the subjective dimension, the inner world of the agent himself is the criterion for attributing reputation (ibid.).

Accordingly, the reputation bearer's expressive actions are appraised with regard to an emotional logic: external third parties judge the former based on the emotionally repellent or attractive emanations of his character. A process, which then manifests itself in negatively or positively 'charged' emotionality toward the reputation bearer (the degree of sympathy, attractiveness or fascination as a possible indicator for this). Possible reputation intermediaries are agents with an aesthetic world reference such as artists, designers, or public relations experts and fashion designers.<sup>48</sup> Due to the fact that this third dimension is concerned with the *inner world* of an agent which remains inaccessible to others, the appraisal particularly depends on the other (accessible and verifiable) dimensions: "Thus a company may appeal to our feelings because it proves to be a particularly innovative force with fascinating products in the functional dimension [or] an enterprise may gain our sympathy because it [...] places ethical principles above its own profit interests if necessary" (ibid.). This is the reason why reputation intermediaries that would typically be assigned to one of the other dimensions are included in the process of judging an agent regarding the subjective world: "experts, analysts and scientists no less than ethical entrepreneurs, members of civil society, politicians and the media can all attest to the emotional attractiveness [...]" (129f).

<sup>48</sup> Thus, the reference is to agents that specialize in the creation and systematic manipulation of impressions that their clients make on others.

However, in this subjective dimension, an agent will inevitably be judged according to the authenticity of his or her actions; more or less obvious strategic intent renders conduct as merely staged and feigned (cf. 130).

In order to glean further aspects of reputation Eisenegger and Imhof explore the implications of the three-dimensional reputation constitution depicted above to action theory via a link to the complementary concept of trust. By expatiating upon the connecting semantics of the two concepts they show that trust and reputation have to be seen as “two sides of the same coin” (ibid.).<sup>49</sup> On this note, reputation can be defined as recognition of trustworthiness and the constitutive conditions of reputation can be depicted by means of an established concept—namely that of Bentele (1994), who describes how trustworthiness is based on the ability to correctly anticipate the actions of an agent whilst simultaneously expecting that this ‘conformity of action’ will continue in the future. This concept is used by Eisenegger and Imhof so as to combine the terms of reputation and trust in a way that it can then be linked to action theory:

[when] institutions, organizations or persons possess a reputation in the perception of outsiders, then its recognition by reputation-endowing individuals is based on expectable actions in a functional and social respect. In a functional respect, reputation bearers are expected to fulfill their performance mandate and in social respect, it is assumed that they observe the norms and values of the society as a whole (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 131).

But an agent that simply adapts well-established expectations concerning the objective and social world would by no means obtain any positive effect on his or her reputation. More likely this agent would suffer from being viewed as conformist. To Eisenegger and Imhof, therefore, it appears as though more sophisticated action stands to reason: whilst the dimensions of functional and social reputation suggest a policy of conformation, a contrasting policy of delimitation is suggested with regard to expressive reputation (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2009: 250). It is only through the effort of delimitation that an agent is able to develop and cultivate a thoroughly individual identity. It is this “stressing of distinctiveness [that] is the indispensable precondition for relevant reference groups to respond emotionally just to him and to no other reputation bearer” (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 131). This combination of fulfilling of social and functional expectations on the one hand and an expressive delimitation on the other, constitutes a ‘balancing act’ that can be seen as the central challenge to reputation management.

---

<sup>49</sup> Plausible examples for these connecting semantics are that one would refer to a reputation bearer as being “trustworthy”, as someone who “merits our trust” or even possesses “trust capital” (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 130).

### 3.2.4 Discussion

#### 3.2.4.1 Relational Public Relations: a Normative Application with Marginal Theoretical Guidance

Maier (2005) applies Habermas' (1962, 1989) and Hauser's (1999) considerations on the public sphere to analyze public relations, and to derive three general dimensions to promote relational public relations practices that allow for "weathering the storm" in a critical public (Maier, 2005: 219). Two aspects of this effort appear especially noticeable: Maier (a) shifts from Habermas' to Hauser's account so as to avoid Habermas' allegedly 'too simplistic' understanding of the public sphere, and (b) he—despite partially distancing himself from Habermas—ultimately promotes a notion of mutual understanding. The former aspect is noticeable because Habermas has explicitly reevaluated and partly reconceptualized those issues Maier wants to emphasize in his model (cf. Habermas, 1990b, 1992b; see also chap. 2.2.5).<sup>50</sup> The latter aspect is noticeable because mutual understanding is nonetheless a core aspect of Habermas' theoretical considerations (cf. chap. 2.2).<sup>51</sup> Both aspects seem to suggest that Maier could have coherently designed his model without including Hauser's (1999) concept. Not to be misunderstood: Hauser's rhetorical counter-assumptions to Habermas' concept of the public sphere—whether they are appropriate or not—are not the issue here; but for the point Maier is trying to make, that is to ultimately stress openness, attentiveness, and responsiveness as 'imperatives' for public relations practice vis-à-vis a reticulate public sphere, he could have found an adequate normative framework *within* Habermas' theory. To give one example: Maier refers to Hauser in claiming that "communicators who attempt to [...] control the discourse of their publics [...] ultimately fail" (Maier, 2005: 223). With reference to Habermas' theory he would be able to arrive at the exact same conclusion, because to Habermas only validity claims that are defended through rational argument can withstand critical publics. Any attempt of force can only secure claims for the medium-term; in fact, this is what distinguishes claims to power from validity claims:

Während Geltungsansprüche intern mit Gründen verknüpft sind und der illokutionären Rolle eine rational motivierende Kraft verleihen, müssen Machtansprüche durch ein Sanktionspotential gedeckt sein, damit sie durchgesetzt werden können (Habermas, 1981a: 408).<sup>xv</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Looking at the application demonstrated in chapter 3.4.2 we see that it is quite possible to speak of the "multiple sites of the public sphere" that individuals participate in as "members of diverse publics", solely by drawing on Habermas' framework (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 131).

<sup>51</sup> Looking at the application demonstrated in chapter 3.2.2, we see that it is quite possible to embark on roughly the same symmetrical position, solely by drawing on Habermas' theory. In addition, the applications discussed in chapter 3.3 can be seen as demonstrations of how Habermas' theory can be drawn upon to promote public relations oriented toward mutual understanding—notwithstanding, of course, the challenges that these efforts entail: see e.g. subsequent discussions (3.2.4.2 and 3.3.4) and intermediate reflections (chap. 4.3).

Thus an attempt to control discourse will either require the exertion of force (i.e. sanctions) or will ultimately fail because power claims—unlike validity claims—lack an illocutionary binding force (see also chap. 2.2.2). Maier in his critique, however, sticks to the early text of Habermas' post-doctoral thesis *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962, 1989) and does not take into account any of the author's later efforts. It is thus quite comprehensible how Maier gets the impression that Habermas' notion of rational, critical discourse is too fragile and how he appears rather disappointed at how “dim the prospects of democracy seem to be” on Habermas' account (Maier, 2005: 221). Solely looking at Habermas' post-doctoral thesis these objections are thoroughly appropriate, in fact, as we demonstrate in chapter 2.2.5, they are generally rearticulations of considerations that Habermas has put forth long since.

Looking at Maier's (2005) modeling effort, especially in comparison to the other two models discussed in this chapter below, one must conclude that the author demonstrates a fairly simple application, thoroughly normative and with only marginal theoretical guidance: he mainly concentrates on a *general* foregrounding of understanding (which he mostly takes from Hauser but, as we argue above, could just as well draw from Habermas' concept) and thereby supports his *general* model of an open, attentive, and responsive public relations practice. Furthermore, the need or requirement of such dialogic public relations on behalf of the publics is simply presumed by the author. The brief analysis performed by Maier as well as his normative concept of 'good public relations practice' that 'truly relates' to its publics, are typical for the perspective of those practicing the discipline (cf. Bentele, 2003: 55; Röttger, 2009b: 15). Thus it is not surprising that Maier, alongside his academic efforts, is mainly a public relations practitioner. An obvious question that emerges from Maier's efforts is how appropriate is the author's normative idea of public relations practices that 'really relate' to publics, in light of considerations on power differentials or concrete forms of (mediated) communications, and how coherent is this positive idea of 'good' public relations with Habermas' theory? But Maier's text—despite its positive and normative idea of public relations itself—via its critique regarding Habermas' “melodrama of the bourgeois public sphere” (Maier, 2005: 221), also points toward a pivotal question regarding this core concept in public relations: how can one adequately assess the multiplicity and, furthermore, the deliberative and rational potential of a public sphere, 'subject' to organized efforts of public relations? Or as Robert Heath and Finn Frandsen (2008: 359) put it: “Must the evolution of the public sphere, necessarily be described as a process of disintegration, or has the public sphere, for the last decade or so, experienced an important communicative revival by virtue of the Internet (sic!) and the

new social media used by everybody, from government and companies to consumers, citizens and activists”<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2.4.2 The COPR Concept: a Situational Complement to Conventional Public Relations<sup>53</sup>

Burkart, who aims to consistently ground his efforts in a solid theoretical framework and also arrive at relevant implications for public relations practice, builds his model around a basic, dyadic argument: On the one hand he alludes to an increasing need in our present societies to explain interests and actions in order to gain public support, on the other hand he—in light of this increase—claims that public relations practice can and should be planned and evaluated as action oriented toward understanding (cf. Burkart, 2004). The first part of this argument, the strong requirement of public legitimacy, is substantiated with reference to Richard Münch's (1991) concept of communication society, whilst the second part of this argument is substantiated by drawing on Habermas' concept of understanding as the inherent telos of human speech (cf. chap. 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Whereas the latter provides a solid theoretical framework for the model, the former emphasizes the model's practical relevance. This dyadic argument is worth a closer look because, at its core, we can detect an ‘inner conflict’ that points toward much of the critique that is leveled against Burkart's model: in his social analysis, Münch—considering the dynamic of a modern communication society—concludes that Habermas' concept of mutual understanding and discourse as a procedure which concentrates merely on the better argument is too naïve (cf. Münch, 1995). Thus, at the core of the aforementioned dyadic structure, we can observe that one part of the argument subversively ‘erodes’ the other: when Burkart (embarking on Habermas' theory) claims that public relations can be planned and evaluated by means of the concept of mutual understanding (cf. Burkart, 2008: 224), he rejects the implications of the social analysis of a communication society, that he (referring to Münch) mounts to emphasize the relevance of his model (cf. Burkart, 2004: 459).

The general objections against a communication theory that builds on a ‘naïve’ idea of mutual understanding has been the basis of criticism of Burkart's model on three levels: (a) the compatibility of the model and its theoretical framework (cf. e.g. Müller-Scholl, 1995), (b) the compatibility of the model and public relations practice (cf. e.g. Liebert, 1995; Merten, 2000;

<sup>52</sup> For further considerations see e.g. chapter 4.3 (on the question regarding the coherency with Habermas' theory) or chapters 3.4 and 5.2 (on the question regarding the conceptualization of a diversified public sphere).

<sup>53</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Burkart's model of consensus-oriented public relations—other than most of the applications dealt with in this thesis—has been discussed in much detail (cf. e.g. Bentele, Liebert, 1995; Hömberg et al., 2010; Zerfaß, 2010; Kunczik, 2010). In the following discussion, we refrain from rearticulating this extensive debate but will, in brief, posit what, to us, appears as the major criticism.

Saxer, 2010),<sup>54</sup> and (c) the compatibility of the theoretical framework and public relations practice (cf. e.g. Theis-Berglmair, 1995). The majority of the debate concerning Burkart's model is, on all three levels, carried out in terms of critical reflections on dialogical or symmetrical communication. When reviewing these, it becomes apparent that Burkart's model seems to provoke two pivotal questions: (a) can public relations adequately be grounded in a theoretical concept that centers around face-to-face communication (dialog) and (b), if so, does the concept of communicative action (understanding) do justice to a profession that is primarily conceived in terms of functional rationality?

Reacting to the objections confronting his model that are raised in light of these important questions, Burkart clarifies that he does not intend to naively "transfer Habermas' conditions for understanding directly onto the reality of public relations" (Burkart, 2004: 462). This clarification, however, practically requires what can be referred to as two slight 'shifts' away from Habermas' theory; namely the 'shift' (a) from discourse to discussion and (b) from consensus to (better) understanding. How is this to be understood?

By 'shifting' from discourse to discussion we mean that Burkart has to insist that in the different stages<sup>54</sup> of his model, (even in the stage he refers to as 'discourse') dialogic forms of interaction are not mandatory (cf. Burkart, 2008: 232, 235). Thus rejecting (ideal) discursive practices in the process he aligns stages two and three of his model. Whereas in Habermas' theory discourse is still aligned with ideal means of communication, i.e. 'pure communicative action' (cf. chap. 2.2.4), Burkart speaks of "virtual discourse" in stage three of his model (Burkart, 2010: 28), which is not distinguishable from discussion (stage two) by means of (ideal) communicative practices. Hence, for this distinction he no longer draws on Habermas' ideals but mainly relies on pointing toward the reflexivity of the communication between 'speaker' and 'addressee'.

By 'shifting' from consensus to (better) understanding we mean that Burkart generally acknowledges the goal rationality underlying public relations and thereby also the unlikelihood of 'true' consensus (cf. Burkart, 2007: 252). Rejecting the (restrictive) idea of consensus, the benefit of his model is 'narrowed' to producing 'rational dissent'; a precise identification of a controversy that "is seen by some sociologists of conflict as a major step toward the minimization solution of social conflicts" (ibid.). Both of these 'shifts' are, of course, necessarily connected: if Burkart withdraws from an ideal notion of discourse that is associated with ideal terminology in which

---

<sup>54</sup> Obviously, regarding this level, Burkart's consensus-oriented model significantly aligns with the normative perspective of symmetrical public relations often advocated by public relations practitioners: see e.g. chapter 3.2.1 and 3.2.4.1; or, to provide another example: in an official statement published by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), public relations is described as a practice that (re-)establishes harmony in complex and pluralistic societies (cf. PRSA, 1999: ii). The preference of normative and positive concepts in public relations practice (cf. also Bentele, 2003: 55) explains the support Burkart's model gains on the part of practitioners (cf. Bogner, 2000).

real public relations practice cannot be conceived, he consequently *needs* to dismiss the 'emphatic' idea of consensus because it is inevitably bound to the ideal conditions of 'real' discourse (cf. chap. 2.2.4).<sup>55</sup>

Despite these 'shifts' consensus-oriented public relations still has to be seen as a practicable model that serves as an accidental or situational complement to conventional public relations (cf. Westerbarkey, 2008); e.g. in situations of expectable or ongoing conflict (cf. Saxer, 2010). It is especially in "situations when conflicts are to be expected" that public relations practitioners "have to take into account that their messages might be questioned by critical recipients" (Burkart, 2007: 251). In these situations the COPR model may serve as a framework to plan and evaluate the process in which to present 'good arguments' with an orientation toward understanding. The COPR model is by no means able to fully "prevent the emergence of conflicts" (253), but the implementation of the different practical stages may help to avoid that conflicts escalate (cf. 254).

Regardless of these limitations, two essential and far-reaching questions emerge from Burkart's efforts. Regarding the field of public relations we might ask: to what extent can different practices of public relations be conceived in terms of dialogical communication and action oriented toward understanding? Regarding the theoretical framework we might ask: in how far can an application that appears to harmonize Habermas' terms of communicative action with the strategic reality of public relations exist without theoretical aporia?<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2.4.3 Public Relations as Reputation Management: Applying Habermas or Weber?

Compared to other applications discussed in this thesis, the model developed by Eisenegger and Imhof shows a particular distinction that becomes apparent when looking at their application of the different terms of rationality. Even though the authors explicitly aim to apply Habermas' theory (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 127), it is primarily Max Weber's (1972) concept of social action that is important for their model (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 127–130). The concept of communicative action, which is distinctive for Habermas' theory (cf. chap. 2.2.1), is not part of the model's theoretical framework. Thus, what considerably distinguishes this model from other applications discussed in this thesis is the complete disregard of mutual understanding as the inherent telos of human speech and, thereby, Habermas' core concept of rationality. Eisenegger and

---

<sup>55</sup> In this sense, one could attest that the English title Burkart chose for his model is rather misleading: 'consensus oriented public relations' implies that the model, in fact, draws on the idealizations of 'real' discourse, and tries to match it with public relations practice, when, in fact, Burkart rejects this and focuses primarily on a process of understanding that is not necessarily directed at consensus.

<sup>56</sup> For further considerations see e.g. chapter 4.3 (on the question regarding the possibility of theoretical aporia).



Imhof are solely interested in the *instrumental* dimension of the concept of world-relations. The fact that in Habermas' theory this concept is necessarily complemented by a *reflexive* dimension that grounds the rational potential of human speech, is insignificant to their modeling effort. The different dimensions of reputation (functional, social, expressive) are matched with Weber's terms of rationality (instrumental rationality, rationality of value, emotional logic of appraisal), without referencing the comprehensive concept of communicative rationality that, as we demonstrate in chapter 2.2.1, underlies all other concepts of rationality in Habermas' theory. Can we at all coherently refer to this concept as an application of Habermas' theory when the terms of rationality of action remain thoroughly teleological, i.e. without associating (communicative) action oriented to understanding?

Following an analytical distinction put forth by Evelyn Gröbel-Steibach (2004) it appears that Eisenegger and Imhof apply a concept of rationality that is quintessentially incompatible with Habermas' theory: rationality, as conceptualized by Habermas, refers to the utilization of knowledge within a speech act that is interpreted in terms of a social action; it does not, however—as in Weber's concept—refer to the rationality of a (teleological) action as such (cf. 99). Indeed, Habermas prominently conceptualizes his theory of action on the basis of Weber's concept, but ultimately he grounds his efforts in aspects of social action that are entirely disregarded in Weber's theory (cf. Habermas, 1981: 369–452; 1984: 273–337). Rather, he develops his concept of rationality in objection to Weber's typology of action that he criticizes as being insufficient for the analysis of the problematic of social rationalization:

Weber hat die inoffizielle Handlungstypologie für die Problematik der gesellschaftlichen Rationalisierung nicht fruchtbar machen können. Die offizielle Version hingegen ist konzeptionell so eng angelegt, daß in diesem Rahmen soziale Handlungen nur unter dem Aspekt der Zweckrationalität beurteilt werden können (1989a).<sup>xvi</sup>

In Weber's terms, this being Habermas' central objection, rationalization can only be described as instrumental or purposive rationalization. This originates from Weber's sole focus on a theory of consciousness: He does not elucidate 'meaning' via a model of speech and possible understanding but via the beliefs and intentions of the isolated subject (cf. Habermas, 1981: 377f; 1984: 279f).

Though explicitly claiming to apply the "three-world concept" as "derived by Habermas from Max Weber" (Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 127), the model developed by Eisenegger and Imhof, in fact merely relies on the *general* idea of the three forms of judgment. Hence their model can only be referred to as an effort of applying Habermas' theory to public relations in a very restricted sense. Moreover we can find this evaluation confirmed in a recent publication of the model, where the author, instead of drawing explicitly on Habermas, refers to the three-world concept as a general "theorem in the social sciences" (Eisenegger, 2009: 12). Here the model is

presented more accurately as based on the general “idea that agents must continually prove themselves in three respects” (ibid.), and is, in this general sense, confirmed to be just as much an application of concepts of, for instance, Karl Popper or Immanuel Kant as it is of Habermas (cf. 13).

### **3.3 Moral Perspective: Grounding and Enacting Public Relations Ethics**

#### **3.3.1 An Ethical Imperative for Public Relations**

Pearson presented a dissertation (1989a) and published two further articles (1989c, 1989b) in which he applies Habermas' theory to public relations ethics. The author modestly labels his application an “exercise in model building in public relations” (Pearson, 1989b: 111). He aims to show that (a) “business ethics can be studied as a series of questions about how a business organization communicates”, that (b) “ethical communication is strongly related to the idea of dialogue” and that (c) “public relations plays a major role in managing the moral dimension of corporate conduct” (ibid.).

The author starts with an examination of three prominent epistemological concepts of post-modern rhetorical theory: objectivism, relativism and intersubjectivism (cf. 113–117). Three components are vital underpinnings for Pearson's subsequent argument: first, the basic assumptions of the individual epistemological concepts; second, the particular role of rhetoric in each of these; and third, the connection to public relations that can be established with the respective concepts.

Pearson states that rationalism and empiricism are two distinct philosophical ways of trying to gain absolute certainty (cf. 13). Irrespective of the grounding of these certainties—in thought or in the senses—the ambitious intent to *attain* absolute certainty defines these objectivist approaches. Rhetoric isn't necessarily involved in either of the objectivist pursuits and they can both be undertaken, fully dispensing of communication; or as Pearson puts it: “Neither Descartes, Bacon, nor Locke needed to communicate with others in their search for certainty. This search was individual and personal” (114). This implies that the objectivist's only concern with rhetoric is to find an effective strategy to—if he or she so wishes—convince someone else to accept a certain truth as being epistemically true. Whenever public relations practitioners aim to ‘educate’ people and try to gain public support by making people ‘understand’, they can be seen as subscribing to this objectivist view (cf. ibid.).

The relativist perspective denies this possibility of the existence of a rational method to distinguish right from wrong (cf. ibid.). In language or rhetoric the relativist perspective often leads to rather cynical statements, because self-interest always constitutes motivation for action: for a

relativist “[...] language is important, not because it plays an essential role in discovering what is true or right, but because it can make something look true or right when another viewpoint is equally valid” (115). From this perspective public relations practice can thus be described as sole sophistry in advancing self-interest. The respective public relations practitioners participate in “a mad cacaphony (sic!) of competing interests with no way to decide among them except self-interest” (Pearson, 1989c: 69).

The intersubjective perspective is described as a ‘middle ground’ between the former two, rejecting the objectivist claims and at the same time not embracing the altogether skeptical view of relativism. This particular position is defended by the core assumption that “rhetoric has a constitutive, creative role in the generation of knowledge” (Pearson, 1989b: 115f).<sup>57</sup> To advocates of intersubjectivism, the alternative to relativism and objectivism lies in the agreement among members of a community (cf. 117). Such agreements are neither strictly objective since they are determined by social and historic conditions and thereby contextual, nor are they strictly relative since they exceed the subjective and the arbitrary; they are in fact a “result of intersubjective communication and are *out there* in the community” (117; italics in original). A public relations practitioner who subscribes to intersubjective assumptions will level his communication according to a participative mode of discourse in which plurality and diversity of perspective is of particular relevance.<sup>58</sup>

Following the epistemological examination depicted above, Pearson introduces Rogene Buchholz’ (1985) three historical concepts to describe how businesses approach their moral environment (namely: social responsibility, social responsiveness, and public policy), and goes on to draw analogies between these concepts and the aforementioned epistemologies. Through this comparison, Pearson aims to produce a better understanding of Buchholz’ concept regarding the history of corporate public affairs.

Social responsibility, the first approach in Buchholz’ chronology, is typical for 1960s public relations practice (cf. Pearson, 1989b: 118). The idea is that business ought to serve social needs that are neither economic nor achievable through liberal economic mechanisms. This approach gradually became problematic, given increasing moral pluralism and a ‘crumbling’ of generally held values about the purpose and conduct of businesses. Thus there existed a criticism of a missing set of universally accepted moral principles that could serve as a guideline for socially

<sup>57</sup> This claim however can be made with different magnitude: Knowledge can be defined as rhetorical (a) “because it is intersubjectively sanctioned”, (b) because it “plays a decisive role in deciding on first principles” or (c) because “all epistemological endeavor is rhetorical” (Pearson, 1989b: 116). Whilst ‘claim a’ can be seen as being fairly weak, ‘claim c’ fully “collapses the empirical into the symbolic”; ‘claim b’ however takes a middle ground between the two (ibid.).

<sup>58</sup> Here Pearson refers to Hugh Culbertson (1989) who also formulates this ‘breadth of perspective’ as being relevant as a public relations concept.

responsible business conduct, but the possibility of successful mediation between the different values was nevertheless still upheld (cf. *ibid.*). According to Pearson, this historical concept of social responsibility can be linked to objectivism because in Buchholz' approach, corporate conduct aiming at social goals can be successfully reconciled with business goals, wherein the discovery of moral truth and the 'right' course of action is assumed to be a realistic possibility (cf. 120).

The social responsiveness approach is typical of the 1970s (cf. 118). The idea is to fully avoid moral debate while simply focusing on the effectiveness of corporate response mechanisms. This implies that the aim consists of pragmatically adapting the broadly accepted values of a given environment, rather than acting according to a 'sense of responsibility'. Hence business is passive and only responding to its environment. To effectively blend in according to a 'mainstream' of social values, public business conduct is based on data provided by public affairs departments through social audits and scanning (cf. 119). In the social responsiveness approach, the difficulties implied by the absence of universal principles are avoided through embarking in a 'passive quietude' or 'cynical activism', thus representing the relativist view (cf. 120).

In the 1980s what Buchholz terms the public policy approach became apparent (cf. 119). It developed subsequently to the realization that it is of central importance to gain an understanding of the public policy process that enables organizations to actively influence this process in favor of relevant business interests. Thus business organizations become an "active participant" in an "essentially political process" (*ibid.*). The key observation to Pearson is that moral questions that emerge from the business becoming an actor within the public policy process must be "asked in terms of how business participates in what is fundamentally a communication process" (120). The public policy approach not only overcomes the radical relativism held by the social responsiveness approach, but also resists returning to the objectivist assumptions of the social responsibility approach and can thus be linked to intersubjectivism:

The public policy approach to business' moral responsibilities as described by Buchholz has the potential for overcoming or synthesizing an earlier opposition in the same way that post-modern rhetorical theory represents a synthesis of competing epistemologies. In the same way that the objectivism-relativism-intersubjectivism triad seems to represent moments in a dialectical process, so does the social responsibility-social responsiveness-public policy triad represent a dialectical process (121).

The important similarity between the two dialectical processes described by Pearson is that they both end in a synthesis that prominently focuses on communication variables (cf. *ibid.*). This very emphasis on communication, which is absent in the preceding stages of thesis and antithesis in the respective dialectical processes, is of central importance to Pearson's model.

Neither objectivist nor relativist epistemologies require that one mind communicate with another in the discovery of truth. Post-modern rhetorical theory, on the other hand, claims it takes two minds to make truth, whether scientific or moral. Likewise, the public policy approach says business cannot act unilaterally but must consult and communicate with others through public policy mechanisms. The

public policy approach implies an emphasis on intersubjective processes, whereas this is not true for either the social responsibility approach or the social responsiveness approach (ibid.).

