Discursive Democracy and the Ambivalent Politics of Care*

Abstract
The emblem of association and the way it currently resonates signals a drive to stimulate repair work in society. Something appears to be broken or absent, an absence that makes its presence felt through a search for discursive closure on the problem by going to work on the wider fabric of social and cultural relations. Empirically this may be a more or less inarticulate bid to restore/maintain ontological security in the face of pervasive change. This analysis draws on theory and empirical work-in-progress to consider the nature of public discourse, which may facilitate or constrain our shared ability to cope with existing and emergent exigencies and cultural differences. Habermas’ theory of communicative action (TCA) provides a framework for engaging with the discursive qualities of democratic association, presenting a model of society that is deeply engaged with itself through a process of questioning and critical reflection. Habermas’ theory of ‘colonisation’ also helps to explain why association and civic engagement have become pervasive concerns in theoretical and policy debates. The idealisations of the TCA may be unstable however, and are challenged by drawing on Lash and Heidegger to argue that communicative action is culturally situated, and to what extent social actors can subject the prevailing worldview to a process of critical questioning and rational argumentation is an empirical question, as shared meanings remain the underlying fabric of cultural community. Heidegger’s concept of Care is employed to rethink the colonisation aspect of the TCA, arguing that particular subject positions gear into the world through meaningful action that can be described as different types of Care. Work-in-progress considers the governance project of social partnership in the Irish Republic in relation to the problematic of social exclusion as a politics of Care, with exclusion emblematic of social capital deficits within EU policy discourse. Social partnership operates through communicative networks rather than regulative structures; however there is evidence of discursive constraint, dissonance, and entanglement that reflects the ambivalence of Care working in different communicative spheres, suggesting that discursive forms of governance may be constrained to the dynamics of monologue rather than dialogue.

Introduction: Social Change and the Problem of (Dis)Order
Theories of society, regardless of different normative standpoints, tend to share a central concern in the related problematic of social change and social order. The centrality of this concern pulls different standpoints together into a common question of whether change as it is evident in a given time and place is predisposing society to more or less order and/or necessitating new forms of social control, which may in turn have a bearing on particular conceptions of freedom, rights, and solidarity. Until relatively recently (and this is of course wide open to disputation) it was more or less possible to parenthesise these debates through various conceptions of a bounded political community, which presupposes some form of national society or nation state, a worldview that may be seen as increasingly challenged in the context of the globalising trend. A key and unavoidable issue now is the tendency towards multi-cultural or pluralist societies. From the position of normative political theory this presents an urgent and unavoidable issue of coexistent and sometimes-conflictual cultures and worldviews within the same space of laws,

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norms, social, civil, and political rights. From a cultural studies perspective the ethnic schema may be enlarged, to include youth cultures and countercultures, so that social and cultural existence within the same juridical and institutional space is constituted through chronic ethnic and cultural diversity. Some might correctly observe that this has always been the case, arguing that the project of the nation state has often been about suppressing cultural heterogeneity, but we will stay with the contrast here and argue that the coexistence of difference is more visible if not also more actual in the current modernity. A question that this leaves unanswered however is the extent to which such collectivities may or may not constitute an overarching community in the sense of nation, or a canopy of associations in the conventional sense of the liberal state, which brings us back to the question of change and social (dis)order. A primary issue given this general context is the nature of public discourse in the current modernity: are the things we identify with and through subject to questioning, are they a means of creative expression or a mode of defence, are they internalised as a naturalised entity resistant to argumentation and critique? Our discursive practices may facilitate or constrain our individual and shared ability to cope with change and difference in the shifting contexts of social life.

These concerns are explicitly acknowledged in contemporary political discourse and policy debates employing and deploying concepts such as social capital, associational and participatory democracy, and community models of self-help and welfare provision. Globalisation is creating conditions that produce what Michael Sandel has called ‘the anxiety of our age’, meaning a loss of control over self-government and the erosion of a sense of community by forces that transcend the agency of the national-state (Sandel: 1996: 294, 202). Robert Putnam is an influential representative in these debates in defence of the role of social capital, and the normative implications of his research are compelling on at least two points: the argument that the degree of social connectivity has a bearing on the extent to which tolerance exists within a society (2000: 358), and the related argument that exposure to a diversity of views and opinions undermines extremist consensus-formation, a classical liberal argument from Putnam’s liberal-communitarian standpoint (2000: 289, 341). Putnam’s position on social capital is an empirically strong but theoretically weak assessment of change however, and his evidence is not sufficient to support the normative thrust of his argument, which calls for the recovery and/or reconstruction of a particular form of social capital which tends to idealise periods of (US) history, notably the Progressive era an earlier period of tumultuous change (also Sandel: 1996), but more so the national solidarity that apparently emerged as a result of WWII. Regardless of Putnam’s intentions, his argument resonates in a particular way and in a particular time, amid contemporary neo-conservative agendas to re-essentialise community and identity in the tradition of bellicose nationalism and imperialistic geopolitics (see Huntington: 1998 [1993]).

It must also be noted that similar evidence to that used by Putnam has been interpreted quite differently by both Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994) and Ulrich Beck (1992, 1994, 1998), who are currently influencing the policy thrust of Third Way social democracy in the UK, Germany, and the EU more generally, and wherein the concept of social capital is also providing an influential emblem of reform in a variety of institutional contexts. Giddens for instance interprets the conditions of late modernity as an increasingly extensive relationship between the facilitative and mediating agency of expert systems and the production of generalised (social) trust, which is to highlight the role of knowledge in the maintenance of ontological security given the existence of
pervasive risks and insecurities. Giddens argues that late modern politics shifts from goals of emancipation to reflexive spheres of life politics and to goals concerned with identity and choice. Beck on the other hand interprets the conditions of ‘reflexive modernity’ as inherently ambivalent, generating a radical social risk consciousness that expands politics beyond the formal parliamentary-constitutional sphere to find expression through direct action in diverse realms of sub-politics, a dynamic that can produce progressive or regressive outcomes. For Beck, the dynamic of change is born out of conflict in the lag between increasingly diverse social institutions that have emerged through processes of economic transformation, socio-political challenge, and biographical individualisation, and the social structures that evolved through ‘primary’ or industrial modernity, and which still tend to assume, more or less, gendered roles and class stratification. That we are in the midst of quite pervasive, rapid, and possibly accelerating change seems to be agreed upon in the literature, but assessing and evaluating the nature of this change raises difficult questions. It is the intention of this discussion to resist relying on normative arguments suggesting that the nature of community and association was somehow better in the past than in the present. It is the nature of association in the present, as an outcome of complex recursive processes, which is of explicit interest. Taking Putnam again as a representative of the social capitalist position, the very fact that the issue is raised as it is raised, and in the socio-political context within which it is raised (the current [dis]order of things), suggests a reflexive-instrumentalist approach to Being-in-the-world that is, by virtue of the fact of raising the problem in this way, a part of the problem he is attempting to address: social capital is present in its absence, it is perceived as a resource that is lost or in danger of being lost from the lifeworld; yet this is a move to enframe it as an object for reification, a resource targeted for quantification in the bid to retool the social world through bringing the past back into the present. This raises serious questions regarding how social capital, whether lost or displaced, can be recovered through using an instrumental relationship to the world which may have been to a greater or lesser extent responsible for eroding it in the first place. This last statement points to a tension in the policy-discourse of associational democracy and social capital that we will leave for now but return to below in an empirical context.

Debates converging on such concepts as associational democracy, civic engagement, and social capital reflect a common concern with the means and mechanisms by which society steers and reproduces itself (Stears: 1999, Skocpol and Fiorina: 1999; Sandel: 1996; Putnam: 2000). Theoretically, this presupposes the possibility of alternative modes of political action and organisation, and the consequences that may result if one or another type is in a position of dominance. One way to conceptualise this is through the difference that separates strong centralised government from looser social governance. Another way is through a longstanding concern in the tradition of social theory, specifically critical theory, in considering the type of rationality that may come to dominate or liberate in the evolutionary processes of modernity. In this second theoretical framework the regulative mechanism hinges on the nature of public discourse and routine social interaction, and considers the question of whether or not and how society is coming to be dominated by instrumental forms of rationality. It is this theoretical tradition that is explored here, and Jurgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action (TCA, 1984, 1987) provides a strong conceptual framework for engaging with the question of associational democracy from this standpoint. The TCA is in some respects an unlikely candidate in considering the role of association in
contemporary democracy given its status as a normative theory. But as will be argued below (see also the accompanying appendix), social partnership and associational approaches to welfare provision, in the Republic of Ireland at least, presuppose communicative networks rather than regulative and procedural structures, and the TCA provides a working model of what such a discursive mode of organisation might look like, and how it might work (see also Benington and Geddes: 2001, for case studies of social partnership throughout the EU).

