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1
'Doing Politics'

> Politics is a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division, in other words, the one that is dominant and recognized as deserving to dominate, that is to say, charged with symbolic violence. (Bourdieu, 2005: 39)

1 Public politics: the 'frontstage'

1.1 Performing politics

On 7 January 2000, Romano Prodi, former president of the European Commission, gave a remarkable speech in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. He began by saying, 'The challenge is to radically rethink the way we do Europe. To re-shape Europe', thus explicitly emphasizing the 'doing' aspect in shaping politics through the use of verbs indicating a material process (Halliday, 1985: 103). Prodi also outlines his vision of Europe in the same speech where he continues:

Text 1.1
If we act boldly and decisively together, we can shape the new Europe our citizens want and that we owe to our future generations.
A just, human, inclusive Europe.
An exciting, energetic, enterprising Europe.
Everyone's Europe.
Let us work together to make this decade a decade of outstanding achievement and success. A decade history will remember as the decade of Europe.

In this speech, Prodi – as president of the European Commission – presents his vision of the European Union for the twenty-first century. The speech consists of a rhetorical and argumentative structure that is typical for visionary, official and formal speeches, with persuasive

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textual, pragmatic and lexical items (see Chapter 2.1, for a detailed analysis). Elsewhere we have classified this very unique genre as 'speculative speeches' (Weiss, 2002; Wodak and Weiss, 2004a, 2004b; see also Footitt, 2002: 115ff.).

It used to be the case, when thinking about politics and political discourse, that political speeches were considered to be the most salient genre (Chilton, 2004; Ensink and Sauer, 2003; Reisigl, 2004, 2007). Many speeches have become famous throughout the centuries, for example 'I Have a Dream', delivered on 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC by Dr Martin Luther King, Jr[1] or 'Blood, Sweat and Tears', one of the most famous calls-to-arms in history, delivered on 13 May 1940 by Sir Winston Churchill.[2]

Speeches are usually written by 'spin-doctors', but performed by the politicians themselves. Nevertheless, the audience and the media tend to identify the particular speech with the speaker and her/his style (Pels, 2003), usually without asking who the author is (Goffman, 1981). Spin-doctors have become ever more important, increasingly taking on the role of 'mediators' (Laux and Schütz, 1996), linking the fields of politics, administration, media, and so forth. 'Spin' is not a new phenomenon – politicians have always used persuasive strategies and tactics;[3] recently, however, in opposition to Tony Blair's policies related to the war in Iraq, the notion of 'spin' acquired a more strongly negative association with the cynical and disingenuous manipulation of the truth by untrustworthy politicians. The central role of 'spin' in the New Labour government is perhaps most clearly embodied in the huge power once wielded by Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's press adviser and 'arch spin-doctor'. However, if one is to believe recent opinion polls in the UK, public tolerance has reached its limit, with a majority of the electorate demanding, doubtless in vain, a 'politics without spin'. In his reflections on the speeches given by David Cameron and Gordon Brown at their respective party conferences in 2007, Parris (2007: 30) identifies another important factor in a speech's perceived success – namely the relevance of audience expectations. He concludes that there are no 'objective' criteria by which one can 'measure' the relative effectiveness of a given particular speech. Rather, its impact can only be assessed in relation to a much larger socio-political context:

> Beyond realising that what a person says matters, the audience actually hears – or thinks it does – exceptional eloquence, fluency and rhetorical command, because we are unconsciously persuaded that the speaker is exceptional. Or we actually hear a stumbling performance because we have decided that the performer is stumbling in other ways. (ibid.)

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In our daily lives, we are confronted with many other genres of political discourse apart from speeches, including, for example, televised press conferences, political debates on radio and TV, snippets on YouTube, or reports on political events in the press. Moreover, slogans and advertisements stare at us when we walk down the street, leaflets from political parties or interest groups come through the post, and during election campaigns we can hear politicians campaigning in town halls or at election rallies. Nowadays political parties appear rather like corporations, with their own logos, brands and websites where we can download relevant documents and photos as well as (manifesto) programmes. On some websites we can even listen to pop songs specially commissioned to promote politicians (for example H. C. Strache, the Austrian extreme right-wing politician).[4] If we wish to contact Members of Parliament or even the president of the United States, we can simply send them an email or chat with them on discussion forums specifically constructed for such purposes (Wright, 2005).