For Pearson this analogy builds the basis to conceptualize and model public relations as well as business ethics. Because he accepts that “moral truths are rhetorical and are grounded in the way we communicate” he claims that “the study of business ethics is the study of the public communication processes that decide corporate action” (121f); and this is the process he sees in public relations practice. The model that he develops thus makes the implicit argument that dialog is the focal concept of public relations—or, for that matter, *ethical* public relations. To Pearson dialog “represents a transcendence of [the] two other approaches to public relations, both of which are essentially monologic as is shown by the epistemological assumptions underlying each” (122). He posits that the collision of incompatible value systems—which he, in reference to Andrew Gollner (1983), sees as public relations’ *raison d’être*—doesn’t necessarily have to lead into a relativistic and cynical debate *ad infinitum* but can indeed be mediated by means of communication: “The important question becomes, not what action or policy is more right than another, but what kind of communication system maximizes the chances that competing interests can be transformed” (Pearson, 1989b: 125). Thus the focus shifts from the question of whether certain policies communicated by public relations practitioners are morally right or wrong to the question of whether the communication process in which these practitioners participate is ethical. Accordingly his model suggests that to ‘overcome’ the tendency toward rather monologic styles of communication, the promotion of ‘interorganizational dialog’ is “a key ethical imperative of public relations practice” (123).<sup>59</sup> Moving on to the practical implications of this imperative, Pearson points to Habermas’ concept of the ideal speech situation (cf. chap. 2.2.4) that allegedly purports ‘clear cut rules’ for public relations practice: “Moving to a higher level of abstraction during a public relations interaction would allow participants to raise questions that, in day-to-day communication, are part of a background consensus shared within a community of discourse” (Pearson, 1989b: 125). To respond to the critical question of how such ideal conditions can be measured within actual public relations practice, Pearson refers to Richard Farace et al. (1977) who—building on coorientation theory—establish a method for measuring structural aspects of a communication environment that involves questioning the participants on topics that concern these aspects: “A communication environment that promotes dialogue and, therefore, legitimate decision outcomes, would be marked by mutual agreement among communicators about structural attributes of the environment and mutual satisfaction with those structural attributes” (Pearson, 1989b: 126). And since public relations departments are concerned with the communi-

---

<sup>59</sup> It is through this emphasis on dialog, that Pearson sees his model, based on discourse ethics, in accord with other models that promote dialog; especially that of Grunig and Hunt (1984).

cative conduct through which an organization participates in these structures, Pearson sees them charged with and responsible for the moral dimension of corporate conduct—he refers to them in terms of a ‘corporate conscience’ (cf. 128): the aim of public relations, as seen by Pearson, lies within the managing of communication systems “such that they come as close as possible to the standards deducted from the idea of dialogue” (ibid.). This can and should ultimately be achieved by fulfilling five concrete conditions for ethical public relations, which Pearson derives directly from Habermas’ concept of the ideal speech situation: each respective communicator should agree on and satisfy (a) equal “opportunity for beginning and ending communicative interaction”, (b) equal “length of time separating messages”, (c) equal “opportunity for suggesting topics and initiating topic changes”, (d) each “response [... counting] as a response”, and (e) equal “channel selection” (Pearson, 1989c: 82f).

### 3.3.2 Discourse Ethics and Codes of Ethics in Public Relations

Very similar to the application demonstrated above is Roy Leeper’s effort (1996).<sup>60</sup> Leeper, much like Pearson (1989a), argues for discourse ethics as a “grounding [...] for the practice of public relations” (Leeper, 1996: 133). This argument contains three basic elements: (a) aiming to show discourse ethics’ compatibility with the two-way symmetrical model of public relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984); (b) demonstrating its applicability to the issue of codes of ethics in public relations; and (c) utilizing Habermas’ theory, as applied by Pearson (e.s.), as an approach to public relations practice concerning the Exxon Valdes oil spill in 1989. Leeper emphasizes the relevance of his application by pointing out the importance of ethical study in the field of public relations on one hand, and by perceiving a prevalent apathy toward the issue among both scholars and practitioners on the other (cf. Leeper, 1996: 133–135). Furthermore he stresses that “the situational perspective in ethics, the predominant approach in public relations, is difficult to justify” and therefore needs to be confronted by an objective “philosophical underpinning” (140).

It is the priority of understanding and the speakers’ readiness to justify validity claims (cf. chap. 2.2.1 and 2.2.2), in which Leeper sees the major links between Habermas’ theory and the model developed by Grunig and Hunt. Habermas’ notion of understanding as the inherent telos of human speech is allegedly reflected in the central assumption of the model of two-way symmetrical public relations: “Communication leads to understanding. The major purpose of communication is to facilitate understanding among people and such other systems as organizations,

---

<sup>60</sup> As we demonstrate in the subsequent discussion (cf. chap. 3.3.4.2), Leeper’s effort may be seen more as a further argument for Pearson’s application (cf. chap. 3.3.1), than as an own, ‘original’ application of Habermas’ theory to public relations. Hence, in the following, we reproduce the author’s effort only in brief. As we demonstrate in chapter 3.3.4.2, though, an inclusion of Leeper’s effort in the context of this thesis is highly justified due to the author’s raising of claims that produce conflicts with Habermas’ concept (e.i).

publics or societies. Persuasion of one person or system by another is less desirable" (Grunig, 1989: 38; cited in Leeper, 1996: 136). The finding of this parallel (or as one could say: 'depiction of a shared ideal') leads Leeper to the assumption that "Habermas's theory would thus seem to lend support to this model of public relations" (Leeper, 1996: 136). Building on a discussion exercised by Richard Johannesen (1990), Leeper then applies discourse ethics to professional codes of ethics and deals with certain general objections that have been raised against them (cf. Leeper, 1996: 141–142). In conclusion he writes that "the approach taken by Habermas seems to be relevant to devising, implementing, and justifying codes of ethics for the public relations field" (142). Finally Leeper draws on the Exxon Valdez oil spill incident to apply to it the normative conditions for unrestricted and unconstrained discourse (cf. *ibid.*), approaching it "from the viewpoint of the four validity claims" (143). Utilized as such, Habermas' approach, according to Leeper, may fulfill two central purposes: it can (a) serve as a post-communication test for the ethical validity of practical public relations and (b) be used as an "anticipatory guideline" that may help public relations practitioners develop adequate communication strategies (cf. *ibid.*).

### 3.3.3 Five Steps of Enacting Discourse Ethics in Public Relations

Rebecca Meisenbach (2006) draws on Habermas' principle of universalization (cf. chap. 2.2.4) so as to derive 'five steps' that enable an organization to enact discourse ethics and may moreover be used in practice to "assess [...] ethical problems and to identify alternative courses of action" (39). The author then applies these steps for enacting Habermas' theory to the American Red Cross' (ARC) handling of the so-called 'Liberty Fund' in 2001 (cf. 48–54).<sup>61</sup>

Opening her argument Meisenbach begins by critiquing the fact that studies addressing the issue of ethics in organizations often "start and end with prescriptions for ethical courses of action in a particular situation" but rarely consider "theoretical and philosophical bases for a moral theory for organizational communication" (40). Hence the author calls for an increasing study in "macro-level organizational ethics" and advises to first address "moral theory and a process for moral argumentation before moving into practical ethics" (*ibid.*). According to Meisenbach, this issue of "moral grounding" can be addressed by discourse ethics, which, due to its "communica-

---

<sup>61</sup> In two subsequent articles Meisenbach and Feldner (2007, 2009) further explore the potential of the established framework by drawing on it to analyze practical public relations with regard to the 'Save Disney' campaign from 2002 to 2005. In the 2007 article, however, the authors focus less on ethical conduct as such, but rather on organizational legitimacy based on Habermas' concept of validity claims, whereas the 2009 article integrates both perspectives. The way in which Meisenbach and Feldner (2007) apply Habermas' concept of validity claims to the process of corporate legitimacy, appears—even though the authors do not present an own model—rudimentarily similar to the application demonstrated in chapter 3.2.2; and just as in this application, Meisenbach and Feldner ultimately see the primary contribution of their analysis in allowing for greater understanding of the ways in which the legitimacy claims of an organization are challenged based on the dimensions of truth, rightness, and sincerity (cf. Meisenbach, Feldner, 2007: 223f).

tive approach” has “valuable potential for organizational ethics” (ibid.). In response to Warren French and David Allbright’s (1998) claim that discourse ethics “requires an operators’ manual as well as proactive implementations if it is to be of use to business” (French, Allbright, 1998: 191; cited in Meisenbach, 2006: 41), the author aims to “articulate specific ways that [discourse ethics] can be interpreted and implemented” (Meisenbach, 2006: 41). Based on the universalization principle Meisenbach suggests “five steps for enacting discourse ethics” specifically designed “to realize the moral principle in communicative action” to be “followed by both individual and organizational rhetors” (45). The first step consists of generating an utterance that makes claims about its validity; preferably one that has both local and universal import and is thus “best suited for a discourse ethics procedure” (46). Hence, in this first step, the terms and meaning of a statement are defined. During the second step the rhetor needs to determine the individuals that are potentially affected by a particular claim considered to be set into force (cf. ibid.). Third, the claim is articulated to the individuals and parties believed to be affected. This step—in anticipation of the following two—should be based on dialogical communication structures such as face-to-face interaction, internet chats, or conference calls (cf. 47). Ergo promoting a discursive modus of communication in the third step brings about the possibility of allowing the participants to “anticipate the consequence of the utterance” through equal and full participation in the discursive debate, which constitutes the fourth step (ibid.). In the fifth step participants finally “make a judgment about whether the claim and its consequences are acceptable to all affected and are, therefore, ethical” (ibid.). To the evident objection that ethical outcomes may be hindered by the high likeliness of disagreement over the validity of a claim, Meisenbach responds, claiming that a “discussion can end in the identification of unreconciled differences” and yet the proceedings of the five-step-model would still be of use since the “original rhetor and dissenting stakeholders are likely to have at least a better understanding of each others’ positions” (48). In this situation a given organization can still “decide to proceed with its plan—that is, stand by its utterance while being aware of the challenges” (ibid.).

As mentioned above, Meisenbach then applies the steps derived from the universalization principle to the ARC’s handling of its ‘Liberty Fund’, which was established shortly after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, in order to alleviate human suffering brought on by these attacks. The ARC’s main problem was that it published inconsistent information on how the money in the ‘Liberty Fund’ was to be spent. When the Organization published information on its website on October 8, 2001, stating that money from the ‘Liberty Fund’ (which had collected more than \$500 million in public donations during the first month) would also be used to “prepare and mitigate in the event of more attacks, [...] publics and donors felt that they had been misled” by the ARC (49). It required the retirement of the ARC’s



CEO and a hearing held by the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Commerce and Energy before the ARC announced its decision to change the use of the donations to exclusively focus on people directly affected by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In the aftermath of these events the ARC "paid for full-page advertisements in major newspapers [...] to further publicize the changes and ask the public to trust them again" as well as establish "a new 'Donor Direct' plan designed to endure better understanding of donor and organization intent" (ibid.).

Beginning her analysis of the events outlined above, Meisenbach determines the October 8, 2001 statement as the "utterance containing validity claims, fulfilling the first step in the process" (51). Looking at the second step of determining those potentially affected by the utterance, the author concludes that the ARC "consulted with very few individuals and groups even within the organization about the fund's creation" (ibid.). Considering the potential participants for an accordant discursive discussion (ARC employees, donors, victims' families, etc.) she also acknowledges the "difficulty of determining where to cut off ever-broadening circles of involvement" (ibid.). Continuing her analysis Meisenbach finds the major problem of the process within the third step of presenting the utterance to the affected parties: even though the amount and range of communication used by the ARC would appear to be quintessentially sufficient at first glance she finds that most of the methods used "can be classified as monologic forms of communication" (52) and speaks of a "failure to dialogically communicate the utterance to publics" (53). As a result from this 'failure' the discussion in step four turned out to be highly insufficient in respect to the ideal drawn on by Meisenbach: The "[m]edia and other stakeholders" only gradually "negotiated their way into the discussion over the utterance" and the consequences of the utterance were accordingly not successfully anticipated (ibid.). Finally, in the fifth step of judging the validity of the utterance's claims, "the organization painfully learned that many stakeholders did not agree that the utterance was valid and acceptable" (54). Meisenbach shows that the validity of the claim was challenged on all three levels: *truth* ("the public [argued that] it was not true that the ARC was using the funds as described in the utterance"), *morality* ("groups did not believe it was right or just for the ARC to use the funds for anything other than helping the victims and their families directly")<sup>62</sup>, and *sincerity* ("considering the [ARC's] initially confusing and reticent stance on presenting the utterance") (ibid.).

---

<sup>62</sup> This finding by Meisenbach appears to be partially incomprehensible since she herself notes that "surveys revealed that 80% of respondents supported the fund's goals of taking a broad understanding of who should be helped" (Meisenbach, 2006: 54). If we now subtract the spectrum of indifferent respondents from the remaining 20%, we are left with only a marginal challenge to the claim of morality.

### 3.3.4 Discussion

#### 3.3.4.1 An Ethical Imperative: Paralleling Public Relations and Ideal Speech

Pearson's application of Habermas' theory is fairly simple: he merely transfers the ideal conditions for ethical communication—as defined in the ideal speech situation—onto public relations practice. This effort is substantiated by the building of an analogy between two groups of concepts: the three epistemological concepts (objectivism, relativism, intersubjectivism) and the three historical concepts (social responsibility, social responsiveness, public policy). This analogy appears compelling particularly because Pearson equally describes both groups of concepts in terms of a dialectical process. In the analogy each stage of one dialectical process (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) can hence be matched with the according stage in the other. Moreover, Pearson demonstrates that both processes end in a synthesis that shows a focus on communication variables.

The most interesting aspect for the assessment of Pearson's application is his depiction of these dialectical processes, because it implies the superiority of the latest concept (synthesis) over the former two. This is reflected in the author's conviction that the epistemological concepts are not to be seen as more or less equal schools of philosophical thought, but as a constellation in which intersubjectivism is the "powerful and cogent" concept by which the other two are in fact "challenged and transcended" (Pearson, 1989b: 120f). This hierarchy illustrates that the author is somewhat 'enthusiastic' about discourse ethics.<sup>63</sup> This in turn might explain Pearson's optimism regarding the practical realization of the concrete rules for ethical public relations he derives from Habermas' ideal speech situation. Even though acknowledging the possibility of dialog lapsing into monologue (cf. Pearson, 1989b: 123), as well as structural constraints in practical public relations (cf. 128), Pearson still upholds the practical relevance of 'genuine dialog' for ethical problems in public relations. As demonstrated above, he goes on to suggest to measure the practical adherence to ideal conditions of discourse by means of the method presented by Farace et al. (1977), which he sees relevant "for the [analysis of the] quality of organization/public relations interaction" (Pearson, 1989c: 76). This method, however, focuses on conversational rules, analyzing communication relationships between subordinates and their superiors (cf. Farace et al., 1977: 18–43). It is hence conceptualized for interactions between individuals within organizations. Whilst Pearson sees "no reason why similar measures cannot be applied to communication rela-

---

<sup>63</sup> To further elucidate Pearson's perspective, i.e. his 'enthusiasm' for discourse ethics, it is insightful to examine one of his important sources for the assessment of the objectivism-relativism dichotomy, namely Richard Bernstein (1983). Bernstein finishes his criticism of this dichotomy in favor of intersubjectivism and virtually dedicates his work "to the practical task of furthering the type of solidarity, participation, and mutual recognition that is founded in dialogical communities" (231). It seems as though Pearson also embarks on this endeavor; even more so, in transferring the ideals of mutual understanding onto public relations—practices that Bernstein on the other hand remarkably criticizes as distorting, undermining, and blocking dialogical communities (cf. 230).

tionships between organizations” and states that such an application “would be an important step toward developing a full blown theory of dialogue for organizations” (Pearson, 1989c: 77), one can object here regarding the type of interaction in question: it is at least arguable whether a method that focuses on interactions between (natural) individuals is adequate in analyzing those forms of interaction generally relevant in public relations (cf. Theis-Berglmair, 1995). But according to Pearson, business conduct is appropriately described as occurring “within the parameters of a dialogic communication process between a business organization and [...] organizations, groups or individuals” (Pearson, 1989b: 127). Furthermore he, typical for a researcher who subscribes to the idea of communication symmetry,<sup>64</sup> sees public relations departments as authoritative in managing the moral conduct of a corporation—as the ‘corporate conscience’ (cf. 128). Ultimately Pearson even parallels (discursive) public relations practices with the idea of democracy as depicted by Donald Day (1961) as a “political philosophy that does not specify what the good life is” but that provides a “methodological framework within which each individual may fulfill his own contemplation of the good life” (Day, 1961: 5f; cited in Pearson, 1989b: 127). Even though this aspect is only traced as a parallel, Pearson, nonetheless, suggests that public relations practices may contribute to the democratic processes as depicted by Day.

In the context of this thesis Pearson’s application of Habermas’ theory raises three pivotal yet partially overlapping questions. First, can public relations practices adequately be described as intersubjective and, moreover, discursive communication? Second, can discourse ethics form a suitable fundament for ethical public relations practice (moreover in concepts that ultimately ‘upraise’ public relations departments as the ‘corporate conscience’) without leading to theoretical aporia? And third, how and to what effect do public relations departments factually participate in and influence political communication, i.e. broader democratic processes?<sup>65</sup>

#### **3.3.4.2 Codes of Ethics: Between a Procedural Imperative and Substantial Norms**

In the context of this thesis Leeper’s effort can only be referred to as an own and original application of Habermas’ theory with some limitation, and should rather be seen as a further argument for the application demonstrated by Pearson (cf. chap. 3.3.1) for three reasons. First, the compatibility of discourse ethics and the two-way symmetrical model by Grunig and Hunt, which Leeper aims to show, has already been clearly demonstrated by Pearson (1989c) as well as Grunig (1992). Second, the short analysis of the Exxon Valdez oil spill is merely an application of

---

<sup>64</sup> See e.g. also Grunig and Hunt (1984) or Cutlip et al. (2006).

<sup>65</sup> For further considerations see e.g. chapter 5.1 (on the question regarding discourse as a fundament for public relations practice) or chapter 5.2 (on the question regarding public relation’s influence on processes of political communication).

Pearson's concept and not connected with further conceptual considerations. Third, the only actually 'original' contribution which Leeper particularly articulates as an application to public relations codes of ethics, remains an unspecific application of discourse ethics to codes of ethics in general. In fact, the objections to codes of ethics that Leeper uses as a basis for applying discourse ethics are totally indefinite toward the issue of public relations: they are general concerns like the static terms of codes of ethics, their failure to be universal, the problem of a lack of enforcement or the intercultural differences that preclude such codes (cf. Leeper, 1996: 141f). Thus what has been enunciated as an 'application to public relations' appears more like a fairly general exercise in discourse ethics as such. Whilst Leeper aims to show how the approach taken by Habermas can be relevant in "devising, implementing, and justifying codes of ethics for the public relations field" (142), he really just demonstrates how Habermas' approach can be applied to codes of ethics in general. This generality is reflected in the "conclusion drawn from the application" where Leeper states that the "use of the Habermasian approach can be beneficial both in testing and legitimating past practices as well as serving as a guide when entering into communication" (144). Here one is left with the impression that Leeper concludes his application rather inauspiciously by assimilating public relations to communication in general—thus admitting the triviality of the article's insights for the field of public relations in particular. Ultimately Leeper's article reads less like an inquiry into public relations and more like a defense of discourse ethics in general. This impression is imposed, not only through Leeper's extensive depiction of Habermas' theoretical program,<sup>66</sup> but also through his conclusion of the article, in which he fails to remark on the specific relevance of applying Habermas' theory to public relations, only stressing the "ultimate worth of the approach taken by Habermas" in general (ibid.).<sup>67</sup>

Despite the fact that Leeper focuses on codes of ethics in general rather than specifically on issues related to public relations codes of ethics, his application still seems to raise an important question in the context of this thesis because he states that Habermas' concept is relevant for "devising" an explicit "code of ethics for the public relations field" (Leeper, 1996: 142). It appears that what Leeper is referring to here as 'devising an explicit code of ethics' implies specific normative contents. This, in fact, would exceed what Pearson (1989b) presents as 'five conditions

---

<sup>66</sup> The author devotes the better half of his effort solely to a reproduction of Habermas' theoretical program.

<sup>67</sup> A possible explanation for this generality, i.e. Leeper's notable effort to 'defend' Habermas' concept of discourse ethics as such, rather than applying it to public relations in particular, may be the fact that, especially Habermas' concept of discourse ethics has found itself under exceedingly high 'scrutiny' during the 1990s. (cf. chap. 5.1.3). Only three years after the publication of Leeper's article, Habermas makes a momentous shift toward pragmatism, thereby renewing his concept of (moral) truth (cf. Habermas, 1999), mainly as a response to the critique by Richard Rorty (cf. Koller, 2004: 169f). Whereas the earlier approach by Pearson—as we demonstrated in chapters 3.3.1 and 3.3.4.1—is a vivid example of a rather 'euphoric' and fairly naïve application of discourse ethics, Leeper appears to try to emphasize the relevance of the theoretical framework more than actually seeking to apply it.

for ethical public relations' (e.s.) because Leeper shifts from procedural conditions to substantial norms. The fact that Leeper does not speak of an ethical imperative but of an explicit code of ethics and, thus indicates an effort of devising normative contents, raises the pivotal question whether Habermas' framework of discourse ethics, which seems to focus solely on communicative procedures (cf. chap. 2.2.4), allows for an application as undertaken by Leeper. In other words: can Habermas' theory be coherently applied to the grounding of substantial norms in public relations codes of ethics?<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3.4.3 The Five-Step Model: Challenges of Enacting Discursive Ideals in Public Relations Reality

Meisenbach demonstrates in what way Habermas' universalization principle can be broken down into "steps that offer both a practical procedure for organizations and their rhetors to follow in pursuit of ethical rhetorical action and an analytic framework for understanding and critiquing the ethical actions and failures of organizations" (Meisenbach, 2006: 55). By doing so—especially through her application of the 'Liberty Fund' incident—she also reveals several challenges for implementing the model as a procedural framework for an organization's communication, some of which are insightfully addressed in the discussion and conclusion of her article (cf. 55–58). We address two fundamental challenges of the five-step model in the following:

Whilst the first step of generating an utterance is rather unproblematic, the second step brings about a challenge: it is the determination of all individuals "potentially affected by the enactment of a particular claim" (46) that evokes a serious problem of practicability. Considering potential participants for a discursive discussion, Meisenbach acknowledges the "difficulty of determining where to cut off ever-broadening circles of involvement" (51). Regarding this problem, and also bearing in mind the limited resources of an organization, Meisenbach makes the practical suggestion to judge exclusively who should participate (cf. 56). But such judgments (however necessary in light of limited resources) would intentionally create a distinct number of 'outsiders', i.e. a certain group of 'concrete others' that may indeed be affected by certain discursive outcomes—the latter would thus, according to Habermas' concept, be necessarily unethical (cf. chap. 2.2.4). Meisenbach summarizes this challenge very tersely when emphasizing that a "decision reached where stakeholder voices have been overpowered is not morally valid. Yet translating this equality into organizational reality is fought with difficulty and requires further consideration" (Meisenbach, 2006: 56). Whilst step three, again, seems fairly manageable, step four poses what one could refer to as a 'logistical problem': the equal recognition of all voices and, furthermore, the time and space needed to discursively anticipate possible consequences,

---

<sup>68</sup> For further considerations on this question see chapter 5.1.1.

constituting an obstacle that cannot adequately be met. Meisenbach clearly acknowledges this when she emphasizes that “corporations are not in the business of giving everyone an equal voice and chance for discussion; they are focused on increasing profit margins” (57). Thus, as demonstrated in chapter 2.2.4 the ideal requirements for ‘real’ discourse are balefully confronted with the obvious spatiotemporal constraints of reality. The conflict between ideal requirements and reality is even more aggravated when the concept is applied to organizations that orient their actions toward success rather than toward mutual understanding. In light of fundamentally conflicting social rationalities (i.e. lifeworld rationality vs. system rationality), the practical application of Meisenbach’s five-step model, not as a tool for post-communication analysis but as a design for the actual planning of real public relations, seems fairly unlikely.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of these challenges, Meisenbach claims her model to be a “concrete and specific” design for enacting discourse ethics in public relations practice (58). Regarding the inducement and extent of such ‘enacting’, Meisenbach does not restrict her model to a mere ‘response-mechanism’: following her analysis of the ARC’s donation scandal, she argues that if the organization would have used the model right from the beginning of its communication of the new fund, the crisis could have been avoided (cf. 55). Here the question emerges whether this means that the model should have been implemented *before* there was any conflict on the issue? If so, Meisenbach—in spite of a fairly detailed and critical discussion following her article—overlooks something essential: by suggesting the model also to be implemented in routine, everyday public relations, i.e. without the necessity of a factual conflict, she elides the formal distinction between an instrumental mode of everyday communication on the one hand and discourse on the other (cf. chap. 2.2.4). In the application discussed in chapters 3.2.2 and 3.2.4.2, for instance, this formal distinction is more clearly considered in this regard. Here it is stated that the discursive practices presuppose a disturbed background consensus, i.e. challenged validity claims. Other than an application that completely disregards the idea of discourse and reestablishing consensus (cf. chap. 3.2.3), Meisenbach’s five-step model, which aims to enact discourse ethics, has to be understood first in terms of a ‘repair mechanism’: its strengths lie in establishing guidelines for coping with a disturbed background consensus or to be applied as a framework for post-communication analysis.

Ultimately, Meisenbach—though demonstrating a more elaborate application—much like Leeper (cf. chap. 3.3.2 and 3.3.4.2), seems to view Habermas’ discourse ethics as more than just an exercise in revealing an irreducible moral point of view. She appears to wonder why Habermas

---

<sup>69</sup> It is noteworthy that Meisenbach, different from the other two authors referred to in this ‘moral perspective’ (Pearson and Leeper), explicitly addresses this problematic aspect.

is only “interested in articulating and justifying” his approach and leaves the effort of “using and implementing” the procedure for actual real situations to others (Meisenbach, 2006: 54). Habermas’ noticeable reservation in this regard, however, may signal his understanding of discourse ethics as merely a philosophical program of justifying a moral point of view (cf. chap. 2.2.4), acknowledging the ‘prostration’ of his concept (cf. chap. 5.1.3). As Niels Gottschalk-Mazouz (2000: 150) points out, Habermas does not explicitly engage in the problematic of enacting his philosophical program. Meisenbach (2006), however, aims for a practical enactment. This effort entails important further questions regarding public relations, like: what types of organizations are—in light of their specific rationale of action—to be seen as more, and what types are to be seen as less likely to ‘enact’ discourse ethics as suggested by Meisenbach? What specific forms of communication may be implemented by an organization to sufficiently (or at least approximately) meet communicative requirements of discourse ethics? How can organizations practicably deal with the challenge of determining who might be affected by an utterance, and should therefore be part of discourse?<sup>70</sup> On a more fundamental level, of course, these practical questions of enacting discourse ethics are preceded by the same basic question that applies to the applications demonstrated in chapters 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2: do efforts that draw on Habermas’ concept of communicative action, or even discourse, so as to generate guiding statements for public relations practice not necessarily entail theoretical aporia?<sup>71</sup>

### **3.4 Societal Perspective: Conceptualizing Public Relations in its Social Context**

#### **3.4.1 The Concept of the Public Sphere as an Analytical Framework for Public Relations**

Applying and partially expanding Habermas’ concept of the public sphere (cf. chap. 2.2.5), Inger Jensen (2001) develops an analytical framework that allows one to view public relations in regard to historically evolving functions of the public sphere. The author suggests a “reintroduction of concepts of the public sphere in public relations theory” and calls attention to “organisational legitimacy and identity” as an “emerging function of the public sphere” (133). This ‘emerging function’ is then combined with “three different concepts of the company in society” to form an “analytical framework for reflecting potential viable or problematic aspects in the future” (ibid.).

