II. Concepts of the Public and the Private:  
Theoretical Approaches

The difficulty of defining the terms *public* and *private* derives, on the one hand, from people’s largely individual understanding of the domains and, on the other hand, from their historically and culturally shaped conceptualisations. According to Barley, different cultures also have vastly different conceptions of these terms (8). Even within Western-European cultures, where a similar distinction is made between *public* and *private*, as a result of historical and social developments, there is no longer the sharp contrast which existed in Greek and most of Roman civilisation; nowadays, the two spheres often overlap, at times they even concur (Geuss 6). Thus, apart from being shaped by one’s personality, the boundaries have been considerably blurred over the centuries and as a result of this process they are “constantly being renegotiated” (Landes 3).

In order to illustrate the transformations which these two realms have undergone in the course of the centuries and in an attempt to identify distinctive features and codes which influence the conception of the public and the private sphere, miscellaneous studies, in such diverse fields as history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, have been conducted. From a Saussurian standpoint, these numerous approaches underline how wide a range of signifieds the terms *public* and *private* cover.

For my analysis of the *public* and the *private* in Anglo-Irish literature in general and in Brian Friel’s plays in particular, I will draw on specific aspects of a number of different theoretical approaches. Predominantly, my focus will be on Hannah Arendt’s chapter “The Public and the Private Realm” in her study *The Human Condition* (originally published in 1958), Jürgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), Stanley Benn and Gerald Gaus’ sociological approach *Public and Private in Social Life* (1983), Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent’s *Riddles of Identity in Modern Times* (1987, the fifth volume of Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby’s study *A History of Private Life*), Gertrud Lehnert’s *Mit dem Handy in der Peepshow: Die Inszenierung des Privaten im öffentlichen Raum* (1999) and Wolfgang Sofsky’s *Privacy: A Manifesto* (2007). Rather than presenting comprehensive overviews of these texts, I will offer a brief summary of the general assumptions. The major historical transformations of the two spheres will, however, be outlined in some greater detail since the tendencies described by Habermas and Arendt were taken to the extreme in Anglo-Irish literature. Thereafter, only features which strengthen my argument with regard to the
spatial interpretation of Anglo-Irish texts or which will help to define the needs or sorrows encountered by Brian Friel’s characters will be extracted.

In his introduction to “Public and Private Spheres in France,” Prost stresses that the original establishment of the public and the private domain is a human invention, and he indicates that, as a result of social changes, constant modifications of the two realms are to be expected:

Private life is not something given in nature from the beginning of time. It is a historical reality, which different societies have construed in different ways. The boundaries of private life are not laid down once and for all; the division of human activity between public and private spheres is subject to change. (3)

He further maintains that “[p]rivate life makes sense only in relation to public life; its history is first of all the history of its definition,” and he concludes that the establishment of private space is closely entangled with the one of its frontiers (3). In his study Privacy: A Manifesto, Sofsky confirms Prost’s view that the history of private space originates in certain realms being marked off from others. He regards this development as by no means “self-evident” and describes the process as “a historical and anthropological fact” (24).

Nonetheless, Sofsky and Prost, as well as Bachelard in his Poetics of Space, stress how significant the invention of walls was in the history of people’s attempt to protect their own sphere of privacy and intimacy from the outside world.1 Sofsky values the wall as “one of humanity’s most important discoveries” and compares this step to the invention of “the wheel, the plow, or writing” (23). Within a short period of time, however, this private/public distinction, as inside or outside the wall of one’s own sphere, initiated a considerable range of social developments and the “separation was enforced by a series of detailed prescriptions” (Prost 3). The public realm outside the wall turned into a sphere where “the pressures of society, vocational obligations, the demands of the community and state dominate” (Sofsky 23). On the other hand, the sphere created behind the wall, this hidden and protected space that was distinguished from the public realm, corresponds – according to Prost at least theoretically – to domesticity, family and household (51). As my study of

1 Studying “the dialectics of within and without, […] of open and closed,” Bachelard’s main focus in The Poetics of Space is on “the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (xxxix and xxxv). Arguing that the space established behind these walls “nearly always exercises an attraction” because “it concentrates being within limits that protect” (xxxvi), Bachelard is convinced that a human being’s life behind the walls “begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (7). Although most of Friel’s protagonists have lost this sense of well-being and protection, their yearning for this state “when being is being-well, when the human being is deposited in a being-well, in the well-being originally associated with being” is one of the main driving forces in their lives (7).
Friel’s plays will show, it is precisely this domain which Sofsky calls “the refuge of the family, friendship, and leisure time” and which Friel’s characters know as their ‘home’ that functions as the focal point of the vast majority of the playwright’s settings (23).