Habermas’ TCA is explicitly alert to the possibility of colonisation of the lifeworld by instrumental rationality and strategic action, which is to say that with increasing societal complexity comes a possibility of the technocratic imperatives of modernity overwhelming the communicative potential of human existence. In Western Europe we are apparently striving to develop and to facilitate a model of governance (i.e. social partnership) whereupon discursive networks of interaction, which are based on communicative rationality, are called forth to retool democracy in the face of known and unknown exigencies and constraints. This lends more than a degree of legitimacy to the suppositions of Habermas’ theory, raising the question of whether or not it is possible to concede that human interaction is evolving toward some post-traditional form of discursive clarity. Societal governance through deliberation and negotiation, involving a host of actors at different levels and in different spheres, appears to be in evidence, it exists; and it claims the egalitarian identity of building consensus, trust, dialogue, participation, and empowerment regarding issues of equality, social justice, and inclusion into the dominant conception of social and economic progress (currently enframed as employability and entrepreneurship). An alternative interpretation is also possible however, and this is the central concern of this discussion: that these efforts to construct communicative networks may in effect work to extensify, intensify, and further naturalise strategic-functional imperatives. The question raised is this: does the communicative aspiration of social partnership in fact (unintentionally) subordinate democratic discourse and deliberation, which may be intrinsically or even unavoidably clumsy and inefficient from a technical viewpoint, to the doctrine of technocratic efficiency? There are sophisticated techniques in evidence that are intended to monitor and benchmark performance in the bid to establish and mainstream (i.e. universalise) best practice (pace New Public Management), but are we also capable of evaluating the nature of unintended effects, which seem to inevitably act beyond the gaze and reach of our best intentions?

Habermas is explicitly engaged with the processes of de-traditionalisation that characterise late modernity: recursive processes wherein the ‘lifeworld’ is de-naturalised and de-essentialised as more and more realms of social existence move from the sacred to the profane and become questionable. This decentred (yet still arguably ethnocentric) worldview presents a situation whereby questions of social integration and cultural reproduction pose an acute problem through the existence of complex and globally interconnected social relations, where everyone can (potentially at least) claim a universal set of entitlements and recognition as of right on an individualised basis, and where the maintenance of relations of domination which rely on the naturalisation of ‘special knowledge’ (Walzer: 1983) meets with increasing resistance and dissent. Coupled with this are technologically produced but largely unknowable negative externalities from industrial modernity, which create ever-larger technical problems and generate ever more complex discursive conflicts as political and economic elites attempt to defend the growth model of socio-economic organisation in accordance with ‘national’ interests. In
short, even as more and more people stake a claim to the promise of Enlightenment modernity (or call its bluff, depending on one’s interpretation), modernity is folding back on itself through ‘boomerang’ dynamics (Beck: op cit) and feedback effects, exposing us increasingly to radical doubt (Giddens: op cit) and provoking the search for new coping techniques. Given this turbulent and dynamic existence, the TCA is significant because it proposes a consensus-generating communicative mechanism at work in the ‘lifeworld’; not something that has to be recovered or engineered, but something that exists and can be described.

Section I below provides an account of Habermas’ TCA, and it is recommended that those readers familiar with the theory skip the bulk of this by proceeding to the paragraph that begins in the middle of page 9. Section II points up some of the TCAs shortcomings, which will be discussed using the work of Scott Lash and Martin Heidegger. Section III (and appendix1) moves the discussion to a case study of associational democracy in Ireland (i.e. the Republic of Ireland: hereafter simply ‘Ireland’). The case study is specifically concerned with the problematic of social exclusion, which is emblematic of social pathologies and social capital deficits within European Union (EU) policy discourse (or ‘underclass’ discourse in the US, see Wilson: 1987). This is being managed through the governance technique of social partnership and through associational approaches to welfare provision which involves the (re)discovery of community and voluntarism. As has been suggested above already, the institutional characteristics of this process are above all communicative rather than structural in the conventional sense. The case study illustrates some of the pervasive conflicts and entanglements at work in the discourse of exclusion. Further, this discussion does not claim to draw definitive conclusions but hopes merely to raise relevant research questions for analysis and debate.

**I: The enigma of social order**

Habermas’ theory of communicative action (1984, 1987) is strongly engaged with the enigma of social order (Cook: 1994: 8), particularly in the context of the current modernity whereby culture and society tear free from strong institutions such as organised religion and traditions. Given this post-traditional ‘lifeworld’ (as the lived realm of the everyday), the TCA attempts what is essentially a phenomenological description of the mechanisms that make possible a regular and stable network of interaction in a given society (Cooke: 1994: 8). The answer proposed by Habermas lies in everyday communication whereby social actors strive continuously to accomplish consensus, with consensus meant in a double sense of accomplished meaning (the communicative dimension) and accomplished agreement (the normative dimension). The TCA assumes on the one hand a pre-given and unreflective ‘stock of knowledge’ (Schutz: 1973), and on the other proposes that such social knowledge is routinely subjected to argumentative processes of re-confirmation or revision. These everyday discursive processes of interaction are said to extend the realm of politics through networks of communication to a vast and complex public sphere.

Communication action as a capacity for the ongoing construction of consensus (in the double sense) is predicated on the idea of redeemable validity claims which are carried in speech acts (as the basic unit of action). Claims to objective truth, to normative rightness, and to subjective truthfulness (Habermas’ three-world model, see below) are unavoidably
exposed to the possibility of argumentative challenge, which in turn requires anticipation on the part of the speaker regarding the need to provide a ‘warranty’ or a guarantee to support claims to validity through the provision of credible reasons (or what Walzer calls the ‘rule of reason’ which in democratic debate relies on the force of argument alone: 1983: 304). Consensus is never a given, but involves a process continuously open to the possibility of criticism (the fallibility thesis) and subject to the agency of diverse voices in a given discursive context. The legitimacy or truth claims or normative arguments then are always subject to critique and revision, and consensus must be secured in an ongoing fashion through rational discourse and intersubjectively regulated argumentation (also Baynes: 1995, Coles: 1995, Dryzek: 1995).

The TCA proposes a broadly optimistic position on the possibility of discursively accomplished consensus. Consensus in this double sense of the term is key to discursive democracy set against the background of an increasingly rationalised lifeworld. The process of rationalisation carries the positive capacity to displace the influence of ideology or other realms of the ‘sacred’, which naturalise inequalities and domination through taken for granted background knowledge. On the positive side, rationalisation points to recursive processes whereby rational argumentation shakes out regimes of ‘truth’, subjecting the given order of things to discursive interrogation. Communicative rationality thus carries the potential to challenge all aspects of existence through post-conventional forms of argumentation, and to include all members in such dialogic processes. There is also however a negative dimension to the process of rationalisation that we will consider below.

The TCA proposes a set of ‘idealising suppositions’ or standards of argumentation implicit in communicative rationality (Cook: 1994: 29-33; the last one is specific to ‘post-conventional’ society, which is to say the normative dimensions of the theory carried to full maturity in society):

- The supposition of consistency of meaning: that participants in the communicative exchange are using the same linguistic expressions in the same way (as a counterfactual assumption this relies on the pragmatics of idealisation, that we assume this in actual dialogue, and hence it is a problem to be resolved in the course of communication).
- That no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded by participants.
- That there is no use of force other than the persuasive effect of the better argument.
- That all participants are motivated only by concern for the better argument.
- That everyone capable of speech and action is entitled to participate.
- That all are equally entitled to question any assertion, introduce new topics, express attitudes, needs, desires, etc.
- That no validity claim is in principle exempt from critical evaluation.

This is a lifeworld that operates through a system of communicative checks and balances in the classical liberal tradition of limiting state control over the autonomy of individuals. Yet there is an important difference here is that Habermas is explicitly opposed to arguments that rest on what he calls the ‘philosophy of consciousness’, which is a tradition of the monadic ego that has a lineage from Descartes, through Kant to Rawls.
For Habermas, the crucial feature of social existence is communicative, which is to say interactional. The TCA is fundamentally associational in the sense that it presupposes variable geometries of discursive interaction. At its purest level of fully unconstrained communication however, which is termed a ‘post-conventional’ society, this remains an as yet unrealised potential, something we may strive for and/or be evolving towards.