---

<sup>70</sup> The enacting of discourse ethics, regardless of the concrete field of public relations, surely and primarily entails more fundamental theoretical problems, the approaching of which is—given the thematic focus—inadequate in this context. For a comprehensive assessment of problems of enacting discourse ethics see e.g. Apel and Kettner (1992) or Gottschalk-Mazouz (2000: 109–242).

<sup>71</sup> For further considerations see e.g. chapter 4.3 (on the question regarding possible theoretical aporia).

Jensen begins her argument by assessing that even though public relations is concerned with the way organizations interact with the public sphere, only a small fraction of public relations literature focuses on this aspect (cf. *ibid.*). The bigger fraction—this being Jensen's initial objection—ignores an essential analytic dimension of public relations, namely its concern with “issues and values that are considered publicly relevant” (*ibid.*). Jensen argues that Habermas' concept of the public sphere and its preconditions “should be further developed to reflect on public relations as a profession in its social context” (134). Preconditions e.g. entail fundamental democratic rights, some of which are retained and protected within constitutional rights like freedom of speech, association, and assembly or the constitutional protection of privacy (cf. chap. 2.2.5). Referring to Habermas (1992a, 1996) the author points out, however, that such basic constitutional guarantees alone cannot prevent a deformation of the public sphere (cf. Jensen, 2001: 134). This can only be achieved by an ‘energetic civil society’, i.e. by individuals reproducing the link between private and public spheres via the private interpretation and public discussion of requirements and failures experienced in the various systems in which they are engaged (cf. 135). The important trait of this process is that whenever private communication is raised onto a level of public concern, “the specific empirical cases are amplified and attributed an aspect of general interest” that “activates the public sphere for the short or long term” (125f). Jensen now suggests that the concept of the public sphere can be utilized as an analytical framework that refers to the discursive processes occurring within a complex network of individuals and organizations.

These discursive processes are differentiated and therefore normally represent a variety of conflicting positions. However conflicting the positions are, a common trait of the discourses is that they are launched as being of common concern, in principle of everybody's interest. Therefore, as part of the process, the networking agents aim to expose their viewpoints via potentially accessible media and forums (136).

Such public sphere discourses practiced by ‘networking agents’ can be viewed as an ongoing ‘civilized’ form of open disagreement on primal matters of common concern via potentially accessible media. To produce a better understanding of the relationship between organizations and the public sphere, Jensen complements the analytically differentiated functions of literary and political public sphere processes (cf. chap. 2.2.5) by a third function: wherever public agenda setting is not directed at political decisions but rather at self-referential identity policy, Jensen speaks of the public sphere processes of organizational legitimacy and identity (cf. Jensen, 2001: 136f). Thus this third function of the public sphere can be understood as the “self-referential process of identifying the *raison d'être* of an organisation” (137; italics in original).



Jensen then goes on to differentiate three socially constructed<sup>72</sup> concepts (or 'predominant images') of the company, each representing a different stage of historical development in liberal democratic societies (cf. 137–140): (a) *the economically successful but socially innocent company* which is linked to liberal market economy and focuses merely on the increase of profits; (b) *the economically successful and legal company* which is also legally restricted from harming common goods and thus focuses on both economic success and the legal scope; and (c) *the economically successful, legal, and responsible company* which is in addition held responsible for all its conduct and therefore focuses not only on profits and laws, but also on social legitimacy and responsibility. These three socio-historical concepts, according to Jensen, hold "analytical potential for public relations research" (140), since they can each be linked to a specific quality and quantity of public relations: whereas the first concept hardly entails any public relations, the second entails some need for lobbying and public affairs, whilst the third concept involves a high degree of sophisticated public relations practices (cf. 141). By relating these concepts to the different public sphere processes, general trends in public relations can be illustrated. The company embodying the first concept solely focuses on the market and is not related to the public sphere; thus "public relations is not relevant" here (ibid.). The company that needs to follow explicit governmental regulations regarding its actions reflects the second concept; it is strongly related to the political public sphere and will hence engage in lobbying or 'government relations'—particularly 'undercover' public relations services are of relevance here, since in these discourses a company would not be considered a legitimate agent (cf. 142). The relation between the company in the third concept and the public sphere is now marked by a significant 'transfer of burden' that occurs between the processes of the political public sphere and the public sphere of organizational legitimacy and identity:

[...] some of the discourses are no longer making claims to the government. Instead they address the public sphere, organisations and companies themselves with arguments about the necessity for companies to become responsible in a broader sense. By transferring some of the burden to companies, a new function of public sphere processes seem to be established. A networking process of discourse has emerged with viewpoints of what it means to be a legitimate and responsible organization [...]. (143)

It is this change of discourse that increasingly places responsibility on companies and challenges them to practice deliberate public relations in order to respond to and engage in these discourses. Unlike Habermas' original concept, the public sphere here practices criticism and control not only regarding the state, but to an increasing degree, also with regard to the functional systems of the economy. In order to act responsibly an organization will then have to adjust to social norms and values that—due to the 'blending in' of the three concepts—may be manifold and ambigu-

<sup>72</sup> Here Jensen builds on Searle's (1995) concept according to which social realities are constructed by means of institutionalized actions.

ous. The aforementioned 'transfer of burden' thus leads to a more complex 'networking situation' that "is hard to integrate in management thinking and practice" (144). To cope with this emerging "ambiguous concept and new functional public sphere" which poses a central "challenge to public relations", Jensen particularly suggests "integrating and developing better analysis of the public sphere dynamics that go beyond organisational communication with its own immediately relevant stakeholders" (145f).

### 3.4.2 Combining the Concepts of the Public Sphere as well as Lifeworld and System in a Framework for Public Relations

Another approach that applies Habermas' theory to public relations on the societal level is demonstrated by Leitch and Neilson (2001). Here the authors conceptualize some core concepts of public relations—namely 'publics', 'relations', and 'organizations'—by drawing on Habermas' theory so as to suggest a "revised version of these [...] concepts" as a framework that "offers scholars and practitioners new ways of thinking about public relations" (127). Leitch and Neilson demonstrate how Habermas' concept of the public sphere (cf. chap. 2.2.5) and his distinction between lifeworld and system (cf. chap. 2.2.3) can be drawn upon to fill a 'gap' in public relations theory by supplying a theoretical framework that clearly distinguishes between different types of publics, different types of organizations, and different types of relations between them.

Regarding the concept of 'publics', Leitch and Neilson commence with the criticism that in most (both dialogic or strategic) approaches, publics are understood from the subject position of the organization (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 128). Subsequently these approaches resist an understanding of publics as actively involved in the continuous construction of their own goals, strategies and identities—a "gap" in public relations theory that can "lead to serious conceptual flaws" (ibid.). This 'gap' becomes apparent, when the according approaches treat organizations and publics as equivalent and interchangeable entities and thus the difference between publics and organizations becomes solely one of perspective. With reference to Timothy Coombs (1993), the authors argue that this idea is ultimately reinforced by "the complete absence of the concept of power in mainstream public relations theory" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 128).<sup>73</sup> It is with regard to this 'gap' that Leitch and Neilson demonstrate the potential of Habermas' theory to develop a differentiated concept of publics (cf. 128–131), and furthermore a theory-led distinction between different types of organizations as well as different types of relations (cf. 131–137). The authors relate their understanding of publics directly to Habermas' account of the public "as all private citizens who may participate in the public sphere" (130). This account, however, not often ac-

<sup>73</sup> Further developing this criticism, Leitch and Neilson (2001) show, for instance, that the 'organizational perspective', i.e. the inability to adequately distinguish between organizations and publics, may lead to an inadequate link of symmetrical communication and communication ethics (129f).

knowledge within mainstream public relations literature, allows one to view publics “as groups who develop their own identities, and perhaps representation of their collective interests, in relation to the system” through shared sets of meanings (131). The participating individuals are, of course, not members of single publics but instead “participate in the multiple sites of the public sphere as members of diverse publics” (ibid.). Thus multiple subject positions of an individual may strongly overlap, even conflict, and have to be seen as constantly altering.

Drawing on the aforementioned concept of the public as well as on Habermas' concept of the realms of lifeworld and system, Leitch and Neilson distinguish between three types of organizational relations (cf. ibid.): (a) *Intersystem organization relations*, which involve public relations practiced between organizations of the political and the economic system; (b) *intraorganizational relations*, which involve public relations practiced between an organization and its own internal publics; and (c) *organization-public relations* which involve public relations practiced between an organization and publics that exist externally to both the particular organization and other system organizations. Within Habermas' framework organizations should be seen as system-based entities (cf. 132). Subsequently they follow the logic of instrumental or strategic action: their inherent rationality is—other than with communicative action—goal driven.<sup>74</sup>

In order to distinguish between different types of organizations Leitch and Neilson extend Habermas' original concept of the public sphere: drawing on Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato's (1990) notion of the increasing institutionalization of the public sphere, Leitch and Neilson distinguish between “lifeworld organizations of the public sphere” on one hand and “system organizations of state and economy” on the other (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 132).<sup>75</sup> This concept is then completed by a third, ‘hybrid’ type of organization that shows some characteristics of both, lifeworld and system, and is referred to as ‘mixed organization’.<sup>76</sup> Each of these three types of organizations can be further characterized by examining their distinctive relation to publics (cf. 133f): first, system organizations are located vis-à-vis publics, which thus may counteract systems' colonization of the lifeworld (defensive role) or pursue their own specific goals which may not only mean furthering certain interests within the existing system, but also changing the system itself (offensive role). Second, lifeworld organizations can be characterized as emerging out of publics

<sup>74</sup> For example: *strategic* approaches to public relations would be based on organizational objectives, whereas *communicative* approaches would be based on the assumption that objectives are formed in an intersubjective communication process (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 132).

<sup>75</sup> In *Faktizität und Geltung* (1992a) Habermas has also included this concept of ‘lifeworld organizations’, which he refers to as non-economic and nongovernmental connections or voluntary associations, into his framework. These associations fulfill the function of an interconnection between the society component of the lifeworld and the communication structures of the public sphere (cf. Habermas, 1992: 443–451; 1998: 366–373).

<sup>76</sup> For practical examples regarding these three types of organizations see Leitch and Neilson (2001: 132f) or the discussion below (cf. chap. 3.4.3.2).

during processes of debate and action. Third, mixed organizations are located on the 'seam' between lifeworld and system, and thus relate ambivalently to publics.

Leitch and Neilson further apply Habermas' theory to examine public relations' core concept of 'relations' with regard to a broader social context, i.e. in terms of objectives, strategies, resources and power (cf. 134–137).<sup>77</sup> This broad perspective also surfaces in their definition of public relations as being concerned with "the many ways in which different types of publics interact with different types of organizations, and vice versa, on a strategic terrain of competing discourses and unequal access to power and resources" (134). First, a system organization engages in practicing relations with publics, which are purely strategic because it aims to "maximize the support of publics and to minimize or neutralize opposition so as to achieve organizational objectives" (135). Accordingly public relations practice seeks to determine public debate, or as George Cheney and George Dionisopoulos (1989) put it, establish certain frames of reference that predetermine the interpretation of information relevant to the organization. The successful establishment of such frames promises "favorable zones of meaning" between an organization and its publics, constructing an "environment in which it is far easier for an organization to achieve its objectives" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 135). Obvious impediments of according public relations practices, however, root in the particular objectives of an organization and their specific 'dissonance' with objectives apparent among relevant publics: "linking the norms and values of [...] individuals who make up the various publics with the objectives and requirements of the organization" (ibid.) thus becomes a major challenge for public relations practice.<sup>78</sup> As the case may be, concessions might have to be made on part of the organization i.e. its objectives. The perception of a system organization's actions and objectives among publics is thus always the product of a negotiation process (136). Public relations' ability to facilitate the creation of the aforementioned frames of reference—apart from the organizations objectives—depends on the availability of "discourse resources" in an organization as well as among publics (ibid.). Discourse resources here refer to the ability of an organization to enlist the support of publics and other system organizations,<sup>79</sup> and the ability or will of the publics to engage in discourse.<sup>80</sup> Apart from the creation

---

<sup>77</sup> Although Leitch and Neilson introduce three types of organizations they go on only to specify the concept of 'relations' with regard to two of them; they do not specifically depict the relations of mixed organizations.

<sup>78</sup> Regarding this difficulty of linking objectives of an organization with the norms and values of publics also see Judy Motion and Leitch (1996).

<sup>79</sup> This 'ability to enlist support' could for instance practically advert to an organization's budget or the know-how available to an organization's public relations department.

<sup>80</sup> Leitch and Neilson distinguish between 'unorganized' and 'organized' publics contingent upon the occurrence of e.g. institutional structures, clearly articulated agendas, or legitimate spokespeople (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 136). The authors indicate that unorganized publics do not necessarily mean that the creation of a preferable frame of reference and the enlistment of the publics support for organizational action is easier. On the contrary: unorganized publics may be more difficult to communicate with, and may challenge more resource intensive public rela-

of frames of reference that enable forms of interpretation favorable to an organization, public relations practice might aim to “alter or construct” the “nature and composition of publics themselves” (ibid.). This may be most distinctively the case when individuals have had no experience whatsoever with an organization before becoming an object of public relations attention.

Though lifeworld organizations will obviously share some of the characteristics depicted above, they also show unique features in their relations to system organizations and to the publics from which they have emerged (cf. ibid.). As Leitch and Neilson point out, lifeworld organizations—that can be characterized as ‘outcomes’ of the activities occurring in publics (e.s.)—practice public relations with their publics that can be seen as quite similar to practices associated with interorganizational relations (cf. 136f). In respect to system organizations on the other hand, the effort becomes one of strategic interaction that Leitch and Neilson describe in terms of a ‘war of opposition’ that is lead with the intent of maximizing “public sentiment and consciousness so as to put pressure on the system to concede some of the demands and goals of the lifeworld organizations” (137).

### 3.4.3 Discussion

#### 3.4.3.1 Public Sphere Processes of Organizational Legitimacy and Identity

The application demonstrated by Jensen (2001) consists of two basic elements: (a) three abstract concepts of public sphere processes, and (b) three different historical concepts of the acceptable company. Both elements are worthy of further review.

As depicted above, Jensen complements the two processes that are elements of Habermas' concept by a third, namely the public sphere processes of organizational legitimacy and identity. We briefly want to clarify how this ‘complement’ relates to the other two processes of the literary and political public sphere. Habermas differentiates between literary public sphere processes to describe the reflexive development of personal identities as well as concepts of others on the one hand, and political public sphere processes to describe the constitution of legitimacy vis-à-vis the realm of the state on the other (cf. chap. 2.2.5; or Jensen, 2001: 136f). Jensen's concept of the public sphere processes of organizational legitimacy and identity is *distinct* from the political public sphere processes in the sense that the former are not concerned with problems relevant to the realm of the state, and they are *parallel* to the literary public sphere processes in the sense that they are indeed concerned with more general interests. These processes aim not for political solutions but for self-referential ‘identity policy’ (cf. 137). They are parallel—not identical—to the

---

tions practices on the part of the system organization (cf. ibid.). Heath (1994) for instance shows that regarding publics without leaders, an organization will have difficulty defining distinctive zones of meaning, and will find it impossible to establish compromise.

literary public sphere processes, because they constitute organizational, not personal identity and legitimacy: in the public sphere processes of organizational legitimacy and identity organizations “contribute with narratives and cases of general interest as stories about ways of being an organization—not a person—in society” (ibid.). It is these new emerging processes that Jensen sees as the central challenge to current public relations (cf. 145).

On the basis of the concepts of the acceptable company suggested by Jensen, the author aims to demonstrate a historic “tendency from the predominance of the first concept, passing the second and towards the third concept” (138). In this ‘evolution’ of the characteristic image of an acceptable company, the different stages don’t replace one another, but rather have to be viewed as coexisting, because at any given time different agents with different values reproduce different images. These images, however, are associated only with companies, i.e. economic or commercial organizations. Thus, the aforementioned category of public sphere processes conceptualized by Jensen is, in the existing framework, restricted to a *company’s* legitimacy and identity. The framework can, hence, only be associated with public relations practiced by this distinct type of organization; it does not capture the processes of legitimacy and identity of e.g. non-governmental organizations. Hence, it could be of interest to further explore Jensen’s application by integrating in it predominant images of other forms of organizations. Such an effort could further elucidate the potential of the concept of public sphere processes of (different forms of) organizational legitimacy and identity.

Jensen’s application of Habermas’ theory shows how the economic, legal and social responsibilities of companies developed historically, and how the currently predominant concept can be associated with the emergence of a new concept of public sphere processes that is suitable for connection with Habermas’ theory. The construction of such a framework allows one to approach further questions, some of which Jensen alludes to in her concluding remarks (cf. 145f). One possible further question that her considerations raise is: how are public relations practices involved in the legitimizing of amplified influence of social, political, and economic organizations—a question that should be approached by including the perspective of (social, political, economic) power and conducting according analyses. Another pivotal question that could be approached on the basis of Jensen’s considerations is: how do different types of organizations, differently relate to the public sphere and how do they differently affect public sphere processes with their public relations efforts. From Jensen’s societal perspective, this question also concerns the general processes through which public relations practiced by different social actors may gain access to and influence on the media (a question which could then be raised in the context of

normative considerations on democracy and rational public deliberation)?<sup>81</sup> We see here how, unlike those models embarking on a 'practical perspective', Jensen's application is not restricted to public relations as an isolated factor of public communication processes, but can furthermore assess those elements that in fact constitute these processes.

Ultimately it must be concluded that, since Jensen's considerations are conducted on a fairly abstract level, it is possible that other processes that are important for the analysis of public relations practices in a social context exist next to and within the mentioned categories of public sphere processes. Jensen acknowledges that empirical studies would probably reveal "a great variety of processes, which would not all be captured by the concepts" she suggested in her framework (Jensen, 2001: 46). Here one could pose questions regarding the integrity of these categories, as well as concrete further processes.

### 3.4.3.2 Beyond the Corporate/Public Perspective

By also focusing on the aspect of power as well as taking into account different types of organizations, the application by Leitch and Neilson (2001) shows how Habermas' theory can—on the same societal level as Jensen's application (cf. chap. 3.4.1)—be utilized to conceptualize a greater spectrum of relations that extends beyond the 'bilateral' processes between an economic organization and its publics. Even though conceptualizing three different types of relations, Leitch and Neilson only go on to further elaborate their application in the direction of what they refer to as 'organization-public relations'. Within this perspective, different aspects of public relations are demonstrated especially with regard to two of the three organizational types (system, and lifeworld organizations). It seems appropriate to further elucidate these categories of organizations, that is, the basis on which they can be differentiated. To give an example of what these categories practically entail, Leitch and Neilson instance the fictitious controversy on a motorway project (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 132). In this instance, both the motorway developer and the regulatory agency that is responsible for the planning of the motorway constitute system organizations. A public, like a suburban neighborhood affected by the construction of the motorway, that comes together to oppose the project, constitutes a lifeworld organization. The third category, namely the mixed organization, could be constituted by an established environmental organization that receives some state funding, has access to official forums and, as such, assists the people of the affected neighborhood in negotiating with the involved system organizations.

Whilst the first category appears to be thoroughly discreet due to the clear association with the realm of the system, the other two types of organizations seem to be rather ambiguous. This

---

<sup>81</sup> For further considerations on a number of these pivotal questions see e.g. chapter 5.2.

is reflected in the inconsistent terminology of Leitch and Neilson, who repeatedly refer to mixed organizations also as 'mature lifeworld organization' and to lifeworld organization also as 'organized public'. This terminology may suggest that it is essentially the procedural or emergent character of the categories that refuses the establishing of a clear distinction: the public gradually *becomes* organized to form a lifeworld organization, which may *mature* to evolve into a mixed organization. The necessity of this procedural distinction between different degrees of organization becomes evident when focusing on the concept of the lifeworld and its distinction from the system (cf. chap. 2.2.3): hence an organization can only be seen as truly anchored in the lifeworld as long as it is thoroughly non-economic and non-governmental. This entails obvious limits to the degree of organization: if what Leitch and Neilson refer to as 'the process of becoming organized' or the 'cementing' of "formal membership and leadership structures" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 133) entails the introduction of symbolic media (money and power), then the organization in question inevitably operates according to the rationale of the system—not the lifeworld. It seems to be difficult to define useful characteristics to describe lifeworld organizations and establish useful categories to distinguish them from the economy, the state, and other functional systems. Habermas (1992a), who also criticizes the deficit of existing definitions, refers, like Leitch and Neilson, to the investigation conducted by Cohen and Arato (1990). These establish the following criteria to distinguish types of organizations from the functional systems such as economy and the state from those organizations coupled with the lifeworld:

*Plurality*: families, informal groups, and voluntary associations whose plurality and autonomy allow for a variety of forms of life; *publicity*: institutions of culture and communication; *privacy*: a domain of individual self-development and moral choice; and *legality*: structures of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy and publicity from at least the state, and tententially, the economy (Cohen, Arato, 1990: 346; cited in Habermas, 1992a: 445; italics in original).

In Habermas' terms, only such forms of organization can promote a 'discursive design' that allow for lifeworld rationality and can be seen as an "organizational substratum" that is "emerging from the private sphere" (Habermas, 1996: 367). Corresponding to this, Leitch and Neilson state that the "distinction between publics and lifeworld organizations develops over time and is an ongoing process" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 133). To give a practical example, a lifeworld organization may form in the course of a heterogeneous social movement. Such a social movement, likewise what one would refer to as 'the gay', 'the feminist' or 'the environmental' movement, has a great number of different agendas and partially conflicting actions (cf. Melucci, 1988). As such, it is not (yet) a social actor in the sense that it has established own and uniform rules and goals—which are important aspects of an organization (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 132). But a social movement may become a social actor "at the point where [a lifeworld organization] takes form" (133).



The aforementioned criteria established by Cohen and Arato (1990) are also the basis on which can further be elucidated why mixed organizations are characterized by Leitch and Neilson to be located on the 'seam' between lifeworld and system and can be said to fulfill ambiguous relations to publics (e.s.). What they refer to as a process of 'maturing' implies that these organizations change what the authors called an 'offensive' or 'defensive role' vis-à-vis the system, to an 'amelioration role'. Thus these organizations "might assist the introduction of the logics of the system into the lifeworld" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 134). Leitch and Neilson instance the organization of *Greenpeace* as fulfilling such an 'amelioration role'; the difficult situation of *Greenpeace* as a mixed organization on the 'seam' between the two rationales is underscored by *Greenpeace's* policy of refusing funds from corporations and governments (ibid.).

Ultimately the aspects discussed above are only a small fraction of potential further considerations that can be conducted on the basis of Leitch and Neilson's application. Obvious starting points for further considerations are the two categories of relations, though conceptualized, but disregarded in the following by the authors, namely 'intersystem organization relations' and 'intra-organizational relations'. Also, it is pointed out, that the framework needs more theoretical lining drawn from organizational theory (cf. 137). And even though the authors do not engage in ethical considerations, they claim that their application could be a basis to "develop links with appropriate theory on communicative ethics" (138). Looking at these possible further considerations the application by Leitch and Neilson, which is acknowledged to possibly have "raised more questions than it has answered" (137), can be viewed as a 'nucleus' for further, public-centered efforts in public relations theory.

Further pivotal questions that can be raised in the course of Leitch and Neilson's application are: what different types of public relations practices are typical for each of the three types of relations? How do the different types of organizations are different in their 'discourse resources'? Even though one would assume a clear superiority of system organizations in this regard, Leitch and Neilson claim that lifeworld organizations "have the potential to equal system organizations in terms of access to recourses including public relations" (ibid.). An interesting question regarding the theoretical framework would be: how coherent is Leitch and Neilson's concept of the mixed organization as 'on the seam' between lifeworld and system with Habermas' theory? Are these types of organizations not inevitably following goal rationality instead of promoting mutual understanding, and are thus more clearly referred to as system organizations? Or similar: can and if so, under what premise, a lifeworld organization that allegedly equals system organizations in terms of access to resources such as professional public relations expertise, still coherently referred to as coupled with the lifeworld? Furthermore, Leitch and Neilson, subsequent to their conceptualization of the public and the public sphere, reveal the dominant public relations mod-

els as “inadequate frameworks for public relations practice” when looking at the “face of the complexities and subtleties inherent in the concept of multiplicity” (138). This multiplicity, i.e. the “multiple subject positions occupied by individuals within multiple publics within the multiple sites of the public sphere”, subsequently leads to the important question of how to adequately assess ‘publics’ and the ‘public sphere’ so as to avoid too simplistic concepts (137). The application of Leitch and Neilson does not further investigate in this direction but the authors explicitly suggest according further inquiry on the basis of the conducted application (cf. *ibid.*).<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> For further considerations on a number of questions raised above see chapter 5.2.

## 4 Intermediate Reflections

Before we engage into particular further considerations in the following chapter, we first want to conduct some general reflections regarding the applications discussed in chapter 3. We commence by making some global recapitulatory remarks regarding the demonstrations and discussions of applications as conducted in the previous chapter (chap. 4.1). Furthermore, we compare the entirety of these applications with Susanne Holmström's (1997) idea of the 'intersubjective public relations paradigm' (chap. 4.2); we do so, with the intent of emphasizing a fundamental difference amongst the various efforts of applying Habermas' theory. Connected to the emphasis of this difference we voice the suspicion that some of the applications may entail theoretical aporia. Following we further elucidate some similarities and conflicts between Habermas' theory on the one hand and the applications on the other (chap. 4.3). In so doing we first clarify how public relations can be conceived in terms of Habermas' theory, and then draw on this account to make explicit whether and in how far the aforementioned difference entails theoretical aporia in some of the applications.

### 4.1 Recapitulatory Remarks

#### 4.1.1 Different Theoretical Foci, Different Theoretical Complexity

In the previous chapter we explored different facets of applying Habermas' theory to public relations. Within four different 'perspectives' we demonstrated how the extensive theoretical program depicted in chapter 2.2 can be drawn upon for an analysis and modeling of public relations practice (cf. chap. 3.1 and 3.2), in grounding and enacting public relations ethics (cf. chap. 3.3), as well as for broader macro societal considerations on public relations (cf. chap. 3.4). In doing so, we made comprehensible how the different applications put different emphases on different core concepts of Habermas' theory: the applications presented in chapters 3.1 and 3.3 primarily focus on discourse ethics, the applications demonstrated in chapters 3.2.1 and 3.4 primarily focus on the concept of the public sphere or rather the two-tiered concept of lifeworld and system, whilst the applications presented in chapters 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 furthermore primarily emphasize pragmatic considerations and the system of validity claims. The applications demonstrated in chapter 3.2, for instance, different from those applications discussed in chapter 3.3, focus neither on morally-based directives, nor on ethical principles. Moreover, in chapters 3.2.2 and 3.2.4.2 we demonstrated how criticism regarding a practical level application has prompted a 'shift' away from characteristic concepts of Habermas' theory. Here an application is explicitly distanced from the ethical implication of the concept of communicative rationality and thereby also from those applications demonstrated in chapter 3.3. The conceptual considerations and the procedures promoted by this application are supposed to be solely concerned with effectiveness from the per-

spective of the communicator: organizations are recommended to apply the model not for the purpose of realizing ethical communication and conduct, but so as not to “postpone or cancel their plans” (Burkart, 2007: 253). This ‘shift’, however, as a reaction to criticism regarding utopian forms of symmetrical communication in public relations, did lead to some limiting remarks, though not to a dismissal of Habermas’ concept of communicative action altogether. In chapters 3.2.3 and 3.2.4.3 we, furthermore, demonstrated how a complete disregard for terms of communicative rationality consequently leads to a rejection of Habermas’ concept.

