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Chapter 8

Politics as Argumentation: Symbolic Space of Authority

Habermas' understanding of lifeworld has to be opened up to the 'political condition'. Instead of subordinating politics and political argumentation to truth in a foundational epistemological sense, we need to understand politics and argumentation as a complex, conflictive, ambiguous, contextual and non-conclusive practice in which actions and decisions need to be taken nonetheless. At the same time, if we want to understand the specific quality of argumentation or public reasoning, we should not reduce it to mere interest conflicts and power-structured bargaining. Political argumentation is more than Weber's *warring of the gods*. In other words, we should try to understand political argumentation – and the lifeworld model – as situated between politics as consensus and politics as conflict, between the foundationalism of Habermas and the postmodernism of scholars like Mouffe. To do so, I propose to give Habermas' lifeworld model a *critical realist re-reading*.

I will first make clear what a critical realist's philosophical and sociological positions entails – or minimally aspires. Second, based upon this position I will propose a different understanding of lifeworld and its connection to political argumentation and political legitimacy based upon a *performative perspective*. This analytical framework, moreover, tries to avoid the functionalism of Habermas in favour of an action theoretical standpoint. Finally, I will argue that this reading provides us a different understanding of political legitimacy understood in subjective normative terms.

8.1 A Critical Realist Re-Reading

Habermas, I argued in the former chapter, provides an epistemological and foundationalist reading of argumentation because he fears that politics would otherwise be swept away in the 'maelstrom of history' and postmodern fantasies. Politics therefore has to be subordinated to universal morality – however counterfactual or teleological – differentiated from historically and contextually situated ethics. The postmodern or sceptical standpoint, on the other hand, has been developed as a criticism of the fact/value dichotomy as proposed by traditional empiricism or logical positivism. Positivists claim that we should separate between facts that can be scientifically understood, on the one hand, and values that are beyond the realm of reason, on the other (Putnam 2002:1; Sayer 2009:768). Values, they claim, are *subjective* and outside reason and beyond *objective truth*. This dichotomy, many have claimed, is intolerable not least because science as a practice is itself *valued*. Scientific action is itself structured by norms and values, especially by so-called epistemic values such as 'coherency, simplicity, plausibility or beauty' (Putnam 2002:31). Science, it is safe to say, is

also historically situated. There is no such thing as a non-value-loaded observation or experience – an Archimedean ‘point from nowhere’. The positivist ideal of a value-free science purely geared towards facts is not only unachievable, it is also the wrong ideal.

The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy, then, problematises the whole notion of truth. But this collapse also takes an ontological turn. The privileged relation between science and reality (or theory and fact) is problematised as soon as we acknowledge it is mediated by language – by theories, paradigms, frames or discourses. Our concepts are not direct ‘natural’ representations of reality but structure how we perceive reality in the first place. We cannot, therefore, understand ‘reality as it is in itself’. Postmodernists, then, claim that reality is inherently *socially constructed*. So far, the reader of this dissertation might not be overtly alarmed. If anything, we have seen how different perspectives on politics change our understanding of legitimacy, and how different value spheres, including science, ‘construct’ different social realities. Furthermore, the ‘social construction’ of reality and the problematisation of a single objective truth precisely seems to open up analysis to the political condition. However, strong-versions of postmodernism tend to overstretch their epistemological critique and warranted scepticism into an ontological argument against realism and essentialism. The ‘social production of knowledge by means of knowledge’ is not the same thing as the ‘social construction of reality’ (Bader unpublished). It is this ‘epistemological fallacy’ that explains its value relativism or judgment-relativism; it explains why politics must necessarily be a power-ridden conflict of the gods. Let us shortly examine these arguments.

The collapse of the epistemological fact/value dichotomy, as we have seen, also problematises the theory/fact dichotomy as our relation with reality is mediated through language. For postmodernists, this seems enough ground to be suspicious of any form of essentialism and causal determinism, especially in the social sciences. Again, their object of critique concerns positivist scientists to the extent that they understand the essence of certain objects in terms of fixed or *naturalised characteristics* and to the extent that they understand causality in terms of *observational regularity* across different contexts, i.e. in terms of universal social laws. Instead of invariant essences and instead of universal causality postmodernist emphasise the contextuality of reality. The postmodern world is not homogeneous, but inherently contextual and fragmented. Instead of illuminating causality as the objective of science, they claim we should rather try to understand and interpret contexts, without, of course, claiming that only one single interpretation can be right. Instead of essentialism, then, postmodernism tends to drift towards forms of nominalism – to emphasise the unique and the distinct. Between contexts, as a consequence, there is no longer any necessary common ground. Reality is not only inherently fragmented but, it seems, is no longer separable from language itself. If language no longer *mediates* between our knowledge

and reality, then we seem to move to some form of 'idealism' in which reality loses all of its everyday connotations – reality becomes a 'text'. Postmodernists 'have lost the world' (Putnam 1995:64).

It is easy to see that when language no longer mediates between us and reality but when language *is* reality, postmodernism drifts away to judgemental relativism. Not only truth becomes a problematic concept but reality itself no longer provides grounds to differentiate between better and worse interpretations or theories. In short, postmodernism's epistemological non-foundationalism and ontological idealism explain its inherent judgment-relativism but also its normative perversion. It takes away all possibilities for critique (Bader & Benschop 1988:153; Putnam 1990:1680). It is therefore unsurprising that Habermas and other discursive democrats are right-out hostile towards such 'anti-modernist' celebration of value relativism described as the 'horror of unreason' or the 'normalisation of evil' (Habermas 1981:13; 1996:xli; Dryzek 1990:21-2; Calhoun 1992:41). Habermas rather wants to 'finish the unfinished project of modernity' (Habermas 1997, 1981). Habermas' antidote to postmodernism, however, is not *ontological* but *epistemological*. Habermas and most liberal normative theories try to reinstall the fact/value dichotomy – not, obviously, to claim that values are merely subjective beyond the realm of reason but precisely for opposite reasons – by forcing a dichotomy between morality (truth) and ethics (values).¹ Putnam argues that this modernist view fails precisely because morality is also mediated by language; in other words, we need 'thick ethical concepts' to be able to understand or to give meaning to morality in the first place (2002:34-5, 118ff.). Morality cannot be form only, it must have substance. Moreover, this epistemological antidote, Barber argues, suppresses a genuine understanding of the political condition as it tries to explain the political in terms of the non-political (2003:48).²

We might be sympathetic of Habermas' attempt to stay clear of profound value relativism but his modernistic approach seems to deny also the strength of postmodernism. Instead, critical realism offers us a different antidote without denying the contributions of postmodernism. First of all, critical realists readily agree that the fact/value dichotomy – of both positive science and of liberal moral theory – is untenable. However, this does not mean that the *distinction* between facts and value loses all meaning (Putnam 2002:9). As I already argued in chapter 1, we might admit that science is inherently *valued* but this does not mean that we can no longer make a distinction between science making value judgments and being (or trying to be) value judgment-free. It still makes sense to make a distinction between the cognitive and the normative even if this distinction is not a dichotomy or duality. What postmodernists seem to forget all too easily is that we can still

¹ Putnam therefore claims that Habermas' 'desires and reasons' ultimately remain 'positivistic' (2002:133).

² Barber makes an elaborate argument to show that liberal theory tends to be "reductionist, genetic, dualistic, speculative and solipsistic" (2003:51).

make a distinction between subjective and objective social validity. It is simply not true that the individual scientist can make just about any normative claim he fancies and pass it off as a fact. The *actions* of scientists are normalised by the objective norms of 'the' scientific practice.³

Second, and related, if we accept the anti-foundationalism of postmodernism there is no inherent need also to accept its idealism. Critical realists agree that there is no direct relation between theory and reality and that this relation is indeed mediated by language but this does not mean that reality no longer matters at all. As Peirce, one of the founding fathers of American pragmatism, already argued, radical doubt or scepticism does not come that easy in everyday life (1877:IV).⁴ Radical scepticism is only easy for armchair philosophers, who searched in vain for the foundation of all truths. But in real life "we cannot begin with complete doubt ... we must begin with all the prejudices we actually have" (Peirce quoted in Barber 2003:164). As many have noted, the irony of postmodernism is that it fails to step out of the modernist trap of foundationalism (Bader 1988:154; Putnam 1995:39). To put it differently, postmodernism remains awkwardly modernistic. In real life, Peirce argues, doubt originates as the result of some kind of 'irritation' between our understanding of reality and reality itself (1877:IV,V; 1878). Indeed, why would a postmodernist doubt at all? If reality is merely a text it could be perfectly coherent, transparent and agreeable by the force of our mere will and imagination (Sayer 1997b:466). A 'recalcitrant experience' or 'anomalous observation' – or fallibilism in general – no longer seems possible (Bader unpublished). Peirce subsequently argues that if doubt is caused by 'irritation' then 'truth' is the opposite of doubt, i.e. truth is the lack of 'irritation' (1877:IV). Truth, then, is not some metaphysical entity but rather 'satisfied doubt' settled by 'opinion' and, we might add, not *subjective* opinion but *socially valid* or *objective opinion*.⁵ In short, this pragmatist standpoint does not try to deny the social construction of knowledge but claims that we should neither deny the social conditions of doubt. Indeed, we should try to understand truth and reality not in metaphysical terms but in terms of *social relevance* or in terms of *action*, i.e. when should we trust or distrust judgments? (Putnam 1995:47,74, 2002:110). Social and political knowledge "is defined by its somewhereness, its concrete history in the real world of human beings" and not 'grounded in nowhere' (Barber 2003:64).

³ The fact that knowledge produced by the social sciences might change society and, hence, its object of inquiry, does not disprove this claim. Social reality is more than its construction by science (Sayer 1997b:468)

⁴ Also Hume already mocked the 'genuine sceptic': "we shall then see whether you go out at the door or the window; and whether you really doubt, if your body has gravity or can be injured by its fall, according to popular opinion derived from our fallacious senses and more fallacious experience" (quoted in Barber 2003:164). In short, in daily life we cannot live 'without making judgments of what is more or less true' (Sayer 2009:771).

⁵ Peirce rightly argued that we should not look down upon man's 'need for a fixed certainty' – as postmodernism tends to forget – but we should be cautious of the consequences of this need (Peirce 1877:V; also Barber 2003:47).

Even if we cannot know reality as it is 'in itself', critical realists claim that this does not mean everything is possible by merely changing our language (Bader 1991:151; Putnam 2002:100). Reality, then, has certain invariant essences that transcend contexts and defies extreme nominalism and idealism. Realism allows us to distinguish between theories or knowledge that are 'better' or 'worse' or that are more or less 'reasonable' without the need to uphold the fact/value dichotomy or to chase after some form of foundationalism. The mere fact that all of our observations and experiences are inherently valued does not mean that our observations and experiences cannot be used to discriminate between more or less reasonable theories, facts or normative claims (Bader 1988:140, 1991:151). Postmodernism just seems to deny the human condition. Realism, obviously, entails specific notions of essentialism and causality but these notions do not have to be as strong as in classical positivism. We need not choose between some naturalised and fixed form of essentialism and an 'ephemeral' notion of reality (Sayer 1997b:463). We merely should acknowledge that reality has more or less invariant characteristics as our everyday understanding of reality confirms which allow us to make an analytical difference between 'intransitive objects' and 'transitive objects of knowledge' (Bader unpublished). This also does not necessarily imply that we should hold on to notions of universal social laws based upon observational regularity. It is perfectly possible to claim that certain (ideal and material) objects have certain invariant 'generative powers' (Sayer 1997b:466) without discarding the importance of contextuality if only we admit of the complexity of social phenomena, i.e. that there exist multiple causes (against reductionism), that causes are potentialities (against determinism) and that causes interfere with one another (against universalism).

Critical realists, then, combine epistemological non-foundationalism with ontological realism – consisting of weak versions of essentialism and causality. Although such position makes science more complex it allows the possibility of value judgments. As long as reality matters – however mediated by language – and as long as reality, experience and observation have invariant qualities – even if these are not fixed forever – we need not fall into the trap of judgment-relativism and extreme versions of incommensurability. Even if there is no single 'true' or 'final' answer, some claims are more reasonable than others (Putnam 1990:1682, 2002:108). The fact that there is no single answer, then, allows for conflict over consensus, but the fact that not everything is equally reasonable assures that reason (without the capital 'R') is not only about power conflict. Importantly, for critical realists 'truth' is not so much an epistemological quality as an ontological quality (Bader unpublished). 'Truth' is about ontological 'reasonableness'.

Finally, what makes critical realists 'critical' is that they try to open up both science and politics to this form of reasonableness. This means that they will not 'speak truth' but rather take an

'institutional turn', i.e. reasonableness seems best safeguarded if we are willing to 'learn' (however, fallible), if we try to 'learn about learning' and if we institutionalise both types of learning processes. Only through learning, Dewey argues, can we make a distinction between *valued* knowledge and *valuable* knowledge (Putnam 2002:103). As such, critical theorists take over the pragmatist standpoint that we should address problems at the level at which they arise – and therefore not escape in abstract notions of consensus – by way of learning, inquiry and experimentalist practices (Bader 1994:143; Putnam 1990:1679, 1995:69ff., 2002:110).⁶ Indeed, as Putnam argues, Habermas' discourse ethics – stripped from its foundationalism – might be a valuable insight in this respect (2002:105). Learning and reasonableness do not deny the political condition, but neither do they make politics *irrational* or reduce it to *power conflicts*. Instead of formulating foundationalist ideal norms to which empirical political practice more or less confirms, critical realists are forced to understand and learn from empirical political practices. The goal is not to study to what extent politics confirms to some 'truth' "untainted by the political world in which men are condemned to live" and neither to 'predict' political behaviour by universal laws, but to study what is and what is not reasonably possible (Barber 2003:xxx; Bader unpublished). Normative and sociological theory ought to be inherently related (Sayer 1997a:474) not for "the application of Truth to the problem of human relations, but [for] the application of human relations to the problem of truth" (Barber 2003:64-5).

What does all this philosophical argumentation mean for our sociological framework? First, the whole concept of postmodernism in sociology seems rather problematic and suffering from inflation as some sociologists want to make a distinction between a 'sociology of postmodernity' and a 'postmodern sociology' (Bauman 1994:203; Owen 2004:73). What is at stake in the 'sociology of postmodernity' is often not value relativism but the 'discovery' of the unfounded foundation of the values we cherish (Bauman 1994:189; Mouffe 1989:34; Lyotard 1984:39). Hence, the transformation of modernity to postmodernity is therefore understood as the point at which reason turned upon reason to discover its own *symbolic nature*. Sociology of postmodernity in this epistemic guise is an intellectual affair that necessitates the *re-writing of history*. It is not that we have lost 'truth' but we discovered that truth has always already been symbolic (Bauman 1994:195). The discovery of symbolic truth 'leaves everything as it is', as Wittgenstein has put it (Mouffe 1989:38; Putnam 2002:45).