The twist to this is that a lifeworld with the capacity to support post-conventional discourse also requires the extensification and intensification of abstract system steering media such as money and political power, leading to the ‘paradox of modernity’ thesis. The paradox points to the potential for regressive forms of evolutionary social development as reflexive modes of communicative action tear free from the normative constraints of strong institutions, such as traditions or organised religion. In complex modern societies, this process of de-traditionalisation necessitates steering media that can alleviate and supplant the stress placed on linguistically accomplished processes of consensus, requiring the de-linguistified steering media of money and political power to manage the material and political reproduction of the social system.

We have then a tension that exists between: 1: The practical necessity of de-linguistified steering media operating at the level of system, and taking the form of money in the economic sphere, and power in the political sphere. This is a mode of action informed primarily by instrumental-type rationality and concerned with system integration, operating at the level of action consequences, and bypassing the consciousness of actors. 2: Communicative action, which is central to social integration as traditions are shaken out and conventions are subject to discursive forms of challenging and critique. This is structured by communicative rationality corresponding to the three worlds of a decentred and fragmented post-conventional worldview (see below), and is governed by idealising suppositions (above) and validity claims intrinsic to the structure of speech acts.

In order to avoid too much detail here, the basic components of the theory can be set down in schematic form, bearing in mind that this oversimplifies things somewhat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Structure</th>
<th>Rationality</th>
<th>Cultural Sphere</th>
<th>Worlds</th>
<th>Speech Acts (from J.L. Austin) and Validity Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Discourse</td>
<td>Instrumental Rationality</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Objective World Of Facts</td>
<td>Constatve: Claim to Propositional Truth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical Discourse</td>
<td>Value Rationality</td>
<td>Legal-Moral</td>
<td>Social World of Norms</td>
<td>Illocutionary: Claim to Normative Rightness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Criticism</td>
<td>Rationality of Choice</td>
<td>Aesthetic-Expressive</td>
<td>Subjective World of Expression</td>
<td>Expressive: Claim to Truthfulness</td>
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The three ‘worlds’ or spheres of rationality and the corresponding validity dimensions (above) underpin the essential dimensions of the lifeworld as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Components of Lifeworld</th>
<th>Corresponding Processes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Cultural Reproduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Social Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Socialisation</td>
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</tbody>
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The modern decentred worldview, schematised by Habermas through his three-world model of facts, norms, and subjective truthfulness, is said to enable the actor to take up different attitudes towards the world through the Performative Attitude. To be able to take up different attitudes is to be to a greater or lesser extent discursively mobile in relation to the caging aspects of social knowledge (Cooke: 1994: 9, also Haugaard: 1997 for a more socially fluid position on this). This carries the capacity for switching between worlds while also enabling the actor to adopt a reflective relation towards elements within any one world. The performative attitude regulates transitions between worlds while retaining consistency of meaning, offsetting the disabling effects of cognitive (or communicative) dissonance.

The significance of this dimension of the TCA is that it proposes an existing and embodied social capacity among participants engaged in communicative speech acts, and this is crucial if social integration is to be constituted discursively rather than through the functional imperatives necessary for system integration. Switching between various validity dimensions in the course of communicative interaction involves the actor in different modes of rationality, which is a capacity to discriminate between types of validity claim and appropriate warranties: e.g. the validation of an empirical truth claim (it is raining outside) requires different accounting procedures to a normative validity claim (abortion is right/wrong), or to a subjective truth claim (I have a headache). Utterances made by any actor party to a discursive situation are subject to the conditions of a warranty, meaning they must be redeemable as they are subject to confirmation, disconfirmation, or non-confirmation among participants. This is the crucial normative dimension as it proposes that interactants strive to accomplish intersubjective recognition of validity claims, such that actors are oriented toward mutual understanding. If social integration is to be accomplished directly in the lifeworld and not as the mechanistic effect of system steering media, then it must be recognised that the means of successful action in the sense of outcomes is not at the disposal of an individual but is constituted through interaction.

The downside to all this relates to the ‘colonisation thesis’ (Habermas: 1987: 232ff), which is explicitly concerned with the ways in which the lifeworld has become increasingly subject to the imperatives of functional modes of system integration, which suppress or sequester the communicative capacity of social actors. This gives rise to deformations or pathologies in various domains of the lifeworld, such as loss of meaning, anomic and psychological disorders, and thus converges with concerns among social capital theorists regarding processes of civic disengagement. The colonisation thesis reworks the dark side of both Marx’s theory of alienation and Weber’s theory of disenchantment to highlight the possible regressive effects that can result from the increased rationalisation of society. The colonisation of the lifeworld by the system is intrinsically related to the paradox of modernity thesis: the unintended effects of technological and technocratic modes of social organisation, which are broadly enabling, may in fact also and at the same time prove to be disabling.

The system may be characterised through the dominance of teleological action geared towards pre-determined ends. However, teleological action is in fact relevant to both spheres, although there is a difference in that teleological action at the lifeworld level seeks to produce influence, while teleological action at the system level is predicated on strategy. While they share a certain affinity in as much as they effectively short-circuit
the open-endedness of Habermas’ ideal type of post-conventional discourse, and they both pursue social order given the degree of societal complexity and functional differentiation in contemporary lifeworlds, they nonetheless differ radically in terms of the media employed to engineer particular outcomes. Influence at the lifeworld level is predicated on trust and communication, exerted through rational forms of persuasion and moral appeal. Strategic action on the other hand is based on the force of sanctions, both positive in the sense of inducements, and negative in the sense of deterrence, and these are concerned with efficiency brought about through the non-linguistic steering media of money and power. Communicative influence presupposes reason-giving as the basis of legitimacy in the search for ‘illocutionary’ effects or outcomes of social bonding, so that social cohesion is supported at the lifeworld level of communication and discursively produced consensus. Strategic influence on the other hand presupposes the purposive-rational manufacture of outcomes through the engineering of ‘perlocutionary’ effects, which seek predetermined ends in the interests of systemic efficiency, and may lack legitimacy in as much as this is not constituted from the ‘ground up’ and is ‘external’ to the agency of social actors.

To reiterate and sum up the main features of the TCA as they are applicable to this discussion, Habermas’ primary tool is the claim that speech acts exhibit redeemable validity claims, and among the constituent aspects of this warranty (or guarantee) wherein reasons can be supplied to substantiate validity claims, ‘constative’ and ‘illocutionary’ aspects of the structure of speech acts are key, providing the basis for propositional truth claims and claims to normative rightness (the worlds of facts and norms) that can be stretched beyond the context of the utterance to operate in all post-conventional discourses. In this way Habermas is making the claim that he can produce evidence for universal criteria and standards of facticity and normative-right that are intrinsic to speech acts at work in the lifeworld, corresponding to the way that language has evolved in accordance with the decentration of worldviews. The theory rests on the evolutionary assertion that the progressive (human) capacity of reason is not to be found in the consciousness of a privileged subject, nor in a human telos whether driven by historical laws or metaphysical design, but in the lifeworld itself, as it exists. Habermas sees the fragmentation of reason into the interrelated complex of three spheres as both enabling and disabling, pointing up the ambivalent tension between lifeworld and system. This ambivalence concerns the dialectical relationships giving rise to the conditions for post-conventional rationality and discourse on the one hand, while on the other hand it also generates the conditions for cultural impoverishment and colonisation of the lifeworld by system imperatives. In the former, everything is potentially subject to critique and all members can potentially engage in argumentation. In the latter scenario expert cultures sequester the resources for argumentation into specialist realms distantiated from the spheres of communicative action among social actors themselves, and the de-linguistified steering media of power and money exert an ever-greater influence in re-constituting society. Within the coordinating mechanism of speech acts lies the hope of a re-constituted Enlightenment for Habermas; anchoring the warranty of redeemable validity claims are the ordinary speech acts that underpin social integration, cultural reproduction, and socialisation, and facilitate the ongoing accomplishment of mutual understanding.