Besides dealing with these different theoretical foci, we also demonstrated how Habermas’ theory can be applied by means of very different conceptual complexity. Whilst in the ‘evaluative perspective’ (cf. chap. 3.1) Habermas’ theory is simply enacted for a critical analysis of certain aspects of practical public relations—not without undergoing some considerable misconceptions of the theoretical framework (cf. chap. 3.1.3)—other applications, especially those discussed in chapter 3.4 and partially those in chapters 3.2 and 3.3, undertake elaborate theoretical efforts. The wide range of this spectrum is evident when comparing the detailed argument based on Habermas’ concept of the public sphere as well as his distinction between lifeworld and system conducted by Leitch and Neilson (2001; cf. chap. 4.4.2) on the one hand, and the considerations of Maier (2005; cf. chap. 4.2.1), which are strikingly cursory regarding the theoretical framework, on the other.

#### **4.1.2 The Pivotal Questions**

In chapter 3, a variety of questions were raised in the course of demonstrating and discussing the different forms of applications. Some of these questions were already assessed in the respective sub-chapters (discussions), some were concluded as essential, pivotal questions emerging from the different applications. Taking an inclusive and comparative look at the conducted discussions in chapter 3, different groups of questions can be formed:

First, corresponding to the structure of chapter 3, i.e. according to the different ‘perspectives’, we can distinguish between: questions concerning the potential of Habermas’ theory for the analysis of practical aspects of public relations like the analytical application of validity claims and the ideal speech situation (cf. chap. 3.1); questions concerning aspects of modeling public relations practice like the conceptual ‘handling’ of Habermas’ concept of communicative action (cf. chap. 3.2); questions concerning the grounding and enacting of public relations ethics like the measuring the quality of ‘ethical’ discourse or the operability of inclusiveness in practical public relations (cf. chap. 3.3); and questions concerning societal aspects, like the conceptualization of publics and the public sphere or the role of public relations in the broader democratic process, i.e. the circulation of power (cf. chap. 3.4).

Second, we can see that in all the discussed perspectives, an important, overarching group of questions centers on the communicative process. Here the focus seems to lie especially on the conception of public relations practice in terms of dialog (cf. chap. 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3) and, furthermore, the different facets of the conflict between public relations practices on the one hand, and ideals of (ethical) communication as promoted by Habermas' theory on the other (cf. chap. 3.1. and 3.3). It may be questioned, for example, whether or not concrete forms of public relations resist Habermas' terminology because they are fundamentally non-dialogic, i.e. mediated and asymmetrical forms of communication, directed at mostly passive recipients. On a macro societal level this group furthermore entails questions concerning the role of the media system vis-à-vis actors trying to gain access to and influence in it.

Third, all types of questions briefly sketched out above can, of course, be posed in terms of conceptual coherency. On the one hand this entails the coherency of an application with the theoretical frame of reference, as demonstrated e.g. concerning the analytical application of the validity claims of sincerity and legitimacy (cf. chap. 3.1.3.2), or the inclusion of non-human participants in discourse (cf. chap. 3.1.3.3), the conceptual paralleling of communicative action and public relations (cf. chap. 3.2.2 and 3.3), the disregard of understanding as the inherent telos of human speech (cf. chap. 3.2.3), the establishing of substantial codes of ethics (cf. chap. 3.3.2), or the conceptualization of distinct types of organizations (cf. chap. 3.4.2). On the other hand, as we have seen in chapters 3.2.4 and 3.3.4, for instance, a question regarding the coherency of an application can certainly be posed in terms of a question concerning the compatibility of the general theoretical framework and the field of public relations as such. Such critique can, for instance, be put forth from the stance of different theoretical paradigms, as seen in the confrontation of the applications in chapters 3.2 and 3.3 with the organizational perspective of Theis-Berglmair (1995), or in the critique conducted from the constructivist perspective of Merten (2000).

Of course, in the context of this thesis, these groups are merely one way of summarizing the important questions emerging from the demonstration and discussion of potential applications of Habermas' theory—some overlap between these groups is evident and further groups are undoubtedly conceivable. Looking at the considerations conducted in chapter 3, however, these groups seem to adequately reflect and summarize the important questions.

## **4.2 In Search of a Category: The Intersubjective Paradigm**

At first glance, it appears that the recapitulatory remarks made above reflect the immense diversity of the applications to a greater extent than demonstrating their similarities. Thus it appears appropriate to assume a more abstract perspective from which to gain some comprehensive and categorical insights on the applications demonstrated in chapter 3. To do so, we can make use of

some meta-theoretical considerations conducted by Holmström, who in her dissertation (1996) and subsequent articles (1997, 1999), explores the contrasting theories of Habermas (1981a, 1981b) and Niklas Luhmann (1987) as “paradigms for reflection on the public relations phenomenon” (Holmström, 1997: 24). The crux of the matter in Holmström’s efforts is the central conflict between the socio-theoretical paradigms of Habermas and Luhmann: the disagreement on one of sociology’s most fundamental problems, namely the relation between an individual subject on one side and a social structure on the other.

From a normative, subject-oriented tradition, Habermas argues that it makes sense to work with individual categories on the level of social systems. In contrast, Luhmann, from a functionalist, systems-oriented position, maintains that, in the evolution of modern societies, qualities have emerged whereby social relations can no longer be traced to conscious acts by individuals (26).

Whilst Habermas advocates the possibility of common reasoning by means of intersubjective communication within the lifeworld, i.e. within a common interpretative framework (cf. chap. 2.2), precisely this is rejected by Luhmann, who postulates that it is the different logics of social systems that construct reason (cf. Holmström, 1997: 27). Subsequently Habermas embarks on the critical tradition that aims to construct normative theories, employing critical analysis to improve society; meanwhile Luhmann concentrates on the mere question of how society functions without trying to describe certain aspects as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. His social-systematic paradigm implies that social relations are only possible via social systems (cf. 30–35). From this perspective the possibility of understanding as promoted by Habermas is denied because each system is created upon its own logic and thus self-referential: cognition “is bound to the specific logic of the observing system” (31), a perspective from which everything is observed and evaluated and that produces a unique image of the world. Hence conflicts, for instance on social responsibility or perceptions on its very concept, can never be collectively solved by means of all-embracing norms or consent, since every system is bound to its own perceptions. But the process of reflection allows a system to establish an understanding of itself as the environment of other systems. Hence “restrictions and co-orientation mechanisms in [the system’s] decision-making process” are developed “with regard to other social systems” (34). The ultimate motive that drives reflexive behavior is the securing of the system’s own autonomy. Habermas’ critical theory perspective on the other hand can be drawn upon to show that conflicts relevant to public relations occur “where the system with its strategic goal rationality, imposes itself upon lifeworld rationality” (29). A conflict—on socially responsible behavior for instance—may be solved by explicitly implying lifeworld rationality in the process of public discourse. Holmström now points out that if public relations is, on the basis of Habermas’ theory, characterized as an effort of an organization to engage in discourse, e.g. to gain legitimacy in society, it is looked at according to an intersubjective paradigm. Thus it is idealized as a practice for re-establishing the coupling between system

and lifeworld and may be described as “an ‘interpreter’ between the communicative rationality of the lifeworld, which is oriented towards understanding, and the system’s goal rationality” (ibid.). Holmström, furthermore, points out that the intersubjective paradigm consequently leads to an understanding that promotes public relations as a practice described as symmetrical communication (cf. ibid.). In order to adequately align with the theoretical concept constituting this paradigm, what is called ‘public relations dialog’ will need to fulfill four central criteria: (a) its underlying rationality needs to be that of understanding and not that of strategic goals, (b) it needs to be performed on behalf of an individual subject, (c) the employed language needs to meet the conditions for the potential challenging of validity claims, and (d) it should be preceded by the genuine intention of reaching mutual understanding (cf. ibid.).

If we match these paradigmatic considerations with the applications discussed in chapter 3, we can produce a better understanding of the scope of applications presented here. On the one hand, some of the applications explicitly build on dialogic criteria (cf. chap. 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.3). On the other hand, the application demonstrated in chapter 3.2.3, for instance, though generally drawing on the intersubjective paradigm, does not do so by promoting the aforementioned dialogical criteria. And, beyond that, the applications demonstrated in chapter 3.4, adhere to a broader societal perspective, which produces a strategic understanding of public relations.

Ultimately, the above considerations elucidate something essential: they show how Holmström’s account of the intersubjective paradigm can only coherently refer to those applications of Habermas’ theory that model public relations practices as symmetrical communication, not including macro-level considerations. Those analyses demonstrated in chapter 3.1, which simply apply Habermas’ concept to evaluate certain aspects of practical public relations from a critical theory perspective, the model of Eisenegger and Imhof, which focuses solely on strategic action (cf. chap. 3.2.3), just as the applications on the societal level (cf. chapter 3.4), do not seem to fit the depicted paradigm. Accordingly, if we muster Holmström’s considerations with the total of applications demonstrated in chapter 3—applications that all draw on the very same general theoretical framework—we see that the line drawn by the authors paradigmatic distinctions does not define a category that equally includes all these applications, but rather creates a ‘borderline’ that divides them. Looking at this conflict further emphasizes a suspicion we already expressed in some of the above discussions: there may exist some significant theoretical aporia in some of the applications. To further elucidate this manifest suspicion, it is helpful to first explicitly demonstrate how public relations is conceived, not in applications of the theory, but in Habermas’ very own terms.

## 4.3 Similarities and Conflicts with the Theoretical Framework

### 4.3.1 Public Relations in Terms of Habermas

Looking at the field of social theory at large, Ihlen and van Ruler (2009: 6) find that public relations “has received remarkably scant attention”. The evaluation of Habermas’ efforts in this regard, is surprisingly contradictory. On the one hand he is said not to study public relations as such (cf. e.g. Ihlen, Ruler, 2007: 243; Holmström, 1997: 37)—a claim that, looking at Habermas’ considerations in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), appears not to be entirely true and is later rearticulated by Ihlen and van Ruler to say that Habermas pays attention to public relations only “in passing” (Ihlen, Ruler, 2009: 7). On the other hand we find claims that Habermas provides a comprehensive and fundamental review of public relations (cf. Liebert, 1995: 38)—an assumedly exaggerated evaluation that appears to be based on the author’s confusion over republications of Habermas’ texts.<sup>83</sup> These inconsistencies are a further motivation to aim for a detailed demonstration in the context of how public relations is conceived in Habermas’ terms.

#### 4.3.1.1 The Changing Functions of the Press and the Primacy of Advertising

Habermas’ understanding of public relations can be demonstrated following his concept of the transformation of the public sphere in general (cf. chap. 2.2.5), and his account of the changing function of the model of the free press in particular (see especially Habermas, 1962: 200–215; 1989: 181–195). As depicted in chapter 2.2.5, the press can be conceived as an important factor in Habermas’ concept of the public sphere (see also Habermas, 1962: 44–57; 1989: 31–43). The momentous developments of the press in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are essential to the emergence of what Habermas refers to as ‘liberal bourgeois publicity’; developments that produced moralistic and critical journals (*moralische und kritische Schriften*) which form an important foundation of public reasoning. The early press was organized in small private businesses and developed, in a first step, from an institution of mere collecting and publishing of daily news to an important contributor to public opinion. In a second step, this function was further enhanced by the press embarking on what Habermas calls pedagogical and political functions, enhancing its critical and moralistic potential (cf. Habermas, 1962: 200f; 1989: 181f). The characteristic structures of this early press were that they were organized as homogenous ‘convolutes’ in which the functions of litterateur, journalist, editor, and publisher converged, and that they often ignored the economic function of the underlying business. Such early press was dominated by publicist,

---

<sup>83</sup> It seems that Liebert bases this evaluation on the fact that he finds Habermas treating public relations not only in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), but also in a later publication in the volume *Medienforschung* (Habermas, 1985b). Referring to both texts separately, Liebert misses the fact that the latter is actually no more than an identical republication of a section of the sixth chapter in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.



not economic, imperatives. It merely prolonged or extended public debate and can thus coherently be referred to as an institution *of* the public. To Habermas it is: “wirksam in der Art eines Vermittlers und Verstärkers, nicht mehr bloßes Organ des Informationstransportes und noch kein Medium der Konsumentenkultur” (Habermas, 1962: 202).<sup>xvii</sup>

The pivotal point in the further development of the press and its political functions is the development of the constitutional state (cf. Habermas, 1962: 203; 1989: 184). Here the press no longer needs to defend its ‘opinion-function’—because the latter is now constitutionally protected—and consequently returns from publicist to economic or commercial imperatives: the press evolves into a business that primarily produces the good of advertising space. This development has momentous consequences. On the one hand it leads to an enhanced importance of private, economic interests within the business itself, on the other hand it enhances the external influence of interests that encroach upon this business from other private enterprises (cf. Habermas, 1962: 204f, 1989: 185f); a process of gradual ‘commercialization’ that ultimately enhances the possibility of manipulation:

Seitdem der Absatz des redaktionellen Teils mit dem Absatz des Annoncenteils in Wechselwirkung steht, wird die Presse, bis dahin Institution der Privatleute als Publikum, zur Institution bestimmter Publikumsteilnehmer als Privatleuten – nämlich zum Einfallstor privilegierter Privatinteressen in der Öffentlichkeit (Habermas, 1962: 204).<sup>xviii</sup>

It is the principles of economic, technological, and organizational concentration and centralization that fundamentally change the structure of the press that extend its publicist reach and effectiveness and thereby extend the influence of private interests (cf. Habermas, 1962: 106f; 1989: 187f).<sup>84</sup> Whilst the early press, as described by Habermas, was an extended function *of* public debate, the evolving press of mass media extends the influence of private interests *on* public debate; and this influence of privileged private interests changes the public sphere as such. Whilst the distinction between the realm of the private sphere and the realm of the public sphere consequently implies that private interests are separated from public interests, the new structures of mass media and advertising lead to private people (e.g. owners of corporations) influencing the private people as the public (cf. Habermas, 1962: 208; 1989: 189); and this form of influence has evolved significantly: to Habermas, systematic advertising became a form of effective manipulation by means of market research. Furthermore, he describes a development in which the adver-

---

<sup>84</sup> In the liberal model of the public sphere, institutions of public reasoning were protected from state-run interferences by being anchored in the realm of the private sphere. But due to further economic, technological, and organizational concentration between the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they became an important factor of power. (The first big private press corporations evolved at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the USA.) Hence, it was especially the anchoring in the private sphere that now thwarts the critical publicist functions of the press. The amount of involved capital as well as the importance of the function regarding public opinion led to great efforts to make the press subject to the control of the state turning private institutions into public ones (cf. Habermas, 1962: 205f; 1989: 186f).

tising industry not only gains influence on existing publicist organs but, in fact, develops its own publicist organs such as catalogs and consumer magazines. Habermas claims that this ‘invasion’ of private advertising in mass media consequently leads the public to debate over goods of consumption rather than political matters—a process he refers to as the soft compulsion of constant consumption training (cf. Habermas, 1962: 208–211; 1989: 189–192).

#### 4.3.1.2 *Meinungspflege*: From Advertising to Public Relations

Analogous to these developments, advertising increasingly fulfills an important additional function: the accelerated influence of private interests in mass media is not only used to further economic interests, from the beginning this influence is linked to political interests as well—the furthering of privileged private interests has a political dimension. To Habermas, the awareness and realization of this political dimension of advertising is the initial point of public relations practices, which he describes as gradually evolving into a key phenomenon in modern western societies in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Habermas, 1962: 212; 1989: 192f). Subsequently Habermas also goes on to claim that public relations has to be seen as having originated in the United States, and was introduced in Europe only after World War II (cf. Habermas, 1962: 212; 1989: 193).<sup>85</sup> Habermas furthermore differentiates public relations from forms of advertising, by referring to the degree to which it addresses the public sphere distinctively in political (not economical) matters: “Private Reklame wendet sich jeweils an andere Privatleute, sowie sie als Verbraucher in Frage kommen; der Adressat der public relations ist die ‘öffentliche Meinung’, sind die Privatleute als Publikum und nicht als Konsumenten unmittelbar” (Habermas, 1962: 212).<sup>xix</sup> Initially one could assume here that public relations is seen as a participative form of nurturing consensus, as a participant of public debate that is seen as constitutive of the liberal, public sphere. But public relations practices, by Habermas also referred to as *Meinungspflege* (opinion management), are only disguised in the form of *Räsonnement*:

Die Beeinflussung der Konsumenten entlehnt der klassischen Figur eines rasonierenden Publikums von Privatleuten ihre Konnotationen und macht sich deren Legitimationen zu nutze: die rezipierten Funktionen der Öffentlichkeit werden der Konkurrenz organisierter Privatinteressen integriert (ibid.).<sup>xx</sup>

To Habermas, the practices of public relations (i.e. the attempts to directly place privileged private opinion in different channels of communication or manufacture events that stimulate structures of mass media in a certain way), in aiming at making or creating news, ultimately dissolve the basic formal distinctions between content and advertising in journalism. Public relations formulates private organizational interests in terms of public interests, pretending as if the private

<sup>85</sup> This, however, is a perspective that has been generally refuted in public relations research (cf. e.g. Kunczik, 1997).

people could still liberally debate them in terms of *Räsonnement*, when in fact this debate is dominated by the organization that aims at the engineering of consent in its own favor. Drawing on Charles Steinberg (1958), Habermas claims this engineering of consent to be the central task of public relations, because it allows for a “promotion to the public, suggesting or urging acceptance of a person, product, organization or idea” (Steinberg, 1958: 74; cited in Habermas, 1962: 213). The readiness to provide acceptance is promoted by the false consciousness that acceptance is formed within processes of public opinion based on liberal *Räsonnement*. But the aforementioned structures of mass media combined with public relations practices only produce what Habermas calls staged public opinion (cf. Habermas, 1962: 214; 1989: 195). Staged public opinion, in turn, produces not only acceptance of a certain brand but, moreover, a form of ‘quasi-political-credit’ for a firm, an industry, or a whole system. To Habermas, this form of public opinion is ‘alienated’ from the public opinion he sees as a product of liberal *Räsonnement*, to the degree to which privileged private interests, via the practices of public relations, manipulate the converging of interests (cf. *ibid.*). These practices, only disguised as a liberal form of debate, cannot allow for mutual unconstrained debate that presupposes rational consent, therefore leading to engineered consent: “Dem im Zeichen eines fingierten public interest durch raffinierte opinion-molding services erzeugten Konsensus fehlen Kriterien des Rasonablen überhaupt” (Habermas, 1962: 214).<sup>xxi</sup> In other words, rational consent collapses into mere good will produced by professional and strategic publicity. Ultimately public relations, as described on Habermas’ account, functions as a catalyzer of what he refers to as refeudalization (cf. chap. 2.2.5):

Die bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit nimmt im Maße ihrer Gestaltung durch public relations wieder feudale Züge an: die ‚Angebotsträger‘ entfalten repräsentativen Aufwand vor folgebereiten Kunden: Publizität ahmt jene Aura eines persönlichen Prestiges und übernatürlicher Autorität nach, die repräsentative Öffentlichkeit einmal verliehen hat (Habermas, 1962: 214).<sup>xxii</sup>

As a significant factor of refeudalization, public relations contributes to turning a liberal public into compliant consumers ready to follow, escalating the new manipulative principle of publicity, which disables Habermas’ ideal of critical publicity. Organizations practicing public relations do not engage in public debate so as to concentrate on the topic on which a compromise is to be achieved. They do so, so as to strengthen their own, specific position—they display representation and unfold prestige (cf. Habermas, 1962: 220; 1989: 200). Thus, public relations does “not genuinely concern public opinion but opinion in the sense of reputation” (Habermas, 1989: 200f); a form of courtesy that organizations can in turn transfer into political pressure. And since these practices are adapted by all forms of associations, since not only private organizations, but public authority aims for publicity in addressing citizens as consumers, Habermas stresses the dubiousness of publicity as the organizational principle of the democratic state (cf. Habermas,

1962: 227; 1989: 206). Public relations, as described by Habermas, does not contribute to democracy—it prevents democracy.<sup>86</sup>

The account of public relations given by Habermas in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) strongly reflects the author's critical theory perspective, inquiring about ideological and material conditions that may restrict human freedom and emancipation. The concept clearly conceives of public relations in terms of a means for strategically enforcing particular interests. Or as Kunczik (2010: 519) puts it: to be anything *but* systematic manipulation, public relations would have to be 'unhinged' from its social function as an instrument of the privileged. To the degree public relations is practiced so as to strengthen a client's own, specific position it stands in conflict with Habermas' ideal concept of democracy (cf. 414). His considerations do not, like Benno Signitzer and Carola Wamser (2006: 393) suggest, emphasize "the emancipatory potential" of public relations—in fact they emphasize the opposite.

#### 4.3.1.3 Three Revisions and a Modified Theoretical Framework

Today, as we demonstrated in chapter 2.2.5, the text from which we draw the above concept of public relations, has to be seen in a new context: not only has Habermas meanwhile acknowledged a number of reductions and misconceptions on his account, but his general theoretical efforts have developed significantly. This has led Habermas to make some revisions on the concept as well as efforts to embed his early considerations into his current theoretical framework (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 11–50; 1992). Looking at this new context, the interesting question with regard to our considerations is of course: in how far do the revisions affect the concept of public relations depicted above, and how can we translate the original understanding of public relations from *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* into Habermas' modified theoretical framework?

As we see it, the revisions made by Habermas only scarcely effect our above demonstrations because the concept of the public sphere transforming into a platform for the furthering of private interests by means of an infiltration of power, which is essential to the aforementioned concept of public relations, remains largely untouched (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 29; 1992: 437). In this regard, Habermas solely revises the analysis of this infiltration of power and his subsequent assessment of the changes in the public's behavior as too simplistic, leading him to label his account of the resisting power and critical potential of an, in fact, much differentiated mass public, as too simplistic (cf. chap. 2.2.5). This, however, does not affect the depicted concept of public relations as such, but it does of course affect the idea of the consequences of what has been as-

---

<sup>86</sup> This position in Habermas' early text can be seen as diametrically opposed to that of then-German scholars in public relations at the time like Carl Hundhausen (1951, 1957, 1969), Albert Oeckl (1964, 1967, 1976) or Ronneberger (1977, 1982). According to Kunczik (Kunczik, 2010: 93), these authors generally advanced the view that if it were not for public relations, democracies would collapse into chaos.

essed as public relations participation in a process of refeudalization. Public relations efforts to engineer consent do not—as it were alongside a model of a linear causal process—simply form compliant consumers ready to follow, but are met with the resisting power of a pluralistic and differentiated mass public. Regardless of the different idea of the consequences, public relations still appears to be one of many key factors in an arrangement that conditions citizens to become compliant consumers. Public relations is one of the mechanisms “that in democracies constituted as social-welfare states function[s] to alienate citizens from the political process” (Habermas, 1992b: 450).

According to Habermas’ new terminology, public relations, i.e. strategic communication between an organization and its publics, is self-evidently a form of strategic action. More accurately, being depicted by Habermas as a form of manipulation, public relations, in the grid of social actions, is a form of conscious deception and, as such, a subcategory to concealed strategic action (cf. Habermas, 1981a: 440–452; 1984: 328–337). Just as any other form of (concealed or open) strategic action, conscious deception is mutually exclusive with communicative action: it “cannot be carried out with the simultaneous intention of reaching a consensus” (Habermas, 1994: 51). Furthermore, since strategic action can be seen as the complementary concept to the concept of the system (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 182), it is plausible that public relations, to the extent that it is conducted by economic or political organizations, is inevitably bound to system rationality. Both, the clear distinction from communicative action as well as the affiliation with the system make plausible why public relations can hardly be seen as qualified to, if only approximately, fulfill the demanding preconditions of unconstrained symmetrical communication *à la* discourse ethics (cf. Habermas, 1990a: 86–94).

In contrast to the early ideology-critical approach in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, the new framework makes it possible to assess public relations by means of a theoretical terminology that allows for empirical sociological investigations on the basis of “the preconditions for communication that have to be fulfilled in the various forms of rational debate and in negotiations if the results of such discourses are to be presumed to be rational” (Habermas, 1992b: 448). In other words, on the basis of Habermas’ normative approach one can investigate to what extent concrete forms of public relations circumvent discursive arrangements.

### **4.3.2 Theoretical Aporia? Confronting the Applications with Habermas’ Terminology**

Having demonstrated how public relations is conceived in Habermas’ terms we can now further elucidate whether and how some of the efforts of applying Habermas theory to public relations depicted in chapter 3 hold the assumed theoretical aporia with regard to Habermas’ concepts of

ethics, communicative action, the public sphere and deliberative democracy, as well as lifeworld and system.

Maybe the most apparent theoretical inconsistencies appear where Habermas' concept of discourse ethics is drawn upon to ground and enact public relations ethics (cf. chap. 3.3). Unlike Habermas himself, these applications conceive of public relations as a possible contributor in realizing the ideal speech situation. In so doing, all of the applications demonstrated in the course of the 'moral perspective' not only align public relations with the concept of communicative action, they moreover make an effort to transfer conditions for ethical communication as 'condensed' in Habermas' universalization principle onto public relations practice. We assessed some of the challenges this entails in chapter 3.3.4. In chapter 5.1 we will develop some further arguments in this regard.

Though not with the same far-reaching ethical demands, the applications demonstrated in chapters 3.2.1, and 3.2.2 also suggest that public relations can be conceived in terms of communicative action—as mutual argumentation, not manipulation. Different from Habermas, who sees public relations as aiming to engineer consent in favor of privileged interests, these applications, by conceptualizing public relations as 'consensus-oriented' or 'relational', seem to view public relations as aiming for a power-neutral 'nurturing' of consent. The authors advocating these applications, on the grounds of Habermas' terminology, maneuver their concepts to the impossible and unsustainable position in which the strategic communication between an organization and its publics (i.e. instrumental action based in system rationality) is conceived of as action with an orientation toward understanding. We have assessed some of the challenges that emerge from this contradiction especially in connection with Burkart's model (cf. chap. 3.2.4.2).

