

**COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND POLITICS :  
A STUDY OF JURGEN HABERMAS'S  
RECENT WORK.**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF JURGEN HABERMAS'S RECENT WORK" submitted by Ms. Vasanthi Srinivasan, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy degree of this University, is an original work, and has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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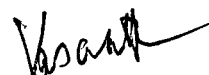
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VASANTHI SRINIVASAN

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## INTRODUCTION

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[ This work focuses on the two volumes of Jurgen Habermas's "The Theory of Communicative Action ." It attempts to explore the political dimension of his concepts of communicative action and discourse. The concept of communicative action claims that the potential for a rational society is 'always already' announced in the reciprocity and equality imminent in the structure of understanding instantiated in communication between speaking subjects.] This thesis of Habermas leads to two interconnected views :

(a) that modernity has not exhausted this potential for rationalisation built into communication and on this score, modernity is "incomplete"

(b) that the triumph of systems theory and functionalism poses a serious challenge to communicative action, a challenge which can be countered only through a revival of the principle of discourse and democratic justification. It is here that we locate the political content of Habermas's work. The emphasis on language as a medium of mutual understanding seeks to disclose the principle of rational redemption that underlies all speech acts.

[ The notion of the life world advances the argument further to show that certain core dimensions of human activity, as the transmission cultural tradition, social norms and values and the shared competences we inherit can be mediated only via

communicative action. This horizon of the normative, conceptualised as the lifeworld, provides the resources for communicative action; hence, any threat to supersede communication in this sphere can have serious consequences for the life world. One such threat ensues from the unidimensional stress on systems functionalism, for functionalist mechanisms of action-coordination seek to replace communicative action in all domains of life world reproduction. This is called "colonization of the lifeworld". This phenomenon can only be reversed through a recovery of the life world as a site for communicative action. Such a recovery is a political task and can spark off a series of struggles between the system and life world. In this border zone between system and lifeworld we can locate a realm of politics as permeated by discursive will-formation. A conception of politics as oriented to deliberation and consensus is implicit in the model of communicative action. Hence, the need to revive a 'public life' that will reinforce a sense of community, a spirit of mutual understanding, a commitment to rational persuasion and a willingness to admit/acknowledge diversity, is not imposed on us from without; it is a possibility and a telos already "anticipated and presupposed" in our engagement in communication in everyday life.

[The main aim of this dissertation is to render explicit this link between communicative action and coercion-free

politics. My major concern being the vision of politics encompassed within the theory of communicative action, I have devoted considerable space to an elucidation of Habermas's analysis of speech acts and his notion of a rationalised lifeworld. There are other aspects of Habermas's argument in the two volumes of "The Theory of Communicative Action" like his reflections on the debate in cultural anthropology, his critique of Weber and the Frankfurt School which are important for his argument as a whole. However, I have not focused on these strands of his thinking partly because they do not have a direct bearing on my concern with the vision of politics that communicative action engenders.

My main contention in this work is that the model of communicative action points at once to a possibility and a lack, of a certain kind of politics, of a politics free from coercion and violence, of a politics that is enriched by equality and diversity. This potential is imminent in the structure of communication and can be realised through a reappropriation of politics as public speech.]

chap I concentrates upon the concept of communicative action. The interconnections between illocutionary acts, validity claims and discourse form the core of this chapter. The idea is to bring out the centrality of discursive justification built into communicative action. The interlocking of discourse and democratic will-formation is the guiding thread in this argument.

chap II examines the notion of a rationalised lifeworld with reference to Habermas's appropriation of Emile Durkhiem and George Herbert Mead. The upshot of this discussion is to bring out (what I understand as )Habermas's central thesis, that the normative complex sedimented in our language and culture can be reproduced and reinforced only through action oriented to reaching understanding . This leads to a claim that the lifeworld has to be defended against a replacement of communicative action by systemic mechanisms .

Chap III analyses Habermas's diagnosis of modernity as deformation of the lifeworld. It explicates the idea of 'colonization of the lifeworld' and "cultural Impoverishment". The objective is to show that any interference with the communicative bases of the lifeworld can lead to pathological consequences. The loss of meaning and anomie that haunt modernity are a result of an "insufficient" rationalisation, that is to say a failure to institutionalise public speech and consensus-based politics.

Chap iv builds upon the conceptual elaboration taken up in the earlier chapters. [It attempts to uncover the links between communicative action and politics. [If colonisation of the lifeworld manifests itself in an eclipse of communicative action , then decolonisation consists in a recovery of the same ; that is to say ,decolonization and defense of the lifeworld as a site of



communicative action imply a politics oriented to public debate and continuous participation. The need for a revitalisation of public life to reverse and displace systemic barriers to open, undistorted communication on practical political issues is expressed in the new social movements which have rocked the advanced countries. These movements have brought to the fore the need to practise constraint-free forms of public communication.]

Chapter I

**THE MODEL OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION :  
THE SHIFT TO INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN LANGUAGE**

[The theory of communicative action marks a decisive departure from subject-centred notions of rationality to one that is intersubjective. Rationality is no more conceived in terms of a monologic actor model but is construed as a process of reaching understanding between two speaking subjects. Habermas uses the term 'communicative rationality' with reference to this dimension of rationality, the consensus that ensues from a communicatively achieved agreement on reasons. There are two related claims which the model of communicative action advances - (a) that language is primarily a medium of reaching understanding regarding something in the world and (b) that rationality is imminent in communication because to call something rational is to say that it can forge an understanding with at least one other person. The concept of communicative action is defined as action oriented to reaching understanding. The focus is on the reciprocity inherent in structures of linguistic interaction. As Habermas says, " We are also concerned today.... with the analysis of power constellations that suppress an intention intrinsic to the rationality of purposive action and linguistic understanding --The claim to reason announced in the teleological and intersubjective structures of social reproduction themselves --and that allow it to take effect only

in a distorted manner. Again and again this claim is silenced ;  
and yet in fantasies and deeds it develops a stubbornly  
transcending power, because it is renewed with each act of  
unconstrained understanding, with each moment of living together  
in solidarity, of successful individuation and saving  
emancipation." <sup>1</sup> ]

The turn to language and communication has been <sup>(2)</sup>  
a continuous motif in Habermas's work. In his earlier works  
he made the distinction between labour and interaction which was  
central to his argument of a rational society. Proceeding from the  
autonomy and reciprocity implicit in interaction, he proposed a  
critical theory on the lines of undistorted communication as  
exemplified in psychoanalytic discourse. However the distinction  
between labour and interaction proved to be too narrow because  
labour was construed merely as monologic activity oriented to  
ends while interaction was defined as activity oriented to  
understanding. Habermas has replaced this distinction with the two  
concepts of purposive rational action and communicative action.

1. J.Habermas, 'A Reply to my Critics', (henceforth abbreviated  
REPLY), in Critical Debates, ed., David Held, (Cambridge 1982), 221.
2. J.Habermas, Towards a Rational Society (Heinemann 1971),  
p.91-92.

The argument for a rational society is now articulated in terms of a theory of communicative action. This theory aims at disclosing the potential for rational understanding built into linguistically mediated interaction. To this end, an elaborate conceptual network woven around concepts like the illocutionary acts, validity claims discursive redemption of these claims has evolved. This chapter attempts an elucidation of communicative action in four steps. First, there is a clarification on purposive rational action and communicative action. Second, we focus on illocutionary acts and validity claims. Third there is an elaboration of the theory of discourse and finally, we explore the implications of communicative action for political will-formation.

The conceptual distinction between purposive rational action and communicative action is central to his project. Habermas uses the term 'action' only for those symbolic expressions by which an actor expresses a relationship to the world.<sup>3</sup> The bodily movements that enable an action to be performed, like movements of the larynx, tongue, lips etc, in case of communicative utterances, constitute elements of an

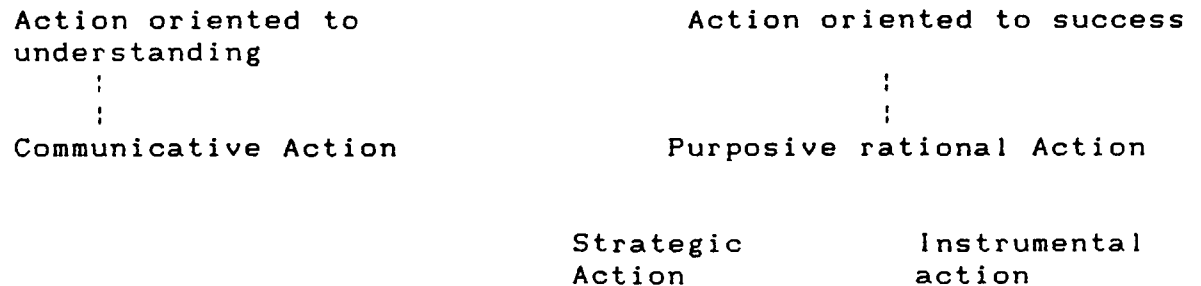
3. J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I (Heinemann 1984), p. 96. (henceforth abbreviated as TCA I)

action but are not 'actions' by themselves. The communicative model of action focuses on 'utterances'. Hence bodily movements which are concomitantly executed do not have the status of non independent action. For Habermas, all social actions can be either oriented to success or oriented to understanding.

4

Reproduced below is his typology of action.

Social actions



Following Weber, Habermas designates purposive rational action as activity oriented to ends , in which an actor selects means that are suited to bring about an intended state of affairs in the world . Success is measured in terms of the appearance of a desired state. There are two subcategories namely strategic action and instrumental action. Strategic action involves rules of rational choice and is appraised from the stand point of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent.

4. J.Habermas, TCA I. p.333.

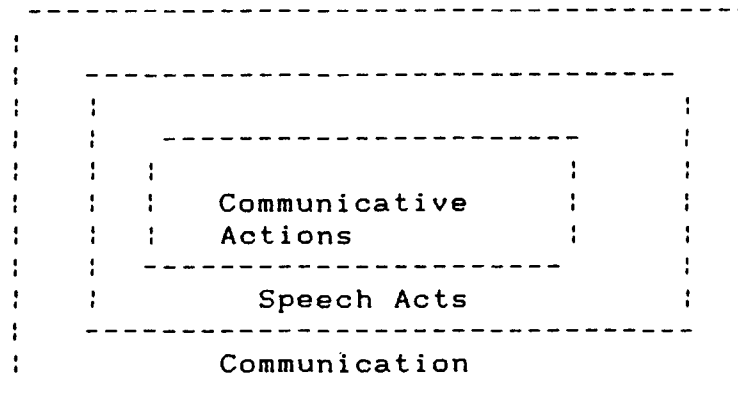
Instrumental action involves application of technical rules and is evaluated for the efficiency of such techniques in attaining desired goal-states Both these types of action are oriented to the consequences of action.

Communicative action, on the other hand, refers to "social interactions which are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success of every individual but through the cooperative achievement of understanding among participants".<sup>5</sup>

What constitutes the hallmark of communicative action is this cooperative endeavour to reach an agreement. The model of communicative action does not reduce action to communication but simply focuses on language as a medium of action-coordination. Communication is, however, not exhausted in the act of reaching understanding. Communicative action includes only those speech acts which are oriented to a cooperative agreement. Schematically, the relationship between communication, speech acts and communicative action may be represented thus:

(see next page)

5. J.Habermas, REPLY, p.264.



At the outset, it may appear as if communicative action is no exception to the teleological structure of all action. However, reaching understanding is a peculiar goal. "In the act of reaching understanding, the actor is not interested in having his or her command carried out but rather in alter accepting the validity claim that ego connects with his utterance."<sup>6</sup> It may be noted that Habermas does not use the terms purposive rational & communicative action only to designate two analytic aspects under which the same action can be described: Rather these two refer to two genuine action types depending on whether an actor adopts either a success oriented attitude or one oriented to understanding .

6. J. Habermas, REPLY, p. 265.

The communicative model of action focuses on the use of language in utterances oriented to understanding between two speaking subjects. A word may be due here on what is called formal pragmatics. Within the tradition of linguistic philosophy, pragmatics refers to the analysis of language as speech. There are two lines of inquiry here; one, empirical pragmatics which focuses on the everyday use of language. This leads to analysis of stories and texts in literature, of conversations in sociology, etc. Two, formal pragmatics analyses contexts of interaction with a view to disclosing the universal conditions that facilitates understanding. Analogous to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence, Habermas introduces the notion of communicative competence. The former refers to mastery over rules of language while the latter refers to mastery over rules of interaction. These rules are stored in the cultural knowledge of a society and are transmitted and reinforced through processes of socialisation. Communicative competence encompasses

- (a) Cognitive competence, mastery over formal logical operations (Piaget),
- (b) Speech competence, (i) mastery over language rules for producing grammatically well formed sentences (Chomsky's linguistic competence) and (ii) mastery over rules for well-formed utterances (universal pragmatics).



(c) Interaction competence or role competence -- mastery of rules<sup>7</sup>  
for taking part in increasingly complex forms of interaction.

Formal pragmatics explores the universal pragmatic infrastructure that facilitates understanding in speech. It attempts to show that in all societies, which have reached the level of linguistically mediated interaction, (whether strategic or communicative), there can be discerned a minimum level of rationality. This thesis is interlinked to the theory of rationalisation of lifeworld.<sup>8</sup>

Habermas explicates communicative action with reference to the case of illocutionary speech acts. In the tradition of linguistic philosophy, J.L. Austin's 'How to do Things with Words' and Searle's 'Speech Acts ; An Essay in the Philosophy of Language ', marked a shift from speaking as a monologic activity to speaking as a dialogue between subjects. The emphasis was laid on language in use, i.e. on speaking which was now defined as an activity governed by 'rules'. To quote Searle, " speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on."<sup>9</sup>

7. Stephen White, The Recent work of Jurgen Habermas (Cambridge Univ. Press), p.29.

8. See Chap. II p.46

9. J. Searle, Speech Acts ; An Essay in the Philosophy of Language... (Cambridge Univ. Press p.16).

Hence a theory of language becomes part of a theory of action. Searle advanced the principle of expressibility which argued that "whatever can be meant can be said." A theory of meaning could now coincide with a theory of speech acts at least in the case of what Austin and Searle called 'illocutionary acts' speech acts were classified into three basic types, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary speech acts refer to utterances in which a speaker expresses a state of affairs. In illocutionary speech acts, the speaker performs an act in saying something ; In this case, one is doing something in saying something. Some illocutionary verbs are: assert, promise, command, order, welcome etc. Perlocutionary acts refer to acts/utterances which seek to produce 'effects' on the hearer that are external to what is said. As Searle explains, " For example, by arguing I may persuade or convince someone, by warning him I may scare or alarm him, by making a request I may get him to do something. by informing him, I may convince him, (enlighten, edify, inspire him, get him to realise)."<sup>10</sup> All these verbs-- convince, scare, alarm, enlighten, signify an orientation to influence the hearer. These are perlocutionary acts.

10. Searle, Ibid., p.25

The difference between the three lies in the fact that in locutionary acts, one says something : in illocutionary acts one acts in saying something and in perlocutionary acts, one brings about something through acting in saying something. The difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts lies in the kind of 'effects' that follows these utterances. These effects can be clarified only with reference to the structure of interaction that takes place . In the performance of an illocutionary act, the effect on the hearer follows directly from what is said. This 'effect' is understanding. For example when I say 'hello', I intend to produce in a hearer the knowledge that he is being greeted. The effect simply consists in understanding the utterance meaning. In case of perlocutionary acts, the intended effect does not follow from what is said.

Habermas explicates communicative action with reference to those speech acts in which actors pursue only illocutionary aims. According to him the difference between locutionary and illocutionary serves to separate the propositional content from the utterance whereas the difference between perlocutionary and illocutionary acts is by no means analytical in character. Perlocutionary acts are embedded in contexts of goal oriented action and do not engage in a rational understanding with the hearer.