Habermas’ TCA provides a comprehensive model for considering a number of key dimensions regarding the significance of association to the functioning of democracy: 1:
the decentred worldview provides an interpretation of contemporary discourse and an argument as to why this may be considered progressive, and hence important. Here we can invert Michel Foucault’s maxim that the Enlightenment which brought the freedoms also created the disciplines (1991 [1977]), so that despite the encroachment of abstract functional steering media (expertise and authority encased in the hospital, the prison, the school, the factory), that increasing societal complexity also creates conditions for questioning and for challenging relations of domination. 2: Habermas shows us how this might be seen to work in the context of routine and mundane social interaction, and 3: the TCA suggests the danger of colonisation of the communicative structure of everyday life by abstract system steering media, which may be considered a substantive explanation as to why the emblem of association has become such an emotive and loaded issue, an issue that is generating retrospective comparisons between democracy as it was and was meant to be, and democratic society as it is, warts and all.

However, in considering governance projects such as Social Partnership it becomes apparent that there is a significant counterfactual at work. The colonisation of the lifeworld by the system may at best be an unintended effect of societal development and growing complexity, yet we currently have in evidence a reverse form of intentionality at work in that the ‘system’ is actively trying to halt dependency by the lifeworld on system steering media. The process of colonisation itself has become reflexive. The ‘system’ is gearing into ‘animating’, ‘enabling’, and otherwise ‘empowering’ the lifeworld capacities of political participation and community forms of welfare provision, and yet it is too early to dismiss Habermas’ warning simply because various Third Way policy communities are bent toward enabling and animating associations and community. As we will see below the issue is densely entangled in questions of power and communicative dissonance. First though it is necessary to interrogate the ideal-type of society presented in the TCA by challenging the universality of its suppositions, drawing attention to arguments made on the communitarian side of the spectrum in claiming that social actors are culturally embedded, and so questions of who, where, when, and in what context things are said matters, something that the work of Scott Lash and Martin Heidegger help to address.

II: Communities of Shared Meanings and the Ambivalence of Care

The TCA presents us with a model of society that is deeply engaged with itself through a process of questioning and critical reflection, and this is constituted discursively so that it presupposes association as of necessity. In this decentred worldview associations are a contingent bonding of individuals engaged in specific discourses, which tells us little about what it is that binds people together beyond the ability or willingness to meet through cognitive reasoning. Yet social action and communication is inevitably culturally situated, and to what extent social actors can take distance from the prevailing worldview in order to subject it to a process of questioning and rational argumentation is an empirical question. Scott Lash (1994: 146f) engages with the debates on reflexivity and individualisation by calling attention to their existent others in three specific areas: the dissolution of social structures is in fact a displacement by information and communication structures; the cognitive actor of concern to Habermas, Giddens and Beck must be set against the aesthetic associations of everyday life including the identifications made by popular and counter-cultures; and the idealised ‘I’ of reflexive individualisation must be seen against the ‘revenge of the repressed We’ giving rise to ethnic cleansing and
neo-Nazism. While these debates will not be dealt with in detail here, what is of interest is Lash’s standpoint on the question of community. Lash is concerned with the particularity of Being and existence, and his position is neither universalistic in the sense of Habermas’ communicative rationality, nor does it assume an open-ended potential for self-construction as many post-modern suppositions tend towards. Lash makes the point that in critiquing the universalistic claim to cognitive rationality from the standpoint of the particular, that is, from an aesthetic celebration of contingency, ambivalence, diversity and difference, post-structural and post-modern critiques engage in a ‘hermeneutics of [continual] suspicion’. Anything that can be said with an air of certainty creates a whiff of foundationalism, and becomes the target of radical deconstruction. This is a recursive retreat that is seen to lead nowhere, and least of all to an understanding of the ‘we’ in the sense of a culturally bounded collective. Lash interprets the particularistic worldview of the post-moderns as aesthetically individualistic, and what he proposes as a counterforce to continual dissolution is a ‘hermeneutics of retrieval’, which seeks to describe a ‘grounded set of substantive goods as the basis of any sort of communal ethics’ (ibid). This is a call to explore, in the Heideggerian sense, the ‘ontological foundations of communal Being-in-the-world’ (ibid). Lash wants to access the lifeworld through explicating the shared meanings which ‘are conditions of existing, indeed are the very existence, of the ‘we’” (ibid: his emphasis).

A key question posed by Lash is whether or not we can legitimately speak of reflexive communities, or is it that reflexive modernity is intrinsically related to processes of individualisation as he alleges Beck and Giddens propose. One such type of reflexive association seems to be relatively easy to confirm and can be identified through the coordinated actions of new social movements, often organising through diffuse networks by using information and communication technologies (Castells: 1996,1997). This type of organisation is also compatible with the idea of the reflexive individual (Giddens: op cit), such that society is a shifting and variable geometry (Castells: 1996) of relatively atomised and biographically differentiated actors (Beck: op cit), who come together through decentred and contingent forms of association in pursuit of particular goals. However, the politics of multi-cultural or pluralist societies, the call for rights and recognition by indigenous or denizen minorities (Taylor: 1994), the politics of alterity and taste among subcultures and counter-cultures, and a myriad of community development organisations and agencies working among the ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘excluded’, all suggest that to idealise one particular type of association as the relevant mode of coordinated action in conditions of reflexive modernity is both inadequate and counterintuitive. It also suggests that rational and autonomous agents who come together within networks of concerted teleological action do not also and at the same time exist within other shared systems of meaning that pertain to a more common-sense, unreflective, and localised collective in the conventional sense of cultural community.

The approach that Lash is proposing requires not continual critical abstraction from the lifeworld, but rather involves going back ‘in’ to language in the ontological sense of ‘to on’. This is not a project of explanation and explication in the pose of emancipatory critical theory, but is a project of description as to the very possibility of cultural community in the current modernity (ibid: 147). The cultural ‘we’ in this sense is a concern with collectivities of shared background practices, habits and routines, or the common ‘stock of knowledge’ in Schutz’s (1973) terminology, which facilitate the
ongoing accomplishment of shared existence. Social existence is neither a wholly given set of conventions without which the subject would be asocial, nor is it a purely self-constructed succession of moments in the ever-unfolding present. It is neither because it comprises elements of both in the sense of discursive structuration, wherein society is communicatively (re-) constituted through both the given-ness of the world and the ability to innovate and transform the world that is given (Haugaard: 1992, 1997, Hajer: 1995).

Communities as broad canopies of shared identity, or as more local and particularistic sub-cultures are instantiated by their members as localised ways of life, producing and reproducing shared system of meaning that are given but not fixed in the sense of determinacy. The lifeworld proposed by Lash makes it possible to consider that one is both a member in the sense of belonging, yet one is not necessarily a ‘cultural dope’ (Garfinkle: 1967) caged by the social knowledge or cultural given-ness of that lifeworld. Rather culture is a broad and undefined toolbox of meaningful resources for critical thought and caring action, which goes beyond the rather narrowly circumscribed cognitive resources proposed by Habermas (see Cooke: 1994). Particular lifeworlds, or situated cultures, make possible and/or necessitate a double dimension of being and becoming: on the one hand through which one gears into projects, and on the other hand from which one may work to gain degrees of distance through employing lifeworld-resources through innovation and creative action. Consistent with Habermas’ TCA, reflexivity is not the work of an atomised transcendental ego but rather presupposes membership, yet this is not constrained to the theoretical coherency of the three-world model which rests primarily on cognitive rationality. The subject in this case is both situated and autonomous, not in all cases or all at once, but in a segmented sense of particular contexts, moments, problems, opportunities and constraints, which requires negotiation within the intersubjective environment and involves varying degrees of freedom. It is both the primordiality of that which is given to the subject in her coming into Being-in-the-world, as well as her ability to work upon it and innovate through projects, which together are key and must be considered in theoretical and methodological debates on community, association, social integration and cultural reproduction.