As can be expected, the applications paralleling public relations with action oriented toward understanding, or moreover discursive ideals, also assess their contribution to public sphere processes and democracy different than Habermas. Whilst Habermas' concept, as demonstrated above, views public relations as interfering with the political public sphere by promoting mere publicity—thereby alienating citizens from the political process—, these applications appear to conceive of public relations as quite the reverse: organizations practicing public relations appear (at least implicitly) as societal participants, analogous to the ideal of citizens in the concept of deliberative democracy, who "share a commitment to the resolution of problems of collective choice through public reasoning, and regard their basic institutions as legitimate insofar as they establish a framework for free public deliberation" (Cohen, 1989: 21). This can be confirmed by referring to the application by Pearson (cf. chapter 3.3.4.1) who claims that his concept of ethical public relations promotes a discursive arrangement that allows for the 'forceless force' of the better argument and thereby also promotes a political philosophy that itself "does not specify

what the good life is” but that provides a “methodological framework within which each individual may fulfill his own contemplation of the good life” (Day, 1961: 5f; cited in Pearson, 1989b: 127). Public relations conceived as such, is seen as supportive of a political public sphere un-subverted by power.

By conducting their considerations in terms of communicative action rather than systematic manipulation, the aforementioned applications, different from Habermas, necessarily assimilate public relations with the concept of the lifeworld. But within the drawn upon theoretical framework, organizations practicing public relations, be they political or economic organizations, are part of the systematically integrated field of action (cf. chap. 2.2.3). The system, as conceived of by Habermas, cannot adopt the mode of communicative integration without damage to its systematic logic and thus its ability to function (cf. Habermas, 1990b: 36). The fact that the mentioned applications, regardless of the clear distinction between lifeworld and system, want to conceptualize and plan public relations practice in terms of action oriented toward understanding, thus, not only evokes irreducible conflicts within the framework, but also seems to suggest that these applications are practically dysfunctional.<sup>87</sup> The disregard of the lifeworld-system distinction does at times even lead some authors of these applications to formulate rather undesirable requests: “To achieve social progress grounded in morally-binding mutual consensus, it is imperative that companies recognize problems inherent in current domination structures and take measures to neutralize power differentials” (Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 62). It is noticeable that these authors do not speak of a situational minimization of power differentials in favor of a discursive arrangement, but in fact call for their neutralization. The pressing question of how to ensure the aspired ‘social progress’ in a setting where companies make efforts to neutralize power differentials remains unanswered. Unlike Yuthas and Reynolds, Burkart realizes the absurdity of such claims and consequently emphasizes the situational character of his model (cf. Burkart, 1995).

We can see above how a number of applications of Habermas’ theory to public relations ultimately appear to differ with their theoretical framework. In concluding chapter 4.2 we alluded to the fact that some of the applications demonstrated in chapter 3, though drawing on Habermas’ intersubjective paradigm, do not try to parallel public relations with communicative action. These applications are more coherent with Habermas’ theory and his concept of public relations as a generally strategic and manipulative form of action. Subsequently, the applications demonstrated in chapter 3.4, for instance, make it possible, in fact, to object to the dialogical as-

---

<sup>87</sup> A similar argument is developed by Zerfaß (2010: 55–62) in connection with the applications by Burkart and Pearson.

sumptions of authors like Maier or Burkart (cf. chap. 3.2), as well as Pearson, Leeper and Meisenbach (cf. chap. 3.3). This is the case, because the broader societal perspective applied in chapter 3.4 and the according considerations on power, allow one to view symmetrical public relations as just one more strategic option (among a number of other options) to ensure the survival and success of an organization (cf. Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 135). Regarding models of symmetrical public relations, Leitch and Neilson (2001) tersely point out that these “attempt to attribute communicative action to system organizations” whilst Habermas stresses that “communicative action is a characteristic of the lifeworld alone” (132). A societal-level application that draws on Habermas’ distinction between lifeworld and system can, furthermore, be consulted to criticize the ethical claims of those applications demonstrated in chapter 3.3. It can help to show that the concept of communicative action here is rather naïvely transferred into the reality of corporations, ignoring the theoretical incompatibility of communicative action and system rationality.<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, from Habermas’ stance, all applications conceptualizing public relations in terms of communicative action, claimed to be dialogical, promote a discursive process, or even stronger, claimed to be ethical in this regard, are participating in what Habermas describes as an effort of disguise; as an effort to appear as a form of *Raisonnement* (e.s.). From Habermas’ critical perspective, calls for greater ‘trust’ in public relations practice merely seem like efforts to conceal the actual role this practice plays in a process Habermas terms refeudalization. In this sense, those applications demonstrated in chapters 3.1, 3.2.3 as well as 3.4 coherently embark on Habermas’ concept of public relations as a strategic and instrumental form of action. Those applications demonstrated in chapters 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.3 on the other hand, try to draw on Habermas’ theory so as to model relational, consensus-oriented and discursive public relations. These applications can indeed be said to contribute to the false ideology Habermas is aiming to unmask. Examining the theoretical aporia above, the fact that the last-mentioned group of applications tries to conceive of public relations in Habermas’ terms of communicative action is, as Benson (2008: 5f) puts it, “surprising to say the least”.

---

<sup>88</sup> Leitch and Neilson (2001: 135f), for instance, explicitly underline the largely unjustified ethical claims associated with the two-way symmetrical model by Grunig and Hunt (1984); see also Juliet Roper (2005). This critique applies even more so to those applications discussed in chapter 3.3, because these utilize a more restrictive concept of understanding and symmetry. Other than the advocates of the two-way symmetrical model, who appear to conceive even of symmetrical communication first in *strategic* terms (cf. Grunig, Repper, 1992: 123), the application discussed in chapter 3.3, moreover, aim to apply Habermas’ concept of ideal speech to public relations. A number of challenges that this entails are already discussed in chapter 3.



## 5 Further Considerations

In this chapter, we conduct some further considerations regarding two of the four ‘perspectives’ from which we demonstrated and discussed possible applications of Habermas’ theory in chapter 3, namely the moral perspective of grounding and enacting public relations ethics on the basis of Habermas’ concept of discourse ethics (chap. 5.1), as well as the perspective of conceptualizing public relations in a macro societal context (chap. 5.2).

Regarding the moral perspective, we commence with a brief assessment of the difficulty of justifying substantial codes of ethics for public relations (chap. 5.1.1). Following we then combine two arguments demonstrated in chapter 3 so as to generate a further question for adjacent theoretical considerations on public relations as the corporate conscience and questions of moral responsibility for the natural environment (chap. 5.1.2). Finally we allude to some general constraints that emerge from the ‘prostration’ of discourse ethics (chap. 5.1.3).

Regarding the societal perspective we draw on Habermas’ more recent texts on the political public sphere and processes of political communication so as to conduct further considerations on the public sphere, opinion-formation, mass media, and public influence by means of public relations. Here, we first assess the function in which public relations engages in the public sphere (chap. 5.2.1), to then put special emphasis on the power structures of mediated mass communication and their effect on public relations conducted by different social actors (chap. 5.2.2). Following we present two further considerations on these power structures (chap. 5.2.3), before further developing our above considerations on public relations of the so-called ‘lifeworld organizations’ (chap. 5.2.4).

### 5.1 On Discourse Ethics and Public Relations

#### 5.1.1 The Difficulty of Justifying Substantial Ethical Codes

In discussing pivotal aspects of applying Habermas’ theory to public relations ethics, we pointed out that devising substantial norms for codes of ethics, as implied by Leeper (1996), would not only exceed Pearson’s (1989b) claims regarding an imperative for public relations, but might ultimately lead to a conflict with the theoretical framework as such (cf. chap. 3.3.4.2). As demonstrated in chapter 2.2.4, the principle of discourse ethics “prohibits singling out with philosophical authority any specific normative contents” (Habermas, 1990a: 122). This singling out of specific normative content, though, appears to be what Leeper actually has in mind when aiming for substantial norms for codes of ethics. In so doing, Leeper ultimately goes beyond discourse ethics’ procedural imperative that is justified by revealing the irreducible moral point of view. Consequently, Leeper’s project of devising normative content cannot be referred to as a coherent application of Habermas’ theory—at least not in the narrower sense. It may be more accurately

described as an effort to apply Karl-Otto Apel's version of discourse ethics: Apel, unlike Habermas, advocates a transcendental-pragmatic version of discourse ethics that allows the temporary preservation of substantial conventions and institutions that are formed by adherence to the universalization principle (cf. Apel, 1988). Habermas on the other hand, who labels Apel's efforts as an unsuitable overextension of the normative approach (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 10), is—as demonstrated in chapter 2.2.4—solely concerned with the revelation of a (counterfactual) moral point of view.<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately, considering the aforementioned conflict, Leeper's application can be seen as a 'borderline case' that, in aiming for normative content, produces an inevitable problematic regarding its theoretical frame of reference. In the context of this thesis, this critical aspect of Leeper's application is, hence, useful to elucidate an important theoretical boundary of Habermas' program for ethical considerations in public relations: it can only be coherently drawn upon to apply a critical point of view for the analysis of (public relations) practices (as e.g. demonstrated in chapter 3.1) or for the justification of an imperative for ethical (public relations) conduct (as e.g. demonstrated in chapter 3.3.1). Furthermore, we have pointed out in chapter 3.3.4.3 that the effort of enacting the procedural imperative of the universalization principle itself entails a series of challenges, fully irrespective of their interface with public relations.

## **5.1.2 Nature: A Challenging Aspect of Applying Discourse Ethics to Public Relations**

### **5.1.2.1 Corporate Conscience and the Natural Environment**

In chapter 3.3 we demonstrated how ethical considerations drawing on Habermas' theory are connected with the pretense of conceptualizing public relations as the organizational or corporate conscience. The understanding of public relations as the corporate conscience is widespread, especially among scholars who subscribe to the idea of communication-symmetry (cf. e.g. Grunig, Hunt, 1984; Cutlip et al., 2000), as well as amongst practitioners: "Good public relations has been called the corporate conscience—an indispensable attitude of modern and progressive business. By keeping its conscience alive and alert, through good conduct and effective communications, corporate enterprise will merit a continued vote of public confidence" (Hill, 1958: 173). As Shannon Bowen (2008: 276f) points out, "[r]esearchers and practitioners alike maintained for decades that public relations officers should act as a corporate conscience", a pretense that reflects the "ideal social role of public relations, in which public relations facilitates dialog that is beneficial to society in general". Heath and Richard Nelson (1986), for instance, just like Pearson

---

<sup>89</sup> For further distinction between both versions of discourse ethics see e.g. Habermas (1983: 93–108; 1990: 82–98; 2005: 84–105) or Uwe Steinhoff (2006).

(1989b), Leeper (1996), or Meisenbach (2006)(see also chap. 3.3), build on the argument, i.e. to guarantee the ethical decision-making of an organization, public relations departments need to facilitate dialog with according stakeholders. This implies that beyond acting as accidental ethical counsel on consequences of management decisions, as documented by Christopher Spicer (1997) or Kenneth Plowman (1998), for instance, public relations practitioners are appointed to the considerable task of enacting the ethical conscience of an organization by means of communication. Hence, what can be conceived as public relations' central function, the managing of communication between an organization and its publics, is attributed a thoroughly ethical connotation.

In chapter 3.1.2 we demonstrated how Reynolds and Yuthas (2008), in aiming to be consistent with concepts in stakeholder management, also “include ‘the natural environment’ as a stakeholder, and do not eliminate from consideration non-human species and future generations” regarding the condition of generality (58). Recent publications on stakeholder management increasingly define not only the stakeholder as “any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization”, but, furthermore, explicitly include the natural environment and non-human species (Carroll, Buchholtz, 2006: 67f). Not only is the natural environment an increasingly important factor in considerations on stakeholder management, it is also a fairly prominent aspect in public relations research. Grunig and Jon White (1992: 40f), for instance, when demonstrating the effect of worldviews on public relations, allude to the problematic of an organization exercising dominance over its natural environment. There also exists an evident interest of public relations researchers in how public relations departments handle issues regarding the natural environment, especially with a focus on environmental disasters and with regard to questions of ethics (cf. e.g. Harrison, Prugh, 1989; Smith, 1993; Bowen, Power, 1993; Benoit, 1995; Livesey, 2002). The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, which occurred in Alaska in 1989, as a most notable example—reflected by the sources above—has attracted strong interest of the public relations scientific community. Furthermore, we can see that standards of responsibility reporting, beyond focusing on the social, prominently include the natural environment as a factor of organizational accountability (cf. Reynolds, Yuthas, 2008: 50–53). The *International Organization for Standardization* (ISO), for instance, issued a specification standard (the 14000 series) that provides requirements allowing to measure the performance of an organization (cf. e.g. Marcus, 1997); these requirements are especially concerned with non-human surroundings of an organization, i.e. natural resources, land, water, air, flora and fauna.

If one acknowledges, like Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) do, the natural environment of an organization as being an important aspect of public relations, and hence accepts the above concept of the stakeholder, one also generates a challenging demand regarding the aforementioned ethical concept of the corporate conscience: the public relations function, conceptualized in

terms of a corporate conscience, would have to prove to be conscious not only of human, but also of non-human stakeholders—it needs to be ‘environmentally conscious’. To further explore the potentials and challenges of Habermas’ theory for public relations in this regard, we can take this conclusion as a starting point to explore how Habermas’ moral theory responds to questions of the moral responsibility of human beings for their natural (i.e. non-human) environment.

### 5.1.2.2 Discourse Ethics and the Question of Moral Responsibility for the Natural Environment

In chapter 2.2.4 we demonstrated that Habermas’ concept of discourse ethics is centered around the interactions of ‘competent speakers’—rational subjects capable of speech and action. This indicates momentous implications regarding issues in ecological ethics. Consequently, Habermas acknowledges: “Der anthropozentrische Zuschnitt scheint Theorien des Kantischen Typs im Ansatz blind zu machen für Fragen, die sich aus der moralischen Verpflichtung des Menschen für seine nicht-menschliche Umwelt ergeben“ (Habermas, 1991: 219).<sup>xxiii</sup> This significant constraint, of course, hasn’t gone unnoticed amongst Habermas’ critics, and so Joel Whitebook claims that as “opposed to all forms of naturalistic ethics anthropocentrism holds that man is the only locus of value and the only being that commands respect in the universe” (Whitebook, 1979: 52). Combined with this critique regarding anthropocentrism in ethics, the author objects that ethics cannot simply adhere to the question of how to justify normative claims amongst a group of rational beings, but must be able to include those intuitions of compassion for non-human species. In replies to this critique and a similar argument by Thomas McCarthy (1982), Habermas is forced to assess such questions of moral responsibility for the natural environment. He does so by competing two arguments, one centered around the concept of anamnestic solidarity (cf. Habermas, 1982; 1984: 475–570), the other based on the capacity to suffer (cf. Habermas, 1991: 119–226; 1993: 19–111).

Habermas puts forth the first argument in connection with considerations of Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer:<sup>90</sup>

Gesetzt den Fall, daß die Nachgeborenen nur dank der Leiden und Opfer vergangener Generationen in den Genuß einer institutionalisierten Freiheit, in den Genuß wenn nicht geradezu einer gerechten Ordnung, so doch von Prozeduren gelangt sind, die Unrecht minimieren – dürfen sie eine Welt, die eine solche Entstehungsgeschichte hat, eine ‚gerechte‘ nennen? (Habermas, 1984b: 515f)<sup>xxiv</sup>

Habermas here refers to a feeling of compassion that is stimulated by commemorating past sacrifice and suffering: even a far developed and perfectly just world could not cancel out past sacrifice. Thus, this kind of compassion becomes an inevitable precondition without which an ideal

<sup>90</sup> Regarding the concept of anamnestic solidarity see also Helmut Peukert (2009: 300–308).

future society is itself thoroughly unjust. The author now claims that such a concept of anamnestic solidarity can be allied with his ethical program when we view past generations as necessary participants of the ideal and counterfactual idea of discourse (cf. Habermas, 1982: 246f; 1984: 516). Just as well, he states that we can interpret a feeling of compassion vis-à-vis our natural environment: compassion and solidarity regarding both past generations and the natural environment appear as limit concepts in a discourse ethic that is consistently thought out to the end (cf. Habermas, 1982: 246).

In dieser Hinsicht ist ‚Mitleid‘, Mitleid mit dem Schmerz einer Verletzung der moralischen und leiblichen Integrität vergangener Generationen, in ähnlicher Weise ein Grenzbegriff der Diskursethik wie ‚Natur an sich‘ ein Grenzbegriff der transzendentalpragmatischen Erkenntnistheorie ist (Habermas, 1984b: 517).<sup>xxv</sup>

Nevertheless, to Habermas’ program of discourse ethics, the concept of anamnestic solidarity can only serve as a metaphor, since it is not only concerned with sacrifice as a state of affair, but as moral injustice. When returning to the original ethical concept it appears that to characterize sacrifice as unjust, the related matter would, of course, itself have to be made subject to a discursive procedure. But due to its centering around the interactions of ‘competent speakers’, discourse ethics is unable to reveal sacrifice on behalf of the natural environment as truly unjust. This reveals: whilst an anthropocentric idea of anamnestic solidarity can—without mystification—hardly be allied with Habermas’ concept, his speech-centered program of discourse ethics remains entirely immune to the introduction of the natural environment, to a concept of nature-in-itself.

Habermas’ second argument in response to the objections by McCarthy (1982) and Whitebook (1979), aims to further reduce discourse ethics’ immunity toward entities that cannot fit the concept of the competent speaker. The author starts by acknowledging that, “our moral feelings, judgements, and actions are directed not only to subjects capable of speech and action” (Habermas, 1993: 105f). He instances categorical obligations toward animals:

[...] Tieren gegenüber fühlen wir uns kategorisch verpflichtet. Jedenfalls hat der Abscheu gegen Tierquälerei eine größere Verwandtschaft mit der Empörung über eine Verletzung moralischer Gebote als mit der bedauernden oder abschätzigen Einstellung gegenüber Personen, die, sagen wir, aus ihrem Leben nichts rechtes machen [...]. Wir ‚sollen‘ Tiere nicht brutal vernachlässigen oder gar grausam quälen (Habermas, 1991: 221).<sup>xxvi</sup>

In his effort to justify duties toward animals by appeal to his theory of intersubjectivity, Habermas speaks of a ‘quasi-moral responsibility’ that can be anchored in interactions with animals as well as the knowledge of their capacity to suffer (cf. 221–125). In other words: by connecting an entity’s entitlement to morality solely to its capacity to express suffering and participate in human interactions, Habermas ultimately denies moral rights to a vast spectrum of the non-human environment. Quite understandably scholars who, unlike Habermas, have their focus

specifically on questions of environmental ethics, quite frankly, reject his attempts as absurd (cf. Krebs, 1997).

### 5.1.2.3 Are Discourse Ethics Suited to Promote Environmental Consciousness in Public Relations?

Bearing the remarks made in the previous paragraph in mind, especially the last-mentioned critique from the side of environmental ethicists, it is difficult to read the question in the title of this paragraph in anything other than a cynical manner. As clearly demonstrated above, Habermas' principle of generalizations in fact only means generalization within the exalted circle of competent speakers. It only demands equal consideration of the interests of "all those we may assume are capable of adopting the perspective of all others" and that, through their potential 'yes' or 'no' responses, can contribute to determining whether a norm could "meet with the agreement of all and hence is valid" (Habermas, 1993: 108). It is only consistent that Habermas concludes his efforts by acknowledging that, within his theory of intersubjectivity, categorical obligations vis-à-vis animals are "a tricky moral question" and that human responsibility for plants and the preservation of whole species "cannot be derived from duties of interaction and thus cannot be *morally* justified" (111, italics in original).

Im Mitleid mit dem gequälten Tier, im Schmerz über zerstörte Biotope regen sich moralische Intuitionen, die durch den kollektiven Narzissmus einer letztlich anthropologisch zentrierten Betrachtungsweise nicht ernstlich befriedigt werden können (Habermas, 1991: 29).<sup>xxvii</sup>

Moreover, Habermas may even be too moderate in the critique of his own concept, when stating that it may not 'fully satisfy' some moral intuitions: what he labels the 'collective narcissism' of his anthropocentric concept not only fails to satisfy intuitions of environmental consciousness, it can, moreover, be accused of contributing to an anthropocentric *hybris* of mankind, which in fact promotes ignorance of the natural environment (cf. Meyer-Abich, 1986: 79–83). Thus we see, for instance, how Yuthas and Reynolds' (2008) claim to include the natural environment as a stakeholder in the process of ethical public relations conduct conceived on the basis of Habermas' theory (cf. chap. 3.1) can indeed be charged with missing sufficient theoretical grounding. Furthermore calls for a conceptualization of public relations as the corporate conscience, philosophically substantiated by discourse ethics, can be abrogated on the same grounds. At least from the perspective of those who advocate a concept of the stakeholder, which includes the natural environment of an organization (cf. Carroll, Buchholtz, 2006), the previous argument can constitute a strong case against the application of Habermas' theory to public relations. In a time, in which "sustainable development" is one of the "most important concepts for enterprises, organizations, governments and institutions" and "responsibility" is to be seen as one of the major "quality measurements of professional public relations" (Bentele, 2004: 487), a framework that

promotes ignorance of the natural environment may be a dubious theoretical resource for the grounding and enacting of public relations ethics.

### 5.1.3 General Constraints: The Prostration of Discourse Ethics

The arguments gathered in the previous demonstration regarding questions of the moral responsibility for the natural environment only constitute an exiguous fraction of an extensive discussion on the constraints of discourse ethics (cf. e.g. Gebauer, 1993; Gottschalk-Mazouz, 2000; Albert, 2003). Habermas immediately acknowledges the massive problems he is confronted with in this debate:

[...] meine restriktive Auffassung von der Leistungsfähigkeit der philosophischen Ethik [ist] vielleicht eine Enttäuschung; auf jeden Fall ist sie auch ein Stachel: die Philosophie nimmt niemandem die praktische Verantwortung ab. Übrigens auch nicht den Philosophen, die sich, wie alle anderen, moralisch-praktischen Fragen von großer Komplikation gegenübersehen und gut daran tun, sich zunächst einmal ein klares Bild von der Situation zu verschaffen. Dazu können die Geschichts- und Sozialwissenschaften mehr beitragen als die Philosophie (Habermas, 1991: 30).<sup>xxviii</sup>

The fact that Habermas explicitly turns ethics over to other sciences, to some clearly constitutes the prostration of discourse ethics (cf. Leschke, 2001: 68f) and shows how his program of philosophical justification has crashed (cf. Reese-Schäfer, 2001: 87). Habermas trivializes his own concept when stating that the “moral intuitions of everyday life are not in need of clarification by the philosopher” (Habermas, 1990a: 98). To him it is incumbent on moral theory to explain the moral point of view (cf. 211). In light of this blatant retraction, the efforts to ground and enact public relations ethics by means of Habermas’ philosophical program as demonstrated in chapter 3.3 may seem rather naïve—regardless of the demonstrated contradictions between public relations conduct and communicative action (cf. chap. 4.3)—especially so when these efforts are connected with the ‘emphatic claim of moral truth. It must be conceded that Habermas’ philosophical self-perception and his narrow focus on a moral theory that is restricted to explaining the moral point of view is no reason why others should confine their efforts in the same manner and not utilize his program to engage in all facets of practical philosophy (cf. Reese-Schäfer, 2001: 88f). But applications that interpret Habermas’ theory as though ethical discourse is at the horizon of practical realization and aim at deriving concrete steps for enacting the program, or ones that try to establish concrete codes of ethics on its basis and at the same time claim their philosophical authority, are not theoretically coherent with the concept of discourse ethics in Habermas’ sense.

## 5.2 On the Public Sphere, Public Opinion, Mass Media, and Influence

In chapter 4.3 we demonstrated how public relations is conceived in terms of Habermas’ theory by drawing on the author’s considerations on the press and its changing functions as given in

*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Habermas, 1962, 1989). Subsequently we concluded that, regardless of Habermas' revised assessment of the effect of an infiltration of power on the public sphere, public relations still appears to be one of the key manipulative factors in an arrangement that conditions citizens to become compliant consumers (cf. chap. 4.3.1.3). Here public relations 'encroaches' on the public sphere, furthering the influence of privileged private interests. Bentele and Wehmeier (2009), in one of their recent articles, make the following passing comment: "As far as we can see, Habermas revised his original highly critical point of view concerning public relations [...]" (348).<sup>91</sup> Despite the notion that Habermas appears to understand "lobbyists in their social function as being parallel to politicians or actors of the civil society" (ibid.), the two authors unfortunately desist from further substantiating their claim of a revised view concerning public relations.

In the following, we want to take the aforementioned claim of Bentele and Wehmeier, which indicates a change of trend in Habermas' concept of public relations, as an occasion to further consider some aspects regarding the public sphere and the influence of public relations practices on it, based on Habermas' more recent considerations on the political public sphere and processes of political communication (cf. Habermas, 1992a, 2005a, 2006, 2008). This will also give us the chance to touch on some of the questions that emerged from the demonstrations and discussions in chapter 3, namely those regarding the processes through which public relations practiced by different social actors may gain access to and influence on the media (cf. chap. 3.4.3.1), the rational potential or 'resistivity' of a reticulate public sphere vis-à-vis such efforts of 'manipulation' (cf. chap. 3.2.4.1), or regarding the different types of organizations, their different 'discourse resources', as well as the different effects that public relations, practiced by distinct types of organizations, have on the public sphere (cf. chap. 3.4.3).

### **5.2.1 The Public Sphere, Opinion-Formation, and Two Ways for Influence**

In short Habermas conceives of the public sphere as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions) that is reproduced through communicative action (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 436; see also chap. 2.2.5). As such, the public sphere allows for processes of communication that filter and synthesize streams of communication in a way that they "coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions" (Habermas, 1996: 360; italics in original). The process of opinion-formation and focusing in the public sphere is characterized as an assorting of utterances according to issue and contributions (affirmative or dismissive). The formed focused

---

<sup>91</sup> The authors here refer not to the revisions conducted adjacent to the 1990 republication of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* that we drew on in chapter 4.3.1.3, but to a recent conference paper, i.e. Habermas' opening speech at the 2006 annual conference of the *International Communication Association* (ICA) in Dresden (cf. Habermas, 2006).



opinions may then be ‘bundled’ into public opinion when they are carried by general approval.<sup>92</sup> Because the public sphere, as the network for communicating information and opinions, allows for the forming of such public opinion, it is the *locus* where “[i]nfluence develops” and where influence “becomes the object of struggle” (Habermas, 1996: 363)—the public sphere appears as a ‘battleground’ over public opinion, which is, both a source for and an object of influence.