⁶ Barber makes a convincing argument that 'fallible' and 'sceptical' liberal models, as that of Popper, do not take an ontological or realist turn but tend to argue that "if we cannot know anything for certain, we should not do anything", which translates into a minimalist model of legitimate politics (Barber 2003:58-62).

However, postmodernity in sociology might secondly be understood as a specific transformation of society. On the one hand, epistemic postmodernity might have social consequences to the extent that it leads to a 'crisis of intellectualism' (Bauman 1994:189).⁷ Not only has this crisis led to the demise of the specific modern charisma or 'aura' of 'high-art' and 'avant-gardism' (Adorno 1975:12; Benjamin: 1999:731ff., 2002:103-4; Habermas 1981:4-6), also the social status of the intellect as well as his own self-understanding seem strained (Bauman 1994).⁸ Postmodernism in this guise connotes a "pervasive sense of cultural disorientation" (Elliot 2002:309). On the other hand, postmodernism in sociology is not just about some epistemic disorientation. Where the sociology of the risk-society (chapter 6) problematises the inherent risks and irrationalities in modernity and its institutions, the sociology of the 'postmodern society' seems to problematise value plurality, discontinuity and multiplicity underlying the institutions of modernity. In this guise, postmodernity connotes the increase in social complexity and interconnectedness due to globalisation and individualisation processes and the consequences for politics in terms of decentred 'multi-levelled polities' and 'multi-layered governance networks' (Bauman 1994:198; Pakulski 2004; Lyotard 1984; Villa 1992:717). The complex, decentred, ambiguous, fragmented, dynamic and often conflictive nature of 'postmodern society' forces us to problematise any assumption of (universal) value consensus (Bauman 1994:203; Mouffe 1989:36; Owen 2004:72). However, if this is how postmodernity is understood in sociology, if postmodernity merely signals the *complexity of modernity*, the whole concept is empty. It would force us to characterise both Weber and Luhmann, amongst many others, as postmodernists. We should neither be 'modernists' nor 'postmodernists'. Instead we should merely accept *the complexity of our late modern-condition*.

Second, if instead 'postmodern sociology' means the invention of a whole new nomenclature consisting of fuzzy, ambiguous, and nebulous concepts – indeed, the scholarly withdrawal into sects of narcissist believers that exclude outsiders who do not speak the language – then postmodern sociology should be discarded in favour of critical realism. However, we might acknowledge that strong versions of postmodernism which slip into idealism are fairly rare in the social sciences, not least because postmodern sociologists tend to emphasise the constructivist nature of social *reality*. Discourses are often understood as forms of 'productive power' precisely because they create a reality that matters for the way in which people *act*. Discourses have *real* consequences. When in the social sciences, however, weak-postmodernism tends to (implicitly)

⁷ Bauman claims that in contemporary societies intellectuals are also becoming politically irrelevant as legitimacy is no longer based upon intellectual arguments but upon 'seduction and repression' administered by experts of public relations and social management (1994:192).

⁸ Postmodernity, as such, might also be understood as an intellectual preoccupation with the question: 'who are we?' (Foucault 1982:781). As this question is a crucial driving force in Weber's theory, it shows that *modernity* already fails to provide satisfying answers.

acknowledge causality and reality, it tends to focus almost exclusively upon language, upon discourse, while downplaying underlying material structures. In short, the weaker versions of postmodernism in sociology tend to create a dichotomy not so much between realism and idealism as between idealism and materialism. This, it seems to me, is unfortunate. Even if one merely wants to understand discourses one should also understand the underlying material conditions, inequalities and constraints. Nevertheless, if such weak forms of postmodern sociology are critical attempts to understand how social action is *discursively structured and coordinated* in specific social and historical contexts or practices without claiming or presuming some form of transcendent truth or value consensus, it might be a valuable approach for understanding lifeworld. As such, the analytical tools developed in 'postmodern sociology' – in particular what I would like to call its *performative perspective* – might be very helpful for understanding a non-consensual lifeworld.

In sum, in what follows I will provide a critical realist understanding of Habermas' lifeworld perspective, which means that I try to discard his foundationalism, his consensual notions of lifeworld and his neglect of the political condition, in favour of an anti-foundationalist realists perspective in which 1) we acknowledge that 'truth' is an *ontological* condition better grasped as reasonableness; 2) we acknowledge the structuring powers of discourses without disregarding material structures; and in which 3) we are aware of the complexities of late-modernity.

8.2 Lifeworld and System: Two Types of Social Coordination

Like Habermas we might start to understand the contours of lifeworld in opposition to our analysis of media coordinated social systems. From such a comparison we can rather confidently conclude what lifeworld is *not*. First, we might agree with Habermas that lifeworld is not a social system in itself. The main reason is that lifeworld action is not coordinated by a codified symbolic medium. Although *speech* as a 'linguistic medium' might be an obvious suspect (Habermas 1984:94), it seems to me that 1) lifeworld coordination is not necessarily coordinated by speech, but also by all kinds of symbols and signs present in behaviour, appearances, gestures, diction, clothes, bodies or objects; and 2) speech is a 'meta-medium' to the extent that it can hardly be excluded from system coordination as well. Speech consists of many different languages.

Second, the lifeworld/system opposition cannot be understood in terms of institutional or organisational boundaries.⁹ If lifeworld is about unthematized background assumptions that make social action possible in daily life, it would be ridiculous to assume that those background resources

⁹ As already analysed in the previous chapter, Habermas draws 'rough and ready' institutional boundaries akin to his public sphere model. System concerns "the economy and the bureaucratic state" and lifeworld the "private spheres of life" and "public spheres" (1987:310).

were not present or relevant in interactions within bureaucratic organisations or political institutions (Baxter 2002:551). Habermas actually acknowledges this but claims that in these institutions lifeworld coordination is 'disempowered' or 'neutralised' by symbolic media (1987:310-1). However, this not only contradicts every empirical evidence about the complexity of bureaucratic organisation, it also overlooks the analytical ambiguities and contradictions of formal organisation (McCarthy 1985:32). We should not confuse institutions and bureaucracy as ideal types with empirical or analytical analysis. Vice versa, media such as money, power and law obviously also coordinate 'practices of daily life'. In sum, lifeworld and system cannot be differentiated in some kind of *spatial metaphor*. Lifeworld is *not* everyday practice, not a specific institution, not society and not system or system environment.

Third, lifeworld is *neither* a specific type of *action orientation* nor a specific *type of action*. To begin with the former, if lifeworld is about the coordination of social action it would be ridiculous to exclude 'strategic-action' from lifeworld. Again, Habermas acknowledges this as he claims that strategic action orientations are the presumption of all social action models (1984:101).¹⁰ But Habermas confusingly excludes strategic action from lifeworld. The confusion concerns the fact that for Habermas system and lifeworld indicate different action orientations *and* different analytical perspectives. Qua perspective, system is an 'objectivist', instrumental, non-social and 'outsider's' perspective and lifeworld an action theoretical, social, 'actor's' perspective (1987:117,374; McCarthy 1985:29). Indeed, we might say that lifeworld coordination excludes such objectivism. However, system is at the same time also an action theoretical perspective. In that case, the difference concerns social coordination based upon 'ego-centric', strategic and 'success-oriented' action in system versus 'harmonious' and 'understanding-oriented' actions in lifeworld (1984:285-6).¹¹ However, in our analysis of media theory we have seen that within systems this difference between strategic action and cooperation or social understanding is not a solid boundary under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. The same ambiguity seems to hold for social coordination in lifeworld practices.¹² There is also no reason at all to exclude normative action orientations from system as Habermas seems to claim by labelling system as a 'norm-free' form of social integration vis-à-vis the

¹⁰ The other two models Habermas differentiates – in addition to communicative action – are the 'normative' model and the dramaturgical model (1984:85-6).

¹¹ Habermas commented on this confusion and acknowledges a difference between a system integrated through mechanisms that are 'external to the structures of action' and system *coordinated* by 'steering media' that do concern action orientations (1991:252). However, according to Habermas, the 'special languages' of money and power have a "specific de-worlding effect" and an 'empirically motivating' power, which enables him to differentiate between actors with an 'objectivating' strategic and a 'performative' communicating attitude nonetheless (1987:76).

¹² Only when Habermas shifts from lifeworld as coordination to lifeworld as understanding – i.e. only when lifeworld is (functionally) decoupled from action and practices – could it be argued that lifeworld is not about strategic action. But such shift seems to discard the essence of lifeworld altogether.

lifeworld as integrated through “a normatively secured or communicatively achieved consensus” (1987:117).

Next to action orientations, Habermas also differentiates system and lifeworld upon two different types of social action: communicative action and strategic action (1984:333).¹³ However, our understanding of systems discounts the possibility to understand lifeworld as the exclusive realm of communicative action as social systems are also communicatively coordinated.¹⁴ In short, both system and lifeworld include strategic and normative action orientations and are coordinated by communicative action.

Finally, this also means that lifeworld is not a specific kind of *rationality*. This must be understood quite carefully as it is Habermas’ goal to “reconstruct the modern concept of rationality” (1984:391). Indeed, Habermas wants to counter Weber’s modernisation thesis in so far that we should not only analyse rationality “under the cognitive-instrumental aspect”, but we should bring in “moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive aspects” captured in communicative rationality (1987:303). Precisely because early critical theory could only perceive rationality in terms of *instrumental reason* – influenced as they were by both Marx and Weber (or the Marxist interpretation of Weber) – it could no longer find solid ground for saving rationality or reason from itself (1987:333). However, in this critical tradition instrumental rationality is foremost understood in terms of *functionalism*. It includes all social mechanisms functional for the reproduction of social systems or the status quo. Yet, we might perceive that from an outsider perspective *both* lifeworld and system can be understood in terms of such functional rationality. Indeed, even Habermas understands both as functional for societal reproduction. Similarly, from an insider or action theoretical perspective *both* system and lifeworld can be understood in terms of the communication of specific expectations. The ‘rationality’ in this perspective concerns the specific *logic* inherent in the different social systems – in specific *worldviews*, as Weber explained. Indeed, the complexity and ambiguity at the level of social organisation and interaction concerns precisely these different and at times conflicting logics. Similarly, we might expect that the *logic* of lifeworld communication is structured by shared lifeworld expectations or, in Habermas’ words, ‘worldviews’ (1987:56). To put it differently,

¹³ We might wonder the extent to which strategic rationality is an action orientation or a type of social action. Obviously, communicative action is not an action orientation by the sheer fact that it is an intersubjective and not a *subjective* orientation. However, Habermas differentiates between the two types of social action in terms of *action orientation*: oriented to success or towards understanding (1984:285). This would mean that communicative social action could never be strategically oriented. Precisely because Habermas fuses action orientations with types of action he leaves little room for the richness and complexity of social life.

¹⁴ Habermas has commented that he never meant to differentiate system and lifeworld in terms of different types of social action and that many of his critics are misled (1991:254). But he immediately adds to the confusion by stating that system, in contrast to lifeworld, demands a “strategic stance on part of the actors”.

communicative logic or *instrumental rationality* can be present in both system and lifeworld depending on one's perspective.¹⁵

When the analytical opposition between lifeworld and system is neither based upon institutional or spatial boundaries, upon different action orientations or action types, upon the presence or absence of communication nor upon different types of rationality, it seems to me that we can only understand system and lifeworld as two different *types of social coordination*.¹⁶ Systems are social action systems, Luhmann style, in which social action is coordinated through specific codified symbolic medium. Lifeworld, on the other hand, is a form of social coordination not based upon a specific symbolic medium but upon a symbolic complex that, for the time being – and against all anthropological resistance – we might call *culture*.

Lifeworld, then, is not just another social system with its own specific medium – it has none. What differentiates system and lifeworld integration is the *type of symbols* used for communication, i.e. for social coordination. This means that at lower levels of social analysis – the level of institutions, organisation and interaction – *both types of coordination can exist side by side*. This is all too obvious. Social coordination in any bureaucratic organisation is not solely coordinated by legitimate power, money, or law but also by identities, customs, routines, histories, values, solidarity, friendship, respect, status, reputation, etcetera. Furthermore, if genuine 'communication' between the different systems with their specific symbolic media, logics and meaningful understandings of the world, is problematic, if not impossible, this is not necessarily the case for the relation between system and lifeworld coordination. For example, one has to pay the judge his salary, but his salary cannot determine his legal judgment without the collapse of legal and economic system as normatively and empirically differentiated systems. In contrast, the fact that the judge wears a black robe or even a wig, sits behind an elevated bench that towers above the accused, who has to swear to tell the 'truth or help me God', while looking at the mural image of a blindfolded Lady Justice – or, in short, the fact that *cultural symbols* present in the judicial practice are *communicating* meanings that accentuate the meanings that are communicated in terms of law and legitimate power, is telling in this regard. This does not mean that lifeworld and system can 'communicate' with each other – one cannot 'decide' or 'buy' the meaning of cultural symbols directly – but it does mean that they might communicate meanings that are *similar*, although that, of course, is not necessarily the case.

¹⁵ Social systems might of course also be understood from an *actor's perspective* in terms of *objective probabilities*. We might even agree with Habermas that media such as legitimate power, money and expertise make such probabilities more 'calculable' and that because of this calculability system imperatives might substantially dominate political and organisational decision-making processes. Nevertheless, even lifeworld can be understood by actors in terms of probabilities, even if it might be less calculable.

¹⁶ As such, I do not agree with either Baxter or Calhoun, who want to see the difference solely in terms of analytical *perspective* (Baxter 1987:78; Calhoun 1988:222).

Cultural symbols, in short, can also communicate expectations of domination, truth, justice, social norms or material value.

What is clear, so far, is that lifeworld integration concerns a specific form of social coordination enabled through the communication of cultural symbols. For these cultural symbols to have social meaning, actors must share some kind of background knowledge; some kind of familiarity with the cultural 'stock of interpretative patterns' in Habermas' terms (1987:124). For Habermas, this implies that actors share a 'massive background consensus', a 'horizon of shared unproblematic beliefs' (1996:22). His lifeworld points to consensual structures to which 'acting subjects *belong*' (1984:328). The question that lies before us is how we can explain lifeworld as a specific form of social coordination without assuming automatically some form of cultural consensus or solidarity, i.e. how we can make lifeworld coordination analytically relevant for complex late-modern society without being forced into an foundationalist epistemic ideal of universal morality and postconventional solidarity.

Based upon a rather loosely integrated scholarly tradition sharing what I would like to call a *performative perspective*, I think we are able to understand lifeworld coordination as a form of *contextual performances* that produce and reproduce *generalised narratives* which in turn allow *decontextualised forms of storytelling*. This analysis, ultimately, enables us to analyse the relation between public spheres, political argumentation and political legitimacy. But let us first try to understand lifeworld coordination as a form of *social performance*.