Trying to define public and private before the above established background, most critics agree that, in its most general sense, the term public is synonymous with what can be seen and heard by anyone as well as with what is commonly accessible to anyone, whereas private connotes that which is concealed or withdrawn from the public sphere and public sight. In this context, private describes what is not easily recognisable: a space where accessibility is either barred or thought to be entirely under the control of the individual. Space in this context can refer to property or possessions as well as to dreams, feelings, thoughts, passions, fantasies or memories; in other words, private space may be a physical entity like one’s home or house or a mental concept such as one’s inner world. Uneasy about precisely this hidden or – to use Arendt’s expression – dark element in a space they cannot control, those in power of society have rarely respected people’s need for private spheres (64). Nevertheless, Sofsky argues that “[t]here has never been a society in which people have not sought to occupy their own terrain and to defend it against attacks” (24). After all, mankind has always undertaken considerable efforts to minimise heteronomy in order to protect its own personal sphere and freedom:

Privacy […] is the individual’s fortress. It is an area free of domination, the only one under the individual’s control. The private comprises what is no one else’s concern. It is neither public nor manifest. The private is not for other eyes, ears, or hands; it is not shared with others and is not accessible to them. (Sofsky 12)

However, this aspect of secrecy or concealment has its own shortcomings; while public knowledge, which is both seen and heard, is closely associated with truth and reality, the private, which is by definition being hidden and veiled from the public realm, cannot only be considered potentially harmful by those in power, but it may be taken or treated as non-existent, too. Arendt addresses this difficulty when she outlines an extreme form of private human existence:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, […] to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent

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2 The definition of home and its conceptualisations in Anglo-Irish autobiographies as well as in Friel’s plays will be closely examined in chapters III (p. 55–65) and IV (p. 204–229).
than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people. (58)

The condition discussed by Arendt, uncommon as it may appear these days, accurately summarises life and reality as it was encountered in antiquity by slaves, women, children, literally by anyone except the *pater familias*, the head of the household, who ruled the private sphere with uncontested and often despotic power and who was the only member of the household to be at home in both the private and the public domain. Appearance, therefore, produces reality and is closely related to the public. What can be seen or heard is unlikely to be questioned in its existence, while the private world, as long as it is not articulated, belongs to the hidden realm and might be regarded as nonexistent; hence, feelings and thoughts “lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized [...] into a shape to fit them for public appearance” (Arendt 50). This statement is on a par with Berkeley’s modification of Descartes’ dictum ‘cogito ergo sum’ into “esse est percipi” (Eliot 29, original emphasis). Perception thus produces existence and shapes space: only that which is perceived exists. Public space in this context would denote that which can be perceived by anyone, whereas private space describes what is only perceived by at least one person, who can shape his or her own sphere. Strikingly, Arendt’s description of “an entirely private life” is at the same time perfectly representative of many postcolonial countries such as Ireland (58). Where entire peoples or communities were silenced by the dominant discourse of the colonisers, they were forced to withdraw into the private or, as it were, mute realm. Retreating from public space allowed these people to protect their own lives at the expense of sacrificing their own – publicly acknowledged – reality.3

Approaching the issue of the public and the private from a historical point of view, both Habermas and Arendt argue that, although much of what shapes the public and the private realm nowadays originated in the eighteenth century, the initial distinction between the spheres was established as early as in Greek times. Greek society distinguished the sphere of the *polis* (state or community), common to all free citizens, from the sphere of the *oikos* (house or dwelling place), pertaining to the individual and closely related to the domestic realm.