The BBC and other national broadcasting services have special programmes dedicated to bringing parliamentary debates right into our living rooms (for example *BBC Parliament*). Such programmes appear to grant the viewer direct access to the decision-making processes and debates at the heart of politics, although in reality we are seeing only a few snapshots of the politician's life:

> And after spending an entire day campaigning with the Conservative leader William Hague, the presenter of Channel Four News, Jon Snow, calculated that the total amount of time spent with members of the 'public' was a mere forty minutes. (Paxman, 2003: 93)

Blogs of individual politicians give insight into almost daily and quasi-private thoughts; some even provide video footage of their 'backstage' activities (e.g. the UK Conservative leader's aptly named 'Webcameron'; www.davidcameronmp.com). At the same time fictional films about important political events ('which nobody will ever forget') construct plausible narratives to keep memories alive or to offer explanations of unsolved cases (e.g. *JFK* by Oliver Stone or *The Life of a President* by Aaron Sorkin). Whatever else we learn from them, these examples all point to an almost symbiotic relationship between the worlds of politics and media.

Hence, Siegfried Weischenberg (1995: 239) claims that these two social systems interpenetrate (in Niklas Luhmann's sense; 1984). In other words, they are intricately linked with each other: 'Media communication follows the logic of political decision-making and leadership,

and political processes follow the media institutions' logic of selection and construction.' This argument relates well to Pierre Bourdieu's observations about the interdependency of the fields of politics, media and economics:

> Those who deal professionally in making things explicit and producing discourses – sociologists, historians, politicians, journalists, etc. – have two things in common. On the one hand, they strive to set out explicitly practical principles of vision and division. On the other hand, they struggle, each in their own universe, to impose these principles of vision and division, and to have them recognized as legitimate categories of construction of the social world. (Bourdieu, 2005: 37)

The above-mentioned examples all throw light on the work and life of politicians from the outside. These are official and semi-official genres, designed for the public; the many ways politicians like to present themselves, stage their work and 'perform', and be perceived by their various audiences ('frontstage'):

> A correctly staged and performed character leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and not the *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman, 1959: 252–3)

These genres and related activities follow specific norms and rules, are part of the *field of politics* (in Bourdieu's sense) and are ritualized, as Murray Edelman claimed in his seminal book *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (1967). Due to national cultural traditions and norms of political parties, we can moreover distinguish specific *communities of practice* with their own forms of address, their particular dress code, their jargon, etc. (see Wenger et al., 2002).[5] Hence, as members of a specific political culture we all have learnt what to expect from an interview, we have internalized cognitive schemas which predict the routines of such conversations (Cicourel, 2006), and are able to detect deviations or exceptions from the norm. A famous example is the interview by Jeremy Paxman with the Conservative MP, Michael Howard (former Home Secretary of the 1997 defeated government), in which the same question was repeated twelve times (Paxman, 2003; Talbot, 2007). However, behind this public face of politics, we have little or no access to the 'backstage' – to the *politics du couloir*, the many conversations and the gossip in the corridors when politicians meet informally.

1.2 Communicating politics

At this point, I should clarify the terms *politics*, *performance*, *front-stage* and *backstage*. Research in the field of language and politics has expanded enormously in recent years;[6] the field seems to be quite 'young', although rhetoric is one of the oldest academic disciplines and was already concerned with aspects of political communication in ancient times (see Holly, 1990: 6–8). The approaches of Aristotle and Machiavelli can be regarded as the two primary roots for the meaning of *politics*: ethics and morals, on the one hand, violence and hegemony, on the other:

> Our purpose is to consider what form of political community is best of all for those who are most able to realize their ideal in life. We must therefore examine not only this but other constitutions, both such as actually exist in well-governed states, and any theoretical forms which are held in esteem, so that what is good and useful may be brought to light. (Aristotle, 1999, book II.1: 30–1)

The Aristotelian goal to discover the best form of government is thus obviously linked to definitions of ethics and morals, i.e. values for a given society: what is believed to be 'good' or 'bad'. The definition of values always depends on the context and the political system: what might have been 'good' for a totalitarian state like Nazi Germany was certainly experienced as 'bad' for democratic systems. On the other hand, we find 'the dark view of political power'. All politics is necessarily driven by a quest for power, but power is inherently unpredictable, irresponsible, irrational and persuasive. This view has been articulated most prominently by Michel Foucault (1995), yet its roots can be detected in many authors from Niccolò Machiavelli (2004 [1532]) to Antonio Gramsci (1978). Paul Chilton has summarized the two opposing views very succinctly:

> On the one hand, politics is viewed as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert their power and those who seek to resist it. On the other hand, politics is viewed as cooperation, as the practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, and the like. (Chilton, 2004: 3)

After World War Two, Lasswell and Leites (1949) published one of the most important studies on quantitative semantics in the field of language and politics, developing approaches from communication and mass media research. The famous economist Friedrich von Hayek (1968) similarly discussed the impact of language on politics during his stay at the London School of Economics. Research in Central Europe, mainly

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in Germany, on the other hand, started in the late 1940s, triggered by the experiences of language policy and censorship in the 'Third Reich'. Moreover, the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (1949) most certainly was a significant point of departure for the development of the entire field: because Orwell captured the rules and conventions of totalitarian states in a very accessible way, readers were able to identify with this quasi-fictional novel. Of course, all this research was influenced by the massive use of propaganda in World War Two and in the emerging Cold War in the 1950s.

'Political linguistics' (*Politolinguistik*) is an attempt to integrate scientific research dealing with the analysis of political discourse into an academic discipline (see Wodak and de Cillia, 2006, for an extensive overview). Klein (1998) argued that the 'linguistic study of political communication' is a sub-discipline of linguistics that developed mainly in German-speaking regions since the 1950s. He cited the critical linguistic research that started in the wake of National Socialism, conducted by Klemperer (1947, 2005) and Sternberger et al. (1957), as paving the way for the new discipline. Because these studies provoked criticism for being inadequate from the perspective of linguistic theory, a new methodological approach emerged in the late 1960s. It drew on various linguistic sub-disciplines (pragmatics, and later in the 1970s on text linguistics) and on media research.

Political linguistics was characterized by Burkhardt (1996) in a seminal programmatic article as a 'sub-discipline between linguistics and political science' that to a large extent still needed to be established. Its purpose was to remedy the confusion of concepts identified by him in this research field. Burkhardt proposed the use of 'political language' as the generic term comprising 'all types of public, institutional and private talks on political issues, all types of texts typical of politics as well as the use of lexical and stylistic linguistic instruments characterizing talks about political contexts' (ibid.: 78). It included talking about politics and political media language, as well as the so-called language of politics. Moreover, he suggested that a differentiation should be made between the *language of politicians* and *language in politics* although both dimensions are necessarily linked (see Laux and Schütz, 1996; Paxman, 2003 for an ironic and sarcastic view). Burkhardt proposed the term 'political linguistics' (*Politolinguistik*) for the 'hitherto nameless discipline' that was committed to studying political language (in the above sense).

As a particularly promising first methodology to be used for *ideological reconstruction*, Burkhardt listed four procedures related to different levels of language:

- *lexical-semantic techniques* (analysis of catchwords and value words, of euphemisms, and of ideological polysemy);
- *sentence and text-semantic procedures* (e.g. analysis of tropes, of semantic isotopes, and of inclusion and exclusion strategies);
- *pragmatic and text-linguistic techniques* (i.e. analysis of forms of address, speech acts, allusions, presuppositions, conversation, argumentation, rhetoric, quotations, genres, and intertextuality);
- and finally *semiotic techniques* (icon, symbol, and semiotic analysis).

This catalogue of methods could be particularly useful as a checklist for the concrete task of analysts (see Chapter 2.3). In the future, Burkhardt suggested, political linguistics should go beyond studies critical of the present and aim at comparative analysis both in diachronic and intercultural terms so as to overcome the 'obsession' with politicians (i.e. to make not only the language of politicians but also the 'act of talking politics' the subject of study). In terms of 'bottom-up linguistics', the voter was to become the subject of linguistic analysis as well. As already noted above, the distinction between these two directions seems artificial; studying politicians always implies taking the context into account – hence politicians 'work' in various domains which have to be factored into the analysis since without this contextual information the discursive behaviour of politicians would remain meaningless.