8.3 Lifeworld Practices as Performances

An everyday practice can be understood and analysed in terms of system coordination – i.e. in terms of social coordination through symbolic media – but also in terms of lifeworld coordination. A lifeworld analysis of practice, I will argue, can be grasped in terms of a performative perspective. This perspective – like a dramaturgical perspective – makes use of the theatre metaphor. However, instead of emphasising the relation between staged actors and acclaiming public – between the active and the passive – a performative perspective emphasises the interaction between the actors themselves. Indeed, social actors are viewed as actors in the most literal sense: as performers, players or artists. Such performative analysis of social practices, for sure, is very complicated but for our purpose we might simplify such analysis by emphasising *four layers of symbolic communication*: scene, role, character and script.¹⁷

¹⁷ The performative perspective, again, is a rather loose scholarly tradition I'm drawing on in this chapter. I consider performance theory to be a specific kind of perspective on social action, which can be found in diverse theories. For this part of the analysis, I am inspired and informed by diverse scholars which cannot, for sure, all be considered to part of the critical realist tradition. These scholars include: Burke 1951, 1963, 1985;

In theatre the props on stage symbolise *the scene* in which the play takes place (Burke 1969:7). For example, a blackboard and some school benches as artefacts almost immediately communicate *expectations* – general expectations about education or school. In real life this is not different. The school building itself or the classroom architecture immediately makes clear to us what is expected. We might say, then, that the setting or *scene* is communicating or *staging* expectations of education (Edelman 1964:95; Hajer 2005b:630, 2006:44). However, this does not mean, of course, that a classroom cannot be used for different practices and purposes. Scene expectations are not only communicated by space, objects, and architecture but also by social action or language itself (Yanow 1995; 1998, 2000:17; Goodsell 1988:288; Burke 1969:9). Importantly, if a classroom is used for a different scene – a different practice – the staged educational symbols either get a different meaning or even become meaningless. The performative perspective, then, is *dialectical* as meaning depends upon the scene performed and the scene performed depends upon meaning communicated.

Second, we might also analyse different *roles* actors perform. When we stay in the educational practice, we can differentiate between the role of the teacher and the role of the student. This (hierarchical) role differentiation is, on the one hand, part and parcel of our general expectations of education and, on the other, *performing* the role of teacher communicates expectations of education. Again *dialectics* is inherent to performances. The teacher can perform his role by symbolically communicating role expectations for example by his age difference, clothes, position in the class or by his command that the students – clearly marked out as students as they sit as an indiscriminate collective behind their benches – must be quiet.¹⁸ The students on their part, for sure, also perform their role by communicating role expectations – for example by raising their hand when they want to ask or say something. For all actors, it is clear what raising one's hand objectively means as it is part of educational expectations. But this symbolic meaning is not identical, or the symbol even meaningful, in other social practices (Yanow 2000:11). Raising one's hand in public transport might just be weird, i.e. incomprehensible. We might say, then, that lifeworld symbols are in essence *empty symbols*, which means that their meaning depends on the performed context.¹⁹ Furthermore, symbolic meaning can be *subjectively* different depending on role differentiation

Geertz 1980; Goffman 1974, Turner 1975, Austin 1955; Searle 1964, 1976, 2005; Butler 1999; Bourdieu 1987, 1994; Foucault 1982; Lyotard 1984; Alexander 2004; Bauman & Briggs 1990; and Hajer 2005a, 2005b, 2006.

¹⁸ As an experiment I have once sat among a group of new students without taking any initiative that would indicate me as the teacher of the class. Confusion, awkwardness and jokes to deal with this awkwardness seem to be the result.

¹⁹ For sure, some lifeworld symbols do not appear to be empty at all as their meaning seems identical across different social practices. An example might be Lady Justice I mentioned earlier or a national flag. Such symbols are almost like proper names. Proper names, including individual persons, as we will see, differ from other symbols to the extent that they are tied to a *biographical narrative* instead of general narratives. Yet analytically, they remain empty symbols that get their meaning from the context.

(Yanow 2000:14). For the teacher, a student raising his hand might connote disturbance, eagerness as well as obedience, while for the student it might connote courage, need or submission. This also shows that symbols can mean different things even for one specific role.

This points towards a third layer of analysis: *character*. Indeed, there are many ways of performing the role of teacher or student. One can perform the authoritative teacher, the pedagogical teacher, the caring teacher, the cynical teacher, the enthusiastic teacher, etc. The students, on the other hand, might perform the interested, the disinterested, the ambitious, the sycophant, the rebel, the cool or the problematic student. Claiming that character is a performance means that we separate it from some kind of authentic core of 'real' personality.²⁰ The relation between character and personality is a complicated relation we will discuss shortly. But even if we emphasise the performative aspect of character, this does not mean, of course, that characters or roles can be 'chosen' at will. It depends upon one's resources as well as upon the characters and roles that are already taken by others. Not all students can be the smart one or the cool one. Precisely by emphasising performance over authenticity and truth we are, in my view, able to see the underlying *material* and potentially conflictive nature of lifeworld coordination.

Characters, in any case, must also be symbolically communicated through a whole plethora of empty symbols. But the complexity of meaning now increases substantially. The cool student is performing a different character than the ambitious student, yet we might assume that both recognise each other's performed characters. As such, the class knows that when the ambitious student is raising his hand slowly he is communicating hesitance or doubt; but when the cool student raises his hand slowly it is to show his coolness; when the rebel student raises his hand, expectations are raised as it promises a good laugh. The teacher as role and character might recognise these different characters as well, but hardly recognises every symbol of 'youth culture'. Secret *languages of resistance* among students might be his worst nightmare.

From this blatantly simplified clarification of a performative analysis of social practices, we might nevertheless gain four important characteristics for understanding lifeworld coordination. First, lifeworld coordination through symbolic communication is inherently *dialectical*, i.e. the symbols used are *empty* and only meaningful in the contextual and specific performance itself, while, vice versa, these contexts become meaningful practices only through the use of these symbols.²¹

²⁰ Indeed, we can also include gender as being performed "through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler 1999:179)

²¹ This dialectic is present in the hermeneutical tradition as well where the meaning of a text does not reside in the words and sentences used, but in the context in which the story is told (Fischer 2009:195).

Second, lifeworld coordination does *not* rest upon some stable consensus or foundational agreement. Lifeworld coordination is inherently *dynamic* – it concerns symbolic action acting upon symbolic action, both between actors as between the different symbolic layers (stage, role, character). It is about making ‘moves and countermoves’ (Lyotard 1984:16). Lifeworld coordination will never reach some *consensual conclusion* but, at most, will arrive at some *stable equilibrium* which can always be disturbed (Lyotard 1984:61). Meaning and expectations are never conclusively fixed, they are continuously performed. The dialectical nature of performance, then, should not so much be perceived as being *circular*, static and stationary but rather as a *helix* dynamically moving onwards in time.

Third, lifeworld coordination achieves coordination precisely by the *rationality of an unfolding script* – beside more mundane material constraints.²² Only through the logic and internal coherency of an unfolding script do symbols and performances make more or less sense (Alexander 2004:529; Hajer 2005a:448). Rationality, in this context, should be understood in terms of a certain logic and coherency, not in terms of some rational truth. Furthermore, a performance remains open to different interpretations while not every interpretation is equally ‘reasonable’ from the experiences and observations of the actors involved. Irrationality, then, is to break with this internal logic – to be *incomprehensible* or *unreasonable*.²³ The logic of script ties the actors together as ‘the scene carries itself’ (Luhmann 1983:39). Breaking radically with the script will end social communication and coordination. Actors are more or less ‘stuck’ in the logic of their roles and characters, which they cannot leave behind without leaving something of themselves behind (Luhmann 1983:94). Yet ultimately, just as in symbolic coordination through system media, lifeworld coordination is inherently *vulnerable*.

Finally, such performative analysis of lifeworld coordination allows for *plurality* and *conflict*. Empty symbols mean different things for different roles and different characters but nevertheless coordinate social action because they make sense in the logic of the unfolding script. Conflict between the *logics* of roles and characters, indeed, even forms of resistance, are not necessarily denying the integrative aspect of lifeworld coordination. Only non-communication or incomprehensibility ends lifeworld coordination – not conflict. To that extent, we might say that

²² Here our theatre metaphor becomes slightly problematic as a script in theatre is known in advance. But I do not understand a script in terms of a ‘blueprint’ that ‘pre-exists a performance’ (Schechner 1973:6). All actors may have different scripts they want to enact, but only one actual script unfolds. Performance is not a ritual.

²³ For sure, irrationality might be a performance in itself or even a character or role expectation making irrationality rational.

'scripted conflict' is not a contradiction of lifeworld coordination.²⁴ Indeed, characters and roles might just be dependent for meaning and self-understanding upon performed conflict or resistance.

We might now be in a better position to contrast lifeworld and system social coordination. If we would analyse an educational practice in terms of system, we could analyse it in *generalised* and *formal* terms of legal rules and norms, the distribution of legitimate power, the knowledge of educational expertise and may be even in terms of money, on the one hand, and how these media communicatively coordinate social interactions, on the other. However, the difference between lifeworld and system is not reducible to a divide between informal and formal coordination, as Habermas often seems to imply. The difference lies in the different forms of *generalisation* or *rationality*. In this thesis, so far, we have understood socially valid norms in terms of rules of the game – valid norms that structure expectations and actions. These norms, we have also claimed, can be progressively *generalised* into expectations no longer grounded in specific practices and persons but in roles, offices and rules, and can be *formalised* and eventually even *controlled* and *prescribed* by an external authority. Such form of generalisation, formalisation and positivation, for sure, is the basis of Weber's understanding of the rationalisation of society and of Luhmann's media theory.

Lifeworld, in contrast, is not about *rules of the game* but more about *rules of art*, i.e. its rationality is dependent upon the logic of performance itself, upon the unfolding of the script.²⁵ The meaning of a specific symbolic action is not dependent upon generalised rules that divide expectations in dualities of legal/illegal, valid/non-valid, true/untrue or value/valueless, but upon the dialectical logic of *action as reaction* upon specific symbolic actions of other actors (Alexander 2004:541). Just as genuine actors in a play, one can improvise, respond and influence the mutual performance but only within certain logical limits, certain 'rules', that make up the *art of a performance*. Rationality must be understood in terms of such *art*, as comprehensibility in relation to the internal logic of a performance.

We might say, to sum up, that the difference between social norms as generalised rules of the game and social norms as contextual dialectical rules of art, or the difference between system and lifeworld, concerns their different type of social coordination.²⁶ With this statement we seem to

²⁴ Mouffe tries to organise such scripted conflict into an agonistic democratic *system* based upon a 'conflictual consensus' (1999:756).

²⁵ Here lies the difference between performance and ritual – a ritual is a formalised, ruled-prescribed practice, while performance is an open-ended and dynamic form of social coordination. Ritual is system, performance is lifeworld. The difference, then, is analytically fundamental (see in contrast Alexander 2004:534).

²⁶ This difference parallels, it seems, the two perspectives of 'power' that Foucault discerns, i.e. a difference between studying power from the perspective of domination or studying power as practice (1982:780). It is no coincidence that many of the disputes between Habermas and Foucault have centred around this difference between dominating and productive power.

have arrived back at Habermas' analysis of communicative rationality as opposed to system rationality. However, not only are we now able to hang on to Luhmann's more sophisticated version of system theory, we also have freed lifeworld coordination from the need for consensus. As such, we have replaced Habermas' 'formal pragmatics' of communicative speech acts with a far less formal 'performative perspective'. For both system and lifeworld coordination, it implies that the communicative symbolic basis of social coordination remains inherently vulnerable.

8.4 Narratives as Lifeworld Generalisation

The rules of art – the logic of lifeworld coordination – refuse generalisation, formalisation, and positivation.²⁷ Performative logic is inherently dialectic, contextual, temporal and dynamic. Nevertheless, I argue that lifeworld coordination allows for a different kind of generalisation. Instead of generalising expectation and meaning in terms of rules and values, lifeworld allows for generalisation in the form of *narratives*. I will argue that lifeworld expectations can be generalised from lifeworld practices in terms of cultural narratives, ontological narratives and discourses. Cultural narratives are generalised meaningful experiences (scene, role, character), ontological narratives are generalised histories (script) and discourses are generalised coordination (the logic or art of performance). All three types of generalisation allow different kinds of *storytelling*: the telling of fictional stories, of factual histories or of public argumentation. This, for sure, requires some explanation.

8.4.1 Cultural Narratives and the Symbolic World of Fiction

The first form of generalisation concerns the generalisation of meaningful experiences actors have in lifeworld practices where it concerns scene, role and character. Such generalisations of experiences are not about formal rules or norms but come in the form of narratives that are detached from specific practices. These narratives are not precise, fixed and formalised, nor do they concern specific contexts or histories, they are generalised or decontextualised lifeworld experiences. Precisely these generalised narratives provide the '*interpretative schemes*', in Habermas' account, detached from a particular practice that enable us to *interpret* scenes, roles and characters in different or new practices. When these generalised narratives are subsequently contextualised, when they are *performed* in a specific practice, they attribute expectations and meanings to symbolic actions allowing social coordination. As such, symbols or signs that communicate 'education' mobilise a narrative of expectations and meanings and it probably makes a difference whether they communicate generalised narratives of 'university', 'high school' or 'kindergarten'.

²⁷ As such, there seems to be a close affinity with Polanyi's concept of 'tacit knowledge' or Scott's idea of 'metis' (Fischer 2009:223; Scott 1998:350ff.).

In lifeworld practices we are able to recognise expectations communicated at the analytical levels of scene, role and character not because we possess some form of *symbolic code* or *special language* that prescribes generalised and socially valid expectations. Rather, *empty symbols* become meaningful because we recognise them to be part of generalised lifeworld narratives. Which means, first, that meanings would differ for alternative narratives and, second, it also means that meaning is never limited to an isolated singular event – meaning is always *also* general (Somers 1994:616). Generalised lifeworld narratives, then, are the ‘art’ which allow actors to coordinate lifeworld through symbolic performances. But, as we have seen, practice is a multi-layered complex of different narratives or interpretative schemes – there is no single ‘right’ interpretative scheme, let alone a single meaning. These generalised narratives are neither norm nor value. Where a moral value – let’s say honesty – demands that we ought to be honest, narratives tell us stories when honesty is a relevant value in the first place. So, if some narratives tell us that honesty is the basis of true love, other stories tell us that if one cares for the other one might have to tell a lie once in a while. There is no single universal moral rule – all depends upon how a specific situation is interpreted; how empty symbols become meaningful and how the script of the social practice unfolds in the social performance.

In short, these narratives as generalised experiences – which I would like to call *cultural narratives* – allow expectations and meanings to travel between practices, making social coordination in different and changing situations possible. If these cultural narratives are what Habermas’ understands as ‘background knowledge’, we can agree as long as this does not imply a consensual understanding or a single right way to interpret social actions and contexts. The actual practice depends upon social *performance* and not upon some presupposed or achieved consensual *agreement*. What integrates lifeworld practices is the contextual dialectic logic of symbolic, meaningful and comprehensible performances not a generalised background consensus.