Habermas depicts two basic ways for an actor to gain the general support needed to form public opinion that allows for substantial influence. The first is the participation in a more or less exhaustive and rational public controversy over information, proposals, and reasons (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 438). The ‘more or less’, derived from Habermas’ normative perspective, refers to the degree to which such a controversy is subverted by power, as indicated by standards of ideal communication (cf. chap. 2.2.4): a relatively discursive (egalitarian and undistorted) controversy unsubverted by power is (tendentally) seen to lead to ‘qualified public opinion’, whilst a relatively manipulated controversy, e.g. by means of market research and public relations practices, is (tendentally) seen to lead to compliance.<sup>93</sup> The second way to gain support is through reputation or prestige. Here Habermas builds on Talcott Parsons’ (1967) concept of influence:<sup>94</sup>

„Einfluß’ zehrt von der Ressource der Verständigung, aber er stützt sich auf einen Vorschub and entgegengebrachtem Vertrauen in aktuell nicht überprüfte Überzeugungsmöglichkeiten. In diesem Sinne stellen öffentliche Meinungen politische Einflußpotentiale dar [...] (Habermas, 1992a: 439).<sup>xxix</sup>

Hence, influence also feeds on a resource that resists testing in a current controversy. An example here is the high reputation enjoyed by an organization, allowing the reputation bearer to influence others’ beliefs with utterances that do not have to be specifically substantiated in the situation. According to Habermas this second way is the path generally taken by public relations, which enfolds “prestige” and does not “genuinely concern public opinion but opinion in the sense of reputation” (Habermas, 1989: 200f).<sup>95</sup> Corporations or organizations practicing public relations attempt to voice their utterances, which are generally not authorized as such, with an ‘authoritative’ effect by covering them with prestige (cf. Habermas, 1981b: 408f). And even if

<sup>92</sup> Public opinion is not to be confused with representative survey results: “It is not an aggregate of individually gathered, privately expressed opinions held by isolated persons [...]. Political opinion polls [at the most] provide a certain reflection of ‘public opinion’” (Habermas, 1996: 362). Public opinions generally result from the efforts of opinion-building elites on the one hand, and the multiple reactions of a highly differentiated mass public on the other; as such, they have to be seen as extremely difficult to grasp (cf. Habermas, 2008: 171).

<sup>93</sup> The applications demonstrated in chapters 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.3, which disregard macro societal considerations, either explicitly or implicitly embark on the notion that public relations can symmetrically engage in controversies unsubverted by power and hence contribute to the development of qualified public opinions. As such these applications oppose Habermas’ concept, which as we demonstrated in chapter 4.3, conceives of public relations as contributing to communicative processes that promote mass loyalty.

<sup>94</sup> For Habermas’ considerations based on Parsons’ concept see also Habermas (1981b: 408f; 1987: 273f).

<sup>95</sup> Recollecting the different applications of Habermas’ theory we see that the practical level application demonstrated in chapter 3.2.3 conceptualizes public relations in this second manner of gaining support.

public relations was to take the first path, that is engage in a public controversy, Habermas' theory suggests that they do so not by enacting practices of argumentation in the sense of rational discourse (cf. Habermas, 2005a: 387): a particular organization that engages in public controversy does so with the intent of furthering its privileged private interests; in Habermas' terminology, such participation in a controversy is not a form of argumentation but may more correctly be described as a form of 'bargaining' because it involves a "conflict between particular interests" (ibid.).

### 5.2.2 Mass Media, Social Actors, and Different Potentials for Influence

Above we depict how public relations may be seen as engaging in public processes of opinion-formation in order to gain general support and influence within the public sphere. Within these considerations we find Habermas highlighting the system of mass media. Habermas describes the public sphere as dominated by mediated mass communication (cf. Habermas, 2008: 155f). In the struggle over public opinions and influence occurring in the public sphere, mediated mass communication is seen as fulfilling neuralgic functions: (a) its *structures* mould the public sphere with abstract and asymmetrical communication (cf. 155–163), whilst (b) its *dynamics* are constitutive to a distinct power structure of the public sphere (cf. 163–179).

The structures of mediated mass communication show characteristic deficits regarding the requirements of discursive argumentation. On the one hand mediated mass communication is abstract in the sense that it lacks forms of simple interaction between physically present parties engaging in egalitarian argumentation. Mediated communication is directed at mostly passive recipients, and it 'overrides' instantaneous glances, gestures, thoughts, and reactions of present speakers and addressees: "Abgekoppelt von einfachen Interaktionen, beginnen die semantischen Gehalte jenseits der imperativen Kraft von reziprok erhobenen Geltungsansprüchen frei zu flottieren" (160).<sup>xxx</sup> On the other hand, the structures of mediated mass communication are asymmetrical in the sense that they sharply separate the roles of actors in the arena from the roles of spectators in the gallery (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 453). Mediated mass communication is organized like a stage that prevents a change of roles between the few actors on it and the large public in front of it: "diese Akteure [...] diskutieren nicht etwa miteinander, sondern zielen auf die Meinungsbildung eines anonymen Publikums ab, ohne ihrerseits Rede und Antwort stehen zu müssen" (Habermas, 2008: 161).<sup>xxxi</sup> From the stance of the ideal requirements of discursive argumentation the lack of face-to-face interactions and reciprocity between roles of speakers and addressees are evident shortcomings.

Furthermore Habermas demonstrates that the dynamics of mediated mass communication can be viewed as 'canalized' by media power (*Medienmacht*), which momentarily affects the public sphere's power structure as a whole (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 454f; 1996: 376f; 2008: 174f). What

Habermas refers to as media power originates in the high degree of centralization and increasing pressure of selection in mass media and is exercised as authoritative in selecting information and shaping the presentation of messages. These dynamics of mediated mass communication are continuously worked on by different actors who “struggle for access to and influence on the media” (Habermas, 2006: 417). This is the case, because the media, as mentioned above, dominates a public sphere, which is the ‘soil’ from which legitimation must be gained. Thus media power is subject to the strategic use of political and social power to influence the agenda as well as to trigger and frame public issues by means of professional public relations practices (cf. 415).

What Habermas refers to here as actors who struggle for access to and influence on the media enter the system of the media from three general directions: (a) from the center of the political system (politicians, political parties, etc.), (b) from the functional systems (lobbyists, special interest groups, etc.), and (c) from civil society (advocates, intellectuals, churches, nongovernmental organizations, moral entrepreneurs, etc.) (cf. Habermas, 2008: 170). The sum of these actors, coupled with mass media professionals, participate in the construction of public opinion. In this social function of struggling for access to and influence on the media these actors are, as claimed by Bentele and Wehmeier (2009: 348), indeed ‘parallel’ (e.s.). Not parallel, however, are the potentials of these actors to transfer power via mass media into public influence. Politicians and political parties are by far the most influential suppliers of the media system, because they not only imply professional methods of communication but also hold a strong position with regard to negotiating privileged access to media (cf. Habermas, 2006: 419). Representatives of functional systems have a less privileged negotiation position but likewise employ highly professional public relations practices to transform their social power into “political muscle” (ibid.).

Dank eines höheren Organisationsgrades und größerer materieller Ressourcen sind Lobbys und *special interest* (sic!) *groups* in der Lage, professionelle Techniken der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und des politischen Marketing zu nutzen, um soziale Macht in politischen Einfluß zu transformieren (Habermas, 2008: 176).<sup>xxxii</sup>

Habermas also points out that a lack of distance between the functional systems and the media is “more frequent and normal” than between media and the political center (Habermas, 2006: 421). Efforts to translate economic power into political influence by means of professional public relations can be “seen to have a measurable effect” when “ecological or health insurance policies impact on the substantial interests of major corporations” (ibid.). Finally, the third type of actors, which have their ‘roots’ in civil society, find themselves—compared to politicians and lobbyists—in the weakest position (cf. 419). Referring to “emergent associations”, which Habermas sees at the “core of civil society” (Habermas, 1996: 367), he makes the following statement:

[...] Assoziationsverhältnisse bilden gewiß nicht das auffälligste Element der Öffentlichkeit, die von Massenmedien und großen Agenturen beherrscht, durch Institutionen der Markt- und Meinungsför-

schung beobachtet und mit der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Propaganda und Werbung der politischen Parteien und Verbände überzogen wird (Habermas, 1992a: 444).<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The peripheral status of actors anchored in civil society stems from their comparably low ‘organizational capacities’, that is their low degree of professionalization and funds (cf. Habermas, 2008: 174), as well as the media’s favoring of input from the direction of well-organized actors of the mentioned functional systems (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 458f).

### 5.2.3 Further Parameters of Influence: Reflexivity and Crises Consciousness

In the paragraph above we demonstrated how the potentials to transfer power via mass media into public influence are unequally distributed amongst different groups of actors, generally disadvantaging civil society actors. Roughly speaking, Habermas’ normative perspective implies that these circumstances undermine effective impulses of lifeworld rationality within the public sphere and hinder the construction of considerate public opinions (cf. chap. 5.1.1). Nevertheless, we can find two significant indications in Habermas’ more recent texts that (a) may allow one to view public relations as participating in an overall public communication that still allows for the generation of considerate public opinions (at least under certain conditions within the media system), and (b) allows one to view civil actors as more influential than suggested by the established power-structure (at least under sporadic conditions within the public sphere).

As seen in chapter 4.3.1.3 Habermas reviewed his originally pessimistic stance regarding the resisting power and the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally differentiated mass public. He now appears to emphasize that different efforts to use public relations practices to gain influence in the public sphere via mediated mass communication cannot be conducted without constraints. These constraints are generally founded in what Habermas refers to as the “peculiar reflexivity” of the public sphere (Habermas, 2006: 420). Reflexivity here means that all participants are generally free to reconsider a perceived public opinion. This reflexivity leads Habermas to claim that the unequal distribution of the means of exercising influence on the public sphere as depicted in chapter 5.2.2 does not necessarily distort the formation of considerate public opinion: “strategic interventions in the public sphere must, unless they run the risk of inefficiency, play by the rules of the game” (419f). From Habermas’ normative perspective, there are two vital conditions for this ‘game of reflexivity’ to function in a way that considerate public opinions can be generated, even if powerful actors try to strategically intervene in the process:

First, a self-regulating media system must maintain its independence vis-à-vis its environments while linking political communication in the public sphere with both civil society and the political center; second, an inclusive civil society must empower citizens to participate in and respond to a public discourse that, in turn, must not degenerate into a colonizing mode of communication (420).

Habermas acknowledges both conditions as being “troubling” (430), but with reference to findings of recent research on the cognitive role of heuristics and information shortcuts in the development and consolidation of political orientations, he, nevertheless, gives a rather optimistic outlook. These studies suggest that “people can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about their political choices, without possessing a large body of knowledge about politics” (Dalton, 2006: 26f; cited in Habermas, 2006: 420). Subsequent to an assumed fulfillment of the above conditions, that is an independent media system and a vital feedback of public discourse, Habermas notably remarks with regard to public relations: he states that, in processes of political communication that proceed under these ideal conditions, “even the powerful actors will only contribute to the mobilization of relevant issues, facts and arguments” (Habermas, 2006: 420). In short, if we can rightly assume a functioning reflexive public sphere, strategic public relations that aims for the building of prestige and ‘bargains’ for particular private interests may, on the whole, even contribute to a general process of public communication that allows for the generation of considerate public opinions.

As demonstrated in chapter 5.2.2 the unequal influence of actors depends in part on the dynamics of mediated mass communication, and in part on the ‘organizational capacities’ of the actors. Thus it is important to notice that each group of actors practicing public relations enters the public sphere under specifically different circumstances regarding (a) the ‘societal background’ behind the actor (the state, the functional systems, the civil society) as well as (b) the dispositions of the dynamics of mediated mass communication for the specific actor’s public relations efforts. In this constellation actors from civil society appear to be in a rather disadvantageous position. This is only the case, however, in a ‘business-as-usual’ situation. In perceived crisis situations, these actors have the capacity to shift the day-to-day circulation of power.

[...] generell lässt sich feststellen, daß sich auch in mehr oder weniger vermachteten politischen Öffentlichkeiten die Kraftverhältnisse verschieben, sobald die Wahrnehmung von relevanten gesellschaftlichen Problemlagen ein *Krisenbewusstsein* an der Peripherie hervorruft (Habermas, 1992a: 461; italics in original).<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In these crisis situations, civil society actors are able to dramatize contributions and by means of mass protests, sensational actions, or incessant campaigns present them effectively enough, so that mass media takes up the matter. The success of such initiatives emerging from within civil society remains possible, because an otherwise latent potential built in the inner structure of the public sphere can be endogenously mobilized and affect the mass media where the same potential is present in form of normative self-understanding (cf. *ibid.*).

### 5.2.4 'Lifeworld Public Relations' as 'Double Politics'?

Finally we want to take the opportunity to return to some of our above considerations regarding the concept of Leitch and Neilson (2001). Looking at the application of Habermas' theory as demonstrated in chapter 3.4.2 we find that Habermas' above differentiation between the different actors within civil society on the one hand, and the functional systems on the other, as well as their different potential for influence (cf. chap. 5.2.2), may be reinforced with the concepts of the lifeworld organization and the system organization. In the application by Leitch and Neilson, however, the lifeworld organizations (or actors of civil society) are not seen quite as underprivileged as in the hierarchy depicted by Habermas: they do not necessarily appear in the weakest position compared to lobbyists or politicians and are said to "have the potential to equal system organizations in terms of access to resources including public relations" (Leitch, Neilson, 2001: 137). Despite his concept of an apparently strict hierarchy, Habermas also seems to acknowledge that to some degree some civil society actors successfully employ professional public relations practices:

Die Organisationen, Gruppen und Advokaten, die angeblich allgemeine Interessen vertreten, können in manchen Fällen auch Mittel des *corporate communication management* einsetzen (Habermas, 2008: 176; italics in original).<sup>xxxv</sup>

The decisive aspect of this comment is Habermas' particular diction, not his general acknowledgement of the employment of such practices by civil society actors. The restrictive formulation of "angeblich allgemeine Interessen" and "in manchen Fällen" appears to be directed at the problematic that if interests are not public but *specific*, and if an actor does not promote overall forms of spontaneous public communication but instead *permanently* employs public relations practices to enforce specific interests, the conception of this actor as being anchored in civil society or as a lifeworld organization, becomes inconsistent. In Habermas' framework, a certain degree of professionalization and funds available for public relations practices appear to be a crucial feature for the assessment of the underlying rationality of the organization in question. It is a specific feature of system organizations, not lifeworld organizations, that they "draw on market studies and opinion surveys and conduct their own professional public relations campaigns" (Habermas, 1996: 375). In our discussion subsequent to the demonstration of Leitch and Neilson's (2001) application, we already assessed this problematic (cf. chap. 3.4.3.2). Here we have, *inter alia*, formulated the question whether and under what premise an alleged lifeworld organization that equals system organizations in terms of access to resources, such as professional public relations expertise, can still coherently be referred to as coupled with the lifeworld? In the following we suggest an answer to this question based on Habermas' theory that helps to

distinguish lifeworld organizations from system organizations not by professionalism but by the specific *structure* of their public relations efforts.

Habermas discusses a number of indicators to distinguish the (lifeworld-bound) loose type of organization on the one hand, from the (system-bound) collective actor on the other (cf. Habermas, 1992a: 454; 1996: 375f). Amongst these indicators are organizational complexity, professionalization, resources, represented interests and identifying features. From the perspective of public relations, however, the most interesting indicator may be seen in Habermas' assessment of the distinctive characteristics in the communication practices of lifeworld organizations, namely the "self-referential character of the practice of communication in civil society" (Habermas, 1996: 369):

[...] mit ihrer Programmatik nehmen sie geradewegs Einfluß auf das politische System, zugleich geht es ihnen aber reflexiv auch um die Stabilisierung und Erweiterung von Zivilgesellschaft und Öffentlichkeit und um die Vergewisserung der eignen Identität und Handlungsfähigkeit (Habermas, 1992a: 447).<sup>xxxvi</sup>

This means that the communication of these organizations is practiced in terms of 'double politics' that always reveal a specific subtext concerned with the critical function of the public sphere as such. It is distinctive for these organizations that, even though their communication may be part of an aggressive contestation of opinions or a struggle for access to media and influence on publics, they—at the same time—communicate so as to preserve the communicative infrastructure of the lifeworld and thus the critical function of the public sphere. Following it is possible to differentiate actors who try to gain access to and influence on the media by their public relations practices but at the same time reproduce the public sphere from those actors who apply professional public relations to forums that already exist (cf. *ibid*).

Ultimately these considerations suggest that it may be possible to decide whether an alleged lifeworld organization that equals system organizations in terms of public relations expertise can coherently be referred to as coupled with the lifeworld, by assessing whether or not its public relations practices show the aforementioned 'double politics'. Furthermore these considerations may also serve as a basis on which to respond to *prima facie* objections to applications of Habermas' theory to public relations (e.g. as demonstrated in chapter 3.2.2) that claim that the "way in which public relations is actually practiced is a far cry from the Habermasian ideals" (Ihlen, Ruler, 2009: 9). Whilst Habermas' framework surely suggests that for system organizations symmetrical communication is merely one more *strategic* option (cf. chap. 4.3.1.3), it also suggests that for associations of civil society, symmetrical forms of communication may not only be more applicable, but may in fact be more or less *constitutive* to the form of organization as such. According to social movements Habermas notes:

Für soziale Bewegungen ist es [...] eine *Existenzfrage*, ob sie Organisationsformen finden, die Solidaritäten und Öffentlichkeiten hervorbringen und die es gestatten, in der Verfolgung spezieller Ziele zugleich bestehende Kommunikationsrechte und -strukturen auszuschöpfen und zu radikalisieren (Habermas, 1992a: 454; italics added).<sup>xxxvii</sup>

On the basis of the suggested concept of lifeworld public relations as ‘double politics’, it may be possible to initiate inquiry in the field of public relations research in which the applications of Habermas’ communicative ideals may be less naïve than in the domain of ‘highly systematic’ corporate communications.



---

## 6 Closing Remarks

### 6.1 Summary

We initiated and based our investigations on the current necessity to further analyze potentials and challenges of different theoretical applications in the field of public relations research and on the particular need for a comprehensive demonstration and discussion of possible applications of Habermas' theory. Having provided an overview of the field of research as well as an introduction of central concepts of Habermas' theory (chap. 2), we illustrated potential applications of the theory and explored challenges emerging from these applications from four different 'perspectives' (chap. 3); some of these investigation's key results shall be summarized in the following.

In the *evaluative perspective* we presented two possible applications of Habermas' idea of the raising of validity claims as well as his concept of discourse ethics for analyses of practical aspects of public relations (chap. 3.1). First this entailed an analysis of annual reports and their adherence to ideal standards of communicative action—an application that allows for the evaluation of the degree to which particular reports adhere to the ideal claims of comprehensibility, truth, legitimacy and sincerity. Second we outlined a possible application that allows for an analysis of different standards of corporate social responsibility reporting. This application ultimately facilitates a judgment of the degree to which conditions of communicative understanding are addressed in different reporting frameworks, and enables a normative critique of the latter. In addition to some terminological misconceptions, our discussion of these applications revealed particular challenges regarding the design in which to operationalize the validity claims of legitimacy and sincerity. We also identified possible incoherencies with the theoretical framework in the researchers' extended idea of the ideal speech situation (including 'all those interested' and 'natural environment'). Furthermore, we stressed the challenge of analyzing asymmetrical or non-discursive forms of communication when drawing on Habermas' concept based on face-to-face interactions.

In the *practical perspective* we presented three quite dissimilar applications of Habermas' theory for the modeling of public relations practice (chap. 3.2). First we demonstrated a possible application of Habermas' concept of the public sphere in a model of 'relational' public relations, especially designed to help institutions better cope with and improve their responses to critical publics. Along with other challenges we stressed that the application not only refers to a somewhat 'antiquated' concept of the public sphere, but yields a simplistic effort, lacking substantive theoretical grounding. Furthermore, we identified this application as a typical example for models developed by public relations practitioners. The pivotal question raised in the course of the subsequent discussion thus concerned possible theoretical incoherencies emerging from rather naïve

and positive ideas of ‘good’ public relations. Furthermore we suggested that the application raises questions regarding the conceptualization of the multiplicity and ‘rational potential’ of the public sphere. Second we outlined a possible application that draws on Habermas’ concept of understanding and thereby establishes a model for the planning, analysis, and evaluation of different ‘stages’ in practical public relations with the overall aim of enabling undisturbed communication processes. We demonstrated some common objections to the model as well as responses and their consequences regarding the theoretical framework. The challenges set forth in the discussion led to the general questioning of the applied idea of communicative understanding in the strategic context of public relations as well as the presumption of some theoretical aporia. Third we presented a fairly recent application of Habermas’ concept of world relations in a three-dimensional model of reputation that allows for the conception of public relations as a ‘balancing act’ between practices of conformation and delimitation in reputation management. In discussing this application we primarily adhered to the question of theoretical coherency and, by elaborating some conceptual differences between Habermas’ and Weber’s concepts, demonstrated that the application in question draws on a concept of rationality that is quintessentially incompatible with Habermas’ theory.

In the *moral perspective* we presented three applications of Habermas’ universalization principle as well as his concepts of discourse and ideal speech that contribute to the grounding and enactment of public relations ethics (chap. 3.3). First we demonstrated an application that develops the study of business ethics as the study of public relations practice by paralleling the latter with aspects of ethical communication as found in Habermas’ concept of discourse ethics—an application that eventually conceives of public relations as managing the moral dimension of organizational conduct. Ultimately we questioned the application’s conceptualization of public relations in intersubjective and discursive terms as well as its ‘emphatic’ idea of practically realizing public relations as the ‘moral conscience’. Second we depicted an effort that attempts to apply discourse ethics to codes of ethics in public relations. Following, we stressed that this effort focuses on codes of ethics in general rather than on particular aspects of codes of ethics in public relations. Furthermore we raised the pivotal question of whether Habermas’ concept can at all be coherently applied to the grounding of substantial norms in public relations. Third we presented an application that derives five concrete steps from Habermas’ principle of universalization, allowing organizations to enact discourse ethics. Furthermore we discussed a number of practical challenges that emerge from this effort, like the difficulty of determining where to cut off circles of involvement or the fundamental contradiction between forms of ideal speech and an organization’s system rationality. After that we raised further questions regarding the realization of the application within different organizational forms as well as by means of different forms of com-

munication and alluded to possible theoretical incoherencies. Generally, all the applications dealt with in this ‘perspective’ led us to assume some unjustified overextensions of Habermas’ concept of discourse ethics and ultimately appeared to advocate a restrictive concept of ethics that Habermas himself has long since rejected.

In the *societal perspective* we presented two possible applications of Habermas’ theory that allow for a conceptualization of public relations in a macro societal context (chap. 3.4). First we demonstrated an application that can show how concepts of a company’s economic, legal and social responsibilities developed historically, and how the currently predominant concept can be associated with the emergence of a new function of the public sphere that is suited for connection with Habermas’ theory: the public sphere processes of organizational legitimacy and identity. These processes are then established as the central challenge of current public relations. In the discussion of the application we emphasized the restricted consideration of economic organizations and formulated further questions regarding the possibilities of including non-economic forms of organization in the established framework. Second we outlined an application that approaches core concepts of public relations by drawing on Habermas’ concept of the public sphere as well as his distinction between lifeworld and system. The application’s emphasis on power allows for the distinction of different types of publics, different types of organizations, and different types of relations between them. In discussing this effort we alluded to some elisions, especially focused on the challenge of a consistent distinction between the suggested types of organizations, and ultimately raised further questions regarding theoretical coherency and conceptualization of multiple and diversified public spheres.

Succeeding these investigations within the different ‘perspectives’ we conducted some general and comprehensive reflections regarding the discussed applications (chap. 4). After emphasizing the different theoretical foci and the varying complexity of the applications, we ‘condensed’ the various questions raised in the course of our previous discussions to three (intersecting) groups that summarize key aspects of the established ‘perspectives’, forms and processes of communication as well as conceptual coherency. We then assumed a more abstract perspective from which we collected some comprehensive and categorical insights on the scope of the applications presented. In so doing we emphasized that, though drawing on the same theoretical framework, these applications partially produce strikingly contradicting (dialogical/strategic) concepts of public relations. We were consequently led to further emphasize a suspicion already put forth within some of the discussion in chapter 3: the possibility of manifest theoretical aporia in some of the applications. After we presented in detail how public relations is conceived in terms of Habermas’ theory by drawing on the author’s early considerations on the press and its changing functions as well as later revisions and theoretical recontextualizations, we further elucidated

whether and how some of the applications hold theoretical aporia regarding Habermas' concepts. With reference to the concepts of discourse ethics, communicative action, the public sphere and deliberative democracy, as well as lifeworld and system, we demonstrated that a number of applications of Habermas' theory fundamentally differ with their theoretical framework and may in fact be 'accused' of contributing to the false ideology Habermas aims to unmask.

In our final chapter we then further explored some aspects associated with the moral and the societal 'perspective' (chap. 5). In embarking on considerations of discourse ethics and public relations we first assessed the question of whether Habermas' theory can be applied to the grounding of substantial norms in public relations. Here we succeeded in demonstrating how such endeavors produce inevitable contradictions. Second we initiated further considerations on public relations as the 'moral conscience' of an organization in light of questions concerning moral responsibility for the natural environment. Having discussed discourse ethics' difficulties regarding the natural environment we concluded that claims to include the natural environment as a stakeholder (as put forth e.g. in the application presented in chapter 3.1.2) lack sufficient theoretical grounding. We also argued that Habermas' concept can indeed be viewed as promoting ignorance of the natural environment and thus constitutes a dubious theoretical resource for grounding and enacting public relations ethics that aims to be 'environmentally conscious'. Ultimately we briefly assessed the general constraints of discourse ethics to emphasize seemingly naïve assumptions in applications that entirely disregard this fundamental critique. In moreover embarking on further considerations regarding macro societal aspects we elucidated how to conceive of public relations' influence on the public sphere, especially focusing on the role of mediated mass communication, by drawing on Habermas' recent considerations on political communication. After we established Habermas' concept of unequal influence of different actors on public sphere processes, we elaborated on 'reflexivity' and 'crises consciousness' as two parameters that resist a far too negative understanding of systematic public relations practices encroaching on the public sphere and dissolving rational forms of opinion-formation. Ultimately we picked up some considerations on the difficulty of distinguishing types of organizations practicing public relations on the basis of Habermas' concepts. Here we suggested turning to the concept of 'double politics' for a clarification on the basis of actual forms of communication.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

When returning to our preliminary overview of current public relations research, we can place our investigations in some perspective. Entering into our efforts, we have already stressed that, within the coarsely mashed 'grid' of research fields constituting the 'discipline' of public relations

research, our emphasis consisted of terminological and theoretical reflections.<sup>96</sup> Regarding the scientific disciplines most relevant for research in public relations the above considerations were concerned with social theory, a field that is currently becoming increasingly important in public relations research (Ihlen, Ruler, 2009; Ihlen, Verhoeven, 2009; see also chap. 2.1.4). With regard to the general debate on public relations theory we conclude that the applications discussed in the different ‘perspectives’ offer insights primarily regarding the micro-level of individual interactions (e.g. chap. 3.2), as well as the macro level of societal structures (e.g. chap. 3.4). Furthermore we have seen that Habermas’ theory is applied for conceptualizing symmetrical as well as asymmetrical public relations.

