# Mariola Gańko-Karwowska

University of Szczecin

# Action Into Change, Power Into Resistance

**ABSTRACT** The author's considerations have been inspired by the work of Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (*Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy edukacyjnej teorii emancypacji [Between Adaptation and Change. Elements of the Educational Emancipation Theory]*), and Jürgen Habermas (*The Theory of Communicative Action*) and deal with the mechanisms of structural change as they are performed within the lifeworld based on the logic of the world imaginings transformation (the cognitive-moral development of an individual and society). The article aims at justifying the thesis that the nature of power and the resulting resistance are part of the system of social action determining the change in the public sphere.

**KEYWORDS** SOCIAL ACTIONS, POWER, CHANGE, RESISTANCE

## Introduction

In view of this article's title and assuming *a priori* that the articulation and attempts at transforming particular concerns into one common interest (the public sphere) produce pedagogic effects, we can affirm that the public sphere is executed via the following socializing and educational functions:

a) participating in the public sphere,

b) knowledge on the public sphere,

c) preparing to partake in the public sphere.

In the language of pedagogy, these three socializing and educational functions of public sphere refer to the broadly understood studies of this sphere. Each of the functions in question is performed via the social actions pushing subjects constituting the public sphere to reproduce this particular lifeworld's structural elements as follows:

– articulating the knowledge (interests) and interpretational models of importance to subjects (culture),

– demonstrating norms regulating social relations in this sphere (society),

– showing their own communication competence enabling subjects to speak and take action (personality) (Habermas 1999: 244).

As a lifeworld, the political public sphere comprises a culturally, socially, and personally resourceful context for social actions performed both by a subject and group representatives. This context is used as a an interpretative and argumentative model of what the subject articulating its demands considers untrue in the objective world (Habermas 1999: 163), right in the social world (Habermas 1999: 166), and sincere in the subjective world. (Habermas 1999: 172–173) Such a model remains "naïvely" related, via the subject, to the conceptualization of what is articulated, demonstrated and revealed. So construed a model questions the "other" and, questioning what does not fit into the sphere of truth, rightness, sincerity and understandability, it at the same time mistrusts the structural resources of the other's lifeworld.

In this perspective social actions can themselves become problematic and be undermined as a way of tackling important, from the point of view of an individual and the society, situations within the public sphere. Nevertheless, the claims pertaining to the quality, character and type of the said actions always refer to the lifeworld. The public sphere thus becomes the space for its representatives to shape and validate the image of the objective world and the norms regulating social relationships as well as determine the subjective dimension of an individual or collective identity as it is articulated via the content significance hierarchies. Still, in this context, not only is the political public sphere an attempt at shaping the image of reality; it is also the space for more or less conscious mind-shaping as well as – more or less conscious – reproduction of the ways of coping with problematic situations. It is rare that the political public sphere becomes an area within which we ponder over own cultural, social and personal resources, our own, so far unevaluated, content significance hierarchy and actions included. Instead, such actions appear as simulated practices – as strategies oriented at charming audiences rather than at genuine transformation.

One needs to realize, however, that the proposed approach demarcates as crucial for the shaping of the objective, social, subjective worlds and human/social awareness neither the political public sphere, nor demands for transformation, not even the concepts of authority or resistance themselves. In relation to the approach in question, its most tangible aspect appears to be the social actions spurred by the components as mentioned above (all of them crucial with reference to my article's title) and related to the content significance hierarchy, the latter being non-inclusive, however, of the actions themselves as meaningful factors in shaping the components as such.

As a means of coping in various situations (Habermas 1999: 225), social actions play a critical role in the (norm) transformation-oriented interactions whose participants make an effort to achieve a consensus. In the political public sphere both actions and consensus take on special meaning, mainly because this sphere is hardly the space for socializing,

even if we agree that the latter can be an effective mechanism of manipulating the public opinion. It needs to be highlighted that the political aspect of its functioning comes down to an exchange, articulation, and arguing of views and interests resulting in concrete stipulations and their individual and social validity.

Consensus constitutes the basis of the public sphere in the same sense as its rejection throws doubt on the meaning such a sphere. Bearing in mind that we need to recognize the consensus as a constitutive of political life, then the notions of change, authority and resistance become determinants of these actions' type and character. The same actions relate to the logics of conceiving about the world and the quality of this logics is bound to the cognitive-moral, social, and emotional development of an individual or a group constituting the political public sphere.