Lifeworld generalisation, then, stand in clear contrast to Luhmann’s and Weber’s account of generalisation in which expectations progressively attach to person, role, rule and office. Lifeworld generalisation, in the first instance, concerns the generalisation of *experiences* in specific practices into *cultural narratives*. Cultural narratives, then, are more or less *detached* from specific practices which enable us to interpret different or novel practices, i.e. they allow us to interpret practice in terms of *expectations*. However, this dialectic between experiences and expectations still remains a rather subjective affair, complicating lifeworld coordination. Just as Luhmann, we need to explain how expectations might also be generalised from the subjective, to intersubjective to objective expectations, i.e. we need to explain the social institutionalisation of cultural narratives. We might

perceive that lifeworld generalisation contains a second kind of mechanism. Precisely because narratives are generalised experiences detached from a specific practice, they can be accessed in a different mode than merely through lifeworld performances (Bauman & Briggs 1990:73). Cultural narratives are – in contrast to Habermas' background knowledge – accessible through *practices of storytelling*. Precisely because narratives are detached from actual practices they can be the building blocks with which we can tell stories not only to ourselves but especially to others allowing us to grasp institutionalisation processes of cultural narratives.

Thirdly, we might also perceive that cultural storytelling opens up a *symbolic world of fiction* over and above the practices of daily life.²⁸ Storytelling, of course, is a practice in its own account and, as such, may come in many different forms. We might say in analytical and general terms that the *material foundation* of this symbolic world – the actual practices of storytelling – can be understood as the *cultural public sphere*. What all practices of storytelling share, however, is that they presume a storyteller and an audience. Storytelling, then, differs from lifeworld performance to the extent that it differentiates between active performers and passive audiences. One can be passive foremost because one is not involved in the story or the performance – the story is not about us as we are listening to the story, not about our immediate context, not about the practice we are involved in. Storytelling is *dramaturgy*.

Lifeworld generalisation, I argue, should be understood in these three terms of *generalised narratives, storytelling and dramaturgy*. Furthermore, these three processes are inherently related and can hardly be separately understood. Storytelling allows one to become detached from one's direct surroundings – detached from the reality of everyday practices – and to enter a symbolic but *meaningful* world of fiction. Indeed, fictional stories can be quite meaningful as they 'move' the audience. The passivity of the audience might therefore be better understood as *uninvolved involvement* (Luhmann 1983:123). This peculiar accomplishment is possible, it seems to me, precisely because the storyteller can 'use' cultural narratives available to tell his fictional story. Through these narratives the audience can identify with the hero of the story, the bravery of his actions, the fairness of his fight, the evil of his adversaries, the excitement and distress when things threaten to go wrong, the gratification when evil is slain and the fulfilment when the hero deservedly gets the girl – or, vice versa, the horror when evil triumphs. When we close the book, when the curtains fall or the lights go on, we are back in our normal life, yet, we have experienced many *real* emotions and thoughts.²⁹

²⁸ For Adorno, this symbolic world has become an escape of 'fleeting gratification' answering to the 'desire to be deceived' because otherwise life would be 'completely intolerable' (1975:16). Mickey Mouse as "a dream for contemporary man" (Benjamin 1999:734-5)

²⁹ Indeed, symbols or rituals often make clear when storytelling starts and ends – to separate it from 'reality'.

We can analyse this process in terms of sentiments and utopias. *Sentiments* concern the identification with the story, roles or characters based upon one's own experiences and observations in life (Jameson 1979:147; Adorno 1975:15; Hariman & Lucaites 2003:38). The fact that we cry when an impossible love is answered despite all odds is not because we really care about these (fictitious) characters but because we complement the story with meanings from our actual life. We (unconsciously) recognise our own life experiences and emotions in the story told. *Utopias* function somewhat differently to the extent that we do not so much complement the story with meanings from our own life experiences, but the story relates to dreams and nightmares about what our own life *could be* – either in terms of utopia or dystopia (Jameson 1979:142, 1982:153). The story not only mobilises hopes and fears, but – like religion – provides us with 'knowledge of the unknowable'.³⁰ Both sentiment and utopia explain uninvolved involvement in terms of a relation between everyday practices and the practice of storytelling, but in opposite directions.

In other words, despite the fact that these stories are fictional – they relate to real life, they are comprehensible and they are meaningful because they make use of cultural narratives (generalised experiences). Yet, vice-versa, this also means that through listening to meaningful and moving stories we can actually gain new 'experiences'. Through fictional stories I can experience, if only symbolically, what it is to be a soldier, the president, to be poor, to be rich, etc. In other words, fictional story telling reproduces but also produces cultural narratives. As such, I might recognise in reality what I have only experienced in fiction and recognise in fiction what I have experienced in reality. Storytelling is not merely reproducing but also producing new cultural narratives. As such, we can understand that our *subjective* experiences in real life partly depend upon the *social production* of cultural narratives and, vice versa, that the social production of narratives depends upon our experiences in reality. This dialectic, then, explains the social character of lifeworld narratives – i.e. why our experiences and observations are inherently 'valued' – but also why not just any fiction is meaningful as it has to relate to real situated experiences.

In *figure 8.1* I have depicted schematically the relations we have discussed so far between lifeworld practices and fiction: 1) the *generalisation* of lifeworld experiences and the interpretation of lifeworld practices in terms of cultural narratives; 2) the practice of *storytelling* which opens up a symbolic world of fiction and a material world of the cultural sphere, both through which cultural narratives are produced and reproduced; and 3) the relation between this symbolic world of fiction and our real lifeworld experiences in term of *dramaturgy*.

³⁰ As such, cultural storytelling can also be a means of propaganda or of social criticism (Alexander 2004:544).

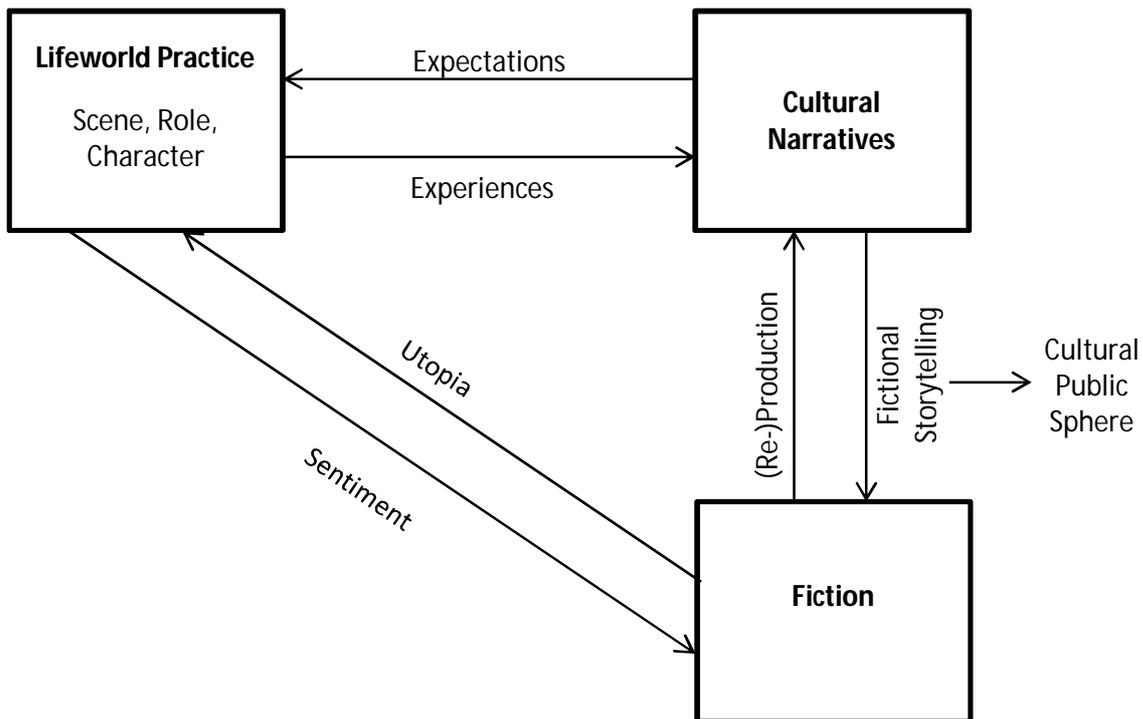


Fig. 8.1 – A performative model of the cultural public sphere. The horizontal lines concern the mechanism of *generalised narratives* in everyday practices; the vertical lines concern the practice of *storytelling*; and the diagonal lines concern the *dramaturgical* part of fiction.

8.4.2 Ontological Narratives and the Symbolic Reality of Worldviews

Cultural narratives allow actors to interpret actions in terms of meaningful expectations. However, what coordinates social action is not only the communication of meaning, but what we have called the logic and internal coherence of the performance, or the *unfolding script*. It is the unfolded script – the social history – that determines the current situation of a practice and which moves are rationally expected to be possible and which acts are comprehensible. As such, for any actor involved in a specific practice, it is not only important to understand the meanings of acts and objects, but to understand the *facts* of the situation – the current *state of affairs*. To understand the facts, an actor must know the past; know how the script has unfolded up to this moment. Practices have a history which determines the current state of affairs.

In principle, actors *share* this factual understanding of reality as they share a history. This must be understood carefully, however. We are not bringing back consensus through the backdoor. First, a shared history, of course, does not mean that the actors share the same meaning of present day reality. We are talking about the factual state of affairs here. Second, when we say that actors share a history or reality we are primarily stating the obvious: an individual cannot make up facts at will. Reality or the state of affairs is an inherent social reality. To understand the unfolded script is to understand the *intersubjective constitution* of reality. For social coordination, as before, it is not

important whether this reality is *true*, in any sense, but whether one expects others to expect this reality to be true. As such, the performed script points out the social construction of the present state of affairs. In this sense, facts are not about epistemological truth but about social validity. However, social validity cannot be understood in terms of generalised norms or rules (system) – what is socially valid is constantly performed (lifeworld). Social validity *is* the unfolding script. Facts do neither depend upon social consensus nor upon epistemic rules, but upon a continuous performance and communication of expectations. In social practice, then, the factual state of affairs is both socially performed and historically informed.

Just as scene, role and character allow a form of generalisation that we have analysed in terms of cultural narratives, fictional storytelling and dramaturgy, we can analyse script in a similar way. A script can be generalised in terms of ontological narratives; produced and reproduced by telling biographical and historical narratives; and from this storytelling symbolic worldviews and personalities are emerging that dramaturgically and dialectically structure the way we understand ourselves in real practices. Let us examine these claims.

Generalisation – The unfolded script, the history of a practice, determines the current state of affairs. It is this history that allows for a different type of generalisation. If the script, in principle, encompasses all history and all social action of a specific practice, we can generalise our factual experience in terms of a *historical narrative*. Historical narratives recount a chronology of factual events that have happened in a specific practice (Alexander 2004:530). And through these narratives we interpret the current state of affairs. Such historical narratives – or generalised scripts – therefore remain tied to specific practices and experiences. However, they are also simplifications at the same time. A historical narrative is not merely a chronology; by necessity it categorises and classifies history. As such, historical narratives always encompass a second type of generalisation: *ontological narratives* (Somers 1994:618). These are narratives of ‘representation’ that recount the nature of things (Bourdieu 1989:839). Ontological narratives allow detachment from a specific practice altogether. They concern the categories and classifications through which we perceive (social) reality and, as such, they can ‘travel’ between different practices. When we enter a new practice we can understand and interpret social reality in terms of these ontological narratives.

Story-telling – Just as cultural narratives allow a form of storytelling, ontological narratives also allow a form of storytelling. Ontological narratives provide the possibility of *combining* and *simplifying* different historical narratives into a more or less coherent history beyond one specific practice; the possibility of understanding different histories and practices in terms of one ontological narrative.

Ontological narratives, then, allow a form of storytelling that opens up a 'symbolic reality' over and above the practices of daily life. There seem to be two important strands of such storytelling: recounting individual and collective histories (Bourdieu 1994:14) subsequently generating the *symbolic realities* of personality and worldview.

Biographical or individual narratives are not about recounting the historical narrative of a particular practice, but of recounting one's life experiences and events within and across different practices. Through telling a biographical story we tell a story of who we are as an individual person in the present – we tell our present 'state of affairs'. Through telling such factual stories one creates a *symbolic* and *coherent* reality beyond particular practices, beyond all the different roles and characters we perform in daily life – a symbolic reality that we can call individual personality. Although we constantly have to perform different roles and characters in different scenes, this symbolic narrative provides a univocal, continuous and coherent sense of reality despite the plurality and fragmentation of everyday practices.³¹ Telling our biography, then, is not just giving factual information about our past experiences in different practices, but also generates persons as an ontological and symbolic reality.

Collective narratives, in contrast, combine historical narratives of *different practices* into a generalised and more or less coherent story. Through telling collective narratives we tell a factual story of how we are as a *collective* in the present, how different practices are coherently related and how we understand our place in this general history. Through telling collective histories we create a *symbolic* and *coherent* reality over and above all the different and isolated practices of daily life – a symbolic reality that we can call *worldview*. Telling collective histories, then, is not just about factual information on what is happening in other social practices beyond our involvement, but generates *worldviews* as an ontological and symbolic reality – it gives rise to the *nature of the world*.

When we understand how scripts might be generalised in terms of ontological narratives, and how these narratives allow telling biographical and collective histories that create symbolic realities of personality and worldview, we might wonder how such storytelling takes shape. As always, storytelling is a social practice, which means that we should be able to identify the material foundations of worldview and personality. In comparison with cultural narratives that allowed distinct practices of storytelling – giving rise to a cultural public sphere – ontological narratives, however, seem to constitute less distinct practices. Both personality and worldview are symbolic realities that rise from telling individual and collective histories through which we understand the current state of affairs; through which we understand the *objective* world beneath and beyond the

³¹ This does not mean, of course, that such narrative is unitary or singular; it probably is a 'multi-layered' story (Prins 2006:282; Somer 1994:612). Furthermore, narratives are never finished, despite our desire for 'closure' or truth.

particular practice in which we are involved. However, these histories are not ontological narratives in themselves. Worldviews as a symbolic reality arise from telling *factual histories*.

Histories recount facts. It is important to notice that biographical and collective histories are not about *meaningful* facts. If worldviews and personalities become meaningful narratives – discourses – we might understand them as normative ideologies and identities (Somers 1994:605; Prins 2006:281). Whether ideology and worldview or personality and identity can be empirically separated is quite a different and difficult matter. Analytically, however, it is important to differentiate between historical narratives and discourses – for the sheer fact that *facts* matter on their own account. If worldviews as a symbolic reality, then, arise from telling factual histories, it seems to me that the underlying material practices concern different forms of *everyday talk* performed in the interstices of lifeworld practices. Such talk concerns the exchange of histories or ‘narrative forms of knowing’ (Fischer 2009:193). We constantly tell others (as well as ourselves) what happened – we constantly tell factual stories. Indeed, just as for any kind of storytelling practice we must presume a narrator and an audience. In case of biographies the audience is as much other people to whom we tell our life histories as it is ourselves. Personality is a story individuals tell themselves. In case of collective stories, it seems to me, we tell factual stories to two kind of audiences. We tell ‘outsiders’ what happened in a specific practice or we tell ‘insiders’ how this specific practice relates to the world beyond.