The characteristic mark of an illocutionary act, according to Habermas is that it attempts to rationally motivate the hearer to accept the speech act offer. Hugh Baxter<sup>11</sup> points out that avowability and redemption of validity claims distinguishes the illocutionary from the perlocutionary act. There are two things to be noted here. Avowability draws the line between illocutionary and perlocutionary in terms of declared or undeclared intentions/aims. "A speaker if he wants to be successful, may not let his perlocutionary aims to be known whereas illocutionary aims can be achieved only through being expressed."<sup>12</sup> It is commonly accepted that the predicates with which perlocutionary acts are described, (to give a fright to, offend ,annoy ,infuriate,insult etc.) cannot be openly admitted as such. However Habermas employs the additional criterion of validity claims to demarcate the two types of speech acts. A perlocutionary act like " get out" does not conceal its intentions ; it is uttered with the explicit intention of getting the hearer to leave. In cases of such open strategic action i.e.action oriented to consequences, Habermas introduces the criterion of validity claims and rational motivation to

11. Hugh Baxter, "System and Lifeworld in Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action," Theory And Society 16 (Jan 1987), p.39-86.

12. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.292.

distinguish illocutionary acts. The term communicative action is restricted to illocutionary acts which derive their binding force from a willingness to induce acceptance through reasons. An example may render this clear ; for instance consider the following pairs of the sentences.

Illocutionary	:	Perlocutionary
(a) S asserted to H that he gave notice to the firm.	:	(P) S upset H through informing him that he had given notice to the firm.
(b) H warned S that he should not give notice to the firm.	:	(Q) H frightened S through warning him that he had better not give notice to the firm.

In cases (a) and (b) above, the speaker makes an assertion or a warning which sets in motion a certain sequel of interaction between the speaker and the hearer. For instance, in case of (b) if the hearer s accepts the warning and decides not to give notice to the firm it would be an illocutionary effect because it signifies a communicatively achieved agreement between H and S . By his 'yes' to the speech act offer of H in (b), the hearer registers an agreement with H. In cases (P) and (Q) above. It may be noted that the effects do not follow from what is said. Further these acts are oriented to having an influence upon the hearer and not reaching an agreement with the hearer. .

13. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.291.

The notion of communicative action is restricted to only those illocutionary acts which derive their binding force from an obligation to redeem validity claims. The idea of 'reaching understanding' that is crucial to the model of communicative action is explicated in terms of a rational redemption of validity claims. Illocutionary acts are "concerned with interpersonal relations where participants come to an understanding about something in the world."<sup>14</sup> [For Habermas, the illocutionary use of language is the original mode of language use because reaching understanding is the telos of all speech. The rational motivating force of an illocutionary act is the foundation on which the edifice of communicative action is built. By definition, an illocutionary act is oriented towards an understanding between the speaker and hearer. This understanding is grounded in a corollary thesis of acceptability. What makes the hearer understand an illocutionary act is a knowledge of the conditions under which it is acceptable. There are two kinds of conditions involved here.] For instance, an utterance like " I request you to stop smoking" is understood when (1) the hearer knows what he has to do to bring about the desired state of affairs ( in this case, stub the cigarette); this is the condition of satisfaction,

14. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.293

(2) the hearer accepts why (1) has to be done i.e. when he is aware of the conditions which lend (1) its credibility. These are called the conditions of sanction.

Here, Habermas points to the difference between simple imperatives which derive their binding force from sanctions and normatively authorised speech acts which derive their force from an appeal to validity. For example, a superior officer asking a junior to stop smoking would be a simple imperative resting on a power claim. On the other hand, a request to stop smoking issued by those holding authorised positions (flight attendants) to a certain class of persons (passengers) under certain circumstances (landing or take off) is grounded in an appeal to validity of certain conventional regulations.<sup>15</sup>

However, Habermas explicates action oriented to reaching understanding only with reference to institutionally unbound speech acts. Examples of institutionally bound speech acts would be marrying baptising where the binding force derives from a defacto normative agreement. To amplify the rationally binding force of illocutionary acts, Habermas takes up only those acts, which do not belong to any particular institutional setting. For instance, what counts as a promise involves certain

15. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.298-301.

constitutive rules which may be differently invoked in different languages and cultures. But that a promise binds the speaker to an obligation to redeem it in future, that the hearer would prefer the state of affairs indicated in the promise, that the hearer would prefer the promise fulfilled are certain rules which are culture-invariant. The major question is what accounts for the binding force of such illocutionary acts. It is here that Habermas employs the notion of validity claims. In performing an illocutionary speech act, the speaker raises a claim to validity. That is he induces the hearer to accept the offer on the basis of a guarantee to give reasons that will be justifiable. ("Thus the speaker owes the binding (or bonding) force of his illocutionary act not to the validity of what is said but to the coordinating effect of the warranty that he offers : namely, to redeem, if necessary, the validity claim raised with his speech act."<sup>16</sup>) It is not the actual testing of a specific claim but the possibility, rather the guarantee of its redemption which lends an illocutionary act, its peculiar force. As Stephen White clarifies, "In ongoing interaction, subjects coordinate their behaviour on the basis of a mutual recognition of validity claims. This reciprocal recognition does not rest on actual testing of a validity claim, but rather on the basis of a supposition by the hearer of the speaker's accountability.

16. J.Habermas, TCA 1, p.301



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This reciprocal supposition of accountability involves two expectations that the other's actions are intentional and that he could, if called upon, justify the claims he raises in interaction." <sup>17</sup> It may be noted that it is not the validity of an utterance but rather its claim, which if need be, can be supported with reasons that is crucial to the argument. This, Habermas calls "rational redemption of validity claims." He distinguishes three different types of validity claims which a speaker may raise, namely truth claims, rightness claims and authenticity claims. All the three claims can be simultaneously raised in the speech acts although one is thematised in one specific mode of language use. Using the pragmatic criterion of a hearer's response as a guideline, Habermas argues for the analytical separability of the three claims. For instance an utterance like "its raining now" can evoke two different kinds of negation.

(a) No, it is not true.

(b) No, you do not mean what you are saying.

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17. Stephen White, op.cit.,p.50.

18. J.Habermas, TCA I,p.313

In the case of (a) the hearer construes the original sentence as a constative utterance and negates its claim to truth while in (b) the hearer construes the original sentence as an expressive utterance and rejects its claim to sincerity. The latter negation includes the former but the converse is not true. That is in rejecting a claim to truthfulness, one can negate a claim to truth; but in negating a claim to truth one does not simultaneously question truthfulness. This is so because one cannot speak the truth untruthfully or insincerely whereas one can say untruths truthfully.

Before we proceed we may pause to consider Habermas's typology of speech acts which develops upon Searle's classification. Searle advances taxonomy according to which there are five modes of language use namely assertives or constatives, directives, commissives, declaratives and expressives. This classification relies on the twin criteria of (a) ascertaining facts and (b) of bringing about a certain state of affairs in the world. Accordingly constatives which assert a state of affairs are classified under criterion (a), of ascertaining facts. Directives which aim to bring about a certain state of affairs are classified under criterion (b). Commissives which command, promise, order etc are classified under (b). Declaratives like resignation, reading a bill, declaring a session open, etc., are supposed to satisfy both (a) and (b). Expressives that express feelings and desires neither satisfy (a) nor (b).

Habermas points out that the major lacuna in Searle's typology is that Searle restricts himself to merely one world which is the objective world and hence to only one validity claim which is the claim to truth. Habermas supplements Searle's one-world relation by positing two more worlds and two distinct validity claims. According to him, commissives and declaratives refer to a social world of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations and raise a claim to normative rightness. They cannot be subsumed under Searle's twin criteria of ascertaining facts or successfully bringing about a state of affairs. Expressives, on the other hand, refer to a subjective world to which a speaker has privileged access. In this case, a speaker raises a claim to sincerity or truthfulness.

According to Habermas there are four different modes of language use (a) Imperatives wherein the speaker expresses a will to bring about something in the objective world. Rejection of an imperative implies rejection of a speaker's power claim. (b) Constatives which include asserting, narrating, reporting explaining predicting in which case the speaker refers to a state of affairs. The negation of such an utterance implies that the hearer contests the truth claim raised by the speaker. (c) Regulatives which comprise of commands, requests, warnings, excuses and recommendations. Through these acts, a speaker refers to a social world ; negations of such utterances dispute the claim to correctness implicit in them. (d) Representatives like

reveal, confess, expose, admit, conceal etc refer to the subjective world to which a speaker has privileged access ; the negation of such utterances contests the claim to sincerity implicit in them. In addition to these, Habermas mentions communicatives which are related to the organisation of speech like questioning and answering, addressing, objecting etc. These form a subclass of regulatives. Finally there are operatives like counting, calculating, identifying which have no genuine communicative intent. They only describe what one does according to generative rules (grammar, mathematics etc )<sup>19</sup> .

Although each mode of language use thematises one specific validity claim, each speech act implicitly raises all the three claims. In the case of non-constatives, like regulatives and expressives, the speaker presupposes the existence of certain states of affairs. There is thus an indirect relation to truth because the propositional content of these non-assertoric sentences can be translated into assertoric ones. Even in cases of propositionally undifferentiated, or illocutionarily abbreviated speech acts like 'hello', the propositional content can be supplemented. "The existential presuppositions of a greeting include, among other things, the presence of a person for whom things can go well or badly, his membership in a social group etc."<sup>20</sup> Similarly nonregulatives raise a claim to normative

19. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.323-326.

20. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.311.

rightness although the generalisability of this claim is not beyond dispute. However, as Habermas notes, communications are sometimes 'out of place', confessions 'awkward', disclosures 'offensive'.

In tune with the four different types of language use, Habermas specifies four types of action. A word may be due here on the 'three worlds' that Habermas refers to. In each mode of language use, there are certain assumptions regarding the world. In the constative mode, a speaker takes up an objectivating attitude to the objective world of entities about which 'true' statements can be made. Regulatives express a norm-conformative attitude toward the social world of legitimate expectations. Representatives express a subjective attitude toward the inner world of feelings and desires to which a speaker alone has access. The inner world does not refer to beliefs and intentions for these relate to the external world (of entities and interpersonal relations).

Parallel to the four modes of language use, Habermas elaborates a fourfold model of action viz. teleological action, norm-regulated action, dramaturgical action and communicative action. The teleological action concept refers to bringing about a desired goal state through appropriate techniques or strategies. The central concept is of a decision among alternate means, with a view to realisation of the end. The model of norm regulated action refers to the behaviour of

members of a social group who orient their action to common values. This type of action can be tested for normative rightness. Dramaturgical action model refers to the interaction between an actor and an audience. The central concept here is presentation of the self which can be tested for authenticity. The communicative action concept refers to interaction between at least two speaking subjects who seek to reach an understanding regarding something in the objective social or subjective worlds. Language occupies a prominent position within this model. Fred Dallmayr<sup>21</sup> has pointed out that the concept of communicative action is not entirely free from teleological strains. In his emphasis upon reaching understanding as the telos, Habermas is unable to exclude the purposive intent from this model. Language becomes an instrument used by actors to arrive at an agreement. Dallmayr argues for the non-instrumentalisable quality of language as instantiated in "conversation". Conversation is seen as a type of communication where there is a "heightened openness to strangeness and unfamiliarity." Genuine communication does not lead to a consensus but rather to a recognition of and respect<sup>22</sup> for the non-identical. However language is not simply an instrument in Habermas's idea of communicative action. It is also

21. Fred Dallmayr, "Lifeworld and Communicative Action," in Bhikhu Parekh and T. Pantham ed., Political Discourse (sage Publ.1987), p.166. See also Polis and Praxis, p.240.

22. Fred Dallmayr, Polis and Praxis, 253.

a pre existing context that cements a sense of commonality among participants in that they all move within a given lifeworld. That is to say they move within a horizon of preunderstandings which may not be directly available for participants. Further although 'conversation' furnishes a practical ideal for which we need to make more space in everyday life, it cannot be construed as a common 'background' mode of interaction.

A final mark of communicative action model is the theory of discourse. It was already mentioned that communicative action alludes to only those illocutionary acts which raise validity claims the rational redemption of these claims, under conditions of undistorted powerfree communication is called 'discourse' Discourse is the term used to characterise what Habermas earlier described as the 'Ideal Speech Situation'. This was an abstract construct implicitly presupposed in all communication and elaborated the conditions that would ensure a consensus. These conditions were

(1) that participants suspend all motives except one to reach understanding

(2) that all participants have free and equal access to speech acts including constatives(to assert), regulatives to initiate or prohibit)and representatives.

(3) That all participants be motivated only by constraints  
be motivated only by constraint-free force of the better argument. 23

In Habermas's recent work, the spirit of Ideal Speech Situation, which is discursive redemption of validity claims is amplified in the theory of argumentation. This theory specifies three different forms of discourse or argumentation to redeem the three validity claims of truth, truthfulness and rightness. These three are theoretical discourse which thematises truth claims, moral practical discourse which thematises normative rightness claims and aesthetic discourse which specialises in truthfulness claims. These three forms of argumentation should not be confused with the institutional differentiation of various rational enterprises as in scientific discourse, medicine, law, art criticism etc. The theory of argumentation merely outlines the procedural conditions under which there can be a redemption of validity claims. It does not specify a substantial conception of a good argument ; It merely upholds that a sound argument has to be oriented to an intersubjective recognition of validity claims.

23. J.Thompson has pointed out in connection with the Ideal Speech Situation that even if internal Constraints are suspended, the final decision may reflect something other than the force of the better argument ; the constraints which affect social life may operate in modes other than restriction of access to speech acts, by restricting access to wealth, honor or weapons - See Thompson, Critical Hermeneutics, (Cambridge Univ.Press.1981), p.203.



Schematic Representation

TYPES OF ACTION	ATTITUDE / ORIENTATION	DOMAIN OF REFERENCE WORLD	VALIDITY CLAIM	FORMS OF ARGUMENTATION	MODES OF LANGUAGE USE
1. Teleological action	objectivating attitude	objective world	Truth	Theoretical discourse	constatives
2. Norm-regulated action	Norm confirming attitude	social world	normative correctness	Practical discourse	Regulatives
3. Dramaturgical action	expressive/ subjective world	subjective world	Authenticity	Aesthetic discourse	expressives
4. communicative action	attitude oriented to understanding, reflective attitude to any of the three worlds	social world of interpersonal relations.	Intelligibility truth normativity rightness and truthfulness	Discourse to redeem validity claims	all the three worlds of language use, illocutionary case as paradigmatic

At this juncture we may summarise the major themes that recur in his work. The communicative action model focuses on language as the medium of reaching understanding. The term communicative action is restricted to those illocutionary acts in which actors solely pursue illocutionary aims i.e. actors seek to induce the hearers to accept their speech act offers through a warranty to redeem the validity claims thereby raised. There are three validity claims of truth, normative correctness and truthfulness, each of which indicates a specific attitude towards one particular world ( see table on p.18). Each of these claims can be vindicated in a specific mode of argumentation or discourse. Argumentation specifies the formal procedural conditions under which validity claims can be redeemed. The entire edifice is built upon the thesis that action oriented to reaching understanding as the original mode of language use.

<sup>24</sup>  
John Thompson has articulated his objections in this regard. The telling of a joke, according to him, involves illocutionary and perlocutionary aims. From the post-structuralist tradition a similar sensitivity to the non-identical is echoed in the case for non serious, fictional discourse and an overcoming of the normal /deviant, original/parasitic oppositions.

24. John Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics*, op.cit.,

Habermas has responded that fictional discourse gains its "world generating capacity" precisely because it suspends illocutionary claims. It is this suspension which empowers it with "playful creation of new worlds". Habermas points out that in a levelling down of genre distinctions between ordinary everyday practice and fictional mode, one overlooks the 'learning capacities' sedimented in language and transmitted through culture. By 'learning capacities' he alludes to the rationalisation of the spheres of culture, into distinct spheres of value, viz science, art, law and morality, each of which evolved a form of discourse. Thomas McCarthy<sup>26</sup> and Joel White<sup>27</sup> book have accused Habermas of anthropocentrism with respect to his specification of attitudes towards the three worlds. Interpreting Habermas's demarcation of the objective world, social world and subjective world as a formal delineation and not a material one (meaning these worlds cut across domains of society and nature) McCarthy proceeds to argue for a norm-conformative attitude towards elements of the objective world, expressive attitude towards the social world and an objectivating attitude towards the subjective world.