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3 As the vast number of postcolonial texts published since the twentieth century proves and as Arendt recognised as early as 1958, storytelling offers those communities and people whose realities were ignored or silenced by the dominant discourse of the colonisers an opportunity to reclaim their own pasts, personal truths and perspectives.
(Habermas 3–4). Arendt observes that, for the Greeks, “[t]he distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms” (28). Since the private realm was ruled by the head of the household, the private space, unlike the public, espoused a hierarchical structure. The private realm was characterised by the use of violence and force, and it left no space for freedom (30–32). The polis, on the other hand, was the sphere in which the free citizens, the heads of the household, met as equals without one exercising power over the other. Power was thus an instrument used exclusively in the private realm of ancient Greek society (32). Habermas strongly disagrees with Arendt, dismissing her notion of power distribution in ancient Greece as a theoretical construct. In reality, he argues, it was enormously prestigious in Greek society to convince other citizens of one’s own view in political debates; persuasion is thus regarded as a means of exercising linguistic power over others (4).

However, this pure distinction between public and private spaces did not survive for long. In fact, there has been a tug-of-war between the two realms, an endless oscillation with one always slightly dominating the other. In addition, whenever the boundaries separating the private and the public sphere “shifted and solidified, the substances of life also changed” (Prost 7). Thus, Sofsky claims that

[t]he history of privacy has never run straight. It has known relapses and leaps forward; sometimes it has gone back to earlier stages or opened up previously unknown areas. Periods of relative freedom have followed periods of intervention, supervision, and regression. The private sphere has repeatedly been compressed by the pressure of the collective, the society, or the authorities until people remembered how to evade official expectations and protect secrets from organized indiscretion. (28)

While Roman society maintained and cultivated a fairly clear distinction between the two domains, the public sphere during the Middle Ages was merely of a ‘representative’ character; it was the ruler’s personal attributes,

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4 The translations of the terms polis and oikos are taken from Liddell and Scott’s dictionary A Greek-English Lexicon (Vol. II: 1204–5 and 1433–4).

5 Freedom had a different connotation at the time: “To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled” (Arendt 32, original emphasis). In this context, freedom was only found in the sphere of the polis.

6 All of the Anglo-Irish texts examined in my study as well as many other postcolonial texts around the globe strongly support Habermas’ claim. Using language as a means of power, each of these texts, in one way or another, linguistically reclaims public space or truth that were initially lost to the colonising power. Characters in these texts, therefore, try to convince the reader of their own – formerly disregarded – point of view.
such as his insignia, which marked an occasion as a public event. Thus, the public sphere consisted of symbols and established codes. Content was fully defined by form; the crucial element of dispute and debate, as found in Greek society, was entirely missing. The emergence of international trade brought with it the need to acquire knowledge of recent events taking place in distant cities or countries. As these needs could not be answered through the existing public sphere, merchants began to exchange letters. At first, this had no influence on the public sphere, as the letters were not publicly accessible. However, as these developments occurred alongside the transformation of the state, the emblematic character of the ‘representative’ public sphere was reduced and thereby opened up new space: the state’s new key responsibilities became stable bureaucracy, financial needs, and a standing army. The sphere of public authority came to be equated with power: “The state is the ‘public authority.’ It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members” (Habermas 2).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie also perceived public space as an empty signifier and further transformed it. Regardless of the minor modifications of the two realms throughout history, the most radical changes of the two spheres are said to have taken place at this stage (Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, “Placemaking” 297). Arendt equates this period of fundamental change with the rise of the social “from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere” (38). She claims that “the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state” (28). Focusing his study on the situation in France, England and Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Habermas embeds the structural transformation of the public sphere in the transformation of the state and its economy. The subsequent loss of a clear-cut dividing line, described by both critics, is criticised by Arendt at a later stage in her book. She believes that this

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7 This paragraph is based on the historical facts presented by Habermas in the first chapter of his study of the bourgeois public sphere, “Introduction: Preliminary Demarcation of a Type of Bourgeois Public Sphere” (1–26).

8 The tension between power and authority will be further investigated with regard to Friel’s oeuvre in Chapter IV. In this context, the aspects of power and authority will also be linked with Foucault’s work, e.g. his book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison and his interview with Fontana and Pasquino published under the title “Truth and Power.”