Personality and worldviews, in conclusion, arise as symbolic realities from all social practices in which we tell factual histories. The material foundation of a symbolic worldview is not only everyday talk but especially also what we might loosely call the *news media system*, i.e. the public sphere that consists of news coverage and report (Hallin & Mancini 2004). We might presume that the mass media are specifically important forms of narrating collective stories and realities, but we should also include the *educational system*. Although histories consists of factual knowledge and information that can always be disputed, these systems especially open up a symbolic space in which worldviews can take shape.

Histories are factual stories we tell to audiences from which symbolic realities – worldviews – arise. This relation between facts and reality, however, is a very complicated one as telling factual stories can give rise to argument and dispute. Facts can be *untrue*. The crucial difference between cultural and historical storytelling, then, is that the former consists of *fictional* stories and the latter of *factual* stories. In fictional stories the meanings experienced do not derive from the authority of the storyteller. A storyteller does not claim to tell the *truth* and as such he is not claiming *authority* even though he might be the author of the story (Lyotard 1984:20). The audience might criticise the

storyteller for telling the story poorly, for telling a boring story, for unconvincing plot changes or even for the immorality of the story – but the storyteller cannot be criticised for the meaning – sentiments and utopias – we each experience on our own account through narration. It simply does not make sense to question the validity of our own experiences as there is no authority to appeal to, they are mere ‘facts’.³² This might be what Habermas means when he claims that lifeworld represents the ‘fusion of validity and facticity’ (1996:23). In storytelling there are no facts as the story is fictional while the meanings experienced are nevertheless factual.

Telling factual stories is inherently different from telling fictional ones in one crucial aspect: factual stories contain *truth-claims*. Telling factual stories, then, is not about authorship so much as about *authority*. One does not claim to have written a story, one claims that what one tells is *true* and that others *ought to* recognise this truth. The opposite of telling a fictional story is telling the audience how they ought to interpret reality. Precisely because truth-claims compel us to interpret a practice, event or action in a specific manner, it opens up, as Habermas also recognises, the tight fusion between facticity and validity. Authority opens up social reality to questions of validity or legitimation (Lyotard 1984:23). Authoritative claims must be proven and questions redeemed.

However, the symbolic reality of worldview that arises from telling factual histories does not give rise to questions of validity – it does not have this *epistemic* notion. When someone tells you his biography – an individual history – you might question some of his factual claims. You might wonder, for example, whether he really did finish his PhD. As such, epistemic questions or questions of validity might arise. However, these questions have nothing to do with the ontological story he is also telling ‘in between the lines’ that creates a symbolic reality – worldview and personality – beyond this specific moment. In other words, we might question the facts narrated but we do not question reality presented and presumed in the ‘pragmatics of narration’ (Lyotard 1984:27). The crucial point, then, is that worldviews arise from within the factual story narrated. It is not *what* is told, but *how* it is told.

We can say, then, that the peculiar feature of worldviews – i.e. their structuring force without questions of legitimation or proof – lies in their *unauthoredness* (Arendt 1998:186). This means that there is no *author*, no *origin*, no *original*, no *first time* (Jameson 1979:137; Butler 1999:175; Foucault 1984b:77; Lyotard 1984:22).³³ Social reality is not based upon author or authority, the key mechanism is *repetition* and *imitation*. The narrator claims to be the author of the factual history he tells, but he does not claim to be the author of the ‘world as it is’ – he is not the

³² This, it seems to me, explains the fact that cultural products are sometimes condemned as immoral or perverted as we can experience thoughts and meanings that are quite real and disturbing.

³³ Even if there is an original – for example an image, painting or picture – its mere reproduction, repetition and circulation, made possible by the technologies of modern society, makes it a convention, a ‘banality’, which can no longer represent some ‘original’ meaning (Hariman & Lucaites 2003; Lucaites & Hariman 2001).

author of the ontological story that is necessary to tell his story. He does not claim that this reality is 'true' because he claims it to be, but he expects this reality to be socially comprehensible. Worldviews are not true but socially constructed. To understand the social construction of reality is not to look for the epistemic truth of affairs, but to understand its social history – the production and reproduction of reality through everyday factual storytelling. Social reality can only be understood in terms of its genealogy – in terms of *Herkunft* not in terms of *Ursprung* (Foucault 1984:46a; 1984a:80). Worldviews, then, might be understood as ontological narratives of representation "adapted to the structures of the world which produces them" (Bourdieu 1989:839). Worldview is an *unauthored reality* that does not need to be *proven* as it is socially produced and reproduced – it is inherent in how we tell factual stories. There is no authority to appeal to.

Dramaturgy – Telling factual histories before an audience opening up a symbolic worldview has inherent dialectical consequences. Worldview structures how we understand reality, while how we understand reality also confirms our worldview. This inherent dialectic of knowledge is the basis of what is sometimes called 'post-empirical' or 'post-positivist' science (Fisher 1993:333, 2009:4; Hajer 1993:44; 2005a:447). The idea that factual reality is about telling or performing historical narratives seems to clash with mainstream ideas about science. Science tells us what the facts are and this, surely, has nothing to do with storytelling? However, it is important to separate a lifeworld perspective of science from science as a social system formally coordinated by *epistemic rules* – rules that tell scientists what valid knowledge is (truth/untruth). Knowledge is true, the formal story of empiricist science goes, when it is *coherent with observations of reality*. Indeed, this epistemic idea of truth as being coherent with reality is also widely shared in most if not all lifeworld practices. Someone either did or did not do something; I gave you either 20 or 30 euros. And it makes no sense denying this experiential basis of truth. Post-empirical critique of this perception of scientific episteme, however, has less to do with the rule of coherency, the problem is what constitutes reality (Horkheimer 1972:240; Fischer 2009:112, 1993:334).

Many have pointed out that science coordinated by its formal episteme cannot account for its actual practices (Kuhn 1970:52; Horkheimer 1972:195-6; Fischer 2009:114; Lyotard 1984:54; Yankelovich 1990:231). Science as a lifeworld practice also needs historical narratives that tell it what its present day reality is, what it knows better today than yesterday and what the current problems, questions and puzzles are that still have to be solved. Such historical narratives, worldviews or paradigms, in Kuhn's words, explain scientific practices and their understanding of reality (1970:43). Every scientist making a factual truth-claim has to relate to this historical narrative which makes his claim comprehensible (rational) – but not necessarily valid (true) – for the scientific

public that he must presume shares this worldview. Indeed, almost every scientific publication begins with a description of 'the field', its main problematic and the research question that follows from it – narrating and reproducing the scientific worldview and its state of affairs (see also Adorno 1976:73). The scientist, in a sense, creates his own symbolic collective reality. The public must accept this worldview if they want to understand his argument (Putnam 2002:39).

Scientific practice is coordinated and the scientific public is integrated through telling collective histories. Breaking with its paradigm makes scientific claims incomprehensible. Science, then, is also a *dramaturgical practice* in which scientists tell collective stories and produce and reproduce a symbolic worldviews which they expect to be socially valid for the scientific public. Only within this *unauthored* worldview can their *authored* truth-claims make sense – be more or less *reasonable*. Kuhn pointed out that the relation between unauthored paradigms and authored truth-claims tends to be counterfactual in 'normal' scientific practice as anomalies or critiques are put aside as irrational (Kuhn 1970:77; Horkheimer 1972:232).³⁴ Post-empiricists often claim that this counterfactuality shows that *facts and values* cannot be separated (Fischer 2009:112; 1995:13). However, as I have demonstrated above, we must be careful not to confuse truth and reality – episteme and ontology. Indeed, paradigms or worldviews are not about *truth* and *untruth* but about *real* and *unreal*.³⁵

Paradigms are narrated and unauthored histories creating a symbolic scientific worldview which makes scientific practice possible in the first place. It allows the scientist to perceive the world in terms of scientific problems and questions, which structures his research and determines the relevance of his findings. As stated before, science is therefore historically situated and inherently valued. However, this does not mean that science is a normative affair – that the paradigm *ought to be true*. A paradigm or a collective worldview is not an ideology. Rather, in science as in real life we tend not to discard our understanding of reality by a single anomaly but rather classify it as incomprehensible, irrational or a mistake. In this context it seems better, then, not to talk about the counterfactual nature of science which often slips into epistemological arguments, but of the dialectic between facts and reality. *Worldview is dramaturgy*: we recognise the symbolic worldview as it aligns with our lifeworld experiences and observations – it proofs itself in *facts* – while at the same time, how we understand and perceive these experiences, how we understand the world and our place in it, is structured by symbolic worldviews. It is this dialectic between two ontologies,

³⁴ Just ask a group of statisticians whether their method is really the most appropriate one to solve a complex social question. Most of the time they will answer – with a slight sigh – that this is the method and data they've got, that they are relating to other claims made in their field and that if it does not say everything it must say something. This is the reality of *all* scientific practice. However, some practices are more institutionalised than others.

³⁵ That does not deny that also scientific *episteme* has its own historical narrative (see e.g. Kwa 2005; Foucault 1971).

reality experienced and symbolic reality narrated that tends to have counterfactual tendencies, but worldviews or paradigms are not fixed *normative* structures. The material institutionalisation of scientific paradigms, of course, is a completely different affair.

The dialectic between real facts and symbolic reality, we might notice, is akin to the dramaturgical dialectic between real and fictional experiences in fictional story telling. Ultimately, this dialectic explains why symbolic worldviews do not give rise to questions of legitimacy.³⁶ Scientific practice is not about a shared consensus or epistemic rules, but about telling collective histories which makes present-day scientific arguments comprehensible and more or less reasonable.³⁷ Whether these arguments are true in an epistemological sense is quite a different matter. This example of science shows in general that we must not so much understand *when* something is true (system episteme) but *how* something is true (lifeworld experiences and storytelling). A performative perspective tries to understand the *ontology of society* – how we make sense of what and who we are through social action and storytelling (Somers 1994:61:614).

Finally, the fact that historical narrations produce unauthored symbolic worldviews with its inherent dialectic and counterfactual tendencies leads some scholars to claim that ontological narratives *legitimate* social order. Ontological stories – symbolic worldviews – might not be about epistemic facts, they are about facts nonetheless. Worldview is not an empty story. It tells us how the world is; it presents itself as natural. Indeed, such ontological realities might be buried deep in social practices and narrations producing and reproducing power relations through their unauthored quality. Social order and its hierarchical relations and divisions are *naturalised* as ‘doxic’ knowledge (Bourdieu 1989:839-40; 1994:2,15). Legitimacy, in this guise, is understood as naturalisation; not a form of normativity but of facticity. The social order is not necessarily right or valid, not how the world ought to be, but the way the world *is*. Worldview ‘confirms the established order’ and prevent the rise of questions of validity or legitimacy (Bourdieu 1989:839; 1994:15). Although I would not call this a form of legitimation, but rather a form of naturalisation, historical narrations do seem to have this effect of *non-legitimation*. However, it should not mean that there is only one single ontological worldview present in ‘society’ – or even a form of consensus – capable of naturalising social order or the political system in its totality (Bader 1991:103). There are many worldviews narrated in late-

³⁶ Indeed, when paradigm shifts do occur we understand them in terms of a *discovery* not in terms of some kind of *emancipation* from scientific authority.

³⁷ That mere episteme does not suffice – or that epistemic problems always presuppose ontological narratives – becomes clear in the famous example in which we wonder whether the discovery of a black swan logically means that not all swans are white or that the black swan is not a swan. Ontological problems do explain why natural science has a tendency to move to its two *universal* extremes: the elementary and the universe – a tendency that Habermas seems to take over. However, these universals do not explain the material and social world that exists in between. The world that matters.

modern society that often conflict. In other words, worldviews must always be socially performed and symbolically narrated in specific practices.

In *figure 8.2* I have depicted schematically the relations we have discussed between lifeworld practices and worldview: 1) the *generalisation* of lifeworld experiences and the interpretation of lifeworld practices in terms of historical and ontological narratives; 2) the practice of *storytelling* which opens up a symbolic world of worldview and a material world of the media and educational system, both through which ontological narratives are produced and reproduced; and 3) the relation between this symbolic reality and our real lifeworld experiences in term of *dramaturgy*.

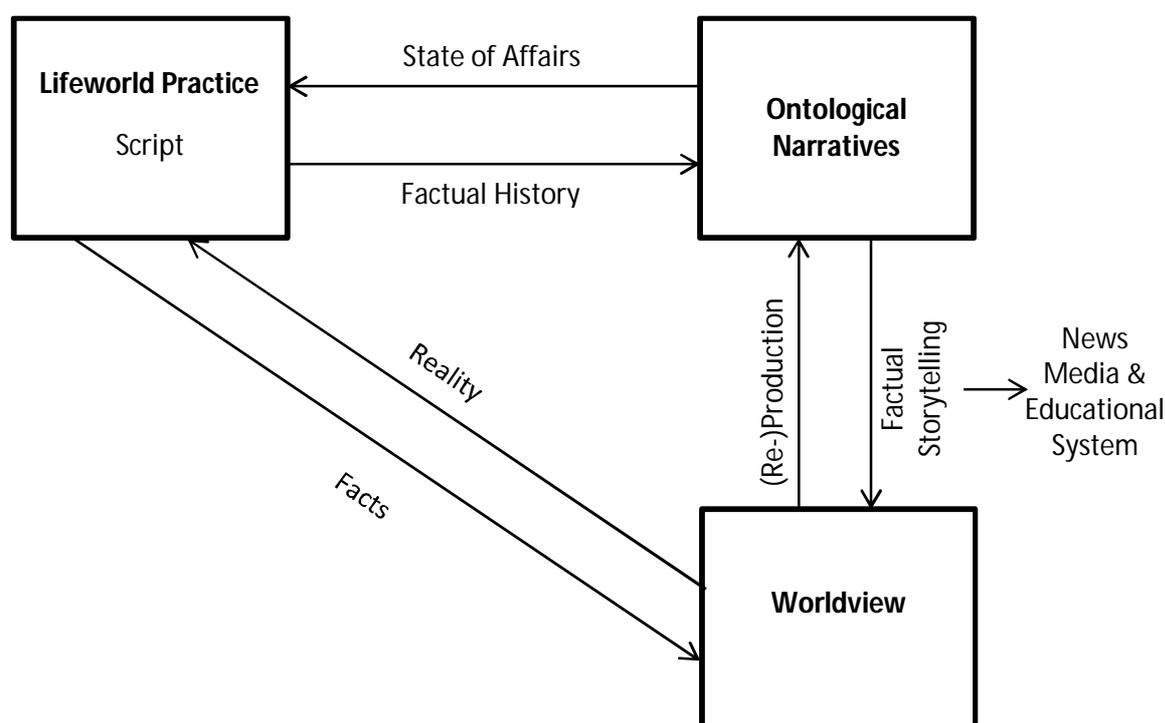


Fig. 8.2 – A performative model of the news media and educational systems. The horizontal lines concern the mechanism of *generalised narratives* in everyday practices; the vertical lines concern the practice of *storytelling*; and the diagonal lines concern the *dramaturgical* part of worldview.