Drawing on Heidegger’s ‘workshop’ metaphor from Being and Time ((1967 [1927]), Lash wants to underscore a point with respect to the possibility of reflexive communities as against reflexive individualisation, and this is concerned with focusing on the signified rather than the post-modern idea of free play among signifiers. This highlights the importance of shared systems of meaning as the very possibility of social existence. It is only when the taken for granted quality of social meanings break down, when for instance the to-hand-ness of ‘gear’ or tools is not present (for instance the hammer cannot be found to refit the nail in order to hang the picture that has fallen) that the meaning of absent gear (the hammer) and its meaning within a wider interconnected sphere of meanings is brought to presence. In Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984) this breakdown in the given-ness of the world may be a moment of extreme anxiety that may generate ontological insecurity, and subsequently cause certain taken-for-granted aspects of the world to rise to a discursive level of consciousness, or more simply, to critical

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* See Haugard: 1997 on the concept of ‘multiple interpretative horizons; Billig et al: 1988 on dissonant themes embedded in language as the basis of argumentative social thought and action.
It is when the given-ness of the world is problematised by events to hand that we find ourselves confronted by subject-object modes of thought, and it is then that we are in need of the ‘theoretical attitude’ (Schutz: 1973) in trying to resolve dissonance in the world, and it is when this is inadequate that we find ourselves in need of public arenas of discourse and negotiation in order to repair the world. It is at this point that we may need to call forth expert systems into new areas of the world in order to resolve the disabling effects of ontological insecurity: “but when the expert-systems and discourses chronically intervene, when they intervene ‘preventatively’ and pervasively, then the practices, shared meanings and community become increasingly marginalised, made progressively less possible” (Lash: 1994: 151, emphasis in original). It is this question of the why which is of central importance in the search for an associative elixir in order to stimulate repair work in society. Something appears to be broken or absent, an absence that makes its presence felt through a search for discursive closure on the problem by going to work on the wider fabric of social and cultural relations. In an empirical sense (below) this may be a more or less inarticulate bid to restore and/or maintain ontological security in the face of pervasive change. It is this context of possible rupture or displacement in the texture of shared meanings that produces the discursive construction of emblems that help to control the context and define the situation. Association and community point to one such emblem; social exclusion points to another, and they come together in the narrative of Social Partnership (i.e. social governance). The degree of discursive entanglement and relative inarticulacy is evident in the associational approach to welfare provision in Ireland as will be illustrated below. This tends to simultaneously disconfirm and validate areas of Habermas’ theory, pointing up the ways in which discursive blockages result as different languages go to work on the same problematic, reflecting different subject positions. One way to conceptualise this is to employ Heidegger’s ambivalent concept of ‘Care’ (1967 [1927]), and it is the very ambivalence of Care that gives it its theoretical value here.

Care as the Being of ‘Dasein’ (or more simply ‘persons’ as beings conscious of their existence) incorporates both ‘concern’ and ‘solicitude’. In Dasein’s existence Care can be expressed in different ways depending on how Dasein gears into its ‘thrown-ness’ and (re-)constitutes its Being through ‘thrown-projection’ (Heidegger: 1967 [1927]). Thrown-ness here refers essentially to our socialised self, the self that is constituted through the given-ness of the world in which we come into Being, and through which we develop as meaningful selves. Thrown-projection on the other hand describes the ways in which we go to work in the world by using our thrown-ness, questioning, refining, and challenging this given self in the pursuit and realisation of individual and shared projects concerned with our ‘ownmost being’. Care reflects horizons of possibility regarding Dasein’s intersubjective existence through concern with, for, or against significant Others (1967: 157ff, 163f). From the point of view of debates on community and association, the relevance of this is that the horizon of possibilities for Dasein’s Being-in-the-world faces the continual danger of being dissolved into ‘we-ness’ through the ‘real dictatorship of the They’, which can shrivel the horizon of possibilities through, among other things, the ‘din of idle talk’ (ibid). Heidegger argues that ‘everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude- that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates’ (ibid: 159). This is a succinct description of the ways in which membership can work to exclude or include, facilitate or annihilate. Being-in-the-world entails ambivalent modes of concern and solicitude that can squeeze the existential or even the biological life out of those subject to particular
modes of Care. Care can be understood as a form of societal love that may exert a crush of conformity on the horizon of possibilities of those it incorporates and regulates, or on the other hand it can facilitate and enable our projects (see Laing and Esterson: 1964). Using the concept of Care in this way we can identify different types of action without addressing the thorny issue of intentionality, as both action geared towards instrumental outcomes through strategic planning, and that geared towards consensus and understanding through communicative rationality, can be interpreted as different types of meaningful and meaning-giving Care. The claim being made here is that associations and community are discursive constructions which on one level are situated and more or less entangled in the meaning-givenness of the world, on another are reproduced and transformed by participants, and on another are influenced by more ‘distanced’ forces of change. Whether we analyse the constitution of society from the ground up (lifeworld) or the top down (system) we effectively point to different types of Care among situated actors facing specific problems, constraints, opportunities, and gearing into specific and often divergent goals and aspirations.

For an Enlightenment thinker like Habermas, communicatively constituted agreement and understanding suggests a facilitative form of Care that must be preserved from the unintended and impoverishing effects of systemic encroachment. Critics of Enlightenment rationality on the other hand accuse Care of the civilising sort of effecting a surreptitious mode of domination. Normative post-modern arguments suggest that Care must be a bond of recognition engendered through the preservation and celebration of difference and alterity, an ethic of possibilities between self and other, here and there, that relates through contingency and play while seeking to expose the illusionary blinkers that mask the workings of modern power. Arguing for the potential of a post-modern ethics, never a given but something that can always and only be accomplished, Zygmunt Bauman reminds us that Care is unavoidably ambivalent, by its very nature a subjective or ethnocentric project that presupposes the ability to act caringly upon others. Even as Care strives to facilitate the being and becoming of Other, it subordinates Otherness to one’s own projected definition of Care, an ambivalence that seems to require unconstrained negotiated reciprocity to offset a linearity between a Carer and a Cared-for. Historically modern attempts to resolve this ambivalence have tended to follow the objectives of Care to sacrificial conclusions, to act on one side of a dualism which invites either self-sacrifice to an external idea or to altruistic commitments, or the sacrifice of others to one’s own projects; or else Care drifts into the post-modern realms of aesthetic individualism wherein ambivalence itself is renounced along with moral obligation to other’s, who become merely contingent players in one’s own identity-projects (Bauman: 1993: 82-109). There is an unavoidable tension between the facilitating and the annihilating effects of Care, and a key dimension lies in asking who does the caring and who is cared for, and in what way is Care enacted. The point of contact may also be a point of dissonance or conflict between different perceptions, experiences, intentions and expectations. Here, at this point of tension, and this is the point to be taken from Lash, Habermas' supposition (above) regarding ‘constancy of meaning’ is intrinsically unstable. If the same world means different things across different subject positions, if meaningful and meaning-giving Care is constituted through particular subject positions and meets through dissonance rather than through resonance, then what are the implications? If Care is the language and mode of action that binds association in both the intra- and inter-dimensions, then Care must be interpreted or translated across differences, and yet describing and defining the rules of the game may be discursively constrained. It is to
this question that we now turn in order to make some tentative and provisional empirical observations.

The point to be emphasised here is that there is no way out of actual contexts and the idexicality of utterances and actions, despite the relevance of flagging an increased incidence of cognitive reflexivity in the current modernity. There is a need to describe the work of those groups who are building cultural community in their everyday lives, and in their banal practices and forms of communication. The issue of indexicality (Garfinkle: 1967) prioritises context: what is said, how it is said, and by whom it is said, all remain important empirical questions, and language is always more than verbal. This is the point at which the kind of associations currently at work and currently in the process of being constructed in the Irish Republic can be instructive. Many groups are coming into being through the associational model of ‘empowerment’ and ‘social partnership’, groups that are categorised as the ‘excluded’ and undergoing ‘animation’ by a myriad of agencies and funding mechanisms. The relationships among different actors or ‘stakeholders’ in the partnership approach to governance are extremely fluid as new techniques, instruments, and institutions undergo continual reconstruction and adjustment, and the model presupposes the existence of effective communicative networks even as it strives to construct such networks in order to exhibit and maintain the status of legitimacy (for a brief outline or ‘snapshot’ of the way things currently stand in Ireland see appendix1).