25. See J.Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity, (Polity 1987), 185-210.

26. T. McCarthy, "Reflections on Rationalisation," Habermas and Modernity, ed, R.Bernstein, (Polity 1987), 176-191.

27. Joel Whitebook, "The Problem of Nature in Habermas" Telos, 40 (Summer 1979), 41-70.

Joel Whitebook, in a similar vein, argues that fraternal relations towards outer nature assume a theoretical relevance in the context of ecological crisis. In his reply <sup>28</sup>, Habermas reiterates that norms, facts and subjective experiences have their 'originary locus' in the three worlds and are in the first instance "accessible to the participant who takes a corresponding attitude. Further each mode of discourse facilitates the redemption of a specific validity claim. Truth claims thematised in the theoretical discourse can be redeemed only through an objectivating attitude towards the outer world. It is precisely the assimilation of normative issues pertaining to sociology and psychology in a purely naturalistic fashion that distorts the issue. Understood thus, ecological crisis would not be an issue for theoretical discourse but one for practical discourse. At higher levels of rationalisation, practical discourse over norms and values takes precedence over truth claims and redirects certain apparently 'scientific questions' to the domain of practice.

Thus the idea of moral practical discourse espouses a rational redemption of normative claims. A normative claim is defined as a claim "about alternative orderings for the satisfaction of interests"<sup>29</sup>. In a different context, Habermas

28. J.Habermas, "Questions and Counter Questions", in R.Bernstein, op.cit., p.208.

29. J.Habermas, TCA I, p.19.

writes that norms regulate legitimate chances for the satisfaction of needs. Habermas does not subscribe to any biological model of needs nor does he elucidate any substantive conception of what these 'needs' could be. He uses the term 'need interpretations'. The model of moral-practical discourse merely outlines the conditions under which normative claims to rightness can be redeemed. Need interpretations will have to be capable of uninversalisability if there is to be any understanding ; Secondly this model does not forestall compromise provided such a compromise is reached within the ideal conditions and is itself based on a discursive consensus. Thirdly, this model is predicated upon a certain level of moral consciousness (which Habermas calls post conventional moral consciousness); Post conventional consciousness<sup>30</sup> reflects a capacity to judge alternative orderings of norms on the basis of 'principles'. The reciprocity and equality of participation built into a discursive situation ensures a constraint free consensus.

The idea of moral practical discourse bears a critical relation to social reality because it may render factually existing norms unjustifiable by revealing their

30. Post Conventional Consciousness is a concept borrowed from Kohlberg and it refers to that stage of moral consciousness when an individual can judge on the basis of hypothetical norms/principles. The other two preceding stages are pre-conventional and conventional consciousness. See White, op.cit., p.66-68.

rootedness in particular interests. The model of communicative action, with its stress on language as the medium of mutual understanding points to discursive will-formation as the only principle of a democratic political order. The essence of democracy consists in the pre-eminence given to public debate on political issues. The conceptual edifice of communicative action built upon illocutionary acts, their validity bases and claims and the redeemability of these claims in discourse lends theoretical credence to a notion of politics as public speech oriented to understanding. It challenges the idea of politics as a technical activity oriented to system maintenance. It renews a demand that politics be restored to its classical status as a practical activity geared toward "good life"; though the renewal of a discursive situation cannot generate a substantive ideal of good life, it can outline the parameters of what can qualify as one. In restoring the participatory dimension through an institutionalisation of a public space, this model makes decision making a process in which all citizens can take part by virtue of their being speaking subjects of a lifeworld. According to this theory a political order is legitimate only when it is grounded in a universalisable interest. In turn this claim to universalisability is subject to the possibility of being justified in discourse. The reciprocity and equality characteristic of discourse are not externally imposed but are pragmatically presupposed whenever we enter rational argumentation.

However, this principle of discursive will formation is rendered superfluous under conditions of a media steered politics. There is a tendency to undercut the validity basis of communicative action under the momentum of functionalist coordination of action.<sup>31</sup> There is a neutralisation of the role of the citizen who is reduced to a passive recipient of benefits and compensations from the political subsystem. The legitimisation of the political subsystem becomes automatic, what with the influence of electronic media into public life. Public opinion is rendered the task of experts and opinion-engineering becomes some kind of a commercial enterprise.

According to Habermas, this elimination of politics as practical activity is a dangerous phenomenon for it results in a loss of meaning and decline in social solidarity. The extent to which such crises can be borne by a society is an empirical question. The theoretical imperative, however, is to rethink the normative bases of a critical theory with a view to reviving the notion of politics as practical activity pursued in the attitude of an interested participant. The communicative action model renews the demand for such a politics and grounds it in the claim that as members of a shared lifeworld, we cannot entirely replace communicative action without disastrous consequences for our society. We should now turn to elucidate the concept of the lifeworld.

31. See chapter III p.74

## CHAPTER II

### THE IDEAL OF A RATIONALISED LIFEWORLD

[The notion of a lifeworld is complementary to that of communicative action. Habermas uses that term to refer to the unthematized horizon of preunderstandings that is always at work "behind our backs". The lifeworld highlights a normative context that furnishes the resources for communicative action. This background context is sedimented in the cultural tradition, the social norms and values as well as the species competences inherited by us. The question Habermas addresses himself to pertains to the reproduction of these normative structures in modern life. According to him, the achievement of modern ways of life is that these structures get mediated and reproduced via communicative action. The lifeworld loses its taken-for-grantedness and opens itself up to argumentative questioning and redemption. In other words, the normative complex implicitly presupposed by us in our everyday interaction becomes accessible to rational debate. This is called rationalisation of the lifeworld. The rationalisation process in this realm does not follow the imperatives of purposive rationality. It moves in the direction of communicative rationality, that is to say. the normative derives in binding force from the possibility of its discursive justification. The notion of the lifeworld simply offers a methodological perspective and should not be construed as an institutional demarcation.]



This chapter focuses on Habermas's elucidation of a rationalised lifeworld. This is done in four steps. First, we elaborate upon the notion of the lifeworld and its reformulation in Habermas. Second, we concentrate upon the reproduction of the lifeworld via communicative action. Third, we briefly recapitulate Habermas's appropriation of Durkheim and Mead with a view to highlighting two theses; (a) that the lifeworld reflects a normative consensus and (b) the lifeworld can only be mediated through language and communicative action. The latter leads us into a detour on why language is the most suitable vehicle for lifeworld reproduction. Finally, we touch upon the implications of a rationalised lifeworld for contemporary politics.

The concept of the lifeworld has been used to throw light on the unthematized unproblematic presuppositions that underlie everyday life. In the phenomenological tradition, lifeworld or lebenswelt refers to "our life as we live it daily and as we experience it prior to any theoretical experience. Whatever is part of the lifeworld is given as a mode of 'Empfindnis'-being at the tips of my fingers, lying open in the here and now." <sup>32</sup> Alfred Schutz made systematic use of the concept in "The Structures of the Lifeworld." In this work, lifeworld refers to the world of everyday life, a realm that is taken-for-granted as the fundamental reality. He writes, "By the everyday

(32) Z. Bauman, *Towards a Critical Sociology*, London, 1976.

lifeworld is to be understood that province of reality which the wide awake and normal adult simply takes-for granted in the attitude of commonsense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything which we experience as unquestionable; every state of affairs is for us unproblematic until further notice"<sup>33</sup>

The lifeworld has an ineluctable intersubjective character. My lifeworld is not my private world but is a shared space that is taken-for granted by other beings also. This intersubjectivity derives from a 'common frame of interpretation' in which everyone participates and draws from. The lifeworld is not merely comprised of material objects and events but also, "the social and therefore cultural world in which I find myself. The lifeworld is not created out of the merely material objects and events which I encounter in my environment. Certainly, these are together one component of my surrounding world; nevertheless, there also belong to this, all meaning-strata which transform natural things into cultural objects, human bodies into fellowmen, and the movements of fellowmen into acts,<sup>34</sup> gestures and communication. Schutz however does not delve into how this intersubjectivity is constituted. He, however, explicates what the lifeworld consists of :

(33) Alfred Schutz and T. Luckmann, *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, tr. Richard M. Zaner and H. T. Engelhardt, (North Western Univ. Press, Evanston, 1973) P.3-4.

(34) *The Structures of the Lifeworld*-P.5.

"In the natural attitude of everyday life, the following are taken-for-granted :

- (a) the corporeal existence of other men ,
- (b) that these bodies are endowed with a consciousness similar to mine,
- (c) that things in the outer world included in my environment and that of my fellowmen are the same for us and have fundamentally the same meaning.
- (d) that I can enter into interrelations and reciprocal relations with my fellowmen.
- (e) that I can make myself understood to them.
- (f) that a stratified social and cultural world is historically pregiven as a frame of reference for me and my fellowmen, indeed in a manner taken-for-granted in the natural world.
- (g) that therefore, the situation in which I find myself at any moment is only to a very small extent created by  
35  
me.

We have already alluded to the taken-for granted attitude toward the lifeworld. This attitude grounds two assumptions.

- (a) that the stock of knowledge obtained from my own past experience and that of my fellowmen will continue to preserve its fundamental validity (this is called the "and so forth" idealisation)and

(35) Ibid,P.5.

(b) that I can repeat my past successful acts (called the "I can always do it again" idealisation).

These two assumptions point to the constancy of the world's structure that marks our everyday life. Besides the intersubjectivity and taken-for-grantedness, a third feature of the lifeworld is its relative intransparency. The lifeworld is at work 'behind our backs' and remains unproblematic 'until further notice', the taken-for-grantedness is exploded when the reference schemata drawn from the prevalent stock of knowledge is inadequate to subsume a new experience. In such a situation a segment of the lifeworld is thrown open to question and becomes visible. Schutz gives the example of a man who returns to his room (which he is fully familiar with) expecting to find it "as he left it". He will routinely orient himself to the room unless something unfamiliar shatters this attitude as may happen if the room looks ransacked. Such an encounter with the unfamiliar is only one situation which thematises a part of the lifeworld. Other situations may arise from biographically or socially imposed themes. Every situation has biologically, ontologically, socially defined aspects which may render a certain segment problematic. The whole of the lifeworld cannot however be simultaneously exploded at once only a segment of the lifeworld gets thematised in a situation.

Habermas employs the concept of lifeworld to refer to the unthematized horizon within which 'communicative action is "always already" moving'. Recast within his own model of communicative action, the lifeworld refers to the reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Lifeworld refers to a background consensus, a set of pre-understandings that functions as a system of reference. In performing a speech act participants relate to the objective world, social world or subjective world simultaneously. Every communicative utterance involves a certain 'common situation definition', which all participants agree upon. A 'situation' is "a segment of lifeworld contexts of relevance that is thrown into relief by themes and goals articulated through plans of action."<sup>36</sup> For example, an older worker on a construction site may command a newly arrived younger co-worker to fetch some beer for the upcoming midmorning snack. He assumes the situation is clear to everyone involved the theme here is the upcoming break; taking care of drinks is a goal related to the theme; the plan is to send the 'new' guy.

The informal group hierarchy of the workers on the site is the normative framework in which the one is allowed to tell the other to do something. The action situation is defined temporally

(36) J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol II (henceforth abbreviated as TCA II), Polity 1987 p.123.

by the upcoming break and spatially by the distance to the nearest store. The new worker might respond by saying 'I am not thirsty now' in which case he will be convinced that beer for the morning break is a norm held independent of individual preferences. If the worker responds, "but I don't have a car", the older worker may have to revise his assumption that a nearby shop is open on Mondays. Thus there is continuous redefinition of the situation which involves correlating contents to the three worlds, according to what counts in a given instance as a generally interpreted element of the objective world, as an intersubjectively valid norm of the social world or as a subjective expression of an inner world to which an individual alone has access.

The notion of life world points to the preinterpreted domain within which participants are always moving : language and culture are constitutive for the lifeworld. In performing a speech act participants are very much moving within their own language, so that they cannot bring a present utterance before themselves "as something intersubjective" in the way they experience an event as something objective, encounter a pattern of behaviour as something normative or ascribe a feeling as something subjective." Thus the three features of the

(37) J. Habermas, TCA II , P.122..

(38) J.Habermas, TCA II, P.125

lifeworld, unquestionability, intersubjectivity and non-transparency get radicalised- As Habermas insists, "qua lifeworld it cannot become problematic. It can at most fall apart." The vast web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be meaningful, that is valid or invalid, cannot all be thematised at once. Only a segment of these can be rendered problematic and even this segment is encompassed within the horizons of lifeworld. Regarding intersubjectivity Habermas notes how the lifeworld has a status of a social apriori-something that is prior to any possible disagreement. Interestingly, he writes, "The members of a collective count themselves as belonging to the lifeworld in the first person plural, in a way similar to that in which, an individual speaker attributes to himself the subjective world to which he has privileged access in the first person singular."<sup>39</sup> This highlights how everyday communicative practice proceeds with a naive trust in lifeworld. Only in a situation context does the lifeworld appear as a contingent reality that needs to be consensually interpreted. Thirdly, for members of a lifeworld, it always remains the background that at once provides the context for a situation and still remains indeterminate. Only when rendered problematic does a segment of it become visible as something taken-for-granted culturally and hence resting on

(39) J.Habermas, TCA II P.131.

interpretation. But, according to Habermas culturally transmitted background knowledge which participants in communication draw upon is only one component of the lifeworld. There are three structural components of the lifeworld culture, society and personality.

"Considered as a resource, the lifeworld can be divided in accord with the 'given' components of speech act (that is their propositional, illocutionary and expressive components) into culture, society and personality. I call culture that store of knowledge from which those engaged in communicative action draw interpretations susceptible of consensus as they come to an understanding about something in the world. I call society (in the narrower sense of a component of the lifeworld) the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity based on belonging to groups as they enter into inter- personal relationships with one another. Personality serves as a term of art for acquired competences that render a subject capable of speech and action and hence able to participate in processes of mutual understanding in a given context and to maintain his or her own identity in shifting contexts of interaction."

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(40) J Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity. Polity 1987, P.343.



The lifeworld comprises not only the stock of knowledge stored in the cultural tradition but also a fund of values and norms that reinforce social solidarity as well as shared competences which enable formation and stabilisation of individual identities. These various components constitute the normative consensus that facilitates interaction in everyday life. It furnishes the background context for both purposive rational action and communicative action. However the former does not serve to reproduce the normative complex. In purposive rational action, the preeminence given to techniques and rules of rational choice screen out the normative dimension. Action is calculated from the standpoint of efficiency in bringing about a desired state of affairs. It is not tied to any demands of rational justification of norms. A classic example is of Luhmann's systems functionalism which aims at an 'economy of consensus'. The stress is reduction of complexity invoked in consensual coordination. To this end, they evolve the concept of a steering medium<sup>41</sup> which can coordinate action without an explicit dependence on the lifeworld. It is only in communicative action, i.e. action oriented to reaching understanding that there is an explicit reference to a background consensus. Action is coordinated through a mutual recognition of the intersubjectively binding force of validity claims. This can be clarified with reference to the structure of understanding exemplified in the

(41) see Chap III p.73-74

illocutionary mode of language use. In performing a speech act, a speaker raises a validity claim to truth, truthfulness or normative rightness. He takes upon himself the obligation to redeem his validity claims, if necessary. The hearer can either accept the offer in which case he implicitly affirms the validity claim ; he can reject the offer in which case he challenges the validity claim. In rejecting the offer the addressee cashes in on the promise of rational redemption. This possibility of a recourse to rational grounding is what gives language its peculiar status as a medium of mutual understanding. According to Habermas, it is precisely this quality of rationally binding force that renders communicative action as a suitable vehicle for reproduction of the lifeworld. "Rationalisation here means extirpating those relations of force that are inconspicuously set in the very structures of communication and that prevent conscious settlement of conflicts, and consensual regulation of conflicts by means of intra psychic as well as interpersonal communicative barriers. Rationalisation means overcoming such systematically distorted communication in which the action supporting consensus concerning reciprocally raised validity claims, especially consensus concerning the truthfulness of intentional expressions and the rightness of underlying norms can be sustained in appearance only, that is, counterfactually."<sup>42</sup>

(42) J.Habermas, quoted in R.Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, (Blackwell 1983)p.188

[Habermas conceives the society as both system and lifeworld. What concerns him is society's evolution along its normative dimension which he calls rationalisation of the life world . A major innovation of his thought pertains to the argument of an autonomous logic of rationalisation for the lifeworld. The rationalisation of lifeworld is not to be evaluated in terms of purposive rationality but in terms of what he calls communicative rationality.] The sign of a thoroughly rationalised lifeworld is the opening up of all the three components to criticism and rational grounding. Construed as a normative consensus lifeworld rationalises itself only when such a consensus is mediated by and dependent upon communicative action. Communicative rationality refers to the fact that rationality presumes communication because something is rational only if it meets, the conditions necessary to forge an understanding with at least one other person. Communicative rationality offers the standard by which to evaluate a rationalised lifeworld i.e. by unveiling the extent to which normative consensus is opened upto criticism and rational agreement in an atmosphere free from coercion and power.