9 At a later stage in her study, Arendt clarifies that, whereas the political and the social realm had been two clearly distinct realms corresponding to the public and the private realm in antiquity, both sets came to be mingled in the modern world. Arendt very poetically writes that the two realms, that is the political and the social, indeed “constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself” (33).
development “has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen” (38). What predominantly concerns Arendt is the extent to which the social undermined and diminished the private realm causing the latter to lose much of its sense of shelter, protection and security. As a result of this, issues deemed private before were suddenly discussed in public (40–49). In fact, a new public sphere developed within the private realm that was distinctive from public authority but believed to be significant for the entire society. Disregarding the unease and disapproval of public authority, the emerging bourgeois society – conceived as a group of private people who met in salons or private circles forming a public society – began to reflect on or even question actions, orders and laws issued by public authority. While the merchants had started to exchange letters to share knowledge, these people aimed at a common response, the public opinion, by discussing key issues of contemporary society. A civil society thus established itself alongside public authority and the bourgeoisie’s economic activities and political dependencies, which had up to this point been of private interest, increasingly gained public recognition and relevance (Habermas 14–26).

In order to show the new distribution of power in relation to state and society, Habermas proposes a diagram that graphically represents the distinction between the public and the private sphere in the eighteenth century (30):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Realm</th>
<th>Sphere of Public Authority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil society (realm of commodity exchange and social labor)</td>
<td>Public sphere in the political realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjugal family’s internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)</td>
<td>Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(market of culture products) ‘Town’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State (realm of the ‘police’)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Court (courty-noble society)</td>
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10 In his study of the French situation, Prost indicates that the change of situation that Arendt is so concerned about really only applies to a minority in society, as “the possibility of having a private life was a class privilege limited to those who lived, often on private incomes, in relatively sumptuous splendour. Those who worked for a living inevitably experienced some intermingling of public and private life” (7). Thus, only “[in] upper class homes [was] there [...] a marked difference between rooms designated for receiving guests and other parts of the house or apartment. Public rooms were for display, for whatever was deemed ‘presentable’; everything that should be shielded from indiscreet eyes was banished” (4). As the history of the concept of home as well as the discussion of O’Casey’s Dublin trilogy will show, the lives of poor people often took place in one single room where public and private aspects were intertwined in a rather complex manner.
Public authority, as illustrated in this diagram, is disconnected from the domains to which society has access. While the public sphere in the political realm is integrated into the private realm, it remained separated from bourgeois society and each family’s privacy or intimacy. The public sphere of civil society is, however, based on a paradox: the principle of universal access, which is nonetheless available only to the bourgeoisie. People who belong neither to public authority nor to bourgeois society remain excluded from both forms of the public sphere. While they are ruled by authority, they are silently (ab)used by the bourgeoisie, who try to strengthen their arguments by claiming to represent public opinion. Public opinion, however, defined as a point of view shared by the majority of the people is shown to be a chimera. Nevertheless, what was looked upon as public opinion in the eighteenth century quickly became an instrument of power for the bourgeoisie, fundamentally changing the power structures and the distribution of power within the state. Using clubs and literary circles to form public opinion effectively allowed the bourgeoisie to control public authority, which until then had held a monopoly on power.11

Apart from witnessing economic changes, which through political debates led to the emergence of a new public sphere, the eighteenth century is also characterised by a growing interest in psychology. These shifts in interest indicate that the location of the new public sphere within the private realm had far-reaching consequences; the private sphere was likewise transformed. Two different realms were established: one realm which was more easily accessible and another realm which was extremely intimate and personal and to which access was exclusive or barred (Habermas 45–46). Prost highlights that as long as all members of a household had inhabited the same room, intimacy had been “an almost meaningless notion” (63). Once intimacy came to be associated with privacy and with the veiled, hidden sphere within the private realm, however, it moved to the centre of people’s concerns. In fact, a profound interest in the zones of intimacy and privacy was aroused.

In his study *The Fall of Public Man*, Sennett equates this new understanding of intimacy with “warmth, trust and open expression of feelings” (5). Whereas

11 In a number of Anglo-Irish texts, the public and the private spheres will be even further intertwined. In O’Casey’s plays, for instance, the public sphere repeatedly invades the family’s internal space, while characters like Molly Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Friel’s *Grace and Frank Hardy* in *Faith Healer* as well as the three protagonists in *Molly Sweeney* willingly share their inner life and thoughts with the reader or the audience and bury the private sphere at the expense of the triumphant public sphere. Therefore, while the characters are shown to be incapable of communicating or disclosing their private truths – their thoughts, woes or sorrows – amongst each other, on a narratological and dramatic level, nothing, in these instances, remains hidden which cannot be articulated in public.
Sennett’s statement refers to a space that is either physical or mental, Arendt takes this idea even further and introduces an exclusively mental space of intimacy indicating that the advent of psychology also led to an interiorised notion of the private. She puts forward a very interesting interpretation suggesting that people’s partial loss of the private realm as an exclusive and personal sphere, which had formerly provided them with a certain degree of shelter and protection, resulted in “a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual” (69). Sennett further hints at the enormous hopes and expectations people had as they turned their attention towards their inner life and subjectivity:

The advent of modern psychology, and of psychoanalysis in particular, was founded on the faith that in understanding the inner workings of the self sui generis, without transcendental ideas of evil or of sin, people might free themselves from these horrors and be liberated to participate more fully and rationally in a life outside the boundaries of their own desires. (5; original emphasis)

Thus, emotions and feelings, apart from political topics, played a crucial role in the new cultural institutions such as salons or literary circles; Samuel Richardson’s Pamela and Clarissa, for instance, serve as prime examples of how literature became interiorised.

Lehnert approaches this very same transformation of the private realm from a slightly different angle. She also acknowledges the growing interest in psychology and subjectivity and agrees that an interest in other people’s feelings, moods, thoughts and selfhood evolved at the time. However, parallel to this, she detects a certain tendency to publicise the private which originated in the above-mentioned interiorisation of the individual. She argues that due to industrialisation and the standardisation of jobs which appeared to threaten the singularity of the individual, people soon began to feel an urge to imagine, create and even fictionalise their own private realm, which was otherwise inaccessible to anyone else (19–49).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud’s psychoanalysis came to offer a language which allowed people to express their most intimate thoughts which up to this point had remained unvoiced or unexpressed simply because people had lacked the vocabulary to articulate their emotions (Lehnert 13).

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12 Arendt does not fail to point out that it is really only in the twentieth century that it has been discovered “how rich and manifold the realm of the hidden can be under the conditions of intimacy” (72).

13 Psychoanalysis is the necessary precondition for Bachelard’s phenomenological approach to space. In his work The Poetics of Space, which is based on radical empiricism, Bachelard argues that psychoanalysis produces the subtext to poetic images, and, through the power of imagination, he claims to be able to offer a systematic psychological analysis of one’s inner
Thus, intimacy paradoxically started to be shared even more extensively amongst the public – the readers, the theatregoers or the listeners of a conversation. Nevertheless, by publicly sharing intimacy or privacy and by self-dramatising one’s private life, the unique aspect of the experience was partly lost. Moreover, the intimate and the public sphere became as intertwined as fiction and reality, a tendency which has continued ever since. Habermas even claims that the public sphere has become “the sphere for the publicizing of private biographies” (171), while Sennett concludes that people’s immense concern “with their single life-histories and particular emotions as never before” in order to free themselves from evil as well as from their own desires by staging and studying the intimate in great detail has “proved to be a trap rather than a liberation” (5).

For large parts of contemporary society, the phenomenon of enacting one’s private space in public still has a dramatic function:

Nearly without exception, our private spaces seem to have mutated into more or less public stages. Never have people felt a stronger need to make their inner life public. It appears that anything can be said or shown, no matter where nor when. (Lehnert 17, my translation)

Everyday life, then, often consists of staging one’s experiences and intimate actions in public. Lehnert recognises an increasing drive toward or thrill at the transgression of the boundary between the spheres and the production of intimacy in public. The collapse of the distinction between public and private domains contributes to the impression that, by sharing intimacy, feelings of loneliness or isolation might be overcome: “The private sphere has mutated into a public space, which is always accessible to anyone and where no one is alone – or, at least, where one can indulge in the idea of not being alone” (101, my translation). This argument is very much in line with Arendt, who

spaces. Drawing a parallel between one’s house and soul, he tries to explain the meaning of the concept of house. Bachelard regards the home as the private space of one’s thoughts, memories and past. Referring to Jung’s concept of unconsciousness he believes that one’s inner life is structured like a house consisting of several floors. Examining “the topography of our intimate being” – the deepest and happiest realms being those of childhood – hidden or seemingly vanished rooms are transformed into realms of an unforgettable past (xxxvi). Home, connected with shelter, security and consolation, protects the intimate self from the dangers of public life and from the outside world.


emphasises that “everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity” (50).