8.4.3 Discourses and the Symbolic Space of Authority

Cultural and ontological forms of storytelling produce the symbolic reality of fictions and worldviews, but do not evoke claims of authority. Both ontological and cultural narratives are *unauthored* schemes of interpretation and representation that allow the individual actor to understand a social situation in terms of facts and meanings. But such analysis is still *static*. Social practice is an open-ended and dynamic social performance that continuously determines meaning and facts of the practice. In this dynamic perspective every action communicates a validity claim, i.e. an *authored* interpretation of how others ought to understand the practice. It is this 'authoredness' that requires

questions of validity and authority, which I will analyse in terms of the by now familiar categories *generalisation*, *storytelling* and *dramaturgy*.

Generalisation – Social coordination, in the performative or lifeworld perspective, means to act upon the actions of others. What integrates and coordinates these actions is the logic of the social script unfolding. It is practical, then, to differentiate between history as the *unfolded* script – making sense of the present state of affairs – and social coordination as the *unfolding* script. Every act, as Habermas points out, makes validity claims as every act communicates an interpretation of the *meaning* and the *facts* of the present situation. Through actions every actor symbolically communicates to the other actors how they *ought to* interpret the situation. Social coordination, then, is a normative affair through which ‘validity and facticity split apart’ (Habermas 1996:27). If other actors do not agree with a normative interpretation – with the facts and meanings claimed – they might accept it for strategic reasons, quit the social relation all together or make a counter-move. Indeed, social performance itself can be perceived as a form of argumentation of how a situation ought to be understood. We often stay clear from open conflict and linguistic argument, while we try to re-interpret the situation through counter-moves, through symbolic actions.

Nevertheless, it is clear that social coordination in a specific lifeworld practice might also be continued in terms of *linguistic argumentation*. In the first instance, a speech act can be interpreted like any other symbolic action. It merely communicates one’s interpretation of scene, role and character and it must be comprehensible in relation to script.³⁸ So, if we return to our educational example, we can see that a speech-act is similar to any other symbolic act if one states: ‘I am your teacher’. Just as any other symbolic action this act entails a *validity claim* to the extent that it communicates how the situation *ought to be* interpreted. However, in second instance, language allows us to demand explanation or clarification if we ask ‘what do you mean?’ Now we might perceive that the performative coordination takes a linguistic turn as we start to *explain* and *justify* what we mean. We subsequently not only communicate an explanation of our interpretation of the current state of affairs, we also simultaneously argue why the other ought to take over this interpretation. We expect our clarification or argument to be persuasive. In its most rudimentary guise our argument concerns a clarification of our train of thoughts that lead us to this particular interpretation. As such, we tell *meaningful histories* that communicate our interpretations of meaning, fact and, above all, the rationality or *logic* of this history. Finally, if the other disagrees with

³⁸ As speech act-theory tries to show, we normally mean more with language than what we actually say (Searle 1964, 1976, 2005). As such, speech acts must not merely be analysed in terms of the meaning of words but especially in terms of a performative perspective.

this argument he might make a counter-argument, a counter-move that provides a different interpretation of (a part of) their shared history.

So, for example, when two lovers argue about the interpretation of an event or the state of their relation they might try to convince each other of the *meaning of facts* and the *factuality of meanings* by telling meaningful histories. According to Habermas a *good argument* would be the argument that forcefully persuades the other of its validity. But this is often not how an argument works. Often an argument does not lead to consensus or agreement at all – often nothing is ‘resolved’ although grievances are expressed, misunderstandings clarified, disagreement better understood and disagreement not further thematised *for the moment*.³⁹ But for sure, things have changed. The argument has given new meaning to the state of affairs of their relation and subsequent actions and events might be interpreted differently than before. The lover’s argument has changed their lifeworld practice as it has changed their history and therefore the meaning and facts of the current state of affairs. Argumentation in this explanatory mode, then, is foremost about social *coordination* – not about searching for truth or proving validity. Indeed, the reason our two lovers are arguing and why they accept certain arguments in order to make a subsequent argument is not because they are necessarily oriented to truth-finding or because they are genuinely persuaded by argumentative proof, but because they are interested in social coordination, which might demand mutual understanding but not agreement. They are *forced* into argument because the alternative is conflict or disintegration.

Linguistic argumentation, in this guise, is lifeworld coordination with different means. Argumentation is an inherent part of lifeworld coordination and no consensus is presumed or necessary. Even more importantly, to understand argumentation is *not* to analyse mechanisms of persuasion, let alone its epistemic rules, but to understand argumentation as a lifeworld practice in itself – as a performance (van Stokkum 2005:400; Hajer 2005a). Argumentation is itself a lifeworld performance in which the unfolding of the argument – its script – determines its internal logic and coherency; the ‘appropriateness’, comprehensibility and reasonableness of speech acts (Turner 1975:150). But this argumentative performance has *real life* consequences.

However, argumentative coordination differs from performative coordination in two respects. First, because coordination is linguistic we are no longer limited to the interpretation of actions, facts and histories inherent in the specific practice only. We can also explicitly relate the history of the specific practice to collective or personal histories, indeed to worldviews and personalities. As such, the two lovers might not only talk about the facts, meanings and logic of their shared history but also how

³⁹ The downside of language, it seems, is that, precisely because of its relative preciseness, conflicts can less easily be avoided or ignored as ‘misinterpretations’. A solution, of course, is fuzzy language.

this history relates to how the world is – how we understand the nature of relationships, gender roles, sexuality or love – or how it relates to who we are as a person – to our ‘character’, our whims and wants. Secondly, language not only enables us to communicate how we meaningfully understand the current state of affairs but also opens it up to the *future*. Language not only allows us to specify how we interpret the current state of affairs in light of our history, but also in light of our common future. This means that the argument can also include how we think we *ought to act* collectively separate from how we actually act. Although symbolic acts including speech acts always make validity claims, this future-orientation make argument explicitly normative as it allows us, as stated before, to make moral, ethical, prudential and realist arguments about what we ought to do. Argumentation no longer is merely explanatory but explicitly *authoritative*.

In sum, we can see that linguistic argumentation easily *generalises* beyond performative coordination with different means, to an argumentative coordination that mobilises general cultural and ontological narratives beyond the particular practice and makes authoritative claims into the future – a generalisation in ‘space’ and ‘time’. In the former, the coordinative logic arises from speech acts acting upon speech acts, while in the latter this logic is generalised into an explicit normative argumentation. The lovers might now argue about what love and their relation ought to be. Such generalisation of coordinative logic produces what we can call *discourses*. Discourses, I will argue, are the analytical building blocks for analysing a specific type of storytelling: *public argumentation*.

Like all forms of storytelling, public argumentation implies a storyteller and a passive audience. This dramaturgical perspective ‘frees’ argument from the inherent force of social coordination. Where the two lovers are forced into argumentation by their mutual need for coordination, public argument can be easily ignored by the audience without immediate consequences for their lifeworld practices. If the coordinative logic of an argument arises from speech-act upon speech act, we need not wonder whether the validity claims made are true or persuasive – what counts is comprehensibility, the force of social coordination and how argumentation subsequently changes the social reality of the practice. When this coordinative logic, however, is generalised into a discourse that allows for the storytelling practice of public argumentation *detached* from our immediate contexts and before a *passive* audience, it seems that we do need to understand how an argument can be persuasive, how it can justify its validity claims, its authority. It seems to me that we, in order to understand the nature of public argumentation, need to address two fundamental questions. First, if public argumentation is no longer directly about social coordination but about telling stories before an audience what explains the force of the better argument? Second, making a public argument is to claim *authority* – to make a truth-claim that the

public ought to acknowledge. The question is why a passive public would agree with that claim. What *legitimizes* this authority?

Dramaturgy – Let us start with the latter question. Authority is to make truth-claims. Authority is to claim to be the author of factual truths, which differs from telling authored fictional stories or unauthored worldviews. Truth-claims might give rise to *argumentation*, to questions and critique, on the one hand, and to justification or *legitimation*, on the other. The question is how authority can be legitimated. How are truth-claims justified?

The answer to these questions, it seems, is provided by *discourse theory* – in particular as understood in the policy sciences in the aftermath of the ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer & Forester 1993; Fischer 2009:120; Hajer 1993:45). Discourses are narratives or storylines that symbolically frame facts as meaningful precisely because *facts do not speak for themselves* (Hajer 1993:45; Yanow 2000:11).⁴⁰ Discourses supply a ‘conceptual scheme’, a ‘lens’, a ‘frame’ or a ‘generic diagnostic or prescriptive story’ through which to understand the world, the issue, the problem at hand, its solution and the alternatives (Rein & Schön 1993: 146; 1996:87-9; Dryzek 1997:8). In a discourse, we might say, fictional and factual storytelling come together. The factual part concerns a factual history that mobilises worldviews and produces and reproduces the *objective* state of affairs (Edelman 1993:232). The fictional part of discourses concerns the mobilisation of cultural narratives especially by making use of *metaphors* and *analogies* (Yanow 1996, 2000:41, Stone 2012:157-60; Rein & Schön 1996:89; Edelman 1998:134). By mobilising cultural narratives through discursive frames we accomplish two things: 1) the mobilisation of *subjective* lifeworld meanings based upon sentiment and utopia, upon real and symbolic experiences; and 2) as interpretative stories, discursive frames mobilise expectations, i.e. it mobilises a specific storyline or *frame logic*. Discourses, then, bring together the factual and the fictional and the objective and the subjective. The most important insight, however, is that if a discourse is able to *frame reality in a meaningful way*, its frame logic is transferred upon the state of affairs, which means that some actions, decision or arguments are more or less logical, more or less *reasonable* than others (Fischer 2009:120; Bennett & Edelman 1985:163).⁴¹

Rein and Schön give the example of the metaphor of ‘disease’ (1996:89). We might imagine that a politician, who has to justify a decision as the *right* decision – a truth-claim – can frame the issue in terms of this metaphor by using words (symbols) such as sick, weak, pale, parasitic, healthy,

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that Rein and Schön differentiate between ‘rhetorical frames’ and ‘action frames’, which seems to parallel the difference between symbolic storytelling and coordinative practices (1996:90).

⁴¹ Discourses are sometimes understood in the terms of Bachrach and Baratz (1962:949) as the ‘mobilisation of bias’ (see e.g. Hajer 1993:45). However, this gives the impression there can be an *unbiased* form of discourse or rationality, immediately pushing us into an epistemic debate.

strong, body, virus, decay, recovery, etcetera. Such metaphors mobilise cultural available narratives of 'disease' which provide expectations through which facts are interpreted. As such, it might frame the situation underlying the decision as a situation of seriousness, crisis, or of life and death. It might also frame the politician as responsible, caring or as an expert or doctor, while others might be framed as patients, as sick or as intruding pathogens. We also 'know' that 'the greatest wealth is health', that 'desperate diseases must have desperate remedies', that 'good medicine often has a bitter taste', that 'there is no medicine for a fool' and that 'the cure might be worse than the disease'. The crucial point, therefore, is that the frame not only provides a meaningful interpretation of the state of affairs it also gives reality a certain *frame logic* (Rein & Schön 1996:89, 92). The disease-frame *demand*s surgery, treatment, quarantine, a cure, recovery or prevention. Thus, the legitimating force of a discourse is not that it provides *proofs* for the truth claim made by the politician, but provides a frame with an inherent logic that provides the decision with *rationality*: it is the only reasonable decision to take.

Framing does not only occur in explicit normative or political arguments. Lyotard, for example, claims that scientific authority legitimated itself in terms of *grand narratives*: science is discursively framed as the driving force of social progress, as an epic or heroic struggle of brilliant minds against ignorance or as the servant of the people (1984:28-31,37). This does not mean, of course, that scientists directly claim their work to be epic or democratic. Rather, by using symbols and metaphors they frame their accomplishments in these terms.⁴² The *internal logic* of this frame derives from meaningful cultural narratives and mobilised sentiments and utopias, which forcefully impose that denying the authority of science, denying its truth-claim, would be to oppose progress, to be on the side of the ignorant and to deny the needs of the people.

Discourse, then, is not so much about truth-claiming as it is about framing. By framing facts authoritative truth-claims are not so much proven to be *true* as framed to be *rational*. To say it more directly, discourses do not validate truth-claims or authority in terms of epistemic *truth* but in terms of a narrative and performative *rationality* (Fischer 2009:198). Frame logic itself is independent of facts as it is based upon meaningful storytelling. Similar to fictional stories, it mobilises subjective meanings and expectations – sentiments, hopes and fears – that are inherently factual and, as we have seen, also inherently social. But this does not, of course, mean that facts can be ignored altogether. Discourses must relate to worldviews present in the public and to our factual experiences. Indeed, discourses are *meaningfully framed* historical narratives: histories that interpret the present state of affairs in a broader meaningful history and, importantly, *implied future*. While histories are merely factual interpretations of the present, this future orientation present in

⁴² Scientific discourse use words such as discovery, progress, new, future, solution, better, improved, etc.

discourses – in frame logic – makes discourses inherently *normative*. In short, discursive frames prescribe which facts are meaningful and which meanings are factual. Again, we are confronted with a dialectic – a dialectic between facts and meanings – or, as most discourse theorists claim, between fact and value.

This dialectic between facts and meanings problematises the whole concept of valid authority or truth-claims. Authority is accepted not because its claims are *epistemically true* but because discourses provide the claim with an inherent logic, with *rationality*. The justification or legitimation of authoritative truth-claims, then, concerns discursive validation. The dialectic between facts and values does not mean that truth disappears into thin air and that everything becomes possible. *Authority is not fiction*. Discourses must relate to cultural narratives and ontological narratives socially present; authority must relate to fictions and worldviews. In other words, public argumentation is not the only form of storytelling present in a society and storytelling is not the only kind of practice present in a society – i.e. stories must relate to our actual experiences in everyday practices. What it does mean is that truth or authority – just as in system theory – is inherently *symbolic*. But as critical realism already showed us, letting go of epistemic standards of proof is actually saving truth from fiction. That is to say, precisely when we understand truth in terms of episteme the dialectic between facts and values threatens to undermine the whole concept. The rationality of truth, however, can be validated in terms of subjective lifeworld experiences that, as discussed before, are at least partly also social or objective. As such, not every authoritative claim is equally reasonable.