2 Staging politics: integrating *performance, habitus, communities of practice*, and the *discursive construction of professional identities*

Laux and Schütz (1996) have provided a comprehensive study of the self-presentation of German politicians while focusing particularly but not exclusively on Social Democrats. They are concerned with strategies for maintaining trustworthiness and consistency. Most importantly, they observe the discrepancy between the *ideal*, projected self-image, and the *real* self-image. Politicians, they maintain, balance assertive strategies and defensive strategies while trying to preserve their trustworthiness (see also the range of discursive strategies of positive self- and negative other presentation, Chapter 2.3). If the gap between these two constructions becomes too big, the politician risks losing support when trying to avoid or cope with scandals (ibid.: 56ff.).

Much earlier than Laux and Schütz, the American sociologist Erving Goffman identified and elaborated seven important elements

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with respect to the performance of professionals in their respective organizations and fields.[7] Here I will only focus on the three most important ones in relation to the everyday lives of politicians: *belief*, *dramatic realization* and *mystification* (Goffman, 1959).

Belief in the part one is playing is important, although it is nearly impossible for others to judge whether the performer is sincere or cynical; while the audience can try to guess at the performer's real inner state of mind, it can only objectively analyse the visible elements of the performance. As Goffman (1959: 56) puts it, '[A] certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every appointed time.' The front or 'the mask' is a standardized, generalizable and transferable way for the performer to control the manner in which the audience perceives him or her. Goffman emphasizes, though, that the distinction between a true and false performance concerns not so much the actual performance as whether the performer is authorized to give the respective performance (see also Branaman, 1997: xv). The performer projects character traits that have normative (cultural, traditional) meanings. Three important elements of the front include *appearance* (how the performer looks), *setting* (where the performer is acting – scenery, props, location), and *behaviour* (what the performer does). Thus both *belief* in one's performance and a *mask* with which to manage its public reception are necessary 'ingredients' for the staging of politics; politicians need to act in a trustworthy way, and their appearance has to conform to the audience's expectations (see Chapter 3.1 for personal accounts of related experiences by Members of the European Parliament [MEPs]).

Dramatic realization is the portrayal of aspects of the performer that she or he wants the audience to know. In political speeches, this might mean the way persuasive devices are strategically employed. When the performer wants to stress something, she or he will pursue the dramatic realization in expected and conventionalized ways. The maintenance of expressive control, as the name implies, refers to the need to stay 'in character'. The performer has to make sure that she or he sends out the correct signals and quells the occasional compulsion towards misleading ones that might distract from the performance. Thus, employing misleading rhetorical signals would confuse the audience and potentially destroy trust. Jokes can only be told on specific occasions; and even if jokes are expected, they have to be well chosen (see Pelinka and Wodak, 2002, for the choice and functions of jokes and word plays in political rhetoric; Roberts, 2008, for the strategic functions of humour in TV debates among politicians).

Thirdly and finally, *mystification* refers to the insinuated concealment of certain information from the audience, whether to increase the audience's interest in the user or to avoid divulging information which could be damaging to the performer: 'Mystification involves the maintenance of a social distance which holds the audience in a state of awe in regard to the performer' (Goffman, 1959: 67).

In the case where allusions or hints are given about important tacit knowledge or events, this might indicate specific information for insiders; or *secrets* which might be disclosed at a later point ('secrets' are important characteristics in every organization and indicate power relations: between those insiders who share the secrets and those who are excluded from important information; see Chapter 2.3). The latter strategy might also serve to get specific attention from the media. We will come back to the importance of 'secrets' and 'rumours' in organizations later on when describing the characteristics of the European Parliament (Goffman, 1959: 212).

The notion of performance is necessarily and inherently related to the metaphor of 'being in the theatre and on stage'. Goffman distinguishes between *frontstage* and *backstage*; these two concepts are central for the analysis and understanding of politicians' behaviour. *Frontstage* is where the performance takes place and the performers and the audience are present.

> Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance. For preliminary purposes, it will be convenient to distinguish and label what seem to be the standard parts of the front. (Goffman, 1959: 17)

It is a part of the dramaturgical performance that is consistent and contains generalized ways to explain the situation or role the actor is playing to the audience that observes it. Goffman states that the frontstage involves a differentiation between *setting* and *personal front*. These two concepts are necessary for the actor to secure a successful performance. Setting is the scene that must be present in order for the actor to perform; if it is gone, the actor cannot perform. For example, for a politician like Prodi to perform, the plenary hall of the European Parliament is the appropriate setting to which he accommodates his appearance and the structure of his speech.