[The reproduction of the normative consensus takes place in all the three components of culture, society and personality. There are two aspects of lifeworld reproduction; one, material reproduction which takes place through purposive rational action and two, symbolic reproduction which takes place

in the three components of culture, society and personality by way of a continuation of valid knowledge, stabilisation of group identities and socialisation of responsible actors respectively. Cultural reproduction results in a continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge. (Rationalisation in this realm manifests itself in an increasingly critical appropriation of tradition via communicative action.) Social reproduction secures and stabilises group identities through reinforcing legitimate interpersonal relations. This is measured by solidarity of the members. Rationalisation here results in a rationally grounded consensus on norms and values based on their representing a 'universal interest'. Disturbances here manifest themselves in anomie wherein actors can no longer coordinate their actions through existing institutional orders. Reproduction of personality takes place through socialisation of members equipped with generalised competences to take part in interaction.) Rationalisation here results in development of ego identities that can think and operate at the level of principles both cognitively and morally. Disturbances in this realm manifest themselves in psychopathologies and alienation. ✓

In all the three components of lifeworld reproduction, there are three moments of rationalisation at work. Firstly, there is structural differentiation which is a process whereby each of the three components gets separated out. With

respect to the relation between culture and society, institutional orders delink themselves from world-views ; with respect to personality and society, there is an extension of the scope of establishing interpersonal relationships. There is an increased trend toward evolving unique individual identities ; with respect to personality and culture, the renewal of tradition comes to depend upon individuals ability to criticise and engage in cooperative processes of interpretation. Secondly, there is a separation of form and content. In the realm of culture, tradition separates itself off from concrete contents and evolves formal world concepts, argumentation procedures etc. At the level of society, general procedures and principles evolve out of particular contents. " In modern societies principles of legal order and of morality are established which are less and less tailored to concrete forms of life." <sup>43</sup> On the level of personality structures , there is a predominance of formal operational thought whereby cognitive structures detached from 'concrete contents'and are rendered amenable to abstract use. Thirdly, there is increased reflexivity so that cultural knowledge is secured through functional specification in different cultural systems of action like modern science, universalist law and post-auratic art. In the sphere of social integration, democratic structures gain strength thereby establishing the principle of discursive will formation.

(43) J.Habermas,TCA II P. 146.

Legitimation of institutional orders has to be secured in principle through a consensus. Socialisation becomes increasingly professionalised through evolution of formal education and new child rearing practices. The vanishing point for these rationalisation processes are for culture, a stage where tradition is subjected to constant revision through critique, for society, a state where institutional orders have to be constantly legitimated via formal procedures and for personality, a formation of highly abstract ego identities which are self-steering.

Habermas's argument of the autonomous logic of rationalisation of lifeworld depends upon two claims. One that the lifeworld reflects a normative consensus and two, that the lifeworld increasingly gets mediated through and dependent upon communicative action. Both these claims have their roots in the theories of Emile Durkheims and George Herbert Mead. A brief excursus into Habermas's appropriation of their views may be helpful here. Durkheim addressed himself to the question of the normative force of institutions and values. Rejecting any argument from utilitarianism, Durkheim claimed that the morally binding power of norms originated not from any calculations of self-interest nor even from the sanctions behind these norms, but from the fact that they were anchored in 'universal interest'. He saw in the development of universalist law embodied in the institution of private legal contract a new principle of social

integration. To him, the spread of democratic ideas and adoption of democratic structures signified an evolutionary achievement from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity refers to integration of similar units while organic solidarity refers to integration of dissimilar, functionally differentiated units. This shift in the principle of social integration took place through

(a) rationalisation of world views which expresses itself in a process that sublimates mythical powers into transcendent gods and finally into ideas and concepts,

(b) value generalisation which points to a universalisation of norms in modern law and morality which became more and more abstract and formalistic,

(c) growing individuation with a stress on personal autonomy so that value consensus could only be secured through cooperative understanding.<sup>44</sup> The shift to universal interest as a principle of legitimation has to be placed within the framework of Durkheim's sociology of religion for it engenders a transition from the spell-binding power of the holy to the rational force of norms. Analysing the obligatory force of the sacred, he argued that the authority of the sacred emanated from the conscience collective, (collective consciousness or identity), that was

(44) J.Habermas TCA II P.83

constantly renewed and regenerated through ritual practice. This collective consciousness was continuously reinforced through religious symbols and rituals. A consensus on what constituted the sacred and the profane contributed to the stabilisation of this collective identity. In rituals he discovered the prelinguistic, archaic core of norm consciousness. However, this consensus was not communicatively achieved ; collective identity being prior to individual identity and latter being derived from the former, the consensus was culturally transmitted and normatively secured but could not be questioned in any fundamental manner. In the emergence of universalist law and morality Durkheim saw a new principle of securing the normative consensus; these new institutions and values were binding because they were grounded in a " general interest", an interest that transcended individual interests and gave to the 'moral' an impersonal character. Durkheim saw in democracy a superior principle of social organisation; "because it is a system based on reflection, it allows the citizen to accept the laws of the country with more intelligence and thus less passively. Because there is a constant flow of communication between themselves and the state, the state is for individuals no longer an exterior force that imparts a wholly mechanical impetus. Owing to the constant exchanges between them and the state, its life becomes linked with theirs and their life with that of the state"

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(45) J.Habermas TCA II P. 82



What is of specific interest to us is how Habermas recasts Durkheim's concerns within his own model of communicative rationality. He reformulates the argument of disenchantment of the sacred in terms of a "linguistification of the sacred". Linguistification alludes to a process whereby the three processes of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation come to be reproduced through communicative action; that is to say the binding force of the normative is displaced on to language in its use as the medium of mutual understanding. More precisely, it refers to a process whereby the normative consensus renewed through ritual practice and mediated through religious symbols slowly gets permeated by language; As a result norms and values get articulated in language and embodied in institutional orders which are legitimated in terms of universal interest; the normative base opens up to critique and cooperative process of interpretation ; The thesis of linguistification owes much to Habermas's appropriation of George Herbert Mead's theory of language. Mead contended that, " in man, the functional differentiation through language gives an entirely different principle of organisation which produces not only a different type of individual but also a different type of society."<sup>46</sup> Mead however approaches language only from the standpoint of its integration of goal-directed

(46) Ibid., P.4

actions and socialisation of individual subjects. The main concern of the model of communicative action, that is language as a medium of understanding through the inter-connection between meaning and validity do not figure in his analysis. However Mead explicates the other two aspects of language as a medium of action coordination, of goal directed actors and socialisation in terms of the genesis of meaning within language. He reconstructs the evolution of language from gestures to symbols and thence to normative regulations. In gesture-mediated interaction, meaning arises out of a series of responses to stimuli - a classic example is a fight between two dogs where the act of one dog becomes a gesture for the other. In this case meaning is a systemic attribute; i.e. it is objective or natural meaning because one can talk of meaning only from the functional role it plays in the whole interaction ; search for food, mating, play would be ways of explaining the meaning of the interaction. From this stage to interaction mediated via symbols is marked by a series of transformations (a) gestures are transformed into symbols through replacement of meaning that exist for one organism with meanings that are the same for both participants (b) the behavior of participant changes in such a way that an interpersonal relationship is established between the speaker and hearer thus replacing the causal connection between stimuli and response. In interacting with one another participants address each other as speaking subjects (c) there is a transformation in

the structure of interaction so that participants can distinguish between action oriented to success and one oriented to understanding.<sup>47</sup> Signal utterances like 'attack', 'shoot', 'fire' etc would be context dependent uses of language ; symbolically mediated interaction proceeds because at this level there is internalisation of meaning structures. Mead explains internalisation in the sense of "taking the attitude of the other", that is of "arousing in oneself the same response as an utterance evokes in the other". Habermas employs Wittgenstein's concept of 'rule' to elaborate upon Mead's insight of meaning conventions; the emergence of speech as a rule governed activity can explain how the utterance of one can evoke the same response in the hearer and speaker. Rules ensure (a) sameness of meaning and (b) intersubjective validity. The characteristic features of rule-following are that a rule has meaning only in the use one makes of it (an arrow points only in the application human beings make of it); a rule has to be followed spontaneously; understanding a rule is manifested in behaviour and not in interpretation and lastly, a rule cannot be obeyed privately. These qualities of rule -following highlight its intersubjective dimension. For Habermas, what is significant about speech as rule-governed activity is that it sets in motion a structure of interaction where validity and criticisability are intertwined.

(47) J, Habermas TCA II P 9.

In producing a speech act S, the speaker expects the hearer will recognise or admit his action as satisfying a rule and the hearer expects that it is the speaker's intention to carry out an action according to a rule. A speaker's ability to apply a rule implies he can recognise others' actions as conforming to a rule; a hearer's ability to judge an action as rule-conforming implies he can carry out acts in accordance with rules. Thus "taking the attitude of the other" is expanded to mean the ability to address one another in the role of speakers and hearers.

Habermas is primarily interested in explaining how language evolves into a medium of understanding in its own right. To this end, he reconstructs the evolution of language from symbolically mediated interaction to grammatical speech and thence to normatively regulated interaction. Before language can coordinate action through mutual understanding it must have reached a stage of internal differentiation; this means one can separate the propositional, illocutionary and expressive components; only at the level of grammatical speech does language fully become a medium of action coordination, because at this level the symbolic structure has permeated all aspects of interaction including the motivational make up and behavioural repertoire of participants so that nothing is left to residues of instinct action coordination is achieved solely through language. Within grammatical speech, each of the three components of speech acts, propositional illocutionary and expressive can be

differentiated and expanded into constative, regulative and expressive modes respectively. Communicative action can fulfill the functions of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation only when language has evolved enough to store cultural knowledge in the form of propositions, to steer action through interpersonal recognition of validity claims and to facilitate reflexivity toward the self by relating to inner nature in the form of expressives. As Habermas observes, "Perceptions and representations take on a propositional structure, obligations are split up at the level of normatively regulated interaction into intersubjective recognition of existing norms on the one hand and norm-conformative motives for action on the other. Spontaneous expressions linked to the body lose their involuntary character when they are replaced with or interpreted by linguistic utterances".<sup>48</sup> For example, one word utterances like 'Attack', 'Fire' and 'Shoot' perform certain socially established actions. Together the role-conforming utterance of the chief and the role-conforming actions of the tribal members make up a nexus of interaction regulated by norms. These utterances can be expanded and understood alternatively,

- (1) as a report that enemies have appeared unexpectedly,
- (2) as an expression of the speaker's fear in the face of an imminent danger, or

(48) J.Habermas TCA II P.63.

(3) as the speaker's command to his hearer that they lend assistance. Further those involved know

(4) that the speaker's (chief's) status authorises him to make the request: i.e. he is entitled to make it

(5) that the hearers, T, U, V, are obligated to lend assistance.  
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It may be noted that (1) is possible only if speaker/hearer knows what it is to make a statement, that is to represent a state of affairs in the objective world with a warranty if necessary to redeem the truth claim raised in it. (2) is possible only when the participants can relate themselves to a social world of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations. Symbols can coordinate action only by tapping residues of instinct. For 'attack' to function as a mechanism of action-coordination proper, it has to be an application of rule that ensures sameness of meaning and intersubjective validity. Further if the command has to be accepted and a sequel of action is to follow, it has to be normatively binding. This normative binding force presupposes that participants can separate out the contents within speech acts and correlate them to worlds -- the propositional to the objective world, the illocutionary to the social world and the expressive to the inner world. In the above example, we may suppose that participants have evolved a

(49) J. Habermas TCA II P. 25

propositionally differentiated language and that there is a difference in status between the speaker S and the others, T,U,V that arises from S's social role as the chief of the tribe. When S shouts 'Attack', this symbolic expression say 'q' counts as a communicative act with which S is moving within the scope of his social role. By uttering q,S actualises the normative expectation that tribal members within hearing distance will interpret it as a call for help and expressive of a subjective state ; (3) is possible only when conditions (4) and (5) obtain, that is when they know what it is to follow a norm of action.

The normative binding force of action arises from the illocutionary force that underlies all speech acts. At the level of grammatical speech, not only can the three components be separated out but can also be interpreted in a grammatical unity so that the "semantic content does not break up into segments but can be freely converted from component to component. <sup>50</sup> The intermeshing of the three components shows how communicative action is specifically suited for process of lifeworld reproduction. The integration of the propositional component with the other two means that anything that can be said, can be said

(50) J.Habermas TCA II P. 64

in an assertoric form. For instance,

(1) 'I promise you that q' can be transformed without damage to the semantic content to

(1.1) He promised him that q where the corresponding personal pronouns refer to the same person.

However while (1) is already an explicit speech act (1.1) is only the propositional component of a constative speech act by which a speaker can reproduce (1) as a happening in the world. That is (1.1) can be expanded into

(1.1 exp) I am reporting to you that he promised him that q. Similarly an expressive speech act like

(2) I fear (confess) that p can be transformed into

(2.1) He fears (confesses) that p which can further be expanded into a constative speech act by

(2.2 exp) I am reporting to you that he has expressed  
51  
(confessed) the fear that P.

This fact that anything can be said can be structured propositionally gives to language the ability to store knowledge. Contents which express or relate to experiences of society that a speaker has in a norm-conformative attitude or in an expressive attitude can be released from its illocutionary and expressive components and stored in the cultural tradition as knowledge. Regarding the intermeshing of the expressive

(51) Ibid ., P 265



component with the other two, Habermas explains has every sincere expression can point to non-expressive speech act components. That is to say, from 'he believes p', we can infer that he will be disposed to 'assert that p' ; from 'he regrets r' we can infer that he will be disposed to apologise 'r'; But we cannot infer inversely from constatives and regulatives that the speaker believes or feels what he expresses. This shows how the subjective world distinguishes itself from an objective world that admits truths claims and a social world of valid norms.

However, it is the intermeshing of the illocutionary component with the other two that gives a speech act its rationally motivating force. There are two levels of identifying the illocutionary component in assertoric and expressive speech acts. At one level, in 'using' these sentences, a speaker is 'performing' a speech act. In 'I assert that p' or 'I express that p', a speaker explicitly indicates a relation to normative regulations as do regulative ones like orders, warnings etc. Here a speaker may merely be using a prior normative consensus. At a second level the illocutionary force can be identified in the claim to validity which a speaker raises as in case of speech acts which may not be tied to any particular institutional context. The difference may be brought out as

follows. Consider

(a) It is right that a in s

(b) It is the case that p(is true).

Both express a validity claim, (a) to normative rightness and (b) a claim to truth. It is possible to imagine a context where (a) can be incontestable and tied to a prior normative context. For instance (a) can be used to describe a wedding ceremony where the marriage may be said to be 'over' when all the rituals have been observed. The validity of the ceremony is dependent upon fulfilling a valid norm where the norm itself may not be criticisable. "It is right that a in s" does not on its own advance a claim to normative rightness that can be rationally redeemed. An action itself may be criticised from the standpoint of its fulfilling or violating a norm but the validity of this underlying norm itself is not grounded rationally. In contrast (b) advances a claim to validity that a speaker can only use in the attitude of a proponent who is willing to defend 'p' against possible objections. What gives (b) its peculiar force is that it can be contested and defended with reasons, should the validity of the norm be questioned; This contestability, in turn, points to a consensus that is communicatively achieved. "The binding force of illocutionary forces comes about, ironically from the fact that speakers can say "no" to speech act offers."