## Change – authority – resistance in light of strategic actions
## – moral preconventionalism

Strategic actions are actions oriented towards realization, a plan enabling the attainment of a false consensus (Habermas 1983: 41). Habermas (1999) distinguishes the following strategic actions:

a) overt strategic actions, including purposefully rational efforts via which consensus is understood as a domination of either technical, or practical rationality. The former becomes justified by a subject's or a group's knowledge and interpretation of the structure of lifeworld resources. The latter, on the other hand, is substantiated by recognized social norms.

b) covert strategic actions including:
   – unconsciously misleading actions shaping consensus as a rationally mythical creation. The acceptable cultural resources of the lifeworld are fragmentary or incomplete, for they refers to myths, stereotypes, superstitions, and common knowledge.
   – consciously misleading actions, or manipulations. They are based on the assumption that a consensus can only be reached in effect of the detriment done to the manipulated person. This kind of action performs rationality as dependent on the actions preferred by the manipulated. It is their lifeworld, its acceptable, unacceptable and neutral resources that are utilized as a source of reason and manipulation.

The public sphere, educating people through the very act of (preparing to) participating in it and informing of its existence is a sphere in which change, authority and resistance are *a priori* necessitated to recognize strategic actions as the sole acceptable (norm) transformation form to come to existence in the objective world.

The subject and its lifeworld are naïvely attached to one another (Habermas 1999: 231); a bond which limits the action space of the two. This limitation manifests as an inability to perform strategic actions as cultural facts and to ponder over them. Cognitively the limitation is objectified via dogmatism and blind faith in the one and only (socially) rightful and sincere concept of a good individual and social life. Such a concept becomes a mode of e.g. an economic, political, educational, or spiritual development. Cognitive structures then remain impermeable and thus impossible to cognitively process information from other lifeworlds in such a way that it would contribute to the criticism of intellectual-emotional, normative, or personal resources, ergo, make substantial shifts in what is un/acceptable or neutral. The argumentative *otherness* realized in social actions (not only strategic) appears to a subject as the strange, the incomprehensible, often the disadvantageous and is considered threatening to the realization of an action. From the moral point of view, every failure, every unsuccessful interference in the objective, the social and the subjective world encounters

a strategically created yet equally well "tamed" resistance. The basis of such failure-inspired resistance (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1995: 185–186; 2006: 142–143) is punishment avoidance and the escape from the responsibility for failures. It is not the cognitively-moral, emotional and social limitation that are the source of failures but the "Him" category that explains the inability to create a "heaven on earth."

The categories of the objective world (state of matters), the social world (norms), and the subjective world (personal evaluations) to depict the above discussed situation are used to explain it. Still, taking into consideration the logics of the development of world imaginings, one needs to emphasize that subjects juggling strategies while involved in social actions might differentiate between these worlds, yet it is only at a linguistic level. On the level of consciousness and argumentation, the worlds in question constitute an "objectively rightful" entirety encompassing both social and subjective worlds.

As mentioned before, what connects authority, resistance and change is the *a priori* recognition of a strategic understanding of these terms as actions. Exercising authority entails the demand to recognize authority within an established content significance hierarchy and, subsequently, to rightfully apply violence for the purpose of respecting this hierarchy. The resistance cannot be free from strategizing, either, due to its disagreement to the governing content hierarchy, or its inability to *not* be an action (questioning actions themselves), or else its law or speech ethics-orientation (to be discussed later on) fails against the stipulations of a strategizing authority. Needless to say, in such a situation any content-oriented change becomes a strategic change.

Considering the above to be a public sphere practice and a way of democracy, one cannot but think of the public sphere promoting, validating and functioning in accordance with the agonistic democracy rules as proposed by Chantal Mouffe (2005a, b, c) and Ernest Laclou (2004a, b). The very basis of this concept conveys a message about the necessity of understanding the public sphere as an autonomous part of social reality. The concept in question propounds social reality as a specific, for *a priori* antagonistically organized, human lifeworld whose participants strategically usurp the right to shape others' consciousness. It is not the subject or the society (the subjective world and the social world) but an egocentric lust to realize one's own interest and to be in power to act violently that validates the strengthening in an individual and social consciousness of propagated idea and action models (the educational role of the public sphere). The resistance against the agonistically formed public sphere is only one of the possible examples of reaction. Such resistance can assume different forms which, strategically applied, turn against those who resist them.