The three lifeworld dialectics that we have found – between real and symbolic meaningful experiences (fiction), between experienced reality and symbolic reality (facticity), and between facts and meanings (epistemic truth) – show that in the analogy to system media, lifeworld *validity* is inherently symbolic. However, in contrast, validity is not circular or *self-referential*. The symbolic foundation of lifeworld is inherently dynamic, caught up in lifeworld practices – in social performances and storytelling. Validity is not circular but helical. Finally, it might also be noted that we might now better understand the legitimating force of Luhmann's 'additional legitimations' in terms of vote, party and expertise because democracy, the common good and competence are very potent discursive frames in our times.

Storytelling – We might now understand public argumentation as a specific *practice* in which actors try to challenge claims and persuade others by *framing facts differently* or by *framing different facts*

before a passive audience.⁴³ Public argumentation is political argumentation to the extent that it questions, thematises, challenges and critiques authoritative truth-claims. Public argumentation, we might say, consist of discourse conflicts (Hajer 1993). Indeed, if we want to understand politics as argumentation we must not merely understand its dramaturgical aspect, i.e. how an argument validates a truth-claim. Politics is not an argument, it is argumentation – a specific practice of storytelling from which, I will claim, authority or truth arises as a *symbolic space*. Furthermore, we might recognise that the material basis of this symbolic space is the *political public sphere*.

How does such practice of public argumentation work? Indeed, what is the *better* argument in this perspective and, more importantly, what is the *force* of the better argument? The better argument, from our dramaturgical perspective is the more reasonable one, i.e. the one that best fits with our meaningful and factual experiences. But facts and meanings, as we have seen, cannot be separated to the extent that they dialectically imply each other in discourse. As such, the *force* of the better argument seems to be reduced to *rhetorical force* – to classic *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*.⁴⁴

It can be said that “effective rhetoric *persuades* rather than *proves*” (Dryzek 2010:322, my emphasis; Manin 1987:353).⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this persuasive *force* of argumentation is also present in Habermas’ work. Argumentation or communicative action, for Habermas, is about ‘reason-giving’ until others are persuaded – convinced – by the argument. If rhetoric plays a role in this process, however, it is judged from the perspective of truth (Dryzek 2010:322). Persuasion is functional for or subordinated to truth which presents itself in consensus. Such epistemic and foundational understanding of argumentation forces Habermas and others to differentiate between good and ‘healthy rhetoric’, between real consensus and ‘pseudo-consensus’ (Habermas 1987:150; Dryzek 2010). To overcome this difficulty, Habermas demands that the arguing actors are genuinely motivated towards truth-finding. Actors are not trying to persuade each other, they are searching for consensus, for truth. This means, that actors have to become *disinterested* actors – no longer strategically acting. They only have one interest and that is truth. Although empirically we might expect that actors commence in argumentation for the sake of understanding each other and to search for agreement, most of the time there is more at stake in political argumentation than mere truth-finding. Political actors are not disinterested and impartial judges. Aristotle has already claimed that where the judge must be ‘impartial and disinterested’, the political actor must be

⁴³ One might also, of course, simply try to show that an argument is inherently contradictory or self-refuting and should therefore be discarded.

⁴⁴ It might be questioned whether Aristotle’s categorisation of rhetoric is analytically the most suitable for analysing the moving power of discourses (Dryzek 2010:320). Nevertheless, Aristotle’s question still stands firmly: rhetoric is to identify “the available means of persuasion” (Yack 2006:418).

⁴⁵ Feminists have argued that we can differentiate between ‘paternalistic rhetoric’ and ‘invitational rhetoric’ – the former geared towards domination, the latter towards understanding (Foss & Griffin 1995). We can agree, beyond the gender categories, that there is no need to perceive rhetoric as instrumental for control only.

involved and committed (Yack 2006:422). The politician is not an outsider but part of the public and as such interested in collective action and binding decisions.

The problem with Habermas' account is that rhetoric and public argumentation is understood in terms of epistemic standards. Also many post-empirical theories seem afraid of letting go of epistemic criteria – as if we are suddenly drawn into an irrational postmodern fantasy. Such position enforces a problematic analysis of the relation between *the different epistemic standards* of science, expertise, politics and public argumentation – which, almost per definition, yields a normative theory of politics as argumentation (Fischer 2009:144; Yankelovich 1991:91ff.). It seems to me that our lifeworld analysis shows that episteme is a concept that belongs to a system perspective – episteme is about rules, norms and universal morality. It would be a mistake, even as a counterfactual ideal, to claim that actors must be committed to truth-finding only. Actors are motivated to commence in argument because they have a strategic (ideal) interest to do so. Their interest is to *persuade* and to *influence* others; an interest constrained by public argumentation itself. We should get rid of the epistemic reading of argumentation. Let me provide a different reading.

Where Habermas explains the function of rhetoric and persuasion in relation to an argumentative process of truth-finding subordinate to truth itself (consensus), we must turn this relation upside down. The rhetorical, dramaturgical or discursive validation of truth-claims or authority is independent of the process of argumentation itself. This, however, seems to make the practice of public argumentation redundant. Argumentation is reduced to mere dramaturgy. Hence, we must understand the independent force of public argumentation – its separate logic. In other words, in contrast to Habermas, who explains how rhetorical argumentation is subordinated to truth, we must explain *how discursive truth can be subordinated to the rational force of argumentation*.

Where the coordinative form of argumentation, as we have seen in our example of the two lovers, is integrated through the force of coordination itself, this is inherently different for public argumentation. The first form of argument, we discussed, is able to change reality not because actors are persuaded by truth or even by rhetoric; the force of argumentation depends upon the need for coordination, i.e. upon (strategic) action orientations. However, this loses its explanatory force in terms of public argumentation before a passive audience. Why would, for example, politicians or public intellectuals even listen to each other's arguments? If politicians are strategic, why would they not turn to the public directly and discursively try to validate truth-claims? The crucial point, it seems to me, is that public argumentation precisely concerns argumentation before an audience. This audience might be the class in an argument between teacher and student or the TV-audience in a presidential debate. The point is that such a *public witness* explains the rational

force of argumentation. So, for example, if a student challenges the teacher's curriculum as being old-fashioned before a class-as-audience, the teacher is almost forced to respond in order not to lose his *authority* – whether or not he finds the argument persuading. One cannot ignore a reasonable argument in public without losing face. The actors, then, do not have to be oriented to truth-finding, they do not have to be persuaded by the argument, they are forced to argumentation and to the better argument through the *force of public opinion*.

However, we must proceed carefully here. We have seen that the *validity* of an argument – its truth – depends upon discursive and dramaturgical validation. And now it seems that public opinion explains the force of the better argument. This emphasis on rhetoric and public opinion, it has been argued over and over, threatens to reduce argumentation to mere dramaturgy and irrationality (Dryzek 2010:319). However, it seems to me that we must differentiate analytically between a public judging the validity or reasonableness of a truth-claim (discursive dramaturgy) and a public that judges the reasonableness of an argumentative move, i.e. whether such a move makes sense in the logic of the unfolding argumentation itself.⁴⁶ The better argument, then, is not just the argument that is valid *independent* of argumentation, but that is valid *within* argumentation as practice. In other words, a public argumentation is a storytelling practice in itself that has its own internal logic – its own unfolding script in which acts or arguments are judged as more or less comprehensible and reasonable.

These two roles of the public – as *judge* and as *arbiter* – might interrelate in practice, but this might change if we consider that public argumentation does not require that an actual public is present.⁴⁷ An imagined public gaze might be enough to force the actors to the logic of an argumentative script. Although, the actors might have different publics in mind, imagined publics are always rationalised publics through which actors discipline themselves – through which they enforce public rationality upon their own arguments and the unfolding argumentation. As Aristotle has already perceived, public reason draws its force from 'reputable opinion' (Yack 2006:417). It is the imagined and disciplinary gaze of a *rational public opinion* that assures the force of the better argument among the participants. Public opinion, then, 'does not exist' (Bourdieu 1979) – it *is* the force of the better argument. Indeed, writing this thesis, you, the readers, are my imagined rationalised public which forces me to justify my claims in terms that I think you will find convincing. Indeed, your gaze regularly deprives me of my sleep!

⁴⁶ Post-empirical analysis tends only to perceive the epistemic dimension of 'public judgment' or else lumps rationality and episteme together (Yankelovich 1990; Fischer 2009:164).

⁴⁷ And also not that the present public is the relevant public – think, for example, about a press-conference where the relevant public is not the journalists but the 'general' public.

Now, precisely because actors are forced to the *performative* practice of argumentation through the public gaze, the *logic* of the unfolding script of the argument – the argumentative moves and counter-moves – does not necessarily lead to a consensus but does lead to a different state of affairs concerning the argumentative practice – a different *argumentative reality*.⁴⁸ Argumentation leads to a different state of affairs concerning the *argument* – i.e. the facts, the meanings, the issues, the questions, the problems and solutions – but also concerning *public opinion*, i.e. the perceived state of affairs of public opinion as consensual, mixed or conflictive. In this regard, the practice of argumentation is both *disciplined* by public opinion and it *produces* public opinion (or the rational public) – once again a form of performative dialectic. Argumentation changes *reality* and, as such, shapes and limits the *rational* actions, moves and arguments one can make (Bourdieu 1987:816; Foucault 1982:790; Fischer 2009:164). Argumentation, indeed, changes the ‘discursive space’ in which an authoritative claim can be discursively validated (Hajer 1993:48).⁴⁹ Public argumentation and dramaturgical validation, then, are inherently connected. In short, the *rational force* of argumentation produces authority as a *symbolic space*, which means that truth (discursive validity) is subordinated to argumentation and not argumentation to truth.

Authority is a symbolic space structured by the practices of public argumentation. This symbolic space structures which facts are meaningful and which meanings are factual. As such it is inherently related to cultural and ontological narratives, to fiction and worldview. However, authority is not a ‘grand narrative’ or a single harmonious discourse. There is no single truth. Symbolic authority resides in the structures and practices of public argumentation itself and merely shapes the discursive or normative arguments one can reasonably make (Dryzek 2001:658). Whether or not this argument will also be accepted as valid by the public is a different matter; it also depends upon its ‘fit’ with their everyday experiences. To the extent that the ‘grand narratives’ or ideologies are no longer present in *all publics*, to the extent that we have to understand the social distribution of ‘petit récits’ instead, the complexity of the symbolic space of authority has only increased in a late-modern society (Lyotard 1984:60). Although I think that ideologies – especially as dystopias – are still quite widely distributed, we might indeed have to analyse how cultural narratives, collective (and biographical) histories and discourses *move* through different lifeworld practices, publics and institutions; how they are continuously *produced and reproduced* in cultural public spheres, media and educational systems and the political public sphere. Indeed, the crucial contribution of this

⁴⁸ Again, this also holds for this thesis – I can no longer claim that political legitimacy is a function of order without making myself completely incomprehensible.

⁴⁹ Which does not mean that the actual results and outcomes are in any way ‘intended’ by the actors involved (Rein & Schön 1996:93).

lifeworld perspective, it seems to me, is that we can understand that cultural, media and everyday life practices are inherently, but in complex ways, connected to political argumentation and to institutionalised politics. Political change and transformation, the rise and fall of political issues, the meaning of discourses and the *validity of authority* demands a more cultural and bottom-up understanding, instead of the scholarly analyses that constantly reify the importance of centralised politics and mass media. Indeed, political analysis cannot ignore the “omnipresence of culture” in contemporary society (Jameson 1979:139).

The frustration of many scholars might not be that they fear the irrationality of discursive legitimation – of rhetoric – but that the relation between argumentation and dramaturgy is easily distorted. The publics might just be ignorant of the history of the argument – the symbolic space of authority – or the populist politician might simply ignore it (Stone 2012:320ff.). In those instances truth is no longer subordinated to the logic of argumentation and the rational gaze of public opinion (although it remains bound to real experiences). Secondly, argumentation itself might be distorted by the sheer fact that reasonable arguments are excluded or not listened to. Both distortions seem to point to the *material* organisation of the political public sphere. As such, neo-pluralists political analyses remain particularly relevant. When the lifeworld model emphasises the symbolic production and reproduction of ‘authority’, this does not mean, of course, that processes of material (re-)production would not be relevant. The *symbolic* world is inherently related to *material* practices or ‘fields’ (Bourdieu 1987:816; Hajer 1993:45; Dryzek 1997:10-1). As Weber has already taught us, the social world is not only about ideas, beliefs and values, it is also about interest conflicts and structures of domination. To analyse discourses or discursive legitimations is to analyse “how interests are played out” (Hajer 1993:48). If our lifeworld perspective has anything to say about it, it is that we must try to understand this relation in a dialectical manner: material structures reproduce symbolic narratives, while symbolic narratives reproduce material structures (Bourdieu 1989:839).

Most importantly ‘individual voice is noise’ (Bader 2008:5). This means that actors and their arguments must first be *noticed* to force political or other actors into public argumentation – to be able to influence the discursive space of authority. As many issues, problems and solutions fight for public and political attention, this is not that easy. It is even more difficult to *sustain* such public attention through time – to become more than an event, to become an issue, a narrative and a public discourse. It points to the fact that political argumentation is not just structured by arguments but also by material resources and the *unequal distribution* thereof – resources as organisation, money, office, status, reputation and knowledge. It explains why social movements tend to use the dramaturgy of unconventional and unorthodox tactical repertoires (Taylor & van Dyke 2004:263). Aside from institutional problems of *public access*, we might also notice the institutionalisation of

narratives into dominant or hegemonic discourses (Fischer 2009:164; Hajer 1993:46). For example, the very institutional structures of contemporary social sciences in terms of curriculum, status, funding, journals and career opportunities asymmetrically reproduce empiricist and neo-classical economic discourses pre-occupied with behaviour, calculability, universal laws, status-quo and short-term production targets. Its institutional structure marginalises the discourse of a critical science and quells a genuine productive argumentation.

Institutions, in short, also structure discursive space. Institutionalisation, however, also assures that not every discussion each time has to start all over again. So, for example, when discussing women equality as a general *issue*, we normally do not have to start all over to argue that women and men are morally equal – most of the time we can take the historical narrative of the feminist struggle as a presumed institutionalised discourse. But institutionalised discourses – especially as ideologies and identities – also have counterfactual tendencies. Dominant and institutionalised discourses not only marginalise counter-discourses, they also exclude other voices as irrational, unrealistic (idealistic), extreme or immoral. Dominance eliminates the necessity to commence in argumentation in the first place. It forces counter-discourses and arguments to adjust to this institutional rationality. It forces outsiders that want to gain influence to let go of ‘radical’ arguments explaining, at least partly, political co-optation processes and the so-called ‘protest cycle’ (Hajer 1993:64; Tarrow 1993:283; Meyer 1993; Meyer 2004).