Provided of course that this "no" is not a product of mere whim

(52) J.Habermas TCA II P 73-74.

or caprice but of a mature and responsible speaking subject who in saying "no" is cashing in on the guarantee of rational redemption of the validity claim. The 'no' implies also that the participant knows the difference between actions oriented to understanding and action oriented to success, between having an influence 'upon' another and reaching an agreement with another; and more importantly, that every speaker capable of saying 'no' is also capable of adopting toward oneself a reflective attitude and ability to defend one's validity claims with reasons. Interestingly every affirmation of an offer is in "the form of a disagreement that has been avoided ; it is mediated through an at least implicit rejection of a contradictory utterance, that is through a negation." A hearer cannot accept an utterance and reject its validity. If the rejection of p means "that the statement p is untrue" then the affirmation of p is a negation of the sentence. "it is untrue that p". If rejection of an avowal r means that ego's utterance is insincere., then the affirmation of 'r' implies a negation of the rejection, a negation of "ego's utterance r is insincere".<sup>53</sup> The upshot of this reconstruction of language as the medium of mutual understanding is that it becomes a medium of lifeworld reproduction. The three functions of lifeworld reproduction namely transmission of cultural tradition, social norms and values and shared competences can be mediated via communicative action.

(53) Ibid.,P 73.

To summarise, Habermas introduces the lifeworld as a complementary concept to communicative action. The horizon of the lifeworld encompasses not only a culturally transmitted stock of knowledge but a fund of values and norms embodied in institutional orders and a set of shared competences inherited through socialisation. Both the thesis of 'linguistification of the sacred' and communicative rationalisation of lifeworld reiterate one major claim that the normative complex gets to be reproduced and reinforced through rationally motivated yes/no decisions on validity claims. The normative background becomes amenable to a discursive treatment. It is this possibility that enhances its binding/bonding force.

To Habermas, the distinct achievement of modern structures of consciousness consists in the fact that they actualise the ideal of a rationalised lifeworld. These structures, embodied as they are in universalist science, law and morality and post-auratic art have evolved specialised forms of argumentation. The emergence of democratic institutions, the subsequent extension of equal rights and equal opportunities are some pointers to a rationalised lifeworld. The rise of a bourgeoisie public sphere during the transition to liberal capitalism rendered discursive will-formation politically significant. This public sphere exploded the secretiveness of the feudal regime and institutionalised, to a certain extent, public debate on political issues. Under the economic imperatives of

capitalism there occurred a disintegration of the public sphere. This happens because of a fundamental antithesis between participatory decision-making by all citizens which is the principle behind the public sphere and capitalist appropriation of profits which is the principle guiding liberal capitalism. This contradiction to some extent gets mitigated in the welfare state compromise. In a late capitalist context, the erosion of public space continues under technocratic redefinition of politics. Under the pretext of technical expertise more and more issues are withdrawn from public debate so that participation of the people is reduced to a passive endorsement of the political subsystem. All this is of course, an oversimplification but the point here is what is called the paradox of rationalisation - it is a rationalised lifeworld that makes discursive will-formation politically possible. The institutionalisation of the democratic principle of justification in various forms is a result of a rationalised lifeworld. In other words, the rise of democratic mechanisms that justify and legitimise a political order on the basis of abstract universal norms is intrinsic to the process of rationalisation. From the perspective of a rationalised lifeworld, politics is not a matter of haggling from different power positions. It is a matter of practising communicative action in the public sphere so that the principle of practical discourse becomes a reality, However, the possibility of

discursive politics is superseded in late capitalism. The one-sided emphasis on cognitive-instrumental rationality<sup>54</sup> has resulted in an eclipse of public space. Habermas calls this paradox, colonisation of the lifeworld. This is explained in Chapter III. At this juncture, what is of special interest to us is the kind of politics envisaged by a rationalised lifeworld. It specifically excludes force and violence from the realm of the political. Politics is a matter of discursive legitimation of norms and values in an atmosphere free from coercion. It thematises issues that can be grounded in universalisable interests. The interconnection between the lifeworld and politics obtains significance under modern conditions of colonisation of the lifeworld. The one dimensional emphasis on systemic self-maintenance cuts into the communicative infrastructure of the lifeworld resulting in a loss of meaning and anomie. Under such conditions the task of restoring the lifeworld to the play of communicative action becomes a political endeavour. This is dealt with in Chapter IV.

However, the concept of the lifeworld and communicative rationality do not identify ways and means of institutionalising a public space. Although communicative rationality demands that the lifeworld be rationally questioned

(54) Cognitive instrumental rationality refers to the orientation toward manipulation and control of the object of knowledge exemplified in the methodology of natural sciences.

and justified , it does not exhaust the lifeworld. That is to say, the lifeworld cannot be swallowed up as one more subsystem among others. Dallmayr<sup>55</sup> apprehends that, Habermas allows the lifeworld to be "steadily eclipsed and absorbed" as the actors continuously reproduce in an increasingly conscious and critical way. But it may be reiterated that communicative action has its limits. It cannot adjudicate between different conflictual forms of life - it can merely outline the parameters of a good form of life. As Stephen White observes, "communicative rationalisation of normative claims between actors can put certain limits on what can count for them as a good society but it possesses no resources itself which would suffice for the generation of a substantive ideal of good society."<sup>56</sup>

(55) Fred Dallmayr, *Polis and Praxis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984 ) P. 254

(56) Stephen White, *op.cit.*, P. 103

## Chapter III

### THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY :COLONIALISATION OF THE LIFEWORLD

The loss of meaning and freedom that haunts modern life has been repeatedly articulated in the discourse on modernity. Max Weber the highpriest of rationalisation invoked the metaphor of the 'iron cage' to point out that under increasing bureaucratisation, men do not any more make history. Georg Lukacs recast rationalisation within a Marxist framework and linked it up to reification. Reification refers to the progressive 'objectification' of interpersonal relations so that men confronted one another as objects. The social world thus took the appearance of a natural world, immutable and beyond human control. This phenomenon was, however, specific to capitalist modernisation, according to him. Adorno and Horkheimer lamented the all-pervasiveness of an 'administered world'. They advanced a critique of modernity in terms of a critique of instrumental reason, that is, reason oriented to control and mastery. It seemed as if a decline in freedom and increase in repression was intrinsic to the very process of modernisation. More recently the post-modernists have announced the demise of modernity itself.

It is against the context of such a crisis of confidence in modernity that Habermas's analysis becomes significant. According to him, modernity can be understood along two parallel interconnected lines of rationalisation, one, at the



level of society as a system and two, at the level of society as a lifeworld. The difference between the two, society as system and society as lifeworld lies in the fact that they represent two distinct principles of sociation. When society is conceptualised as a system the focus is on systemic differentiation and complexity. Action is coordinated not through consensus but through functionalist interconnections between structures. However it is rationalisation of the lifeworld that is important for Habermas. The problem with modernity is the fact that although a rationalised lifeworld provides the initial conditions for the evolution of systemic differentiation, the latter 'uncouples' itself from the lifeworld. Moreover, systemic dynamics tend to invade the domain of the lifeworld thereby altering the normative basis of action coordination. This interference of the systemic mechanisms of coordination is called 'colonisation of the lifeworld'. This chapter attempts to explicate Habermas's diagnosis of modernity as colonialisation and cultural impoverishment. We begin with an explanation of 'uncoupling' in terms of society getting separated out under two different principles of integration. We proceed to replicate Habermas's analysis of systemic differentiation with reference to the emergence of steering media. Then we elucidate the idea that a rationalised lifeworld already stands at the threshold of modernity facilitating the transition from lifeworld to systems.

Finally we explain the erosion of the communicative bases of the lifeworld under colonialisation which is rounded off with a critique of Habermas's use of the term lifeworld.

Habermas's analysis of modernity rests on two propositions : (a) that the transition to modernity is characterised by an 'uncoupling' of system and lifeworld and (b) that the capitalist path of modernisation is marked by a reification of the symbolic structures of lifeworld under systemic imperatives. The latter is explicated under the rubric of colonialisation of lifeworld. But before we analyse (b), it is crucial to classify the 'uncoupling' thesis. The term 'uncoupling' refers to the separating out of system and lifeworld from one another. As Habermas puts it.

I understand social evolution as a second-order process of differentiation : system and lifeworld are differentiated in the sense that the complexity of one and the rationality of the other grow. But it is not only qua system and qua lifeworld that they get differentiated ; they get differentiated from one another at the same time<sup>57</sup>

It may be helpful here to outline Habermas's model of social evolution in terms of the 'uncoupling' process. At the level of tribal societies, the lifeworld immediately constitutes the social structures. As reflected in mythical-magical world

(57) J.Habermas, TCA II P.153.

views, the lifeworld remains undifferentiated. These world-views do not distinguish between language and the world . They confuse internal relations of meaning and external relations among things. "concepts of validity such as morality and truth are merged with concepts of causality and health"<sup>58</sup>. Further, there is no distinction between the objective, social and subjective worlds. " They assimilate external nature and internal nature to the social order, natural phenomena to interpersonal relations and events to communicative utterances."<sup>59</sup> The lifeworld gets reproduced through rituals and is secured against the potential of speech for innovation and negation. The kinship system forms a total institution with reference to which social memberships are defined. Sex, generation and descent provide the parameters for division of labour. Tribal societies move over to a higher level of differentiation when they evolve exchange relations with other tribes through exogamy. But enchange at this level has no economic significance and is geared to promote friendly relations between tribes. Certain tribes may also evolve vertical stratification of unilinear descent groups ; power is anchored in prestige grounded in descent and is used for the purpose of coordinating actions oriented to material reproduction.<sup>60</sup> The

(58) *ibid.*, p.159.

(59) *ibid.*,p.158.

(60) *ibid.*,p.161-164.

next stage of differentiation is societies organised around a state; at this level markets for goods arise which are steered via the medium of money. The subsystems of economy and polity are separated out ; power detaches itself from kinship and is now anchored in the authority of office. "Social units can themselves become functionally specified via participation or exclusion from political power. The dominant status groups - officials, militarymen, landowners and the mass of population - fishermen, farmers, mineworkers and craftsmen, change from classifications based on birth to politically organised social classes based on possessions." <sup>61</sup> The capitalist economy separates itself out as a subsystem steered via the money medium thus enhancing the scope for functional differentiation and complexity.

The hallmark of systemic differentiation is this rise of steering media. The notion of a steering media was systematically employed by Talcott Parsons within a systems-theoretical framework. In his later works, Parsons engaged in developing a family of steering media which extended over the whole range of human activity, which he called 'the human condition'. From a communication-theoretic point of view, Habermas analyses the concept of a steering medium and explores its potential to replace communicative action in areas of material reproduction. According to him, steering media can

(61) *ibid.*, p.169.

supersede language only in certain areas of human endeavour. This is particularly true of economic and political subsystems where money and power take over coordinating functions. This supersession of language enhances complexity because the risk of disagreement is minimised. " Media such as money and power can largely spare us of the costs of dissensus because they uncouple the coordination of action from consensus formation in language and neutralise it against the alternatives of achieved versus failed agreement."<sup>62</sup>

A classic example of a steering medium is money. There are certain properties peculiar to money as a medium which enable it to replace language as a medium of action coordination. Firstly, the steering medium has a code that is applicable for a narrowly circumscribed class of standard situations which is defined by clear interest positions. The ego can get alter to accept the offer through empirical motivations and interaction is oriented towards a generalised value. The primary orientation of actors is directed to the consequences of their actions. In the case of money, the standard situation is the process of exchanging goods, the generalised value is utility and profitabilty serves as the standard of success.

(62) *ibid.*, p.262-263.

Secondly, there are qualitative properties intrinsic to a medium -- it should be measurable, circulable and depositable. These are qualities entailed by the fact that media like money steer interaction independently of context and solely through empirical inducements.

The steering media replace communicative action by introducing a less risky means of action coordination. In communicative action, ego gets alter to accept his offer through a warranty to redeem his claim through reasons. A steering medium on the contrary, enables ego to influence, control or direct alter to accept his offer through empirical motivation. That is, media like money introduce an entirely new principle of social integration -- one based on monetary rewards and oriented to success. Parsons found in the power medium another such mechanism of action coordination. According to Habermas, although power fulfills most of the above mentioned structural features of a code and can be measured, alienated and stored to some extent, it is less of a steering medium than money. This is so because (a) it does not have a universal sign system equivalent to prices as in the case of money. It operates through a multiplicity of signs and symbols, ranging from uniforms and emblems to official seals

and signatures. (b) Power is tied closely to legitimation because it demands not only compliance but also obligation. This element links power more strongly to the lifeworld. As Habermas puts it, "power as a medium evidently retains something of the power to command that is connected with the authority behind commands, in contrast to simple imperatives. This connection seems to leave power less suited to the role of a steering medium designed to relieve us of the burdens and risks of consensus formation in language than is money which needs no legitimation."<sup>63</sup> Habermas also challenges Parsons' assimilation of influence and value commitment to the family of steering media.

However, with a rise of steering media-based subsystems, the process of uncoupling is complete. These systems detach themselves from contexts of normative justification. The uncoupling of systems in this manner is possible only because a rationalised lifeworld has preceded such systemic differentiation. Taking his cue from Weber, Habermas emphasises that it is the institutionalisation of positive law and

(63) *ibid.*, p.272.

separation of the household that provide initial conditions for  
modernisation.<sup>64</sup> These modern institutions embody a post-  
conventional moral consciousness based on principles.<sup>65</sup> In his  
own words :

...At the level of a principled moral consciousness,  
morality is deinstitutionalised to such an extent that it is now  
only anchored in the personality system as an internal control of  
behaviour. Likewise law develops into an external force, imposed  
from without, to such an extent that modern compulsory law

(64) Habermas's interpretation of Weber argues that Weber started with two level conception of rationality as purposive rationality and practical rationality. This was clear from the fact that Weber used 'rationalisation' not only to describe the institutionalisation of purposive rationality in the capitalist enterprise and modern administration but also to the process whereby rationality enters the structures of consciousness and alters the motivational set-up : that is to say, Weber not only wants to describe societal rationalisation but also explain it as a process that provides the initial conditions for the former. It is this second level that Habermas expands into the autonomous logic of rationalisation of the lifeworld. With this move, he is able to bridge the gap between Weber's contention of the universal historical significance of rationalisation and his pessimistic diagnosis. See J.Habermas, TCA I p.166-167.

(65) Kohlberg put forth a three-stage, six-step maturation of individual moral consciousness. Habermas analyses the same from the standpoint of communicative competence, i.e. an individual's maturation into contexts of interaction. But he goes beyond this to transpose these levels of development onto a phylogenetic scale. Here he analyses rationalisation in terms of the structural alterations in mythical world views to modern ways of understanding, from a communication-theoretic perspective, as successive release of communicative rationality.



sanctioned by the state, becomes an institutions detached from the ethical motivations of the legal person and dependent upon abstract obedience to law. This development is part of the structural differentiation of the lifeworld...<sup>66</sup>

In tribal societies, law merely embodies a preconventional moral consciousness in which only the consequences of action are judged. Law here is oriented to a redemption of the wrong done and punishment is not aimed at the wrong-doer. " The validity of norms is directly rooted in ritual actions of a cultic community. It is not based on external sanctions under the exclusive control of some supreme legal authority."<sup>67</sup> In societies organised around a state, law assumes the status of metainstitution and gets housed in the office of royal judgship. This signifies a conventional stage of moral consciousness which directs itself to an intentional breach of norms. The office of law becomes that of securing the integrity of the legal order which is regarded as valid. Political power comes to crystallise around judicial office. However, law constitutes the subsystems of economy and polity as 'formal domains of action' which are ethically neutralised. The law no longer starts from previously existing structures of communication (in modern societies). It gets instrumentalised for

(66) TCA II p.174

(67) ibid.,p.176.

the purpose of system maintenance. Thus, it is a rationalised lifeworld which facilitates increased systemic complexity which in turn delinks itself from normative claims. Systems emerged as a norm-free realm mainly because they do away with an orientation toward understanding. They do not rely on actor-orientations (even purposive-rational ones). They seek to coordinate consequences of actions through functional mechanisms. They detach themselves from all the three components of the lifeworld. Talking of 'organisations' as an exemplary case of systemic integration, Habermas notes how they short-circuit processes of consensus. Organisations strip individuals of their particular life-histories by defining them as members. Further they steer clear of constraints emanating from culture through an avowed ideological neutrality. They disconnect themselves from society by organising into domains of action free from the normative constraints of everyday life. They disempower the validity bases of communicative action because members act communicatively with each other only with reservations. They know that they can have recourse to formal regulations even under routine circumstances.