In interpreting our investigations in light of the current debates in public relations research we can also see how some of the general challenges and deficiencies of the field are reflected in the applications demonstrated and discussed here. Examining the previously mentioned challenge regarding characteristic shortcomings of theoretical approaches to public relations conducted within different disciplines, for instance, we find that the better half of applications of Habermas’ theory—as is typical for social theory-based approaches—lack attention to questions assessed in organizational theory and business. Minor exceptions in this regard are, for example, Meisenbach’s (2006) reference to the possibility of further considerations on the organizational level, or the basic deliberations on general forms of organizations conducted by Leitch and Neilson (2001). Furthermore, if organizations as such are part of the considerations, we see that the applications tend to focus primarily on economic organizations, like in Eisenegger and Imhof (2008) or Jensen (2001).<sup>97</sup> As we clarified initially, such a focus on business is a further, characteristic shortcoming found in current public relations research. Another common research deficiency is reflected by the discussed applications: some of the applications dealt with here contribute to the common ignoring of the perspective of the recipient. As we have demonstrated, several of the applications simply presume certain needs (e.g. demand for dialog; cf. chap. 3.2.1) or interests (e.g. relevant information; cf. chap. 3.1) of stakeholders, instead of empirically analyzing them. Another common deficiency is reflected not in the applications but in Habermas’ own concept of public relations, namely the preeminent focus on journalism. Habermas, much like public relations research based on classical communication studies, primarily considers public

---

<sup>96</sup> Regarding the ‘knowledge production’ on the level of student theses in the field of public relations research, this may be seen as a distinguishing feature of our effort, since only a minimal fraction of these works are dedicated to review and reflection of public relations theory (c.f. Signitzer, 1992; Röttger et al., 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Unlike Jensen (2001), who solely refers to companies, Eisenegger and Imhof (2008) generally design their model as applicable for various forms of organizations (cf. chap. 3.2.3). Nevertheless, when methodically illustrating the model the researchers are exclusively concerned with large corporations (cf. Eisenegger, Imhof, 2008: 136–142).

relations in terms of a ‘dangerous influence’ on journalism (cf. chap. 4.3.1 and 5.2)—this tends to lead to a reduction of public relations to mere ‘press work’.

When we now assume a more abstract position and, instead of looking at the objects of investigation, concentrate on the general effort and focus of our approach, we can conclude that this thesis particularly responds to presently prevailing desiderata in public relations research. In fact, this thesis provides investigations into all basic categories, which Röttger characterizes as present deficiencies in the field (cf. Röttger, 2009b; or chap. 2.1.4): we (a) enfold basic and theory-led discussions, (b) provide considerations on the level of societal public relations theory, (c) include considerations on the public sphere, and (d) provide—especially in focusing on Habermas’ theory and applications drawing on it—investigations which extend beyond the common framework of systems theory. The latter, that is the field’s domination by systems theory, is presently criticized due to the ‘paradigm’s’ resistance of the meso- and micro-level that are becoming more and more important in public relations research (cf. Jarren, Röttger, 2008: 33; Röttger, 2009b: 13). Generally speaking, this thesis responds to this problem by offering insights into the potentials and challenges of an action-theoretical approach that centers on those intersubjective processes that are excluded from concepts based on systems theory. Furthermore, our general effort responds to what is currently stressed as necessary and fruitful for the ‘discipline’, namely the review of theoretical efforts in public relations, the comparison of different approaches and the analysis of commonalities and incommensurabilities (cf. Bentele, Wehmeier, 2009: 241)—indeed, this is the general endeavor to which this thesis aspires to make a modest contribution.

### **6.3 Constraints and Future Prospects**

Having made some concluding remarks with reference to the overall field of research, we must not conceal the constraints or limitations of our efforts. First of all, the comprehensiveness of our approach entails some evident constraints on the ‘depth’ in which specific potentials and challenges could be further considered. In chapter 5 we could only selectively conduct further considerations on a restricted number of the many aspects that were raised in the previous investigations. In so doing, we introduced some arguments from the philosophical debate on discourse ethics, for instance, and applied them to questions that had risen in our earlier considerations on public relations. But as Ansgar Zerfaß (2010) correctly remarks, there exists a great number of further arguments on basic philosophical and sociological questions within the wide debate on Habermas’ program that have yet to be introduced to public relations research (cf.

62).<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, what remained widely unconsidered in our discussions is the fact that the theoretical frame of reference drawn upon by the discussed applications was and still is a ‘work in progress’ rather than a fixed theoretical structure (cf. White, 1988: 4f).<sup>99</sup> In this sense the different applications, which in total cover a timespan of approximately twenty years, each reflect ‘stages’ in the overall negotiation process and development of Habermas’ theoretical framework. Subsequently some of the applications have been developed under slightly different yet nevertheless theoretically significant conditions. We see this reflected for instance when comparing Pearson’s (1989a) rather ‘euphoric’ application of discourse ethics with Leeper’s (1996) considerations (cf. chap. 3.3).<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the general focus of our thesis entails evident limitations: by conducting our efforts primarily on a terminological and theoretical level, we intentionally excluded from consideration research regarding the field of public relations history as but one example.

In terms of suggestions for future research, we can begin, of course, by embarking on the aforementioned constraints of our investigations. Thus a general request for future efforts could be to further introduce core arguments from the well-established debate on Habermas’ program into public relations discourse. Future texts on Habermas’ concepts or applications of the latter, conducted in the field of public relations, should make an effort to consider up-to-date arguments from the debate on the theoretical framework as such. Due to the significantly less elaborate debate in other languages (cf. Albert, 2003: VIII), this is especially true for those authors from the German-speaking discourse who have ‘barrier-free’ access to the full controversy on Habermas’ concepts. Another constraint of our investigations that can be reformulated in terms of possible future research is the limited focus on the theoretical and terminological level. Further prospects may lie in the exploration of reflections on public relations history; for this, Habermas’

---

<sup>98</sup> For instance, we find a disregard of principally well-established basic criticisms from the debate on Habermas’ theory in the applications discussed in chapter 3.3. These largely ignore important arguments from the fundamental critique regarding the concept of discourse ethics (see also chap. 5.1.3).

<sup>99</sup> Around the late 1980s, for instance, the author fundamentally rejected some of his earlier normative assumptions (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1992a), and later performed a significant ‘shift’ toward pragmatism (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1999). In connection to the general disregard of fundamental arguments on Habermas’ theory within the field of public relations research (cf. Zerfaß, 2010: 62), we might add that significant theoretical developments of the program are also partially disregarded. As demonstrated above, Maier (2005) refers solely to an ‘antiquated’ version of the public sphere (cf. chap. 3.2.4.1), or Meisenbach (2006), who wonders about Habermas’ resistance to apply his own concept (cf. chap. 3.3.4.3) when the latter has in fact long since acknowledged fundamental constraints and, hence, resigned from his restrictive considerations on moral theory (cf. chap. 5.1.3). A rather impressive example of such disregard in public relations research is the fact that Kunczik (2010), in the latest edition of his standard work *Public Relations: Konzepte und Theorien*, reproduces a version of Habermas’ concept of the ideal speech situation that in fact became obsolete in the 1970s (cf. 329). On the basis of this version the author then goes on to reveal Habermas’ apparent ignorance of the utopian character of his concept, interpreting it as representative of the conditions of an ideal life form (cf. *ibid.*). Habermas, however, has argued against this understanding of the ideal speech situation since the late 1970s, and he now labels it a fallacy of misplaced concreteness (cf. Habermas, 1995: 152)—since his work *Faktizität und Geltung* (1992a) he has stopped using the term altogether. See also Koller (2004: 81f).

<sup>100</sup> In this respect, see also footnote 67 drawn out in the course of the discussion on Leeper’s application (chap. 3.3.4.2, page 59).

theory also holds great potential (cf. Bentele, Wehmeier, 2009: 247). One possible starting point for such an endeavor is provided in Habermas' socio-historical considerations on the public sphere. Marvin Olasky (1987), for instance, draws on Habermas' *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) to historically distinguish public relations from 'private relations'. His approach to the history of public relations in a corporate setting, however, has so far not received much attention or animated further research (cf. Ruler, Vercic, 2008: 314). Moreover, as Zerfaß (2010) points out, Habermas' considerations from his seminal work *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981a, 1981b) can further contribute to public relations research by helping to elucidate differences between persuasive and argumentative as well as between personal and mass-medial forms of communication. In public relations research, these aspects have yet to be elaborated on the basis of Habermas' theory (cf. Zerfaß, 2010: 60). Compared to the applications in the practical and moral 'perspective' that conceive of public relations more or less as communicative action, and thus entail some fundamental theoretical aporia, we may find that those efforts demonstrated within the 'societal perspective' offer more prospects for future research. These include an account of power that is generally coherent with Habermas' concepts and make no efforts to engage in an ethical and intellectual project that, from the perspective of current public relations research, can be labeled as obsolete (cf. Benson, 2008: 18). Furthermore, a prospect regarding the 'evaluative perspective' may be found in recent efforts to operationalize Habermas' concept of deliberative democracy for empirical research. A number of articles collected in an *Acta Politica* special issue on empirical approaches to deliberative democracy may provide some initial suggestions in this regard. Even though none of the authors deal specifically with public relations, some of the effort may, nonetheless, inspire research in the field; we want to provide some basic examples: with reference to Katharina Holzinger (2005), for instance, who investigates correlations between types of conflicts and modes of communication, one could further elucidate the correlation between symmetrical (or asymmetrical) public relations practices and different contexts of conflict; or with reference to Simone Chambers' (2005) article on *Measuring Publicity's Effect* one could further elucidate public relation's effect on the public's capacity to reason and produce considerate public opinions; or with reference to Patrizia Nanz and Jens Steffek (2005), one could assess the effectiveness of civil society organizations' public relations practice regarding the 'stimulation' of the 'political center'. Of course, these are merely some of many initial opportunities from which to commence further research in the field.

Ultimately, every effort to further apply Habermas' theory to public relations or—as done here—provide reflections on the same, contributes to the overall endeavor of further testing the fruitfulness of Habermas' program as such. This fulfills the very process Habermas desires when he emphasizes the "fully open character and the flexibility" of his approach (Habermas, 1987:



---

383). Indeed this process of repeated testing is far from over: as Jan Philipp Reemtsma (2001) comments: “Habermas zu historisieren heißt, die von ihm selbst betonte Offenheit seines Werkes als Anschlusschance zu nutzen mit ihm über das 21. Jahrhundert nachzudenken” (57).<sup>xxxviii</sup>

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Trans.: “For the communicative model of action, language is relevant only from the pragmatic viewpoint that speakers, in employing sentences with an orientation to reaching understanding, take up relations to the world, not only directly as in teleological, normatively regulated, or dramaturgical action, but in a reflective way. [...] They no longer relate *straightaway* to something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds; instead they relativize their utterances against the possibility that their validity will be contested by other actors” (Habermas, 1984a: 98f, italics in original).
- <sup>ii</sup> Trans.: “[...] a speaker can *rationaly motivate* a hearer to accept his speech act offer because—on the basis of an internal connection between validity, validity claim, and redemption of a validity claim—he can assume the *warranty* [Gewähr] for providing, if necessary, convincing reasons that would stand up to a hearer’s criticism of the validity claim” (Habermas, 1984a: 302, italics in original).
- <sup>iii</sup> Trans.: “[...] communicative reason does not simply encounter ready-made subjects or systems; rather, it takes part in structuring what is to be preserved. The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is [...] built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species” (Habermas, 1984a: 398).
- <sup>iv</sup> Trans.: “In fact, however, [...] goal-directed actions are coordinated not only through processes of reaching understanding, but also through functional interactions that are not intended [...] and are usually not even perceived within the horizon of everyday practice” (Habermas, 1987: 150).
- <sup>v</sup> Trans.: “[...] all affected can *freely* accept the consequences and the side effects that the *general* observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of *each individual*” (Habermas, 1990a: 93, italics in original).
- <sup>vi</sup> Trans.: “The *truth* of propositions seems to signify the *existence* of states of affairs in much the same way as the *rightness* of actions signifies the *observance* of norms” (Habermas, 1990a: 59f, italics in original).
- <sup>vii</sup> Trans.: “(3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse. (3.2) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever [...], is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse, [...] and] allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs. (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3.1) and (3.2)” (Habermas, 1990a: 89).

- <sup>viii</sup> Trans.: “The bourgeois public sphere may be considered above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor” (Habermas, 1989: 27).
- <sup>ix</sup> Trans.: “The ‘domination’ of the public, according to its own idea, was an order in which domination itself was dissolved” (Habermas, 1989: 84).
- <sup>x</sup> Trans.: “Public opinion remains the object of domination even when it forces the letter to make concessions or to reorient itself. It is not bound to rules of public discussion or forms of verbalization in general, nor need it be concerned with political problems or even be addressed to political authorities” (Habermas, 1989: 343).
- <sup>xi</sup> Trans.: “[...] my diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into a bad privacy, from a ‘culture-debating to a culture-consuming public’, is too simplistic. At the time, I was too pessimistic about the resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public whose cultural usages have begun to shake off the constraints of class” (Habermas, 1992b: 438).
- <sup>xii</sup> Trans.: “In complex societies, the public sphere consists of an intermediary structure between the political system, on the one hand, and the private sectors of the lifeworld and functional systems, on the other. It represents a highly complex network that branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local, and subcultural arenas. Functional specifications, thematic foci, policy fields, and so forth, provide the points of reference for a substantive differentiation of public spheres that are, however, still accessible to laypersons (for example, popular science and literary publics, religious and artistic publics, feminist and ‘alternative’ publics, publics concerned with health-care issues, social welfare, or environmental policy). Moreover, the public sphere is differentiated into levels according to the density of communication, organizational complexity, and range—from the *episodic* publics found in taverns, coffee houses, or on the streets; through the *occasional* or ‘arranged’ publics of particular presentations and events, such as theater performances, rock concerts, party assemblies, or church congresses; up to *abstract* public spheres of isolated readers, listeners, and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through mass media” (Habermas, 1996: 373f; italics in original).

- <sup>xiii</sup> Trans.: “Comprehensibility is a claim that is already redeemed when general communication proceeds undisturbed. Thus I want to refer to ‘comprehensibility’ as a *precondition* of communication in general, not as a (discursive or non-discursive) validity claim that is raised *within* communication” [our own translation].
- <sup>xiv</sup> Trans.: “The discourse-centered theoretical approach has the advantage of being able to specify the preconditions of communication that have to be fulfilled in the various forms of rational debate and in negotiations if the results of such discourses are to be presumed to be rational. Therewith this approach opens up the possibility of linking normative considerations to empirical sociological ones” (Habermas, 1992b: 448).
- <sup>xv</sup> Trans.: “We have distinguished genuine imperatives, with which the speaker connects a claim to power, from speech acts with which the speaker raises a criticizable validity claim. Whereas validity claims are internally connected with grounds and give the illocutionary act a rationally motivating force, power claims have to be covered by a potential for sanction if they are to be successful” (Habermas, 1984a: 304).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Trans.: “Weber was not able to make his unofficial typology of action fruitful for the problematic of social rationalization. The official version, however, is so narrowly conceived that in its framework social action can be assessed only under the aspect of purposive-rationality” (Habermas, 1984a: 284).
- <sup>xvii</sup> Trans.: “effective in the mode of a transmitter and amplifier, no longer a mere vehicle for the transportation of information but not yet a medium for culture as an object of consumption” (Habermas, 1989: 183).
- <sup>xviii</sup> Trans.: “Ever since the marketing of the editorial section became independent with that of the advertising section, the press (until then an institution of private people insofar as they constituted a public) became an institution of certain participants in the public sphere in their capacity as private individuals; that is, it became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere” (Habermas, 1989: 185).
- <sup>xix</sup> Trans.: “Private advertisements are always directed to other private people insofar as they are consumers; the addressee of public relations is ‘public opinion’, or the private citizens as the public and not directly as consumers” (Habermas, 1989: 193).
- <sup>xx</sup> Trans.: “The influencing of customers borrows its connotations from the classic idea of a public of private people putting their reason to use and exploits its legitimations for its own ends. The accepted functions of the public sphere are integrated into the competition or organized private interests” (Habermas, 1989: 193).

- <sup>xxi</sup> Trans.: “For the criteria of rationality are completely lacking in a consensus created by sophisticated opinion-molding services under the aegis of a sham public interest” (Habermas, 1989: 195).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Trans.: “In the measure that it is shaped by public relations, the public sphere of civil society again takes on feudal features. The ‘suppliers’ display a show pomp before customers ready to follow. Publicity imitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity involved in representation” (Habermas, 1989: 195).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Trans.: “The anthropocentric profile of theories of the Kantian type seems to render them blind to questions of the moral responsibility of human beings for their non-human environment” (Habermas, 1993: 105).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Trans.: “Let us assume that it is only by virtue of the suffering and sacrifice of past generations that subsequent generations can enjoy an instrumentalised freedom, can enjoy, if not exactly a just order, then procedures that minimise injustice—could they call a world that has such a basis a ‘just’ world? (Habermas, 1982: 246)
- <sup>xxv</sup> Trans.: “In this respect ‘compassion’, compassion for the violation of moral or bodily integrity [of past generations], is a limit concept of the discourse ethic, just as nature-in-itself is a limit concept of the transcendental-pragmatic theory of knowledge” (Habermas, 1982: 247).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Trans.: “[...] we have a sense of being under categorical obligations toward animals. The horror inspired by the torment of animals is, at any rate, more closely related to outrage at the violation of moral demands than to the pitying or condescending attitude toward people who, as we are wont to say, have made nothing of their lives [...]. We ‘ought’ not to neglect animals callously, much less cruelly torment them” (Habermas, 1993: 107).
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Trans.: “Compassion for tormented animals and the pain caused by the destruction of biotopes are surely manifestations of moral intuitions that cannot be fully satisfied by the collective narcissism of what in the final analysis is an anthropocentric way of looking at things” (Habermas, 1990a: 211).
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Trans.: “[...] my modest opinion about what philosophy can and cannot accomplish may come as a disappointment. Be that as it may, philosophy cannot absolve anyone of moral responsibility. And that includes philosophers, for like everyone else, they face moral-practical issues of great complexity, and the first thing they might profitably do is to get a

- clearer view of the situation they find themselves in. The historical and social sciences can be of greater help in this endeavor than philosophy” (Habermas, 1993: 211).
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Trans.: “Influence’ feeds on the resource of mutual understanding, but it is based on advancing trust in beliefs that are not currently tested. In this sense, public opinion represents political potentials [...]” (Habermas, 1996: 439).
- <sup>xxx</sup> Trans.: “Detached from simple interactions, the semantic contents begin floating beyond the imperative force inherent to mutually raised validity claims” [our own translation].
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Trans.: “These actors do not debate with one another, but aim at the opinion-formation of an anonymous public without having to be responsive to it” [our own translation].
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Trans.: “Thanks to a higher degree of organization and larger material resources, lobbies and special interest groups are in the position to employ professional techniques in public relations and political marketing so as to transform social power into political influence” [our own translation].
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Trans.: “[...] associations certainly do not represent the most conspicuous element of a public sphere dominated by mass media and large agencies, observed by market and opinion research, and inundated by the public relations work, propaganda, and advertising of political parties and groups” (Habermas, 1996: 367).
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Trans.: “[...] in general, one can say that even in more or less power-ridden public spheres, the power relations shift as soon as the perception of relevant social problems evokes a *crisis consciousness* at the periphery” (Habermas, 1996: 382; italics in original).
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Trans.: “Organizations, groups, and advocates that allegedly defend public interests may at times apply means of corporate communication management” [our own translation].
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Trans.: “[...] with their programs, they directly influence the political system, but at the same time they are also reflexively concerned with revitalizing and enlarging civil society and the public sphere as well as with confirming their own identities and capacities to act” (Habermas, 1996: 370).
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Trans.: “The very *existence* of social movements [...] depends on whether they find organizational forms that produce solidarities and publics, forms that allow them to fully utilize and radicalize existing communication rights and structures as they pursue special goals” (Habermas, 1996: 376; italics added).
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Trans.: “To historicize Habermas means to make use of the very openness he emphasizes in his works as a chance to reflect with him on the 21<sup>st</sup> century” [our own translation].

## Bibliography

- Albert, Hans (2003): *Kritik des transzendentalen Denkens: Von der Begründung des Wissens zur Analyse der Erkenntnispraxis*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Alexy, Robert (1978): "Eine Theorie des praktischen Diskurses". In: Oelmüller, Willi (ed.) *Normenbegründung, Normendurchsetzung*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 22–58.
- Apel, Karl-Otto (1988): *Diskurs und Verantwortung: Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Apel, Karl-Otto; Kettner, Matthias (eds.) (1992): *Zur Anwendung der Diskursethik in Politik, Recht und Wissenschaft*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Austin, John L. (1962): *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baerns, Barbara (2005): "Public Relations ist, was Public Relations tut". In: *PR-Magazin*. 35 (9), 51–58.
- Bains, Gurnek; Bains, Kylie (2007): *Meaning inc: The blueprint for business success in the 21st century*. London: Profile Books.
- Benoit, William L. (1995): *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Benson, Rodney D. (2008): *Public relations in the public sphere: Habermas, Bourdieu, and the question of power*. Paper presented at the 58th annual meeting of the International Communication Association: Montreal, Canada.
- Bentele, Günter (1994): "Öffentliches Vertrauen: Normative und soziale Grundlagen für Public Relations". In: Armbrecht, Wolfgang; Zabel, Ulf (eds.) *Normative Aspekte der Public Relations*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 131–158.
- Bentele, Günter (1998): "Was ist eigentlich PR? Verständnisse von PR in Beruf und Wissenschaft". In: Bentele, Günter (ed.) *Berufsfeld Public Relations. PR-Fernstudium (Studienband 1)*. Berlin: PR Kolleg Berlin, 12–25.
- Bentele, Günter (2003): "Kommunikationsforschung: Public Relations". In: Bentele, Günter; Brosius, Hans-Bernd; Jarren, Otfried (eds.) *Öffentliche Kommunikation: Handbuch Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 54–78.
- Bentele, Günter (2004): "New perspectives of public relations in Europe". In: Ruler, Betteke van; Vercic, Dejan (eds.) *Public relations and communication management in Europe: A nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice*. New York, NY: de Gruyter, 485–496.
- Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) (2008): *Handbuch der Public Relations: Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

- Bentele, Günter; Liebert, Tobias (eds.) (1995): *Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Darstellung und Diskussion des Ansatzes von Roland Burkart*. Leipzig: ZV Universität Leipzig.
- Bentele, Günter; Wehmeier, Stefan (2009): "Linking social theory with public relations: Some critical reflections in reflexive times". In: Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van; Fredriksson, Magnus (eds.) *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge, 241–361.
- Bernstein, Richard J. (1983): *Beyond objectivism and relativism: Science, hermeneutics, and praxis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bogner, Franz (2000): "Die Lüge von der medienzentrierten PR". In: *Public Relations Forum für Wissenschaft und Praxis*. 6 (4), 210–211.
- Botan, Carl (1997): "Ethics in strategic communication campaigns: The case for a new approach to public relations". In: *Journal of Business Communication*. 34 (2), 188–202.
- Botan, Carl H.; Hazleton, Vincent (2006): *Public relations theory II*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Botan, Carl H.; Taylor, Maureen (2004): "Public relations: State of the field". In: *Journal of Communication*. 54 (4), 645–661.
- Bowen, Michael G; Power, F. Clark (1993): "The moral manager: Communicative Ethics and the Exxon Valdez disaster". In: *Business Ethics Quarterly*. 3 (2), 97–115.
- Bowen, Shannon A. (2008): "A state of neglect: Public relations as 'corporate conscience' or ethics counsel". In: *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 20 (3), 271–296.
- Buchholz, Rogene A. (1985): *Essentials of public policy for management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bühler, Karl (1934): *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*. Jena: Fischer.
- Burkart, Roland (1993): *Public Relations als Konfliktmanagement. Ein Konzept für verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Untersucht am Beispiel der Planung von Sonderabfalldeponien in Niederösterreich*. Wien: Braumüller.
- Burkart, Roland (1994): "Consensus-oriented public relations as a solution to the Landfill Conflict". In: *Waste Management and Research*. (12), 223–232.
- Burkart, Roland (1995): "Das VÖA-Konzept: Eine Replik". In: Bentele, Günter; Liebert, Tobias (eds.) *Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Darstellung und Diskussion des Ansatzes von Roland Burkart*. Leipzig: ZV Universität Leipzig, 65–80.
- Burkart, Roland (1996): "Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit. Der Dialog als PR-Konzeption". In: Bentele, Günter; Steinmann, Horst; Zerfaß, Ansgar (eds.) *Dialogorientierte Unternehmenskommunikation: Grundlagen, Praxiserfahrungen, Perspektiven*. Berlin: Vistas, 245–270.



- Burkart, Roland (2000): "Online-Dialoge: Eine neue Qualität für Konflikt PR?". In: Baerns, Barbara; Raupp, Juliana (eds.) *Information und Kommunikation in Europa*. Berlin: Vistas, 222–230.
- Burkart, Roland (2004): "Consensus-oriented public relations (COPR): A conception for planning and evaluation of public relations". In: Ruler, Betteke van; Vercic, Dejan (eds.) *Public relations in Europe: A nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice*. New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 446–452.
- Burkart, Roland (2007): "On Jürgen Habermas and public relations". In: *Public Relations Review*. 33 (3), 249–254.
- Burkart, Roland (2008): "Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) *Handbuch der Public Relations*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 223–240.
- Burkart, Roland (2009): "On Habermas: Understanding and public relations". In: Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van; Fredriksson, Magnus (eds.) *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge, 141–165.
- Burkart, Roland (2010): "Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Hömberg, Walter; Hahn, Daniela; Schaffner, Timon B. (eds.) *Kommunikation und Verständigung: Theorie, Empirie, Praxis*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 17–37.
- Burkart, Roland; Probst, Sabine (1991): "Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Eine kommunikationswissenschaftlich begründete Perspektive". In: *Publizistik*. 36 (1), 56–76.
- Carroll, Archie B.; Buchholtz, Ann K. (2006): *Business and society: Ethics and stakeholder management*. Mason, OH: South-Western.
- Chambers, Simone (2005): "Measuring publicity's effect: Reconciling empirical research and normative theory". In: *Acta Politica*. 40 (2), 255–266.
- Cheney, George; Christensen, Lars Thøger (2001): "Organizational identity: Linkages between internal and external communication". In: Jablin, Fredric M.; Putnam, Linda L. (eds.) *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 231–269.
- Cheney, George; Dionisopoulos, George N. (1989): "Public relations? No, relations with publics: A rhetorical-organizational approach to contemporary corporate communications". In: Botan, Carl H.; Hazleton, Vincent (eds.) *Public relations theory*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 135–157.
- Cohen, Jean L.; Arato, Andrew (1990): *Civil society and political theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cohen, Joshua (1989): "Deliberation and democratic legitimacy". In: Hamlin, Alan P.; Pettit, Philip (eds.) *The good polity: Normative analysis of the state*. Oxford: Blackwell, 12–34.