The contemporary times provide us with examples galore of such resistance. For instance, the elections is nowadays always a time of strategic actions leading to a subject reification. The "Institutions of authority" (the elected/the electorate) are subjects struggling to employ violence towards the Otherness, ideological and of opinions. It is a more or less apparent struggle against different lifeworld resources, a struggle whose ethical and social dimensions do not go beyond the preconventional forms of manipulating human consciousness. As a form of resistance, giving up participation is not interpreted by "authority institutions" (the elected/the electorate) in terms of cultural interpretative resources of verified manipulators and their supporters – puppets. Rather, such resistance is *a priori* understood as an un/conscious agreement to "authority institution's" actions. The latter create the myth of a passive citizen (Rosanvallon 2011: 17–20) forgetting that so peopled a reality is also both a form of autoreification and an agreement of the reified "authority institutions" to take part in acts of violence.

The hate campaign against neoliberal practices is another example of cognitively, ethically and socially lacking practices. It is not the question of my support or opposition towards those practices (it is a different problem). Rather, it is about the mechanisms of embalming certain contents in the structural resources of the lifeworld of an individual/society. Besides, neoliberalism only exemplifies what happens if we unthinkingly "marry" theory and practice thus solidifying radical opinions. Judith Butler gives an example of how a modern intellectual, struggling with the unethical hegemony of neoliberal experiences, supports and preserves immorality. When she writes "not doing anything actually does not mean "doing nothing" but is an effective way of acting," she interprets behavior thus puncturing the myth of a passive citizen. Still, when she stands up for "the homeless," "the hungry," and "the unemployed" (my inverted commas), Butler on one hand employs the rhetoric of "big words" derived from natural and established laws (human right to shelter, food and employment), while also making use of the hate rhetoric (reproaching the rich for greed (?!) without doubting the understandability and rightness of her own content) and the rhetoric of demands (requiring the rich to share their resources) on the other. She never remarks though on how subjecting others' behavior to strategic criticism ("the greedy-demanding" personality) releases a conformist "greedy-demanding-begging" nature.

The above examples of the powers of strategic actions might be referred to as truly "infernal," for although they constitute reflections on the future, they do not prompt us to ponder over our own understanding/consciousness of things thus becoming mechanisms of realizing plans of action. Strategic authority intertwined with strategic resistance yields strategic change. Their power seems enormous but it is actually fragile, short-termed and counterproductive as regards development, not so much cognitive, but moral, social and emotional.

## Change – authority – resistance in light of conventional actions

Looking at the categories of authority, resistance and change via the lens of the cognitive-moral development, one needs to see these terms in the context of conventional actions. The latter are not typical strategic actions since it is this ultimate right – the law, not subject – that decides about consensus in the process of argumentation. Reached through the realization of the law, consensus is not part of a discourse on its own rightness or falsehood in relation to the lifeworld of law-oriented individuals. The rules of demarcating authority, resistance and change, their quality, forms of realization in action are regulated. This form of dealing with reality occurs when applied strategies and explanations (mediations) fail or strategic actions encounter communicational and situational resistance (Habermas 2005).

Let us put aside all possible traps that strategically legal actions set to a degree that individuals stop respecting the law using it as a lever for their actions. From the educational point of view, the public sphere whose subjects instrumentalize law is a sphere of this law's degradation where omnipotence and purism reign supreme. So perceived law serves to:
a) strategically stabilize social relations (authority),
b) create an illusion of being a rightful struggle for justice (resistance),
c) strategically change legal regulations as dictated by authority or resistance to this authority,
d) repressively subordinate resistance to authority.

Still, non-instrumental law can become a bridge between strategic and communication actions providing that both this law and the order it entails concern individual and social matters. This means that the organization and implementation of a plan of action serving individual/particular convictions as to what rightness is also takes into account social

consequences of these particular convictions, with law constituting the skeleton of a plan of action. In situations where it is impossible to accept a legal norm, for it does not respect humans as an individual/social subject, the dynamic function of law, orienting the subject towards changing the rules first and executing the plan later, will come to the fore.

Conventional actions are not realized as educational when resistance is performed preconventionally as punishment evasion. In such circumstances the conventionally operating authority cannot but conventionally stabilize social relations. Although authority, resistance or change are not objectified in the traditionally understood social actions, nevertheless, conventional actions can, too, have the developmental potential as regards the individual/society dyad. Both the awareness as to the necessity of reproducing the lifeworld's structural elements and the understanding when they fail to get reproduced (resulting in the feeling of senselessness, anomy and social pathology) are the *sine qua non* of the success of conventional actions mechanisms.

## Change – authority – resistance in light of communicational actions

Neither authority, nor resistance or change are part of conventional actions and law when realized via communicational actions. When in the public sphere, subjects will resort to the ethics of speech that assumes each individual's equality before law and respect for human dignity to be of the highest significance. Change, authority and resistance directly relate to such principles and when the governing law clashes with the latter, either the subject, or a social group's representatives act in accordance the principles in question. The illusionary character of the strategic or conventional care for individual or social welfare gives in when confronted with authentic, propositional change. If, in strategic actions, authority and resistance translate into (practiced) violence, then, in communicational actions, these categories have no such power.