Most significant in this regard is the almost unquestioned dominance of expertise and ‘evidence-based’ administrative policymaking (Fischer 2009:145). The discourse of expertise forces all political argumentation into an *epistemic* argument – an argument about the *value* of knowledge and the *utility* of practices. It explains the situation in which all kinds of cultural, social and scientific institutions must prove their utility or else be excluded as irrational. In a Weberian spirit, this mechanism shows the ‘cultural’ source – the lifeworld foundation – of the instrumentalisation of society. As such, we must resist Habermas’ analysis that society’s rationalisation and instrumentalisation is purely about the system perspective. Lifeworld is not some innocent *antidote* – some ‘intact form of social life’ (Honneth 2005:340). In short, to understand political argumentation and authority one must also analyse the material structures that produce and reproduce discourses. Political argumentation and legitimation do not take place in a purely symbolic space.

In conclusion, in *figure 8.3* I have depicted schematically the relations we have discussed between lifeworld practices and authority: 1) the *generalisation* of lifeworld coordinative logic and the normative interpretation of lifeworld practices into discourses; 2) the practice of public argument as

storytelling which opens up a symbolic space of authority and a material world of public sphere, both through which discourses are produced and reproduced; and 3) the relation between this symbolic space of authority and our real lifeworld experiences in term of *dramaturgy*.

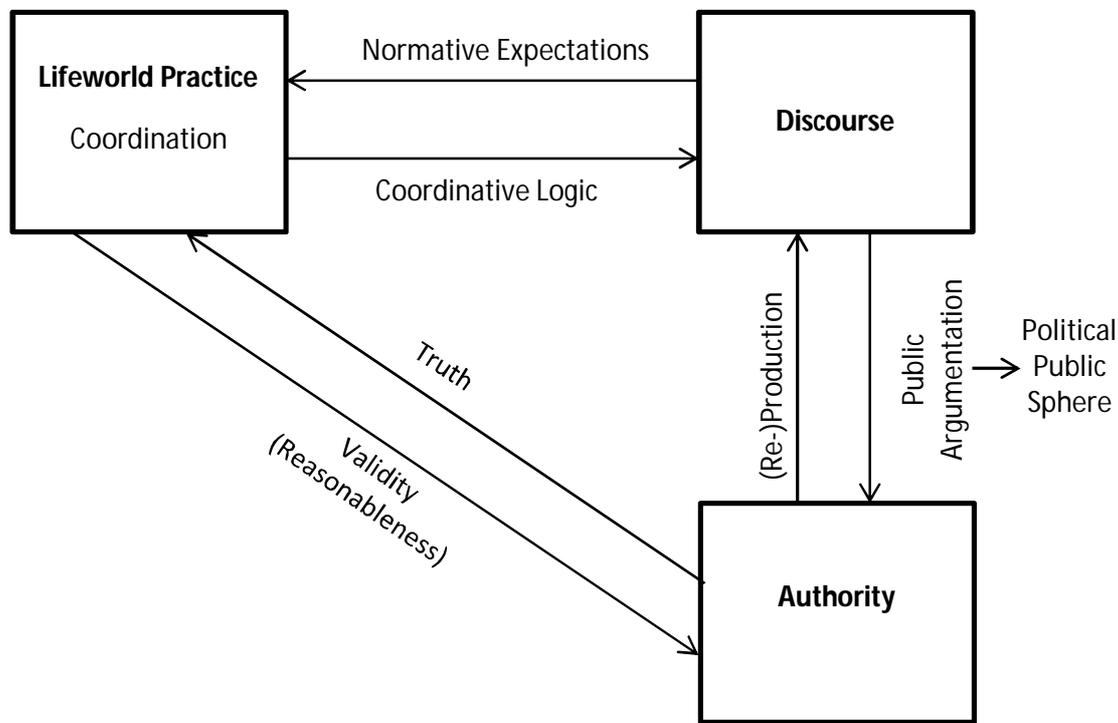


Fig. 8.3 – A performative model of the political public sphere. The horizontal lines concern the mechanism of *generalised narratives* in everyday practices; the vertical lines concern the practice of *storytelling*; and the diagonal lines concern the *dramaturgical* part of authority.

8.5 Conclusion: Argumentation, Legitimacy and Critique

Now that we defined public argumentation, public opinion and valid authority, it seems to me that we finished our critical realist re-reading of Habermas' lifeworld concept. The most important discoveries concern, first, that lifeworld practices are inherently dialectically structured and that lifeworld generalisations are not norm or rule based but narrative. Second, public spheres consist of cultural narratives, ontological narratives and discourses that are constantly produced and reproduced in practices of storytelling, giving rise to symbolic worlds of fiction, worldviews and authority, which in their dramaturgical guise provide meaningful, factual and normative understandings. Finally, we have also discussed how we should perceive the practice of public argumentation, how public opinion is the disciplinary force of the better argument and how the rational force of argumentation shapes truth or authority as a symbolic or discursive space. *Table 8.1* summarises the most important aspects of the three lifeworld domains we discovered.

	Practice	Generalisation	Symbolic world	Material Basis
Meaningful	Scene, Role, Character	Cultural Narrative	Fiction	Cultural Public Sphere
Factual	Script	Ontological Narrative	Worldview Person	Media & Educational System
Normative	Coordination	Discourse	Authority	Political Public Sphere

Table 8.1 – The three lifeworld domains

In conclusion, we might wonder whether this critical realist rereading of lifeworld addresses the problems we have ascribed to Habermas' theory. I think we successfully did away with either functional or consensual conceptualisations of lifeworld. By introducing a performative perspective of social coordination we can understand social integration or order without having to introduce consensus as a necessary presumption. As such, we are able to overcome the deeply ingrained bias in sociology that without consensus there can be no social order. Furthermore, such performative and coordinative understanding allows us to stay comfortably within action theoretical premises without the need to introduce unwanted forms of cybernetic functionalism. Finally, our lifeworld analysis shows how symbolic actions can be rational without implying or necessitating epistemic notions. Episteme, I have claimed, belongs to a system perspective. It leaves room for the political condition because political argument is not subordinated to foundational truth, but 'truth' is subordinated to politics. In short, I see no need to succumb to solidaristic notions of society (however rationalised), to leave behind action theoretical premises or to impose or presuppose strong epistemic rules upon lifeworld or argumentation.

We might be less satisfied, however, with the fact that the lifeworld concept remains rather complex. Nevertheless, things did gain more clarity – especially in analytical opposition to our Luhmannian understanding of social systems. Just as system, lifeworld concerns social coordination and opens up symbolic realms above the level of social interaction – realms we labelled as fiction, worldview and authority. The problem of our critical realist rereading of lifeworld is not that we do not have the tools to analyse specific lifeworld and argumentative practices, or that we do not have the tools to differentiate between lifeworld and system coordination, the problem is the difficulty to provide a generalised, stable, non-moving conception of lifeworld practices. This, obviously, is precisely the point. It does mean that we cannot simply answer the question of whether or when politics is legitimate.

The first difficulty concerns the meaning of politics in a lifeworld perspective. If politics is about authority or truth-claiming, we must acknowledge a proliferation of politics beyond political institutions and organisations coordinated by legitimate power. Politics is not only about making

binding legitimate decisions, but about making truth-claims anywhere in the policy-cycle – ranging from agenda setting, to problem formulation, to solution seeking, to policy implementation, to political accountability. Indeed, such understanding of politics as authority inherently *politicises* our daily practices giving attention to how authority takes shape in the workplace, family or classroom, as well as overt and covert forms of *resistance*. As the feminist slogan goes, ‘the personal is political’. So the first question is which politics do we want to understand?

But even if we understand – like Habermas – politics in terms of the political system, the relationship between the political system and the public sphere remains utterly complex. There is no sense in asking whether or not politics *is* legitimate. There is no single, coherent public or public sphere that serves as the analytical basis of political legitimacy. Politics does not simply legitimise itself in ‘public opinion’. Public opinion is not only plural, but it merely symbolises the rationalising force of public argumentation and is dialectically constructed by it. We must not so much ask whether politics *is* legitimate but rather how politics *acts* to legitimise itself in, and in front of different and fragmented publics. We must understand the legitimising performances of politics. Indeed, it is fairly easy to see that political actors constantly struggle with this ongoing demand for legitimation. Often arguments are tailor-made for specific publics and frequently such publics are even aware of this (Dryzek 2010:325). And, if not, politicians often mobilise ambiguous or fuzzy meanings to “blur or hide problematic implications or controversial decisions” (Fischer 2009:175; Bennett & Edelman 1985:165). Politics is “to sharpen the pointless and to blunt the too sharply pointed” (Burke 1969:393).

Analysing the abstract and dynamic relation between the political system and public spheres in terms of legitimation processes and political argumentation forces us to understand authority as a symbolic space arising from all kinds of practices and narratives. Just as in Habermas’ account, authority resides in the structures of the public sphere – in the organisation of discursive space (Dryzek 2001:658). However, and importantly, authority in this framework is not closed off from a *subjective understanding*. Lifeworld analysis shows how authoritative political claims must be discursively validated. Most interestingly, such discursive and dramaturgical form of *legitimation* differs from the forms of political legitimacy we have discussed before.

An authoritative truth-claim is valid when the addressee finds it *reasonable*. Political legitimation, then, is not about proving the epistemological truth of the claim but rather its ontological reasonableness given the current state of affairs, i.e. whether it fits with our experiences as well as with other discourses, cultural and ontological narratives. If a discursive argument is successful, it forces us to agree that the decision is the right one to make, i.e. given these circumstances we *ought to agree whether we like it or not*. Discursive validation therefore differs

from the other forms of legitimacy to the extent that it is a *cognitive* affair despite the mixture of facts and meanings. Indeed, when the 'facts' change we want to take a different decision and not counter factually hold on to it. Yet, proving the rationality or reasonableness of a decision – its cognitive validity – has also a distinct *normative* quality: given the 'facts' I cannot but agree that the decision is reasonable. If I am rational, then I *ought to* recognise its validity. The normativity of cognitive agreement, then, rests upon the objective and subjective norm that one ought to be rational or reasonable even when it comes into conflict with one's interests and values. Only then can we explain the leap from 'is' to 'ought'. Politics as argumentation, then, can explain the subjective normativity of political claims and decisions. And just as in the case of trust, we do not need the notion of epistemic *truth*: ontological *reasonableness* suffices.

What we find reasonable is, of course, related to our experiences, values, knowledge, interests and identities – that is the whole point of discursive framing, there is no final truth – but this does not mean it is pre-determined and fixed by these qualities. Argumentation has its own independent force. As such, we should not mistake the dramaturgy of discursive legitimation for the dramaturgy of political support discussed in chapter 4. In that chapter we argued that dramaturgy consisted of the cheering for our political champions, a form of acclamation in the face of truth presented before the supporters and a form of immediate symbolic satisfaction of aroused normative expectations. The dramaturgy of discursive validation, on the other hand, asks the public to make a *judgment* about the rationality of the argument or decision. Obviously, a judgment might be better or worse but it is not sheer acclamation.

In conclusion, our critical realist reconstruction of lifeworld addresses many of the problems inherent in Habermas' model. As a final note, we might wonder whether we have also destroyed his critical project in the meanwhile. Although critical theory is not our primary interest this seems a justified question at the end of this chapter.

It appears to me that our understanding of political argumentation allows a form of critique that addresses the material structures and inequalities underlying public argument. Indeed, just as Habermas, we might still point out how the system imperatives of mass media skew public information, public argumentation and public access.⁵⁰ We might still point out, as do Habermas and Adorno, that opinion- or survey-research mistakes public opinion for the aggregation of individual opinions which undermines the rational force of the better argument (Habermas 1987:346; Adorno 1976:85).⁵¹ We might still point out how institutional structures and practices reproduce discourses,

⁵⁰ The so-called 'media logic' (Altheide 2004; Brants & Van Praag 2006).

⁵¹ Just as the disciplinary gaze in Bentham's panopticum does not function if we can see whether the prisoner guard is looking, so political argumentation malfunctions if actors *know* the actual opinions of the public. The

authority and the status-quo. Indeed, we might still point out how public argument is replaced by acclamation. However, what our reading of lifeworld *cannot* do is to provide such critical project with an epistemic foundational validity. Critical theory is still viable, but it cannot stand outside of society – it is an intrinsic part of it. An outsiders' perspective does not exist.

However, a critical realist conclusion might not be all that different from that of Habermas: to open up politics to the rationalising force of public argumentation and not simply to acclamative dramaturgy. However, rationality as an 'environmental fit' instead of a universal 'vanishing point' has more to do with the *good life* than with universal *moral rules*. When Habermas wants to finish the project of modernity, it seems that we have to step out of its 'linear' thinking while not falling into the 'circular' thought of postmodernism or the "rationality of the revolving door" (Foucault in Rabinow 1984b:249; Lash 2003). In this regard, we might follow Kuhn's cautious suggestions that progress must be understood in the same way that biological evolution progresses (1970:170ff.). The progress of evolution is not that the present state of a specific life form is in any sense *better* than its former state – evolution is not teleological or cumulative – rather, this life form is *better* suited or adapted to the present state of its environment, its opportunities and problems. My intention is not to reintroduce cybernetic concepts, let alone social-Darwinism, the point, rather is that learning processes might be *rational* but not *progressive* or *teleological*. Critical realism shows that critical theory should make an institutional turn in which the *rationality of social learning* is the main objective. The rationality of learning differs from Weber's linear rationalisation thesis, which historically ends in an 'iron cage'. If Habermas wants to escape this cage, it seems that lifeworld learning processes at least hold open the possibility of a *re-enchantment of society*. Our lifeworld is an inherently *meaningful* world as it remains upon to dreams, nightmares and utopias.

Foucault argued that the promise of modernity is not the rule of reason, but a specific kind of 'attitude' that does not aim to find something 'eternal' beyond or behind the present, but perceives 'the heroic aspect' of the present with an 'eagerness to imagine it otherwise' (1984a:39-41; compare Habermas 1981:5ff.).⁵² Modernity, according to Foucault, is neither a quest for truth nor merely subjective experience, but to manifest the necessities of our time. It seems to me that this modern attitude is still alive in critical realism and suitable for late-modernity. Critical scholars should not waste time finding the ultimate foundation of moral truth and political legitimacy – they should engage in public debate and ask the critical questions that need to be asked. At the same time, intellectuals should refrain from using the 'philosophy of the hammer' merely to show that

more public opinion is known and measured as an aggregation of opinions, the more public argumentation is about dramaturgical action between actor and public and less about rational argumentation between actors. The paradoxical nature of opinion research that tries to address 'fact free politics' is apparent.

⁵² "The identification ... of men of critical mind with their society is marked by tension, and the tension characterises all the concepts of the critical way of thinking" (Horkheimer 1972:208).

nothing is 'true' or truth is symbolic – we know that already for a long time. Intellectuals, rather, have to acknowledge the fact there is no linear or foundational truth. It would be a mistake if intellectuals, because of the absence of such foundations, are hesitant to enter the public stage and leave it to anti-intellectuals, experts or the 'market'. *Rationality is argumentation*, not mere dramaturgy, statistics or consumerism. Freedom will not be found in epistemic rules, freedom is a praxis (Flyvbjerg 2001:128).