The process of uncoupling of systemic contexts from lifeworld is an intrinsic part of modernisation. The separating out of an economy and polity as media-steered subsystems delinked from norms is indispensable for rationalisation. Habermas analyses the contemporary crisis as resulting from a one-dimensional emphasis on systemic

development. The rise of the welfare state resulted in an increased capacity to manage crises. There has been a pacification of class conflict through collective bargaining laws and labour laws. Crises get displaced from the economic realm and take class-unspecific forms. The inner dynamics of system differentiations leads into a colonisation of the lifeworld.

Colonisation refers to the disturbances in lifeworld reproduction whenever there is an attempt at displacing language as medium of understanding. Such disturbances manifest themselves in loss of meaning in dimension of culture, anomie with respect to norms and mental illnesses in the dimension of personality. Colonialisation occurs, " when critical disequilibria in material reproduction, that is, systemic crises amenable to a system-theoretic analysis -- can be avoided only at the cost of disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld -- that is, of 'subjectively' experienced identity-threatening crises or pathologies." These pathologies result from an erosion of communicative structures of the lifeworld.

(68) This has been elaborately analysed by Habermas in 'Legitimation Crisis'. He explores how the state regulation of the market economy (albeit in favour of the dominant class) and the welfare state compromises pacify class conflict. The state, however, gets caught in the contradictory web of increasing compensations without taxing the rich adversely or cutting into their profits. This coupled with the increasing incursions into every day life (bureaucratisation ) traps the state in a series of crises. See J.Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, Heinemann 1976.

(69) TCA II p.305.

Domains of symbolic reproduction	Disturbances for the corresponding structural components
1. Cultural reproduction	Loss of meaning.
2. Societal reproduction	Anomie -- declining solidarity crisis in norms and values.
3. Socialisation	psychopathologies.

In his earlier works, Habermas had analysed disturbances to communicative action under the rubric of "systematically distorted communication." Such problems manifested themselves on various levels. First, on the level of language, distorted communication results in the use of rules which diverge from the recognised system of linguistic conventions. Second, on the level of behaviour, distorted communication reflects itself in rigid and compulsory repetition of behaviour patterns. Finally, when one considers distorted communication as a whole, a discrepancy appears between various levels of communication. The normal congruency between symbols, action patterns and expressions breaks down so that actions and expressions belie what is said. A barrier appears between the publicly participating ego and the repressed realm of the unconscious. Habermas conceives of repression, the defensive reaction through which ego 'hides from itself' as the banishment

(70) J. Thompson, op.cit., p.94-95.

of symbols representing undesirable, instinctual demands from public communication. These contents are deformed as a private language. This phenomenon is reflected at both the intrapsychic and interpersonal levels. In his recent work,<sup>71</sup> Habermas mentions that systematically distorted communication is a case of unconscious deception when one party is deceiving oneself and others about the fact that he is acting with an orientation to success while merely keeping up the appearance of communicative action.

The pathologies of the lifeworld provide a useful tool to unmask relations of power in political discourse. The inequality of access to information and employment of speech acts within public bodies serve to exclude the people from politics. The monopoly over dialogue chances by the technical experts in many policy-making bodies has accelerated systemic invasions into the lifeworld. This model of communicative action helps in identifying "power in the maintenance of selective silences, in the fragmentation of issue definitions, in the management of information and the subsequent shaping of popular attention,<sup>72</sup> consent, belief and trust."<sup>73</sup> Ben Agger uses colonisation to

(71) TCA II p.332.

(72) J.Forester. "Introduction" in J.Forester.(ed) Critical Theory and Public Life (MIT press 1985)p. xiv.

(73) Ben Agger. 'The Dialectic of Deindustrialisation', in J.Forester, ibid., p.3-22.

conceptualise the ravages of hi-tech capitalism. According to him, the fragmentation of the workforce along the axes of skill, unionisation and work-style leads into a crisis of the lifeworld. It also leads to a deepening of the mythos of science and technology further evacuating public speech. Computerisation and canned programs have the effect of shortcircuiting serious reflection on practical issues through personalising opinion-formation. Further information gets disseminated in fragments precluding any coherent understanding of the larger issues involved.

A corollary to colonisation of the lifeworld is what Habermas calls 'cultural impoverishment'. This refers to the misinterpretation of cultural differentiation into separate spheres of validity in science, art, law and morality as a loss of meaning.<sup>74</sup> The loss of meaning, in fact, results from a construal of these spheres into 'expert cultures'. The promise of criticisability and rational grounding opened up by lifeworld rationalisation is neutralised under this elevation of expertise. These spheres have evolved into enterprises which are removed from everyday practice. Most practical matters involving mass participation are interpreted as technical matters and hence

(74) See Habermas on Weber, TCA I p.249. "But Weber goes too far when he infers from the loss of substantial unity of reason a polytheism of gods and demons struggling with one another, with their irreconcilability rooted in plurality of incompatible validity claims."

with- drawn from the public sphere. If one side of cultural impoverishment is hypostatisation of expertise, the other side of emergence of a 'fragmented consciousness'. By this, Habermas means that "everyday consciousness is robbed of its synthesising power."<sup>75</sup> According to Habermas, rationalisation of lifeworld renders culture inaccessible for ideological functions. Once culture is split into spheres of validity, it is permeated by communicative action. However, these spheres congeal into a expert cultures so that they do not overcome outmoded traditions continuing in everyday life. The result is that, "in place of the positive task of meeting a certain need for interpretation by ideological means, we have the negative requirement of preventing<sup>76</sup> holistic interpretations from coming into existence." It must be mentioned that Habermas's analysis of fragmented consciousness is at best sketchy. He does not specify how these insulate cultures are reproduced.

Colonisation refers to the systematic erosion of the communicative infrastructure of the lifeworld. A concrete instance of such shortcircuiting under the welfare state occurs from 'juridification'. Juridification refers to the extension of formal law in modern life. Habermas identifies four major juridification thrusts. The first wave led to the rise of the

(75) TCA II p.355.

(76) *ibid.*, p.355.

bourgeoise state, which in Western Europe, took place during the phase of Absolutism. Law, in this period, guaranteed, "the liberty and property of the private person, the security of law, the formal equality of all legal subjects before the law and thereby the calculability of legally normed action."<sup>77</sup> The evolution of law at this stage aided in the institutionalisation of the two media of money and power, through which the economy and polity separate out as subsystems. The second phase led to the bourgeoise constitutional state which saw the articulation of civil rights as limits on state power. The third phase leads into the emergence of a democratic constitutional state which saw an extension of rights to political participation. Legitimation could now be secured only through formal procedures of justification. This was institutionalised in the parliamentary debate and public discussion. The last phase is the formation of the welfare state which continued the freedom-guaranteeing nature of the earlier phases. This was possible through a limiting of working hours, freedom to organise unions, bargain for wages, social security etc. However, juridification takes on a freedom-threatening character under the welfare state. Habermas makes a distinction between increasing density which refers to procedural specification within already legally constituted domains of economy and administration and increasing expansion of law which

(77) TCA II p.358.



leads to legal regulation of new hitherto informally regulated spheres. In the case of increasing density, law acts as steering medium since it operates within already norm-free contexts. What Habermas calls freedom-guaranteeing or freedom-threatening alludes to increasing expansion of law. In the case of legal institutions like constitutional law, penal law and all regulation of punishable offences (murder, rape, abortion etc.), there arises the need for substantive justification. From this standpoint, "the first phase had a freedom-guaranteeing character to the extent the bourgeoisie civil law and a bureaucratic domination exercised by legal means at least meant a freedom from premodern relations of power and dependence. The three subsequent juridification thrusts guaranteed an increase in freedom in so far as they were able to restrain, in the interests of the citizens and private legal subjects, the political and economic dynamics that had been released by the legal institutionalisation of the media of money and power." <sup>78</sup> The threat to freedom in the welfare state arises from the fact that law draws core areas of the lifeworld into contexts which are immune to demands of validity. Social welfare law increasingly renders citizens into 'clients' of the welfare state. Habermas cites to examples in the legalistic constitution of socialisation through family law and school law in West Germany. These laws have cut into the communicative bases of the family and school.

(78) *ibid.*, p.366.

The liberalisation of child rearing practices and egalitarian patterns of relationship combined to make the family a site of communicative action. The rise of family law implemented through wardship courts has only resulted in increased dependence on the state. The welfare of the child gets redefined to suit administrative convenience, with a result, the primary orientation is not to communicate with the child or the parents ; instead, it becomes assessing the conformity or otherwise, to state-supervised child rearing. In the case of school law, "socialisation is broken up into a mosaic of legally contestable administrative acts...The compulsion toward litigation-proof certainty of grades and the over-regulation of curriculum lead to such phenomena as depersonalisation, inhibition of innovation, breakdown of responsibility, immobility and so on. "<sup>79</sup> The school is thus converted into a social welfare institution that distributes schooling as a social benefit. In all cases of social welfare legislation, there is an implicit redefinition of an individual into a client who relates to the bureaucracy in an attitude of dependence. In the long run, this impedes the propensity of citizens to participate in decision-making. Juridification thus provides one instance of systemic imperatives colonising areas of the lifeworld.

(79)       ibid., p.371-372.

To summarise thus far, Habermas's analysis of modernity rests on two theses -- one, uncoupling which points to the separation of subsystems from a rationalised lifeworld and two, colonisation which refers to the distortion of the lifeworld when symbolic reproduction is drawn into norm free contexts. The latter thesis is built upon one basic hypothesis -- that the lifeworld can be reproduced only through communicative action. When steering media intervene here, there result pathologies.

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Fred Dallmayr has pointed out that the consensual basis of the lifeworld is not adequately grounded. According to him, Habermas seems to be taking "an innatist position that the symbolic domains of the lifeworld are somehow by nature consensually constituted or pregnant with the communicative order." This innatism is in sharp contrast to Habermas's own non-ontological claims. Hugh Baxter has objected to the ambiguity in Habermas's notion of the lifeworld. Habermas initially characterised the lifeworld as background context that underlies all interaction. However, in his explication of colonisation he seems to identify the lifeworld with informally organised spheres of action like family, voluntary association, neighbourhoods etc. This is particularly so when he analyses the interchange between the subsystems of economy and polity on the one hand, and the lifeworld on the other -- the lifeworld is

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(80) Fred Dallmayr, op.cit., p.249.

(81) Hugh Baxter, op.cit., p.39-86

split into a private sphere consisting of households and a public sphere comprising of communicative networks amplified by a cultural complex, press and later mass media.<sup>82</sup>

It must be pointed out that systemic action contexts may involve less of consensuality but cannot be entirely norm-free. From a feminist standpoint, Nancy Fraser<sup>83</sup> has argued that the absolute difference between the system world and the lifeworld cannot be sustained. Further, this absolute difference between family and public sphere on the one hand and administrative state and capitalist economy on the other hand, simply reinforce the institutional separation of family and economy, household and the paid work-place. It occludes the fact that family is permeated by considerations of money and power. "They are sites of egocentric, strategic and instrumental calculation as well as sites of usually exploitable exchanges of services, labour, cash, and sex, as well as coercion and violence."

In conclusion, it may be mentioned that there is a deep-seated ambiguity in Habermas's use of the system/ lifeworld dualism. In his elucidation of colonisation, he transgresses a methodological usage. He tends to delineate system and lifeworld

(82) TCA II p.320.

(83) Nancy Fraser, "What is Critical about Critical Theory? The case of Habermas and Gender," in Seyla Benhabib, (ed.) *Feminism and Critique*, (Polity 1987).p.31-56.

in terms of formally organised and informally organised domains of action. Habermas initially defines the lifeworld as a background context which supplies the resources for all action, even purposive rational action. Later, analysing the interchange between lifeworld and systems, he tends to identify the former with informally organised groups like family neighbourhood and the latter with economy and modern administration. This way he is enabled to sustain the distinction between lifeworld and system in terms of communicative action and purposive rational action. The point is that no one societal sphere can be identified with one type of action. Every societal sphere displays a variety of action types. Therefore systems cannot be characterised as fully norm-free. The subsystems may rely predominantly on functional mechanism of action coordination but cannot do away with communicative action altogether. In his earlier work, 'Legitimation Crisis',<sup>84</sup> Habermas had pointed out how scarcity in supplies of meaning (motivation crisis) can lead to legitimation deficits.<sup>85</sup> David Held had remarked that reproduction of legitimation need not depend upon the same norms that give people their 'common frames of meaning'.<sup>86</sup> In his response Habermas admitted that both motivation and legitimation crises have to be

(84) J.Habermas, Legitimation Crisis. (Heinemann 1976).

(85) David Held, " Crisis Tendencies, Legitimation and the State , " in David Held (ed.) Critical Debates (Cambridge 1982) p.181-195.

(86) J.Habermas.REPLY.op.cit.,p.280-281

analytically distinguished from lifeworld pathologies. This is so because deficits in motives and norms are viewed within the systems perspective as disequilibria. What appears as withdrawal of motivation from the systemic point of view would actually be a result of a crisis in the lifeworld; that norms which are functional for the system are not forthcoming is one indication of problems within the lifeworld. However interconnected these processes may be empirically, they manifest themselves in different ways. The motivation crisis affects the occupational system and the legitimation crisis affects the system of domination whereas the pathologies of the lifeworld manifest themselves in loss of meaning, anomie and personal disorders. These pathologies occur whenever there is an attempt to replace communicative action. This is so because the lifeworld can only be reproduced via communicative action. This, contrary to Dallmayr's contention, is not an innatist position. It is entailed by the logic of rationalisation specific to the lifeworld. Further, Dallmayr alleges that the pathologies arise from the very logic of rationalisation. His disagreement springs from a hermeneutic conception of dialogue. According to this tradition (hermeneutics), discourse/dialogue cannot be totally separated from action contexts. Moreover, it is not oriented to agreement or disagreement. All understanding is made possible because of the prejudices and preunderstandings which constitute what we are --- i.e. our own historicity. Understanding 'happens'

independent of actor-orientations. It is not geared to reaching a consensus. It is simply being open to the 'unfamiliar and the alien'. There is rejection of the presumption that the reflecting subject is the supreme authority in matters of knowledge. From this standpoint, it is understandable that Dallmayr objects to the communicative rationalisation of the lifeworld. However Habermas does not conceive rationalisation as rendering the lifeworld totally visible --- only a segment of the lifeworld loses its taken-for-grantedness and becomes accessible to critical interpretation. Through a systematic reconstruction of the preconditions and presuppositions of communicative action and discourse, Habermas attempts to show that what constitutes our historicity is constantly changing and gains capacity to orient action.

The colonisation of the lifeworld offers a perspective that has serious political consequences. If the crisis of modernity is onesided emphasis on functionalist reason, it can only be overcome by retrieving the lifeworld as a site of communicative action. This diagnosis directly challenges the neo-conservative position. According to the neo-conservatives, the problems of the welfare state can be traced to the inflation of expectations triggered off by the hedonistic culture of the west, which in turn erodes the motivational bases of capitalism. Retreating from the principle of the welfare state, this school

of thinking calls for a reduction of legitimation burdens through a transfer of economic tasks to the market. This stance is characterised by a fundamental ambiguity --- while they affirm societal modernity, they denigrate cultural modernity. Richard Lowenthal<sup>87</sup> argues that there is no reason to think that organised capitalism will run into crises that will alter its basic nature. To him, Habermas underestimates the flexibility of the political subsystem which hitherto has creatively responded to economic and socio-cultural crises within the constitutional forms of democratic state. He thinks a collapse of western democracies is possible only as a consequence of the generalisation and intensification of the 'anomic cultural crisis' of the west. This results from a dissonance between the proclaimed values of the west and the functioning of its institutions and norms of conduct, i.e., a cultural lag. It may be noted how this analysis confuses cause and effect. A motivational crisis is simply a reflection on the systemic level of a deeper problem, the distortion of the lifeworld. The pathologies 'follow from' the erosion of communicative bases entailed by increases in systemic complexity. And, this can be explained not in terms of a culture lag but in terms of a lifeworld forced to fall behind a certain level of

(87) Richard Lowenthal, " Social Transformation and Democratic Legitimacy," Social Research 43 (summer 1976)p.246-275.



rationalisation already achieved. It is not culture that lags behind the level of rationalisation institutionalised in the modern state but that a rationalised lifeworld cannot regress below a certain level of communicative rationality without adverse consequences for our way of life. The political problem is then one of defending the lifeworld against eradication of communicative action.