New Public Management doctrines propose that context-transcendent policies and instruments can be generalised through policy transfer techniques, thereby assuming the possibility of a universalising policy regime. Yet local actors work through interpretations and translations that embed governance in the particularities of place, so that the politics of Care must be considered from the standpoint of context-specific objectives and perceptions. The universalistic and the particularistic dimensions of policy discourse illustrate tensions between rhetoric which declares the existence and further development of creative dialogue on the one hand, and the actuality of discursive regions of constrained monologue on the other hand. Even though system-level actors are currently attempting to facilitate associational democracy, this may nonetheless produce outcomes conditioned by the primacy of instrumentalist forms of conflict containment and context control (Lyotard: 1984), in which case we are back to Habermas’ colonisation thesis (which we are considering as a particular mode of Care). If this is in evidence, then we are faced with a profound difficulty that is heavily glossed by many commentators within the communitarian/social capital camps: if social capital is indeed in decline or is being lost, and this is not merely an unreflective developmental or evolutionary outcome but is advancing despite concerted efforts to reverse the process, then how do we (re-)construct the communicative basis of social integration and solidarity through projects of social engineering, how do we re-presence something that is apparently now only present in its absence? To address this problem it is necessary to go ‘in’ to lifeworld discourse and to try and describe some of the entanglements that resist Habermas’ suppositions of an idealised rationality, that is, to interrogate local and situated discourses wherein rhetoric and dissonance can be observed as agents of communicative constraint.
III: Social Exclusion and the Politics of Care in the Irish Development Space

“In Ireland a large number of separate groups and specialist agencies deal with such matters as industrial development, local development, physical planning, education, health, social services, agriculture, environment, tourism, fisheries and other sectors. These all report more or less directly “vertically” to their parent Departments. Ensuring “horizontally” integrated service delivery across these bodies at local level is therefore not easy. Neither is co-ordination with other interests – business, local development groups, and local communities.”


Governance through social partnership in Ireland, in as far as it is geared towards managing social exclusion, exhibits complex conduits and networks of communication that link system steering media to the lifeworld through the idea of ‘animating’ or ‘enabling’ association and community. It is not intended here to supply an historical account of how this has evolved, but rather to focus on the discursive links between partnership and social exclusion as they currently relate among different actors (see Appendix 1 for a sketch of social partnership as communicative networks; this also sketches a degree of institutional detail from the point of view of community/association). In order to avoid excessive detail here, we can proceed from the argument that the complex institutional architecture supporting the discourse of partnership and exclusion in Ireland is an outcome, or an historical accretion (Silver: 1995, 1996). There are a myriad of policies, offices and agencies at work, devolving and negotiating strategies, goals, resources and responsibilities, and involving a diverse range of actors in a process that has been, in may respects, ad hoc and has been ordered and made sense of very much after the fact. Untangling the type of Care that moves between these communicative nodes is an empirical matter that goes beyond the limits of this discussion, yet examples from research currently in progress can serve to illustrate pervasive discursive entanglements and dissonance. There are discursive points or switches wherein Care directed towards instrumentalised ends meets with Care oriented to qualitative issues of understanding, and they impact on each other in contingent ways (see Clegg: 1989). For example, efficiency-oriented concerns that emerge through EU directives and funding sources, or likewise through state policy, may be interpreted and translated locally as a form of concern and solicitude geared towards understanding and agreement that enacts Care through moral and ethical considerations, or emotive and affectual concerns such as altruism and love. Alternatively, aspirations that emerge from local arenas of negotiation may be instrumentalised at any number of points, including the point of origin, and may therein begin through strategically formulated communicative action that expresses Care of a purposive means-ends kind, concerned with objective and quantifiable teleological goals such as the acquisition of material or financial resources. Different types of Care flow through different forms of intention, they shape and are shaped by various modes of influence, and they are resisted through context-specific interactions, such that the overall dynamic defies neat schematic presentation.

To address these issues in any comprehensive sense would of course require a detailed and dedicated analysis. What is proposed instead is to sketch out three levels or spheres of discourse that are engaged in the problematic of exclusion:
1: **Policy discourse**: based on official documents and policy recommendations
2: **Organisational discourse**: focusing on community and voluntary (C&V) sector organisations involved in associational democracy
3: **Lifeworld Discourse**: an ethnographic example from a local self-help group

**III:1: Policy Discourse**

The ambivalence of Care is explicit in the relationship between policy objectives and local institutions promoting associational models of welfare. One constraining aspect of this results from a lack of effective local democracy, with executive positions made by centralised appointment, and decisions of any real weight made in a highly concentrated and centralised fashion. Local democracy in Ireland in relation to the ‘associative turn’ extends primarily to two strands:

1: One strand involves the construction of local resource centres and area-based partnership companies (ABPs) to service and assist both socio-geographic areas designated as ‘disadvantaged’, and individuals and groups categorised in general terms as at risk or ‘marginalised’. The objective is to promote active welfare policies and to generate R&D in the ‘social economy’, and this incorporates the rediscovery of community and voluntary organisations as local resources to be ‘animated’ or ‘enabled’ by both statutory and Third Sector agencies in pursuit of socio-economic innovation and enterprise, self-help, community policing, educational and training programmes, etc.

2: The other strand assumes a broader definition of association beyond a concern with exclusion through the construction of a new C&V sector institution, called the Community Forum. This operates within a recently integrated ‘Local Government and Development System’ (see appendix 1), signalling a particular model of social governance. This aims to bring together any and all forms of association in the local administrative area, coordinating this as a comprehensive resource to script local economic, social, and cultural development strategies (listed in official texts in that order). This reflects the extent to which integrated development plans have become a generalised blueprint for concerted action in the local and national development spaces, governing all three spheres of economy, society, and culture through the dominant goal of sustaining economic growth. This is also a model that could be construed as a form of tyranny in Walzer’s conception of complex equality, which presupposes maximum differentiation as against the total synthesis of spheres (Walzer: 1983: 316).

Taken together, these two strands reflect various attempts to build local ‘capacity’ in the bid to foster societal R&D in the search for efficient solutions to socio-economic constraints. A study of local partnerships by the OECD in 1996 termed the approach ‘democratic experimentalism’ (Sabel: 1996), and was in many respects a paradigm statement illustrating the degree of interest among actors in both national and supranational spheres of governance in identifying optimal solutions that could be quantified, mainstreamed, and transferred through policy transfer techniques. This signals concerns with the efficiency potential of associational models of social organisation, and reflects broad consensus regarding the existence of fiscal constraints and the jeopardy this presents to the distributive policies of welfare regimes. In the context of institutional reform in the Irish development space, which has been heavily financed and influenced through transfers and policy prescriptions from the EU, the
associational approach to democracy is framed through a market vision of what association and political participation should be about.

The approach is driven by an agenda of reconstructing the Keynesian welfare state model, using a mix of neo-liberal market-driven and Third Way social democratic policy instruments. Documents produced to build legitimacy around these programmes exhibit acute tensions. A recent government white paper on rural development (Ireland: 1999), and a later one on supporting the voluntary sector (2000) make such tensions clear. Both are clearly attempts to engineer or animate the C&V sector through the cost-reducing aspirations of an enabling state, yet this is a motive that is obscured and displaced through appeal to the natural and organic basis of community. In the forward to ‘Supporting the Voluntary Sector’ (Ireland: 2000), the current Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern states that ‘voluntary activity forms the very core of all vibrant and inclusive societies’ and goes on to remind us that ‘the great strength of voluntary activity is that it emerges organically from communities’. The statement exists in a text that works from a clearly instrumentalist and strategic position, yet it appeals to the idea of voluntary and community activity as an organic resource that occurs naturally. There is an explicit tension between the way that social collectives are identified, and what it is that is in fact required of them, that is, the undeclared distance between representation and motive. The 1999 white paper ‘Ensuring the Future: A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland’ describes rural communities as ‘closely associated with Irish traditions, heritage and culture which have been critical in shaping the national culture…The national culture provides a sense of place for rural communities, a link with the past, but it also has through its traditions and values, a crucial role in defining modern society’ (Ireland: 1999: 53). These cultural and historical resources were until relatively recently the stuff of political nationalism, and primordial Irishness was to be found in rural space; the further West one went the more one discovered the essence of authentic Irishness (Gibbons: 1996). This is now a capital resource that is re-appropriated to illustrate a renewed vision of national belonging, tied less to historical destiny than to participation in the economy. Culture and history, which are to be marketed to tourists, are the bridge to the future defined as a new ‘independent’ sense of community. Rural space is re-presented through a policy prescription of exploiting the spectacular industry of global tourism, and the only way into the future wherein ‘we want everyone to have a chance to contribute to the wealth of the nation and to share the benefits of economic growth’, is to reify and market the past (Ireland: 1999/2000). The tension is heightened when it comes to the consideration of Gaeltacht Irish-speaking communities, which are said to face ‘an ongoing threat to their language and culture…from mass media and population movement’. The place for these communities in the process of globalisation is a form of mobility that requires others to come to them, to de-couple from the welfare state through self-dependency made possible by selling historical place. Their future depends on the very stuff that is said to threaten them, mass-mediated tourist culture.