Considering communication as it is realized in the public sphere, namely, via the educational aspect of participation in this sphere (through), the knowledge of it (about), and studying it (for), the change attained and the authority and resistance as manifested demonstrate (Habermas 1999):
1. Procedurally, subjective and argumentative inclusiveness, which means that those about to significantly contribute to consensus-reaching process (the real one), will not be marginalized due to e.g. age, maturity, sex, represented ethnic or other minority group, knowledge, education etc.
2. Processually, discoursivity, which means orienting communicational interactions towards the most important demands as well as the realization of communication processes as the following discourses:
   a) explicational – when a demand is made for discourse understandability,
   b) theoretical – when discourse (e.g. opinions) authenticity is questioned,
   c) practical – when discourse content (e.g. decisions) is questioned.
   The complexity of communicational interactions allows us to assume that each of them can pertain to several demands. Still, one argumentation type can "make" one demand only. The lack of respect for this rule creates further barriers as regards consensus-oriented actions.
3. Subjectively, fallibilism, which means that articulated truths and rights are propositional, at the most, in relation to other individual or social worlds. The starting point for respecting this rule is the assumption that in discourse the source of cognition and the quality of content are not as important as what a subject does with this content in cooperation-oriented communicational interactions. The idea of studying is – interactively – inscribed

into communicational actions which means that an arguing subject interferes with structural elements of his/her lifeworld as well as learns from the latter so as to change the relations between what is acceptable, unacceptable and neutral for him/her.

4. Structurally and with reference to elements of the lifeworld, the way of processing arguments, in a fashion that makes the relations of content acceptance, rejection and neutrality devoid of passion and substantial processing-oriented to a degree that content shifts between what is acceptable, unacceptable and neutral will only reflect the established law, whereas in a situation where those laws will clash with ethics, the subject will follow the latter, in particular where speech is concerned.

5. With reference to the logics of world imaginings, decentralization of mind/consciousness, in a way that makes subjects of communicational interactions identify structural elements of the lifeworld as different thinking spectra. Understanding of what belongs into the realms of culture, society, or personality creates bases for differentiating the objective world from that of social norms and values and the latter – from the world of subjective evaluations. The ability to distinguish ourselves from others is fundamental in understanding the lifeworld of the "other."

The concept of communicational actions allows to eliminate strategic and conventional violence from the areas of change, authority and resistance. The three are associated with communicational rationality. This means that their constitutive quality cannot but be tantamount to their very own discoursivity, i.e. an ability to reach crucial decisions by way substantial argumentation that takes into consideration both individual and social interests of a person. It is not that Habermas' concept has not been criticised. Its adversaries accuse the concept in question e.g. of using "too dense a stylistics," of being too infantile to be realized in bigger social groups, or of its inherent unrealism disabling the said concept to be applicable for emotions-loaded contexts.

Each of the above mentioned allegations can, naturally, be refuted. For example, the tails of the "dense stylistics" argument might be an aversion to crossing the barriers of one's own disabilities (aversion to learning). The reverse of the infantilism can be seen in terms of a conviction that we are all the same, ergo, we all can achieve the same level of cognitive, intellectual, moral, social, or emotional development. Not only is such a development dependent on socio-cultural factors, significant in discovering an individual potential of the (in)ability to master discourse rules; it also entails the personality itself as a factor decisive in making socio-cultural resources of the lifeworld influencial as regards the said rules. The inapplicability of the concept in emotionally loaded situation fails in the face of the significance both of the content of such situations itself and the process of learning. If we consider the psychological circumstances of learning, it will become obvious that negative emotions block rather than support the process in question, one which translates into a change in the lifeworld's structural elements. A result of the presence of negative emotions is e.g. the inability of substantial processing. It is this, very naïve and dogmatic, relation of an individual and resources, and the rigidity of cognitive structures visible in argumentative purity that make emotions prompt people to think and act.