## Chapter IV

### RETHINKING THE POLITICAL : PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

[The shift to communicative action and the lifeworld has been interpreted as an eclipse of the political which neither falls into the systems world nor lifeworld and is perhaps doomed to extinction.<sup>88</sup> This chapter attempts to argue that the model of communicative action encapsulates a vision of politics as discursive will-formation in a public space characterised by equality and plurality of participants. This vision is anchored in the reciprocity and a mutual understanding built into communicative action. Habermas's reconstruction of the evolution of language as a medium of mutual understanding expounds that the lifeworld can only be mediated via communicative action. This is political claim because it reformulates the critical task as decolonisation of the lifeworld. The recovery of the lifeworld is defined in terms of a rolling back of systemic hegemony and reassertion of democratic control over the systems world.

This chapter examines the links between communicative action and democratic politics. It expands the notion of a 'public sphere' as a site of democratic will-formation. The decolonisation of the lifeworld calls for a

(88) Fred Dallmayr. op,cit.,p.176

rethinking of the political beyond the political subsystem. The political is conceived as public space in which all persons engage in, by virtue of their being speaking subjects of a shared lifeworld. This kind of politics supersedes mechanisms of formal democracy. It calls into question the marginalisation of people from practical issues. It restores the political as the realm of public communication and collective opinion formation in an atmosphere free from violence or restrictions to communication. In this context, I touch upon the new social movements which exemplify a politics between system and lifeworld. I conclude with a note on the critique from feminist quarters.

The model of communicative action articulates the principles of democratic justification of political power. The notion of moral-practical discourse argues that all political questions can, in principle, be redeemed in situation free from coercion and violence. The potential for such discursive will-formation is already announced in the reciprocity and equality that underlie all communication. There is a close interconnection between politics and public speech which is central to Habermas's argument. A reclamation of the lifeworld for communicative action entails a public space that institutionalises deliberation and consensus on practical issues.

" By the public sphere, we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed... The expressions public opinion refers to

the task of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally (and formally through elections ) practises vis-a-vis the ruling structure organised in the form of a state." <sup>89</sup>

In an earlier work, Habermas had analysed the rise of the 'bourgeois public sphere' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the struggle for freedom of speech and assembly, open court hearings, the legitimacy of public opinion vis-a-vis the state eroded the secretiveness of the feudal and absolutist orders. This public space institutionalised the principle of argumentation in political life and it spread over literary salons, clubs, scientific groups, discussion circles etc. It was also complemented by a local press which generated a articulated opinion. <sup>90</sup> The public sphere was, however, restricted to male property owners and hence very class and gender-specific. The theory of communicative action demands that every speaking subject has a right to participate in the public sphere simply by virtue of his/her capacity to engage in communicative action. A public sphere can exist wherever there is action oriented to understanding on specific issues.

(89) J.Habermas quoted in John J.Rodger, "On the Degeneration of the Public Sphere" Political Studies 33 (1985) p.205.

(90) John Keane has pointed out that there were other plebian forms of public sphere which effected lasting reversals of power through carnival-like gatherings. see J.Keane.Public Life and Late Capitalism (Cambridge Univ.Press 1984).p.40

[ " Technologies of communication such as book publishing and the press, first of all and then radio and T.V.--- make utterances practically available for any context and make possible a highly differentiated network of public spheres --- local and transregional, literary, scientific and political, within parties or associations, media-dependent or cultural. Within these spheres, processes of opinion and consensus formation, which depend on diffusion and mutual interpenetration, no matter how specialised they are, get institutionalised." <sup>91</sup> Public sphere thus refers to any site of communicative action that generates public debate. It can provide an outlet for communication between experts and ordinary citizens which is crucial for radical democratic will-formation. Three conditions are essential for a public sphere to operate--- reciprocity, plurality and unfettered critical discussion. These conditions are not externally imposed upon participants but are pragmatically presupposed by anyone engaging in argumentation.]

A reclamation of issues for public debate directly challenges the principle of technocratic legitimation that governs political subsystem. This principle has reduced politics to "a sphere of technical elimination of dysfunctions and avoidance of risks that threaten the system." <sup>92</sup> Not only has

(91) J.Habermas. The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity (Polity 1987)p.359 to 360.

(92) J.Habermas. Toward a Rational Society, p.102

politics been absorbed into a subsystem closely linked to the economic subsystem but it has also congealed into an experts' paradise. There has been a progressive withdrawal of issues from the public sphere under the pretext of administrative convenience. Under the increasing neutralisation of the role of the citizen in welfare state, participation has come down to a passive endorsement of the status quo. Hence a revival of the public sphere has to be kept distinct from the political system. "I call those public spheres autonomous which are neither bred nor kept by a political system for purposes of creating legitimation. Centres of concentrated communication that arise spontaneously out of the micro-domains of everyday practice can develop into autonomous public spheres and consolidate as self-supporting higher level intersubjectivities only to the degree that the life-world potential for self-organisation and for the self-organised use of means of communication are utilised." <sup>93</sup>

The public sphere will be closely tied to the life world as at the same time thematising issues which infringe upon the latter . [The transmission of tradition, values and norms and species competences can only be mediated via communicative action. [The decolonisation of the lifeworld simply aims at restoring it as the domain of communicative rationality.] It does not, however, envisage a reversal of systemic logic at the level

(93) J.Habermas. The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity p.364.

of material reproduction. The public sphere will operate at the level of the interface between system and lifeworld.

" The systemic spell cast by the capitalist labour market over the life-histories of those able to work, by the network of responsible, regulating and supervising public authorities over the life-forms of their clients and by the now autonomous nuclear arms race over the life expectancy of peoples cannot be broken by systems learning to function better. Rather impulses from the lifeworld must be able to enter into the self-steering of functional systems. " <sup>94</sup> The politics characteristic of participatory democracy falls into this conflict zone between the system and the life world.

[ The theory of communicative action advances an idea of politics that supersedes formal democracy. It argues for the equality of participation of all speaking subjects on issues of practical concern. This is a direct challenge to the triumph of technical expertise in the realm of politics and the subsequent marginalisation of people. Under the onslaught of the sciences of management and public administration, questions of validity are translated into questions of behaviour. The normative is totally obscured and problem of the lifeworld are redefined as technical problems ensuing from increased complexity of the system. Against such an exclusion of people and politics

(94) *ibid.*, p.364

as public speech, the model of communicative action seeks to rehabilitate the autonomy of the public sphere. It articulates the capacity to reason of all societal members on the basis of a set of competences which qualify them to participate in deliberations on societal norms simply on basis of their being able to speak. This is the political intention informing the theory of communicative competence the defense of the normative core of modernity in terms of a rationalised lifeworld should not be construed as an endorsement of existing institutions of politics. ] The formal institutions of the parliament, parties and elections have all been penetrated by the rationale of the sciences of public administration. The influx of electronic media, the substitution of images for words and the intermingling of categories of advertising, publicity, politics and administration has meant a systematisation of opinion-engineering. Parliaments hardly generate debate or consensus that can have ramifications beyond the confines of electoral politics. Parties have become a part of the state apparatus and they indulge in legitimation from above, delinked as they are from popular bases. Thoroughly penetrated by strategic action, they have forfeited both the right and the capacity to initiate dialogue. The observations we could make of any election campaign tell us that decisions of principle are calculated right from the start to gain the publicity needed for continued electoral success. This has made it impossible for politicians to



clearly differentiate between deciding in order to gain public support (re-election) and deciding in order to do what is right. The latter would involve an understanding of norms and principles and a continuous rapport with his constituency.

The impact of such deformations has been an erosion of the communicative bases of the lifeworld. The repeated invasion of systemic media has had the effect of disempowering the validity claims of communicative action. Legitimation of political orders has been transformed into a problem of mass loyalty that incurs to the political system in return for an appearance of order and stability. John O'Neill<sup>95</sup> refers to a 'relative linguistic privacy' at work that undercuts legitimation as discursive justification. This is reflected in four tendencies:

(a) The rationalisation of administration and society requires that discourse be problem-specific and subject to decisionistic or calculative reasoning.

(b) The very scientificity of language and reportage of social science contribute to the administrative effort to manage behaviour and institutions according to standards of maximum efficiency.

(95) John O'Neill. "Critical Note : Language and the Legitimation Problem", *Sociology* 2 (1977) p.354.

(c) The ability, by and large, of the administered society to command allegiance in exchange for goods and services which reduces political participation to the demand for 'information' and the residual right to withdraw loyalty in elections.

(d) The combined effects of these processes upon the communicative competence of the individual is that discourse about values and norms of social and political life is marginalised and alienated as lacking in any rational decisionistic grammar.

Habermas analyses the disturbances caused in the domain of the lifeworld as pathological because they distort symbolic reproduction. In the realm of culture the splitting off of science, morality and law and art into specialised spheres of argumentation has simultaneously led to their emerging as expert cultures. These spheres of value have been deprived of their power to guide everyday life. The devaluative shifts that occurred vis-a-vis religion has meant that mass atheism and meaninglessness coexist. The revival of religious fundamentalism has been one response to this general loss of meaning. From within a communication-theoretic perspective this is construed as regressive because it falls behind the level of communicative rationality already made available by a rationalised lifeworld. The intereference of systemic mechanisms of money and power into the social world of norms and values has resulted in anomie, for the norms no more evoke a sense of community. The spread of

alternate lifestyles and rural communes has been a fall-out of this decline in a feeling of solidarity. In the realm of personality an erosion of consensus can lead to ruptures in identity formation, leading to psychopathologies.

Habermas's reconceptualisation of the problem of modern politics as colonisation of the lifeworld points to a participatory politics of decolonising the lifeworld. It posits a recovery of communicative action in whole range of sites --- family, schools, public places and cultural institutions. In each of these realms the task is to reappropriate the right to define need -interpretations collectively. This, in turn, implies a rethinking of a host of taken-for-granted lifestyles and technocratic wisdom, all of which have to be subjected to discursive scrutiny. This enterprise of reviving public discussion on practical issues can proceed only through the active engagement of both experts and layman citizens in a dialogue oriented to understanding. In the face of an increasing elimination of normative issues, the defense of a public space is a common interest that concerns all citizens, irrespective of their positions in the economic and administrative systems. The proliferation of local action groups in most of the advanced countries is one testimony to the fact that there could be a convergence of issues that can bring together the citizens and experts against uncontrolled systemic complexity. The emergence

of citizens' action groups, free schools, neighbourhood councils, law clinics, women's groups are all instances of a conscious revival of public speech and persuasion. An exchange of dialogue could take place across spatial boundaries through an intelligent use of the electronic media of communication. It is in this context, that the 'ambivalent' potential of modernity comes into picture ; phenomena such as computerisation and cable television can be used either to exacerbate distorted communication or to facilitate a more decentralised public space.

"For example, microprocessing units can be used equally well to generate power on a handful of massive orbital solar satellites or in millions of tiny roof-top solar panels. And cable television can be used equally well as an instrument of effective marketing of products and images or as a local informational device for helping producers and citizens to take greater control over their lives." <sup>96</sup> Habermas notes this ambivalence in the role of mass media in public life. They at once condense communication and at the same time remove restrictions to communicative action ; that is to say, on the one hand they channelise communication flows hierarchically and strengthen the efficacy of social controls. In this case, communication is received as information and participants are

(96) Timothy W. Luke and Stephen White. "Critical Theory, The Information Revolution and Ecological Path to Modernity" in John Forester, op.cit., p.43

deprived of taking a yes or no stance on validity claims. Simultaneously, mass media can free communication processes from " the provinciality of spatio-temporally restricted contexts and permit public spheres to emerge, through a establishing the abstract simultaneity of a virtually present network of communication contents far removed in space and time and through keeping messages available for manifold contexts." <sup>97</sup>

It is this potential for protest built into modern institutions that is important for the politics of communicative action. However, Habermas does not see this potential as subversive in content --- a revival of public space is not seen as actualising conditions of moral practical discourse in all realms of social action. The systemic organisation of material reproduction is here to stay and is even conceded as necessary for a recovery of democratic politics. Further the control over the system world is not conceived as a story of unimpeded progress. As Habermas puts it, " I can only imagine revolution as a long-term process that makes possible (a) an experimental transformation, guided at every step by its successes and failure, of central decision-making structures, (b) simultaneously if not indeed as an actual premise of this change, an acclimatisation to new democratic forms of life through a gradual enlargement of democracy, participation, discursive action." <sup>98</sup>

(97) J.Habermas. TCA II p.390.

(98) J.Habermas, in Peter Dews(ed), Autonomy and Solidarity (Verso 1986) p.68.

It may be mentioned once again that the model of communicative action does not prescribe strategies of institutionalising this protest potential inherent in modern structures. In *Theory and Practice*, Habermas had noted that the three moments of critical theory, namely the development of critical theorems, the organisation of enlightenment and the actual conduct of political struggle needed to be kept distinct from one another. The first was a matter for theoretical discourse, the second for therapeutic discourse and the third for moral practical discourse. On the first level, the aim is true statements, the second, authentic insights and the third, prudent decisions.<sup>99</sup> No organisations that aims to master all the three tasks according to the same principle can fulfill them correctly. A single party which, with an eye on the successful conduct of the political struggle, subordinates the other two moments to the compulsions of strategic action, can only lead to dictatorship at all levels. The autonomy of theory and enlightenment is crucial for the independence of political action and have to be kept free from the requirements of strategic action.<sup>100</sup> John Keane has objected that the exclusion of purposive rational action from public life overlooks two important features of a struggle for autonomous public sphere. One, the defense of a public sphere

(99) J.Habermas. *Theory and Practice* (Heinemann 1973) p.32

(100) John Keane. *op.cit.*, p.184-187.

cannot cling to the illusions that the resistance from ruling groups can be overcome through consensual speech. According to Keane, public political action is possible only with the 'strategy' of reaching morally virtuous ends through processes of deliberation and action. " Socialist public life, " Keane asserts, " will not necessarily be the cumulative result of progressive evolution, of the peaceful 'determinate negation' of late capitalist society and its institutionalised depoliticisation. The historical appearance of democratic public life cannot be represented as a largely consensual process... under certain conditions, theoretically informed instrumental and strategic action may be vindicable providing it prudently prepares the way for the realisation of democratic forms of life committed to the overcoming of heteronomy." <sup>101</sup> Two, Keane points out that certain hybrid forms of purposive rational action like political disobedience are intrinsic to public life. A political life structured through the principle of negotiated consent implies disobedience. It is this right to disobey that contributes to preserving public life against authoritarianism. In response, it may be noted that Habermas's theory does not prejudge questions of strategy in actual political struggle. As he says, "decisions for the political struggle cannot, at the outset, be justified theoretically and then be carried out

(101) *ibid.*, 185-186.

organisationally. The sole possible justification at this level is consensus, aimed at in practical discourse, among the participants, who, in the consciousness of their common interests and their knowledge of the circumstances, of predictable consequences and secondary consequences, are the only ones who can know what risks they are willing to undergo and with what expectations." <sup>102</sup> The exclusion of purposive rational action from the process of enlightenment does not underestimate the responses and resistances from the ruling groups. On the contrary, it is acutely aware of the difficulties involved in excluding these groups from practical discourse. The point here is this : within the perspective of a rationalised lifeworld, the defense of a public sphere to safeguard the lifeworld from pathologies is not a vested interest of a few groups or even intellectuals. Recast in system and lifeworld terms, the political task is to preserve a certain rationalised form of life that accounts for our "being" as speaking, communicating subjects. Regarding political disobedience, it can serve to draw our attention to instances of pseudo consensus. However, it cannot serve as a long term political strategy, for continuous disobedience toward norms can erode the consensual bases of the lifeworld. To the extent that political disobedience discloses the authoritative bases of certain basic values incorporated into institutions like the

(102) J.Habermas.Theory and Practice. p.33



constitution, it can have a liberating potential. In the context of what has been called "authoritarian legalism" according to which civil disobedience is not only a punishable offence but is also morally unacceptable, the importance of imaginative protest practices cannot be overlooked. The tendency toward authoritarian legalism has "criminalised protest in a constitutional-legal sense. This is only a step from contempt for the moral-political motivating principles of those who breach the law to the disqualification of the protester as a enemy within the state."<sup>103</sup>

[ The communicative model of action simply outlines the formal conditions essentials to generate consensus on norms. Accordingly, the prerequisites of reciprocity, equality and uncoerced argumentation circumscribe the space for political will-formation. Therefore, what specific issues will come into debate is not limited by theory. It may be reiterated that practical discourse can only adjudge competing norms with respect to validity claims but it cannot generate norms. It cannot solve problems of 'good life' because such conceptions essentially carry the stamp of particular groups. The principle of discursive redemption is perfectly compatible with a plurality of forms of life. It does not prejudge the substantive content of forms of life. One has to keep distinct the principle of

(103) J.Habermas."Right and Violence : A German Trauma",Cultural Critique 1 (fall 1985) p.129

democratic justification of political power and the actual instantiation of this principle in various societies under various conditions.] By means of a development logic Habermas attempts to argue for the normative core common to all societies which have evolved speech. This does not in anyway commit him a grand format of historical development. What should be clear is that a moral practical discourse will depend upon the universalisability of the need-interpretations brought into question. This ensures that "the consequences and side effects for the satisfaction of the interests of every individual which are expected to result from a general observance of the norm can be accepted with good reason by all."<sup>104</sup> As McCarthy puts it, "the emphasis is not on what each individual can will without contradiction to be a universal law but on what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm."<sup>105</sup> For example, traffic rules and laws against murder can be seen as resting on the generalisable interest in the safety and sanctity of persons.