A related document by the European Social Fund Evaluation Unit (1999) on the Local Urban and Rural Development Operational Programme, which the structural funds have sponsored and which has been a key contributor to partnership-governance in Ireland, states that ‘we were unable to form a tangible picture of what a Partnership [company] is’ (ESF: 1999: 183). The authors cannot say what the ABPs are, nor what they are supposed to be, but they can evaluate what they are supposed to achieve, and this is explicitly concerned with identifying performance and value for money with the view of
‘mainstreaming best practice’, that is, within the framework of policy transfer mechanisms and the techniques of New Public Management (NPM). Somewhat in contradiction to Ahern’s image of organic, and hence unavoidably particularistic, communities which are merely in need of financially cheap encouragement, the authors want the concrete implementation of NPM and accounting practices that can clearly show ‘value-added’ benefits from social investment, and this is to be documented in such a way that clearly indicates cause-effect. The authors go on to argue that:

“There is an argument that a programmatic approach is not possible because of the variation in approach across the local development agencies which is dictated, in turn, by the bottom-up approach. We do not accept that argument. The implementation of a bottom-up approach is a managed process through which needs are identified. We do not accept that there is an infinite number of effective or potentially effective responses to those needs. In any managed process it should be possible to assist towards identifying optimal solutions. This presupposes that there is a generally accepted understanding of and knowledge about such solutions and this is exactly what is lacking’ (ibid: 189, emphasis in the original).

Needs and solutions are discursively enframed as finite and it is argued that they can be quantified and optimised in accordance with the drive to construct a fixed menu of policy and client options, and these are to be predicated on their cost effectiveness and transportability. While there is rhetorical appeal to the organic given-ness of communities, what is sought are universalistic and context transcendent instruments of efficiency. From the point of view of policy debates, this is a type of Care which suggests that the efficiency requirements of Habermas’ system are in evidence, and strategic action works to annihilate the horizon of possibilities that may or may not emerge from experiments in social partnership.

III:2: Organisational Discourse

A recent conference in Galway city in the West of Ireland was titled ‘Include Us In’*, and was convened by representatives of the ‘socially excluded’ (and open to the ‘excluded’ themselves). This was organised by the Galway City Partnership (an ABP as part of a programme originally funded by the EU) and the Galway Travellers Support Group (representing an indigenous nomadic minority not unlike the gypsies or Roma, and who are funded through a National Development Programme under the auspices of Social Welfare). The conference was convened with the express intention of formulating a strategy to challenge what is perceived as at best inertia in the progress of social partnership, and at worst as a form of institutional constraint or even political co-optation (Crowley: 1998). This is a perspective from the point of view of those groups who are least well positioned to benefit from the ‘Celtic Tiger’ version of market governance. The call to ‘Include Us In’ pointed to growing frustration regarding the ineffectiveness of social partnership programmes to transform rhetoric into concrete outcomes and lived experience. The conference was contextualised by the move to ‘claim the agenda’ and the consideration of moving to oppositional tactics from without the theatre of consensus, pointing up the perceived imbalances of resources and influence in the partnership model.

* The ‘Include Us In’ conference on social exclusion was held at the Victoria Hotel, 28th September 2000, aimed at ‘exploring a collective voice to combat social exclusion in Galway’.
The point of interest here is the fact that the conference unintentionally raised issues of communicative constraint and identified indirect causes of social exclusion. More specifically the debate was concerned with the use of ‘jargon’, which was in fact an accusation directed against the technical language of NPM. This emerged directly from participants at the conference challenging the way in which the language of NPM had infiltrated the speech acts of community representatives, some of whom participate in national-level partnership negotiations. On the one hand this marked explicit resistance to the type of language used to present social exclusion as a particular set of issues, but on the other hand and more importantly it exposed the way that this technical terminology may work to alienate the very persons who are being talked about, and who are supposed to be ‘empowered’ to participate in the political process of governance through partnership. A graphic illustration of this grievance was presented to the forum by a young girl following facilitated workshops; she displayed a large drawing of a ‘Welcoming Home’ with a ‘jargon buster’ at the entrance. The consistent reference to this issue indicated a widespread frustration among those unable to participate fully in the associational forum due to the constraints imposed by an inappropriate mode of language. A consensus of sorts emerged among participants alleging that C&V sector representatives were themselves guilty of excluding people through the use of this type of technical language. The grievance was countered through the argument that the obscurity of the language was a cost that had to be balanced against the need to appropriate and use it in official theatres of negotiation, which is to argue the benefits against the costs of employing the language of power on behalf of the excluded. A similar critique was made from participants with regard to the institutional structures governing community development and social exclusion. They are seen to confuse, to exclude, and hence to block participation except by those with the necessary expertise.

What was particularly instructive about the conference was that there was no visible or corporeal ‘system’ at the meeting, no embodied representatives from statutory agencies, and no disembodied presence in the form of bureaucratic or funding constraints. The conference was a fairly autonomous episode, yet Habermas’ ‘system’ was present and active through a type of Care embodied in the community activists speaking to and on behalf of the excluded. Importantly, this did not bypass the consciousness of all actors in going to work on action consequences as Habermas assumes; instead it exerted an abrasive force on the consciousness of those present who had not (yet) internalised the language as an unreflective mode of communicative action. The discursive existence, presence, and agency of the jargonistic language of Performance Management caused static, dissonance, and ultimately inertia in the potential social capital that was present at the meeting, and which was attempting to gear into the problem of exclusion. The possibilities of what could be said and what was actually said were constrained not only through the incomprehensibility of jargon concerned with instrumental efficiency, but also by the inertia this caused as a prior problem to be dealt with, consuming both time and energy on the part of participants. The language was being used, ostensibly, against the objectives of the ‘system’ (seen as oriented to economic priorities and threatening the political co-optation of the C&V sector), yet the reflexive qualities of the language rebounded back to constrain the agency of the conference with the stated objective of demanding social inclusion into the worldview conditioned by this very language*

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* This is not an isolated incident but is presented as an example. See Appendix1, section 3 for further elaboration.
III:3: Lifeworld Discourse:

The following notes relate to work that is currently in progress in an area of Galway city officially designated as ‘disadvantaged’. The study is tracking the work of a Men’s Group that was formed in 1997 and operates under the auspice of a local Community Development Resource Centre, which is in turn funded as an institution for local partnership. Activities undertaken within the Group relate largely to educational, creative and communicative media, which is to say that the project is not geared toward economic enterprise but toward self-development and self-help through the benefits of association. It is not intended here to provide an account of the Group from the point of view of in-group cohesion, or the kind of benefits that accrue to individuals and to the Group as a whole as a result of their collective endeavours. Rather this will concern itself with the broader process of governance and the way that perceptions exert a kind of agency in defining the situation from particular subject positions. It should be noted that the comments below are paraphrased from written field-notes, as material has not yet been recorded on audiotape.

The Group occasionally engages in informal discussion, which between November and December 2001 ranged across topics such as: local efforts at a waste-management scheme and the move towards recycling by the local authorities; the social effects of technological and cultural change; local crime and drug issues; and local zoning and planning decisions. To go into any or all of these debates in any detail would require more space than is available here, so that it is merely intended to sketch out some consistent aspects of the debates that tend to produce a very localised sort of discursive closure over contentious issues. It is also worth mentioning that while the Group is ostensibly organised to promote social inclusion in an area of disadvantage, most (but not all) of these men, with a core membership of about ten, are involved in a variety of organisations and associations such as conservation, community organisation, first aid, and youth sports, among others.