One needs to emphasize, however, that it would be naïve to deem communicational actions an antidote for all world problems. According to William A. Galston, why should we not primarily inquire into an extent to which we can reconcile these two dissimilar stands? If we manage to progress morally, than it is for the better; in this way, we enlarge the collection of mutual, ergo, useful assumptions (Galston 1999: 121–122). Jacek Wasilewski – refuting the allegations as regards the inability of reach consensus in morally charged situations stresses that such a consensus can be a difficult yet not as exceptional as critics

might suggest. This is because consensus does not translate into a general agreement as to all the aspects of a given case, and neither does it mean accepting the entire line of the "other" reasoning and hence a radical change of views; rather, it is a mark of understanding of the peripheral (Wasilewski 2007: 16). In such a view, authority and resistance do not imply a necessity of accepting an imposed content significance hierarchy but are associated with learning and crossing one's own limits resulting from the natural naïve relation a person has with the lifeworld. Elsewhere, Wasilewski mentions the so-called moral disagreement economization rule according to which an unbiased way of attitude presenting supports the consensus-reaching processes: "and if a consensus is impossible, it still mediates attitudes and demarcates the common areas possible to be negotiated in the future" (Wasilewski 2007: 14).

## Conclusions

There is a saying "it is as plain as the nose on your face." Grandiloquence and moralizing tone aside, I hereby summarize this article by putting forward yet another thesis:

1) as long as social actions in the political public sphere realizing itself via education:
    a) will create unproblematic background for all communicational interactions,
    b) will not objectify themselves as criticism-prone cultural facts;
2) then the reflection on change:
    a) will be a communicationally thoughtless reflection, and
    b) the interpretation of "change" will be closer to that of "exchange" existing between the already transformed in the past intellectual-emotional states within the areas of culture, society and personality (i.e. contents expressing all kinds of scientific and commonly interpreted ideological knowledge as it is realized in the realm of world politics) thus enabling the creation of *deja-vu* in a new historic time and place (*nihil novi*);
3) whereas authority and resistance will automatically continue to reproduce violence, with the difference that the reasoning of authority and resistance will remain within the borders of the consciously:
    a) mythical,
    b) practical,
    c) instrumental.

**WORKS CITED**

Butler, J. 2014. *Tak, żądamy niemożliwego! Praktyka Teoretyczna*, www.praktykateoretyczna.pl. Accessed: March 20, 2014.

Czerepaniak-Walczak, M. 1995. *Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy emancypacyjnej teorii edukacji*. Szczecin, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.

Czerepaniak-Walczak, M. 2006. *Pedagogika emancypacyjna. Rozwój świadomości krytycznej człowieka*. Sopot, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.

Galston, W.A. 1999. *Cele liberalizmu*. Kraków, Znak.

Habermas, J. 1983. *Niektóre trudności próby związania teorii z praktyką. Wprowadzenie do nowego wydania*. In: J. Habermas. *Teoria i praktyka. Wybór pism*. Warszawa, PIW.

Habermas, J. 1999. *Teoria działania komunikacyjnego*. Vol. I, II. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Habermas, J. 2005. *Faktyczność i obowiązywanie. Teoria dyskursu wobec zagadnień prawa i demokratycznego państwa prawnego*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Habermas, J. 2007. *Strukturalne przeobrażenia sfery publicznej*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Laclau, E. 2004a *Dlaczego puste znaczące mają znaczenie dla polityki?* In: E. Laclau. Emancypacje. Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Laclau, E. 2004b. *Emancypacje.* Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Mouffe, Ch. 2005a. *Agonistyczny model demokracji*. In: Ch. Mouffe. *Paradoks demokracji.* Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Mouffe, Ch. 2005b. *Paradoks demokracji*. Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Mouffe, Ch. 2005c. *Wittgenstein, teoria polityczna i demokracja*. In: Ch. Mouffe. *Paradoks demokracji.* Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Rosanvallon, P. 2011. *Kontrdemokracja. Polityka w dobie nieufności*. Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP.

Wasilewski, J. 2007. *Czy demokracja deliberatywna naprawi współczesną demokrację?* In: *Konflikt i porozumienie. Psychologiczne podstawy demokracji deliberatywnej*. Ed. J. Reykowski. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo SWPS Academica.

## JAKIE DZIAŁANIE — TAKA ZMIANA, JAKA WŁADZA — TAKI OPÓR

**STRESZCZENIE** Przedmiotem rozważań autorki, inspirowanych pracami Marii Czerepaniak-Walczak (*Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy edukacyjnej teorii emancypacji*) oraz Jürgena Habermasa (*Teoria działania komunikacyjnego)* są mechanizmy działania zorientowane na zmianę strukturalnych komponentów świata życia codziennego, u podstaw których leży logika przekształceń wyobrażeń o świecie (rozwój poznawczo-moralny jednostki i społeczeństwa). Celem artykułu autorka uczyniła uzasadnienie tezy, zgodnie z którą charakter władzy oraz związany z nią opór uwikłane są w system działań społecznych w sferze publicznej determinujących zmianę.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**
DZIAŁANIA SPOŁECZNE, ZMIANA, WŁADZA, OPÓR