The conflicts however, arise along the seams between the system and lifeworld. What has come to be called 'new social movements' thematise issues which fall into this category of boundary conflict. The anti-nuclear and peace movements,

(104) J.Habermas. REPLY, op,cit.,p.257.

(105) T.McCarthy. The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, (Polity 1984) p.326.

environmental groups, the alternative movements (alternate life styles, rural communes), the tax protest movements, school protests by parent associations, resistance to 'modernist' reforms and women's movement, bring to the fore hitherto unthematized issues and work in the gaps between the system and the lifeworld. Jean Cohen <sup>106</sup> points to the self-limiting character of these movements which manifests itself in four ways: firstly, the relevant actors do not envisage a return to an undifferentiated society free from all power. Secondly, they limit themselves regarding one another, for they struggle for plurality and autonomy without surrendering parliamentary institutions or the existing machinery of conflict resolution ; they are self-limiting and pragmatic with respect to their own values. Thirdly they accept the existence of market economy and work within a given framework. They do not perceive themselves as revolutionaries articulating global concerns. They attack the civil society rather than the state and raise issues which concern the everyday life of the citizens. Fourthly, they eschew any elaborate organisational set-up. They focus on grassroots politics and create horizontal, directly democratic units that are loosely federalised at the national/international levels.

(106) Jean Cohen. " Strategy or Identity ; New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements", Social Research 52 (winter 1985), p.663-716.

Klaus Eder has shown that these groups adopt three main strategies of collective protest action. The collective moral protest works via a logic of 'official reversals of official reality'. In such reversals of institutional action, the stress is on decentralisation as opposed to centralisation, legitimacy and not legality, the need to act expressively and not strategically. The peace movements have adopted sit-ins as a reversal of parliamentary sessions. The ecology movement adopts the strategy of bringing expert knowledge to pressurise governments. Public attention is mobilised on the same basis as representative government but alternative rules of the game arise. Another form demands new culture and retreats into communes demanding new forms of justice and happiness. Among theorists, these movements have been conceptualised in terms of collective learning processes which presuppose that social actors can resolve all questions through recourse to argumentative debate.

From the viewpoint of communicative action, three features of these movements are significant : firstly, they have a defensive character. According to Habermas, they indicate 'resistances' from the lifeworld to systemic violations of communicative action. Within resistance movements, he

(107) Klaus Eder. "New Social Movements : Moral Crusades, Political Pressure Groups or Social Movements ?" Social Research 52 (winter 1985), p.869-890.

distinguishes between movements based on the defense of traditional and social rank (based on property) and a defense that already operates on the basis of rationalised lifeworld and tries out new ways of cooperating and living together.<sup>108</sup> The former include protest from traditional middle classes against threats to neighbourhoods by large technical projects, the protest of parents against schools and the protest against taxes. The latter comprises of youth and alternative movements which focus on limits to growth from the standpoint of ecology and peace. These constitute the defense of a rationalised lifeworld. Secondly, these protests articulate post-materialist needs. Politics is not a matter "of compensations that the welfare state can provide. Rather the question is how to defend or reinstate endangered ways of life or how to put reformed ways of life into practice. In short the new conflicts are not sparked off by problems of distribution but concern the grammar of forms of life."<sup>109</sup> The issues have to do with the quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realisation, participation, human rights, maintaining the organic balance etc. They are directed against "the profit-dependent instrumentalisation of work in one's vocation, the market-dependent mobilisation of labour power,

(108) J.Habermas . TCA II p.394

(109) ibid.,p.392.

against the extension of pressures of competition and performance, all the way down to elementary school. It also takes aim at the monetarisation of services, relationships and time, at the consumerist redefinitions of private spheres of life and personal life styles." <sup>110</sup> Thirdly, these movements do not visualise a thorough reorganisation of the economy and modern administration. They only seek to preserve their socio-cultural lifeworlds. They do not operate through parties. Habermas observes that most political parties have delinked themselves from their bases and become a part of the political system. They engage in legitimation from the top. Hence it is useless to rely on party mechanisms for opinion formation. The working of the economy cannot be solved via simple recipes of workers' self-management. The question is one of bringing the media steered subsystems into democratic control and this cannot be done "without the abolition of the labour market and a radical <sup>111</sup> democratic implantation of parties in their public spheres." The specific form such a institutionalisation of democratic control over the system by the lifeworld is a matter for discourse among participants. However, such a recovery of the normative would shatter the insulation of expertise from public debate and redefine technical tasks in terms of accountability to the lifeworld.

(110) *ibid.*, p.395.

(111) J.Habermas quoted in Peter Dews.*op,cit.*,187.

The categorisation of the women's movement as a resistance from the lifeworld has come under attack from feminist theorists. Nancy Fraser<sup>112</sup> argues that the rationalisation of the lifeworld obscures the continuing repression and violence within the family. Such repression may require critical tools that are strategic and fall behind the certain ideal of universalist validity claims. She alludes to the systems of male dominance that link the lifeworld to the system such that a 'normatively secured consensus' replicates and reproduces inequality in both. Hence decolonisation of the lifeworld cannot proceed via a defense of the lifeworld but only through a democratic access to interpretations of social norms and values which rationalises both the lifeworld and system. Referring to the fact that welfare state programs directed toward alleviating the position of women define them as members of a 'defective household', as 'negatives of possessive individuals'. The client role has only resulted in a shift from private patriarchy to public patriarchy. There is an urgent need to demand equality in the public sphere also. She argues that if it is progressive for paid workers to acquire strategic means to confront their employers, then it is just as progressive that women acquire similar means to similar ends in the politics of familial and personal life. It may be mentioned that Habermas

(112) Nancy Fraser. "What is Critical about Critical Theory ? The Case of Habermas and Gender", in Seyla Benhabib (ed,) *Feminism and Critique* (Polity 1987)p.31-56.

does not classify the women's movement as defensive. Among the new social movements, this is the only offensive movement because there is no return to status quo ante. Further, he is fully aware of the gender bias of the roles which fall into lifeworld. When advancing an argument for the lifeworld as a realm of communicative action, one is upholding the principle of discursive justification of the taken-for-granted. The gender subtext can be fruitfully analysed in conjunction with the communicative model. Iris Marion Young<sup>113</sup> has expressed a guarded appreciation of the discourse model. According to her it is an improvement over what she calls the 'normative ideal of Impartial Reason' which elevates an abstract universalist reason at the cost of specificity, situatedness and personal attachment. This ideal has excluded instincts, desires and emotions as non-reason and even anti-reason. It has excluded women construed as 'housekeepers of emotions'. There is a need to redraw the boundaries of the public and the private realms. The political has always excluded women : citizenship rights were the privilege of male property owners and the parties to the social contract have always been men.<sup>114</sup> To the extent the model of communicative

(113) Iris Marion Young. "Impartiality and the Civic Public : Some Implications of Feminist Critique of Moral and Political Theory" in Seyla Benhabib , *ibid.*, p.57-76.

(114) See Carole Pateman. "The Fraternal Social Contract", in John Keane, (ed) *Civil Society and the State : New European Perspectives* (Verso 1988) p.101-129.



action means an extension of access to interpreting socio cultural meanings and norms it is an advance over other ideals of normative reason (Kant, Rawls). However, Young opines that Habermas does not totally resist the ideal of an impartial, unembodied reason because (a) he posits consensus as being arrived at only when all motives except one to reaching understanding are suspended and (b) he posits a sameness of meaning in arguing that utterances are understood in terms of acceptability. The latter only replicates the 'metaphysics of presence'<sup>115</sup> because "it presumes unity of the speaking subjects that knows himself/herself and seeks to represent his/her feelings, the unity of the subjects with one another which makes it possible for them to have the same meaning and the unity, in the sense of correspondence between an utterance and the aspects<sup>116</sup> of one or more worlds to which it refers..." According to this version, Habermas overlooks embodied speech in facial expressions and tone and written aspects like dramatic emphases and evocative metaphors. Further, regeneration of public life can proceed via ironic slogans, gay banners etc. There are a few

(115) Derrida says about the metaphysics of presence, "its matrix is the determination of Being as Presence in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all natures related to the fundamentals, to principles or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence, eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, god, man and so forth..." from R. Bernstein. "Metaphysics, Critique and Utopia", Review of Metaphysics XLIII (Dec 1988), p.265.

(116) Young, op.cit., p70

clarifications in order here. To Habermas the pragmatic presuppositions come out clearly only in the standard form of speech acts oriented to understanding. He is simply alluding to those features that are essential for the rationally binding effect of such action. Hence he excludes facial expressions and other bodily gestures which cannot be considered rationally binding in an intersubjective sense. Other modes such as jokes, irony, fictional representations are considered derivative because they intentionally suspend an orientation to understanding. The argument that a speech act derives its bonding force from the possibility of rational redemption of its validity claims does not in anyway preclude the potential for multiple meanings inherent in language use. The unity presupposed merely points to the conditions that facilitate understanding. "It is easy for the psychologists and Derrida to show that there is only non-identity over the whole space of communication. On the other hand, we have simultaneously to realise that any human communication would break down the moment you could not presuppose that we exchange identical meanings."<sup>117</sup>

The opposition to moral practical discourse on grounds that it excludes embodied speech and expressive modes of communication

(117) J.Habermas quoted in Peter Dews. op.cit.,p.202

partly takes off from the works of Michel Foucault. Foucault's chief targets are the cognitive and institutional structures of modernity. He tries to unmask the repressive nature of reason by focusing on what it banishes from the realm of the useful and the manipulable. He sensitises us to the intertwining of power and knowledge and the fact that all institutions which appear emancipatory are also constraining. The theoretical point of such analyses is to show that 'things were not as necessary as all that', to replace the unitary, necessary and invariant with the contingent, multiple and arbitrary. He insightfully reconstructs the relationship between the development of human sciences and practices of supervisory isolation both of which institutionalise the 'gaze' --- the regarding of the 'other' as an object of manipulation. In his later works, he moved over to an elucidation of power in its pervasive aspect, its omnipresence by lodging itself in the capillaries of the body politic. He calls this bio-power which is not internalisation in consciousness but is something somatic without any dependence on mediations by a subject. The attack on self reflecting, self-transparent subject shows how the self is coopted into self-policing and self-disciplining, thereby writing oneself into authoritarian scripts.

He focuses on aesthetic self-formation as the only way out as amplified in the attitude of a dandy, "who makes his body, his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence a work of art."<sup>118</sup> The self is to delink itself from socio-political structures and dominant values and engage in an articulation of oneself according to aesthetic criteria.

Foucault's image of a 'carceral archipelego' reflects the processes Habermas laments under the rubric of colonialisation and cultural impoverishment more forcefully. However, Foucault is guilty of conflating the enabling and constraining aspects of modernity. If history cannot be an epic of unabated emancipation, it cannot also be reduced to absolute repression and regress. According to Habermas,<sup>119</sup> Foucault is guilty of a performative contradiction because he uses the tools of reason to criticise reason. There is, besides, a certain normative intent that lurks behind the unquestioned objectionableness of asymmetrical relations of power and the reifying effects of power on the moral and bodily integrity of the subjects. Further, to Habermas, the 'transgression of the normal' intimated in modern art is an achievement of a

(118) M.Foucault quoted in Stephen White.op. cit.,146.

(119) J.Habermas. The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity p.266-294.

rationalised lifeworld. The disclosure of the unfamiliar and the unassimilated made possible is part of a learning process of decentration and unbounding subjectivity. This awareness of the fleeting, alien and bodily can mediate our claims to truth and rightness. The aesthetic can permeate moral practical discourse but cannot however serve as a model of discourse on practical issues. This is so because the kind of reconciliation with the 'other' is only brought to appearance in art ; it cannot replace the sense of community and understanding achieved in a real dialogue between speaking subjects. A fundamental disagreement between Foucault and Habermas is whether enlightenment backfires because of an excess of reason or a deficiency of reason. For the former, modernity is not incomplete but has liquidated itself. There can be no more grand narratives of history. The post-modernists renounce any search for origins and grand philosophies of history. They recognise and endorse a plurality of language games. For Habermas however, that First Philosophy stands discredited need not be taken to mean that philosophy renounce its cognitive claims. It can enter into a division of labour with the reconstructive sciences in full acceptance of its own fallibility. Instead of raising unquestionable teleologies, it can advance universalist claims that can be subjected to critical testing. The stress on consensus does not aim at a 'homogenisation of discourse'. It simply mentions the presuppositions that facilitate different language games to



converse and coexist. In that sense, it is the hope for those without hope in the modern.

[ The immediate political task is to revitalise a public space and revive a sense of community through the willingness to speak and listen. The essence of politics is a democratic justification of institutions and values that constitute modern life. And this capacity for discursive justification is 'always already' there, reinforced in every act of communication. The defense of the lifeworld as the realm of communicative action is loaded with consequences for present day politics. The demand for more democracy and openness is not specific to any particular context. The strategy of articulation may vary but the demand for justification on the basis of a universalisable interest is a product of a rationalised lifeworld. ]

[ In recent political philosophy, the works of Hannah Arendt amplify a demand for renewal of direct, participatory democracy. For her, politics is participation in atmosphere of equality. But the political as the realm of freedom is distinct from the 'social question', the question of material deprivation and need. <sup>120</sup> The essence of politics is deliberation

(120) Richard Bernstein points to the ambiguity in this distinction between the social and the political ; liberation from want and need are political issues and cannot be left to social technologists / experts. see R. Bernstein, Philosophical Profiles (Polity 1986), p.238-259.

and persuasion. Some modern examples include the founding of constitutions, participation in revolutionary council governments and civil disobedience. Politics is conceived as public disclosure of an agent in the speech deed. "Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain an answer to the question of every newcomer, 'who are you ?' This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both speech and deed."<sup>121</sup> The public realm is characterised by equality and plurality and debates issues which can lead to opinions. Hence it cannot involve any discussion on economic self interest or group interest. In her emphasis on direct participation, she reserves any acclaim for representative democracy. Only interests can be represented, not opinions and actions : voting, in her view, is given to a citizen as a private right and hence cannot be deemed a public act. [Arendt's idea of politics goes beyond the conventional frame of power distribution or monopoly over legitimate violence or alleviation of poverty. The proper realm of politics is a public space and political action is not "doing what one ought to do but in collaborating with others in the common task of deciding what all will do after all have directly expressed divergent opinions."<sup>122</sup> This comes close to Habermas's idea of moral practical discourse and

(121) *ibid.*, p.222.

(122) George Kateb. Hannah Arendt : Politics, Conscience, Evil (Oxford 1984) p.24.

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