The communicative dynamic within the group rests principally on the steering capacity of three members: the first who we will call Matt is a strong authoritative and charismatic personality, very opinionated, informed, and intelligent; the second (in order of informally recognised rank) we will call Albert, who is the oldest member and is highly respected both for his practical skills and his opinion; the third we will call Jack who is a wealth of local knowledge and has a more official position within the Group due to the fact that he is employed by the Resource Centre. The axes of debate, whether in terms of agreement, disagreement, or non-engagement, works through this triangular nexus of key actors, and conclusions rest ultimately on the force of argument made by Matt. In the course of these discussions, Habermas’ three-world structure of communicative action is in evidence: claims of facticity, of normative right, and of subjective truthfulness are ubiquitous. Yet the warranties that accompany utterances resemble and reflect a world in tension between conventional/traditional and reflexive/post-conventional worldviews. If reasons are required they are likely to be provided through appeal to natural law, religion and magic, traditions and conventions, experience and nostalgia, reflecting a different set of idealisations to those listed above with respect to the TCA. They are also enacted through a type of persuasion that rests on personal charisma and, if necessary aggressive defence of standpoints, so that reasons and warranties do not always or necessarily rest
on persuasiveness geared toward mutual understanding. This is an emotive form of Care about ‘us’ and with ‘here’, expressed through a defensive stance against forces that are experienced as bigger than both. In these debates ‘Brussels’ is typically the centre of ‘evil’, the cause of regressive change and the agent of oppression denuding the authenticity of both national culture and local place; and if the examples above (i.e. the more existentially distant spheres of discourse) are indicative of current trends, then this is indeed the case to a greater or lesser extent, although this is a decentred process of rationalisation which is discursively controlled through using symbolic icons such as ‘Brussels’ to re-centre the effects of political power. Entangled in the evil of ‘Brussels’ is the evil of ‘America’, the evil of ‘Big Business’, the conspiracy of ‘Germany’ to dominate Europe economically, and the plight of the ‘little man’ who is acted upon with intention and through conspiracy in the pursuit of power and wealth by conspiratorial manipulators, the ‘puppet masters’ that pull ‘our’ strings. In theoretical terms this is a variant of ‘vulgar Marxism’, and presupposes a form of false-consciousness on the part of those whose strings are pulled, but as usual in such debates, the speaker reserves for her or himself the status of critical insight. In more practical terms, this is a common-sense understanding of Habermas’ insight regarding a parasitic ‘system’ burrowing deeper into the lifeworld of shared meanings. Within the Group consensus, which is generally one of majority closure, ‘Brussels’ is responsible for undermining democracy, yet the dynamic of debate within the Men’s Group is itself anything but democratic in Habermas’ post-conventional sense, with a range of already-given opinions and conclusions working to establish tacit boundaries regarding what it is permissible to say and by whom. There is an undeclared hierarchy at work based on position not only within the Group but also within the local community, the local culture, and the local history of shared place. This type of group consensus resembles what Walzer calls a ‘jury room’ as an analogy of political participation- despite the initial democratic structure, the jury room is a setting for the unequal exercise of power wherein some members possess more effective rhetorical skills, personal charm, moral force, or simple stubbornness than others, and these are the players that tend to determine the verdict (Walzer: 1983: 308). This is not the place to tackle the full implications of all of this, suffice to say that the work of Harold Garfinkle has probably gone the furthest in describing the non-verbal inflections of language that work in the positive sense to define the situation and to control the context, to say what can be said, how it can be said, and by whom. One ‘knows’ this and ‘feels’ it in a particular context even if one cannot always explain its presence. This could of course be written off as the mere exercise of dogma on the part of a dominant actor, but technically speaking dogma is an empirical claim to historical truth that requires a communicative forum of affirmation in order to carry any weight. It is also worth noting in passing that while the Men’s Group exists in local geographic space and calendric time (via scheduled activities), in view of the ever-widening communicative reach of (mobile) information and communication technologies this type of localised consensus-formation cannot be taken too lightly, which brings us back to the warnings posed by Putnam at the beginning of the discussion vis-à-vis the need for heterogeneous perspectives in public discourse.

The Men’s Group illustrates the way that rhetoric, charisma, and subjective perceptions and experiences are entangled in the reflexive issues of the current modernity; issues such as environmental crisis, recycling waste, and the possibility of social disintegration brought about by technological and societal change are all themes that have been dealt with by the Group. The ways in which consensus is constructed reflects both individual
and collective, and hence lived experience as the principle criteria of truth. This is an embodied realm of experience and perception that serves as the measure of normality and naturalness. Rhetoric, charisma, experience and perception can only be dismissed in certain privileged discursive contexts (e.g. a university conference), but even then it is not sure that they are totally absent, and to ignore them altogether is to depart from the lifeworld as it is, to a lifeworld that should or could be.

**IV: Some Tentative Conclusions**

These three levels or spheres of public discourse are linked through the emblem of social exclusion and the management technique of social partnership, yet there are clear communicative constraints that suggest action geared towards instrumental efficiency is in a position of dominance, driven not by intentions but through pragmatic considerations of what can be done given the current definition of the situation, rather than what should or could be done if action was to be guided by egalitarian aspirations. Level one above reveals systemic encroachment, embedded in policy documents and instruments seeking strategic outcomes in tune with efficiency objectives. Level two also provides evidence of systemic encroachment and discursive dissonance, but this is not structurally embedded but is instead embodied in community activists trying to bridge between different languages in the diverse contexts of social governance. Level three does not signal systemic encroachment but rather discursive resistance, entangled in both traditional/conventional and reflexive/post-conventional forms of argumentation. In this incidence of lifeworld discourse there are entangled criteria of validity which tend to interpret the ‘system’ as thing-like, as conspiring against those who are relatively powerless, and it has been speculated above that this is anything but naïve, although the degree of assumed intentionality both challenges and undermines the integrity of governance through partnership. This oppositional interpretation of contemporary politics is expressed not only through cognitive reason, but also through subjective perceptions, personal charisma, appeal to myths and symbols, traditions, prophecy, and the experiences that accompany individual and shared biographies.

What is the significance of all this? A society geared toward complex equality (Walzer: 1983), which is to say steered and reproduced in an egalitarian fashion without the strictures of strong state regulation, requires very sophisticated and/or clear modes of communication. What the examples above point to is quite the contrary, evidencing very opaque communication among and within different spheres of discursive engagement, and this is manifest less in terms of creative dialogue than through constrained monologue. There is evidence of speaking about, speaking for, speaking against, but less evidence of speaking with. Yet society is reproducing itself, not always to our particular liking, expectations, or aspirations, which comes around again to the ‘how’- the enigma of social order. Admittedly the examples that have been provided are not the whole story, as there are many incidences of positive outcomes as a result of social partnership, however these constraining forms of communicative action that have been used as examples indicate a sort of negative benchmark that points up the limits of the partnership model.

All of these levels or spheres of public discourse strive for a universal and context-transcendent status of truth, while in fact remaining more or less saturated with culturally embedded meanings. What seem to be in evidence are spheres of communicative
constraint, static, dissonance, and entanglement. In these spheres of public discourse, the
universalising language of NPM driving an agenda of policy transfer and motivated by
technocratic problems of efficiency collides with particularistic realms of Being in ways
that seem more or less incommensurable. The ways in which Care can be expressed are
conditioned by the very possibilities of the lifeworld itself, and notwithstanding the
ability to innovate through creative action as has been argued above, the indeterminacy of
the lifeworld is intrinsically relative. How we can gear into the world of everyday life is
conditioned, more or less, through particular locations and situations, or in this case, by
very diffuse and decentred relations of domination as the market economy serves
increasingly as the model to be emulated in managing society; and this is a model of
instrumental efficiency that tends to leave other types of Care in its wake, as antiquated,
as idealistic, as aspirational, as 'unrealistic'. In the empirical sense of current trends, the
stimulation of association and community through social partnership may prove to be
little more than a residual buffer zone to manage conflict in the process of reconstructing
welfare regimes in the bid for greater economic and political efficiency. The ability to
engage with centres of authority, to access and acquire services and resources, to make
demands in various theatres of negotiation, etc, all point to modes of political action.
However what may be equally if not more important is the availability of an
interpretative scheme, or a definition of the situation whereby inequality, discrimination,
justice, and oppression can be discursively articulated as a basis for co-ordinated action
and meaningful democracy. Social inclusion may be, as Walzer argues, tied ultimately to
public recognition and self-respect, which hang together and presuppose the ability to
participate in political struggles; to be able to resist the violation of rights is itself an
important dimension of social existence (Walzer: 1983: 310). As the emblem of
'exclusion' comes to dominate and presents the current model of development as a
positive-sum game, it may be the absence of this very capacity to describe and articulate
grievances, more so than material inequalities, that conditions and constrains the nature
of political action. The concept of social exclusion tells us little or nothing about the
inequalities experienced and endured among the 'included' for instance, who account for
some 80% of society (Levitas: 1996), and it also generates communicative inarticulacy
between communicative spheres linking the so-called excluded themselves, their
representatives, and policies and policy-instruments designed to sequester the
phenomenon. Discursive inarticulacy on questions of distributive justice, exploitation,
and oppression (whether actual or perceived, the inference of the Thomas Theorem
prevails) carries the potential to exacerbate social conflict through constraining public
discourse and argumentation to the limits of a consensual definition of the situation,
obscuring a reality that is perceived and experienced, at least by some, as radically Other.

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