- Coombs, W. Timothy (1993): "Philosophical underpinnings: Ramifications of a pluralist paradigm". In: *Public Relations Review*. 19 (2), 111–119.
- Culbertson, Hugh M. (1989): "Breadth of perspective: An important concept for public relations". In: *Public Relations Research*. 1 (1), 3–25.
- Curtin, Patricia A.; Boynton, Lois A. (2001): "Ethics in public relations: Theory and practice". In: Heath, Robert L. (ed.) *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 411–421.
- Cutlip, Scott M.; Center, Allen H.; Broom, Glen M. (2000): *Effective public relations*. 8th edn. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Cutlip, Scott M.; Center, Allen H.; Broom, Glen M. (2006): *Effective public relations*. 9th rev. edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- D'Aveni, Richard A.; MacMillan, Ian C. (1990): "Crisis and the content of managerial communications: A study of the focus of attention of top Managers in surviving and failing firms". In: *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 35 (4), 634–657.
- Dalton, Russell J. (2006): *Citizen politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Day, Donald G. (1961): "The ethics of democratic debate". In: *Central States Speech Journal*. 17 (1), 5–14.
- Eberl, Markus; Schwaiger, Manfred (2005): "Corporate reputation: Disentangling the effects on financial performance". In: *European Journal of Marketing*. 39 (7/8), 838–854.
- Eisenegger, Mark (2009): "Trust and reputation in the age of globalization". In: Klewes, Joachim; Wreschniok, Robert (eds.) *Reputation capital: Building trust in the 21st century*. Berlin: Springer, 11–22.
- Eisenegger, Mark; Imhof, Kurt (2008): "The true, the good and the beautiful: Reputation management in the media society". In: Zerfaß, Ansgar; Ruler, Betteke van; Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy (eds.) *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 125–146.
- Eisenegger, Mark; Imhof, Kurt (2009): "Funktionale, soziale und expressive Reputation: Grundzüge einer Reputationstheorie". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd. rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 243–264.
- Elwood, William N. (1995): *Public relations inquiry as rhetorical criticism: Case studies of corporate discourse and social influence*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Esrock, Stuart L.; Leichty, Greg B. (1998): "Social responsibility and corporate web pages: Self-presentation or agenda-setting?". In: *Public Relations Review*. 24 (3), 305–319.
- Farace, Richard V.; Monge, Peter R.; Russell, Hamish M. (1977): *Communicating and organizing*. London: Addison-Wesley.

- Faulstich, Werner (2000): *Grundwissen Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*. München: Fink.
- Femers, Susanne (2009): "PR-Theorie? PR-Theorie! Plädoyer für eine wissenschaftliche und fachliche Fundierung der Public Relations durch Theoriebildung und reflektiertes Handeln im Berufsfeld". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 201–212.
- Fombrun, Charles J. (1996): *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- French, Warren; Allbright, David (1998): "Resolving a moral conflict through discourse". In: *Journal of Business Ethics*. 17 (2), 177–194.
- Fröhlich, Romy (2008): "Die Problematik der PR-Definition(en)". In: Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) *Handbuch der Public Relations. Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 95–109.
- Gebauer, Richard (1993): *Letzte Begründung: Eine Kritik der Diskursethik von Jürgen Habermas*. München: Fink.
- German, Kathleen M. (1995): "Critical theory in public relations inquiry". In: Elwood, William N. (ed.) *Public relations inquiry as rhetorical criticism: Case studies of corporate discourse and social influence*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 279–294.
- Gollner, Andrew B. (1983): *Social change and corporate strategy: The expanding role of public affairs*. Stamford, CT: Issue Action Press.
- Gottschalk-Mazouz, Niels (2000): *Diskursethik: Theorien, Entwicklungen, Perspektiven*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Gröbel-Steinbach, Evelyn (2004): "Handlungsrationalität und Rationalisierung des Handelns bei Weber und Habermas". In: Gabriel, Manfred (ed.) *Paradigmen der akteurszentrierten Soziologie*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 91–102.
- Grunig, James E. (1989): "Symmetrical presuppositions as a framework for public relations theory". In: Botan, Carl H.; Hazleton, Vincent (eds.) *Public relations theory*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 17–44.
- Grunig, James E. (1992): *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Grunig, James E.; Grunig, Larissa A. (1989): "Toward a theory of the public relations behavior of organizations: Review of a program of research". In: *Public Relations Research Annual*. 1 (1), 27–64.
- Grunig, James E.; Hunt, Todd (1984): *Managing public relations*. New York, NY: Holt.

- Grunig, James E.; Repper, Fred C. (1992): "Strategic management, publics, and issues". In: *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 117–158.
- Grunig, James E.; White, Jon (1992): "The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice". In: Grunig, James E.; Dozier, David M. (eds.) *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 31–64.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1962): *Strukturwandel Der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1964): "Öffentlichkeit". In: Fraenkel, Ernst; Bracher, Karl D. (eds.) *Fischer Lexikon Staat und Politik*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 220–226.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1968): *Erkenntnis und Interesse*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1973): "Wahrheitstheorien". In: Fahrenbach, Helmut (ed.) *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion*. Pfullingen: Neske, 211–266.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1974): "The public sphere: An encyclopedia article". In: *New German Critique*. (3), 49–55.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1976): "Was heißt Universalpragmatik". In: Apel, Karl-Otto (ed.) *Sprachpragmatik und Philosophie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 174–272.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1979): *Communication and the evolution of society*. Thomas McCarthy (trans.). Toronto: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1981a): *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (vol. 1): Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1981b): *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (vol. 2): Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1982): "A reply to my critics". In: Thompson, John B.; Held, David (eds.) *Habermas: Critical debates*. London: MacMillan, 219–283.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1983): *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984a): *The theory of communicative action (vol. 1). Reason and the rationalization of society*. Thomas McCarthy (trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984b): *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1985a): *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1985b): "Politischer Funktionswandel der Öffentlichkeit: Vom Journalismus schriftstellender Privatleute zu den öffentlichen Dienstleistungen der Massenmedien. Werbung als Funktion der Öffentlichkeit". In: Prokop, Dieter (ed.) *Medienforschung (vol. 1): Konzerne, Macher, Kontrolleure*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 325–340.

- Habermas, Jürgen (1987): *The theory of communicative action (vol. 2). Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason*. Thomas McCarthy (trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1988): *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1989): *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Thomas Burger (trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1990a): *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (trans.). Maldon, MA: Polity Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1990b): *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Mit einem Vorwort zur Neuauflage. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1991): *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1992a): *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1992b): “Further reflections on the public sphere”. In: Calhoun, Craig J. (ed.) *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 421–461.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1993): *Justification and application: Remarks on discourse ethics*. Ciaran P. Cronin (trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1994): “Actions, speech acts, linguistically mediated interactions and the life-world”. In: Fløistad, Guttorm (ed.) *Philosophical problems today*. Boston, MA: Kluwer, 45–74.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1995): *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik. Kleine politische Schriften VIII*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1996): *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. William Rehg (trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1998): *On the pragmatics of communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1999): *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung: Philosophische Aufsätze*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2001): *Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2003): *Truth and justification*. Barbara Fultner (trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2005a): “Concluding comments on empirical approaches to deliberative politics”. In: *Acta Política*. 40 (3), 384–392.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2005b): *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.

- Habermas, Jürgen (2006): "Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research". In: *Communication Theory*. 16 (4), 411–426.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2008): "Hat die Demokratie noch eine epistemische Dimension? Empirische Forschung und normative Theorie". In: Habermas, Jürgen (ed.) *Ach, Europa. Kleine politische Schriften XI*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 138–191.
- Harlow, Rex F. (1976): "Building a public relations definition". In: *Public Relations Review*. 2 (2), 34–42.
- Harrison, Bruce E.; Prugh, Tom (1989): "Assessing the damage: Practitioner perspectives on the Valdez". In: *Public Relations Journal*. (45), 35–45.
- Hauser, Gerard A. (1999): *Vernacular voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Hazleton, Vincent (1992): "Toward a system theory of public relations". In: Avenarius, Horst; Ambrecht, Wolfgang (eds.) *Ist Public Relations eine Wissenschaft?* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 33–45.
- Heath, Robert L. (1994): *Management of corporate communication: From interpersonal contacts to external affairs*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Heath, Robert L. (2005): "Public relations". In: Heath, Robert L. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of public relations (vol. 2)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 679–684.
- Heath, Robert L.; Frandsen, Finn (2008): "Rhetorical perspective and public relations: Meaning matters". In: Zerfaß, Ansgar; Ruler, Betteke van; Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy (eds.) *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 349–364.
- Heath, Robert L.; Nelson, Richard A. (1986): *Issues management: Corporate public policymaking in an information society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hill, John W. (1958): *Corporate public relations: Arm of modern management*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Holmström, Susanne (1996): *An intersubjective and the social systemic public relations paradigm: Public relations interpreted from systems theory (Niklas Luhmann) in opposition to the critical tradition (Jürgen Habermas)*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Roskilde, Denmark.
- Holmström, Susanne (1997): "The inter-subjective and the social systemic public relations paradigms". In: *Journal of Communication Management*. 2 (1), 24–39.
- Holmström, Susanne (1999): "Public Relations: Perspectives and Paradigms. An Intersubjective and a Social Systematic Public Relations Paradigm". In: *Public Relations Forum für Wissenschaft und Praxis*. 5 (2), 108.

- Holzinger, Katharina (2005): "Context or conflict types: Which determines the selection of communication mode". In: *Acta Politica*. 40 (2), 239–254.
- Hömberg, Walter; Hahn, Daniela; Schaffer, Timon B. (eds.) (2010): *Kommunikation und Verständigung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Hundhausen, Carl (1951): *Werbung um öffentliches Vertrauen: Public Relations*. Essen: Girardet.
- Hundhausen, Carl (1957): *Industrielle Publizität als Public Relations*. Essen: Girardet.
- Hundhausen, Carl (1969): *Public Relations: Theorie und Systematik*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van (2007): "How public relations works: Theoretical roots and public relations perspectives". In: *Public Relations Review*. 33 (3), 243–248.
- Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van (2009): "Applying social theory to public relations". In: Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van; Fredriksson, Magnus (eds.) *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1–20.
- Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van; Fredriksson, Magnus (eds.) (2009): *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ihlen, Øyvind; Verhoeven, Piet (2009): "Conclusions on the domain, context, concepts, issues, and empirical avenues of public relations". In: Ihlen, Øyvind; Ruler, Betteke van; Fredriksson, Magnus (eds.) *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge, 323–340.
- Jarren, Otfried; Röttger, Ulrike (2008): "Public Relations aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Sicht". In: Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) *Handbuch der Public Relations: Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 19–36.
- Jensen, Inger (2001): "Public relations and emerging functions of the public sphere: An analytical framework". In: *Journal of Communication Management*. 6 (2), 133–147.
- Johannesen, Richard L. (1990): *Ethics and human communication*. 3rd edn. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- Kent, Michael; Taylor, Maureen (1998): "Building dialogic relationships through the world wide web". In: *Public Relations Review*. 24 (3), 321–334.
- Kent, Michael L.; Taylor, Maureen (2002): "Toward a dialogic theory of public relations". In: *Public Relations Review*. 28 (1), 21–37.
- Kettner, Michael (1993): "Citizen virtues in a technological order". In: Winkler, Earl R.; Coombs, Jerrold R. (eds.) *Applied ethics: A reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 167–187.

- Kocks, Klaus (2009): "PR-Theorien: Vergebliche Versuche in der Halbwelt amerikanischer Wissenschaft". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 213–222.
- Koller, Andreas (2004): *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit in Westeuropa und den USA. Theoretische meta-theoretische und empirische Rekonstruktion und transatlantische Integration der Klassiker*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Zurich, Switzerland.
- Krebs, Angelika (1997): "Discourse ethics and nature". In: *Environmental Values*. 6 (3), 269–278.
- Kunczik, Michael (1997): *Geschichte Der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in Deutschland*. Köln: Böhlau.
- Kunczik, Michael (2009): "PR-Theorie und PR-Praxis: Historische Aspekte". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 223–242.
- Kunczik, Michael (2010): *Public Relations: Konzepte und Theorien*. 5th rev. and extd. edn. Köln: Böhlau.
- Lang, Alfred (1993): "Jürgen Habermas' Verständigungsparadigma als theoretischer und forschungsleitender Rahmen in der Kommunikationswissenschaft". In: Bentele, Günter; Rühl, Manfred (eds.) *Theorien öffentlicher Kommunikation: Problemfelder, Positionen, Perspektiven*. München: Ölschläger, 214–217.
- Langenbacher, Wolfgang R. (1991): "PR und Journalismus in der Risikogesellschaft". In: Dorer, Johanna (ed.) *Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: theoretische Ansätze, empirische Befunde und Berufspraxis der Public Relations*. Wien: Braumüller, 28–36.
- Ledingham, John A. (2003): "Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations". In: *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 15 (2), 181–198.
- Leeper, Roy V. (1996): "Moral objectivity, Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics, and public relations". In: *Public Relations Review*. 22 (2), 133–150.
- Leif, Thomas; Speth, Rudolf (2006): "Die fünfte Gewalt: Anatomie des Lobbyismus in Deutschland". In: Leif, Thomas; Speth, Rudolf (eds.) *Die fünfte Gewalt: Lobbyismus in Deutschland*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 10–36.
- Leitch, Shirley; Neilson, David (2001): "Bringing publics into public relations". In: Heath, Robert L. (ed.) *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 127–138.
- Leschke, Rainer (2001): *Einführung in die Medienethik*. München: Fink.
- Liebert, Tobias (1995): "Sind PR 'kommunikatives Handeln' nach Habermas? Anmerkungen zu Roland Burkarts Konzept einer verständigungsorientierten Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Bentele, Günter; Liebert, Tobias (eds.) *Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Darstellung und Diskussion des Ansatzes von Roland Burkart*. Leipzig: ZV Universität Leipzig, 38–42.



- Livesey, Sharon M. (2002): "Global warming wars: Rhetorical and discourse analytic approaches to Exxon Mobil's corporate public discourse". In: *Journal of Business Communication*. 39 (1), 117–148.
- Luhmann, Niklas (1987): *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Maier, Craig T. (2005): "Weathering the storm: Hauser's vernacular voices, public relations and the Roman catholic church's sexual abuse scandal". In: *Public Relations Review*. 31 (2), 219–227.
- Marcus, Philip A. (1997): *Moving ahead with ISO 14000: Improving environmental management and advancing sustainable development*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- McCarthy, Thomas (1982): "Rationality and relativism: Habermas's overcoming of Hermeneutics". In: *Habermas: Critical debates*. London: MacMillan, 57–76.
- McLean, Rachel; Wainwright, David W. (2009): "Social networks, football fans, fantasy and reality: How corporate and media interests are invading our lifeworld". In: *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*. 7 (1), 54–71.
- Meisenbach, Rebecca J. (2006): "Habermas's discourse ethics and principle of universalization as a moral framework for organizational communication". In: *Management Communication Quarterly*. 20 (1), 39–62.
- Meisenbach, Rebecca J.; Feldner, Sarah (2007): "SaveDisney.com and activists challenges: A Habermasian perspective on corporate legitimacy". In: *International Journal of Strategic Communication*. 1 (4), 207–226.
- Meisenbach, Rebecca J.; Feldner, Sarah (2009): "Dialogue, discourse ethics, and Disney". In: Heath, Robert L.; Toth, Elizabeth L.; Waymer, Damion (eds.) *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations II*. New York, NY: Routledge, 253–271.
- Melucci, Alberto (1988): "Social movements and the democratization of everyday life". In: Keane, John (ed.) *Civil society and the state: New European perspectives*. London: Verso, 245–260.
- Merten, Klaus (2000): "Die Lüge vom Dialog". In: *Public Relations Forum für Wissenschaft und Praxis*. 6 (1), 6–9.
- Merten, Klaus (2009): "Zur Theorie der PR-Theorien. Oder: Kann man PR-Theorien anders als systemisch modellieren". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 51–70.

- Merten, Klaus; Westerbarkey, Joachim (1994): "Public opinion and public relations". In: Merten, Klaus; Schmidt, Siegfried J.; Weischenberg, Siegfried (eds.) *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 188–211.
- Metzler, Maribeth S. (1996): *A communicative theory of organizational legitimacy*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA.
- Metzler, Maribeth S. (2001): "The centrality of organizational legitimacy to public relations practice". In: Heath, Robert L. (ed.) *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 321–333.
- Meyer-Abich, Klaus M. (1986): *Wege zum Frieden mit der Natur: Praktische Naturphilosophie für die Umweltpolitik*. München: DTV.
- Mickey, Thomas J. (2003): *Deconstructing public relations: Public relations criticism*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Motion, Judy; Leitch, Shirley (1996): "A discursive perspective from New Zealand: Another world view". In: *Public Relations Review*. 22 (3), 297–309.
- Müller-Scholl, Ulrich (1995): "Erfolgs- vs. Verständigungsorientierung. Kritisches Statement zu Roland Burkarts Konzept für verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Bentele, Günter; Liebert, Tobias (eds.) *Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Darstellung und Diskussion des Ansatzes von Roland Burkart*. Leipzig: ZV Universität Leipzig, 43–46.
- Münch, Richard (1991): *Dialektik der Kommunikationsgesellschaft*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Münch, Richard (1995): *Dynamik der Kommunikationsgesellschaft*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Nanz, Patrizia; Steffek, Jens (2005): "Assessing the democratic quality of deliberation in international governance: Criteria and research strategies". In: *Acta Politica*. 40 (3), 368–383.
- Nessmann, Karl (1995): "Public relations in Europe: A comparison with the United States". In: *Public Relations Review*. 21 (2), 151–160.
- Oeckl, Albert (1964): *Handbuch der Public Relations: Theorie und Praxis der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in Deutschland und der Welt*. München: Süddeutscher Verlag.
- Oeckl, Albert (1967): *PR in Deutschland: Ihre Entwicklung, ihr gegenwärtiger Stand und ihre Aussichten für die Zukunft*. Hamburg: Märkte und Medien Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Oeckl, Albert (1976): *PR-Praxis: Der Schlüssel zur Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*. Düsseldorf: Econ.
- Ogburn, William F. (1969): *Kultur und sozialer Wandel*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.
- Olasky, Marvin N. (1987): *Corporate public relations: A new historical perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Parsons, Talcott (1967): *Sociological theory and modern society*. New York: Free Press.
- Pearson, Ron (1989a): *A theory of public relations ethics*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Ohio State University, USA.

- Pearson, Ron (1989b): "Business ethics as communication ethics: Public relations practice and the idea of dialogue". In: Botan, Carl H. (ed.) *Public relations theory*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 111–131.
- Pearson, Ron (1989c): "Beyond ethical relativism in public relations: Coorientation, rules, and the idea of communication symmetry". In: *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 1 (1), 67–86.
- Peukert, Helmut (2009): *Wissenschaftstheorie, Handlungstheorie, fundamentale Theologie: Analysen zu Ansatz und Status theologischer Theoriebildung*. 3rd edn. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Plowman, Kenneth D. (1998): "Power in conflict for public relations". In: *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 10 (4), 237–261.
- PRSA (1999): *Public relations tactics: The blue book*. New York, NY: PRSA.
- Rao, Hayagreeva (1994): "The social construction of reputation: Certification contests, legitimation, and the survival of organizations in the American automobile industry: 1895–1912". In: *Strategic Management Journal*. 15 (1), 29–44.
- Raupp, Juliana (2006): "Kumulation oder Diversifizierung? Ein Beitrag zur Wissenssystematik der PR-Forschung". In: Pühringer, Karin; Zielmann, Sahra (eds.) *Vom Wissen und Nicht-Wissen einer Wissenschaft. Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Domänen: Darstellungen und Defizite*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 21–50.
- Reemtsma, Jan Philipp (2001): "Laudatio". In: Habermas, Jürgen; *Glauben und Wissen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 35–57.
- Reese-Schäfer, Walter (2001): *Jürgen Habermas*. 3rd rev. edn. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag.
- Reynolds, Mary-Ann; Yuthas, Kristi (2008): "Moral discourse and corporate social responsibility reporting". In: *Journal of Business Ethics*. 78 (1/2), 47–64.
- Rolke, Lothar (1999): "Die gesellschaftliche Kernfunktion von Public Relations". In: *Publizistik*. 44 (3), 431–444.
- Rolke, Lothar (2009): "Public Relations: Die Lizenz zur Mitgestaltung öffentlicher Meinung". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 173–198.
- Ronneberger, Franz (1977): *Legitimation durch Information: Ein kommunikationstheoretischer Ansatz zur Theorie der PR*. Düsseldorf: Econ.
- Ronneberger, Franz (1982): *Public Relations zur Zukunftssicherung: Hinweise zur Überlebensstrategie der technisch-wissenschaftlichen Zivilisation*. Düsseldorf: Flieger.
- Ronneberger, Franz; Rühl, Manfred (1992): *Theorie Der Public Relations: Ein Entwurf*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

- Roper, Juliet (2005): "Symmetrical communication: Excellent public relations or a strategy for hegemony?". In: *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 17 (1), 69–86.
- Röttger, Ulrike (2000): *Public Relations: Organisation und Profession. Öffentlichkeitsarbeit als Organisationsfunktion*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) (2009a): *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundlagen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Röttger, Ulrike (2009b): "Welche Theorien für welche PR?". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 9–25.
- Röttger, Ulrike; Hoffmann, Jochen; Jarren, Otfried (2003): *Public Relations in der Schweiz; Eine empirische Studie zum Berufsfeld Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Rühl, Manfred (2009): "Für Public Relations? Ein kommunikationswissenschaftliches Theoriebouquet!". In: Röttger, Ulrike (ed.) *Theorien der Public Relations: Grundfragen und Perspektiven der PR-Forschung*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 71–86.
- Ruler, Betteke van; Vercic, Dejan (2008): "Communication management in Europe: Challenges and opportunities". In: Zerfaß, Ansgar; Ruler, Betteke van; Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy (eds.) *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 313–324.
- Saxer, Ulrich (1991): "Public Relations als Innovation: Innovationstheorie als public-relationswissenschaftlicher Ansatz". In: *Media Perspektiven*. 5 (1), 273–290.
- Saxer, Ulrich (1994): "Norm und Gegenorm: Probleme und Normverträglichkeit in der PR-Arbeit". In: Armbrecht, Wolfgang; Zabel, Ulf (eds.) *Normative Aspekte der Public Relations*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 195–224.
- Saxer, Ulrich (2010): "Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Ein Strategien-fundiertes public-relations-wissenschaftliches Konzept". In: Hömberg, Walter; Hahn, Daniela; Schaffer, Timon B. (eds.) *Kommunikation und Verständigung: Theorie, Empirie, Praxis*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 39–54.
- Schulz, Winfried (2004): "Public Relations/Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth; Schulz, Winfried; Wilke, Jürgen (eds.) 3rd rev. and extd. edn. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 517–545.
- Schütz, Alfred; Luckmann, Thomas (1979): *Strukturen Der Lebenswelt*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Schwaiger, Manfred (2004): "Components and parameters of corporate reputation: An empirical study". In: *Schmalenbach Business Review*. 56 (1), 46–71.

- Searle, John R. (1969): *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, John R. (1995): *The construction of social reality*. London: Penguin.
- Shrum, Wesley; Wuthnow, Robert (1988): "Reputation states of organizations in technical systems". In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 93 (3), 882–912.
- Signitzer, Benno (1992): "Aspekte der Produktion von Public Relations-Wissen: PR-Forschung in studentischen Abschlußarbeiten". In: Avenarius, Horst; Ambrecht, Wolfgang (eds.) *Ist Public Relations eine Wissenschaft?* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 171–206.
- Signitzer, Benno; Wamser, Carola (2006): "Public diplomacy: A specific governmental public relations function". In: Botan, Carl H.; Hazleton, Vincent (eds.) *Public relations theory II*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 381–411.
- Smith, Conrad (1993): "News sources and power elites in news coverage of Exxon Valdez oil spill". In: *Journalism Quarterly*. (70), 388–398.
- Spicer, Christopher (1997): *Organizational public relations: A political perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Steinberg, Charles S. (1958): *The mass communicators: Public relations, public opinion, and mass media*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Steinhoff, Uwe (2006): *Kritik der kommunikativen Rationalität: Eine Darstellung und Kritik der kommunikationstheoretischen Philosophie von Jürgen Habermas und Karl-Otto Apel*. Paderborn: Mentis.
- Strawson, Peter F. (1974): *Freedom and resentment*. London: Methuen.
- Szyszka, Peter (2008): "Organisationsbezogene Ansätze". In: Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) *Handbuch der Public Relations. Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 161–176.
- Szyszka, Peter; Schütte, Dagmar; Urbahn, Katharina (2009): *Public Relations in Deutschland: Eine empirische Studie zum Berufsfeld Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Taylor, Maureen (2001): "International public relations: Opportunities and challenges for the 21st century". In: *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 629–637.
- Theis-Berglmair, Anna M. (1995): "PR als Interaktionstypus. Anmerkungen zu Roland Burkarts Konzept einer verständigungsorientierten Öffentlichkeitsarbeit". In: Bentele, Günter; Liebert, Tobias (eds.) *Verständigungsorientierte Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Darstellung und Diskussion des Ansatzes von Roland Burkart*. Leipzig: ZV Universität Leipzig, 60–64.
- Theis, Anna M. (1992): "Inter-Organisations-Beziehungen im Mediensystem: Public Relations aus organisationssoziologischer Perspektive". In: *Publizistik*. 37 (1), 25–35.

- Toulmin, Stephen E. (1970): *An examination of place of reason in ethics*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Troup, Calvin L. (2009): "Ordinary people can reason: A rhetorical case for including vernacular voices in ethical public relations practice". In: *Journal of Business Ethics*. 87 (4), 441–453.
- Vasquez, Gabriel M.; Taylor, Maureen (2000): "Public relations: An emerging social science enters the new millennium". In: Gudykunst, William B. (ed.) *Communication yearbook (vol. 24)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 319–342.
- Vercic, Dejan (2008): "Public relations and power: How hard is soft power?". In: Zerfaß, Ansgar; Ruler, Betteke van; Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy (eds.) *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 271–279.
- Weber, Max (1972): *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. 5th rev. edn. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Wehmeier, Stefan (2008): "Communication management, organizational communication and public relations: Developments and future directions from a German perspective". In: Zerfaß, Ansgar; Ruler, Betteke van; Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy (eds.) *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 219–231.
- Westerbarkey, Joachim (2008): "Kritische Ansätze: ausgewählte Paradigmen". In: Bentele, Günter; Fröhlich, Romy; Szyszka, Peter (eds.) *Handbuch der Public Relations. Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln*. 2nd rev. and extd. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 177–191.
- White, Stephen K. (1988): *The recent work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, justice and modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitebook, Joel (1979): "The problem of nature in Habermas". In: *Telos*. 40 (1), 41–69.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1967): *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Yuthas, Kristi; Rogers, Rodney; Dillard, Jesse F. (2002): "Communicative action and corporate annual reports". In: *Journal of Business Ethics*. 41 (1/2), 141–157.
- Zerfaß, Ansgar (2010): *Unternehmensführung und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit: Grundlagen einer Theorie der Unternehmenskommunikation und Public Relations*. 3rd rev. edn. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.