These considerations lead directly to Benn and Gaus’ sociological approach. Their study *Public and Private in Social Life* offers additional insight into the *public* and the *private* dimension, as the authors focus on the “conceptual framework that organises action in a social environment” (5). Privateness and publicness are said to influence one another as the definitions of both terms are governed by three features: *access*, *agency* and *interest* (7).

The first feature, *access*, is closely related to power and “can be further divided into four sub-dimensions: *physical* access to spaces, access to *activities and intercourse*, access to *information* and access to *resources*” (7, original emphasis). Publicness means granting access to anyone and everyone. By contrast, as soon as groups or individuals have the right to decide whether to allow or deny someone entry to a room, participation in a discussion, or access to information, the situation takes on a private character:

A concern for one’s privacy is typically a concern to be able to control the dissemination of information about oneself: to insist that a certain piece of information is private is not necessarily to assert that no one but oneself should have access to it, but rather that the access should be under one’s own control. [...] Information that is made public is available to the public at large or to any interested member of the public. Our ‘public face’ is thus that which we allow anyone to see, our ‘private side’ is that to which we restrict access. But although we often contrast ‘publicity’ with ‘privacy’ in this way, the former is at least as often opposed to ‘secrecy.’ (8)

In this sense, the degree of access available to one’s private realm also describes the degree of confidence and trust in the person who is granted access. Although sharing information with someone else does not normally mean making the information public, the people involved might not have the same perception of how private the shared information is. This explains why the definition of *public* and *private* always needs to remain an individual issue. The statement that secrecy is the opposite of publicity confirms the idea that space can be a mental concept and need not always be physical; it is possible to live in

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16 Following Benn and Gaus, I have chosen to use the rare and unusual words *publicness* and *privateness* because they have a much wider meaning than *publicity* or *privacy*. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *publicness* is defined as “[t]he quality or character of being public, in various senses; publicity, notoriety, openness; the fact of pertaining to or affecting the community as a whole; devotedness to the public interest; the condition of being commonly accepted, prevalence” (783). *Privateness*, on the other hand, is referred to by the dictionary as “[t]he quality or condition of being private, in various senses; privacy, the opposite of publicity; withdrawal from society, seclusion; secrecy; the pursuit of private ends; the quality of being a private person or of living privately; confidential intercourse, intimacy” (520).
a world of dreams no one else knows or is aware of. The second feature, the agent, is the person who dispenses and controls access: “The basic distinction is between an agent acting privately, i.e. on his own account, or publicly, i.e. as an officer of the city, community, commonwealth, state etc.” (9). An agent might have to act differently depending on whether he or she is talking to someone in a private or public function. Interest is the third and last feature to influence the public or private nature of a space, place, resource or situation and “is concerned with the status of the people who will be better or worse off for whatever is in question” (10). This aspect addresses the following questions: Who benefits from having access? Is there some public or private interest to be considered? The tension between what is thought of as being of individual and collective interest is largely based on ideology.

For my purposes, I understand the meanings of public and private to go far beyond the dimension of space. These categories form people’s identity and organise their behaviour or discourse with others. Rather than denoting spatial entities, the terms describe mental categories. What one perceives as public or private remains largely individual. I believe that public and private spaces rarely stand in complete opposition to one another; in fact, more often they are a matter of degree. Thus, I agree with Benn and Gaus, who suggest that the two terms “constitute a continuum, along which particular instances can be ordered, ranging from the more public to the more private” (13). Whether knowledge is made public or is kept private is primarily a question of power. Whatever is public is associated with the dimension of reality as it is available to all. The existence of the public is, therefore, never questioned. The private realm, on the other hand, is hidden, veiled and susceptible to criticism. It is linked to intimacy, confidential discourse, ideas of home, shelter and protection of individuality, an atmosphere of cosiness as well as a sense of belonging. As a space which is strongly associated with the concept of the other, its existence is often ignored, silenced or feared by those who rule the public sphere. Indeed, the private realm is often concerned with the evasion of power structures and closely related to imagination as mental space cannot be restricted. One can go as far as one’s imagination allows in order to find freedom or protection from the outside, the public world.

Talking of the production of mental spaces as a result of one’s personal experiences, Harvey argues that “[w]e do recognise, of course, that our subjective experience can take us into realms of perception, imagination, fiction and fantasy, which produce mental spaces and maps as so many mirages of the supposedly ‘real’ thing” (203).