Personal front consists of items or equipment needed in order to perform. These items are usually identifiable by the audience as a constant representation of the performance and actor:

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> As part of the personal front we may include: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech pattern; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like. Some of these vehicles for conveying signs, such as racial characteristics, are relatively fixed and over a span of time do not vary for the individual from one situation to another. On the other hand, some of these sign vehicles are relatively mobile or transitory, such as facial expression, and can vary during a performance from one moment to the next. (Goffman, 1959: 22–3)

In the case of politicians, the dress code, the microphone, the podium, and possibly the written manuscript of the speech in the hands of the speaker are items of the personal front. The personal front consists of two different aspects, appearance and manners. *Appearance* refers to the items that are a reflection of the actor's social status. *Manner* refers to the ways actors conduct themselves. The actor's manner tells the audience what to expect from his or her performance. Importantly, Goffman (ibid.: 25) also states that performing and performance on the front stage imply investing much energy: 'Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well.'

This is an interesting observation and relates well to the field of politics: this might explain why much substantial work is done by advisers who stay in the background whereas good performers move on the stage and implement activities and decisions which have been taken by others who are the experts (see Chapter 4.1 for the multiple roles of the MEPs' personal assistants).

Backstage is where performers are present but the audience is not, and the performers can step out of character without fear of disrupting the performance; 'the back region is the place where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course' (Goffman, 1959: 112). It is where facts suppressed in the frontstage or various kinds of informal actions may appear which are not accessible to outsiders. The backstage is completely separate from the frontstage. No members of the audience can or should appear in the back. The actors adopt many measures to ensure this; thus access is controlled by gate keepers (for example, special passes allow visitors to enter the backstage in the European Parliament which have to be worn visibly like an identification card). It is, of course, much more difficult to perform once a member of the audience is in the backstage; politicians would not want the audience to see when she or he is practising a speech or being briefed by an adviser.

However, when performers are in the back region, they are nonetheless engaged in another performance: that of a loyal team member;

a member of the field of politics and – in this field – of a particular *community of practice* (the Social-Democratic MEPs, for example): 'most frequently, communication out of character occurs backstage among team-mates; treatment of the absent, staging talk, and team collusion are examples of such' (Branaman, 1997: xvi). 'Back region' is a relative concept; it exists only in relation to a specific audience: where two or more people are present, there will almost never be a true 'back region' because of what is known as the 'observers' paradox'. This is why ethnographers rarely have access to a genuine backstage even if they have gained the trust of the professionals they observe. However, as has been frequently stated in ethnography and in sociolinguistics, the observers' paradox tends to get smaller when the participant observation continues over a certain length of time; the performers cannot maintain control when they have to focus on urgent events and on their complex daily routines (see Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber, 2007; Wodak, 1986, 1996).

Three other theoretical concepts are, as I will illustrate throughout this book, linked to the notions of 'performance', 'backstage and frontstage', and the 'transition between backstage and frontstage'.[8] These concepts are *habitus*, *community of practice*, and *identity and identification*. In all our daily interactions in everyday life as well as in our professions and organizational activities, we have to acquire 'the rules of the game' and are socialized into these rules and the expectations related to certain professional roles. Bourdieu coined the concept of habitus to capture this conventionalized and internalized behaviour which is constituted in professional *fields* (Bourdieu, 1989).

Bourdieu combined a structuralist framework with close attention to subjectivity in social context. A key relationship in bridging objectivism and subjectivism in social research, for Bourdieu, is that between *habitus* and *field*, via *practices*. The politicians thus draw on a range of genres while fulfilling the functions specific to their professional life. All this comes together in the notion of habitus.

Introduced by the French sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss (2006 [1902]) as 'body techniques' (*techniques du corps*) and further developed by the German sociologist Norbert Elias in the 1930s (Elias, 1998 [1939]), habitus can then be understood as those aspects of culture that are anchored in the body or daily practices of individuals, groups, societies, and even nations (see Wodak et al., 1999). It includes the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, perceptions, and other non-discursive knowledges that characterize a specific group, and as such can be said to operate beneath the level of (conscious) beliefs and ideology. Habitus is thus defined as the cultural structures

and meanings that exist in people's bodies and minds. *Fields* are sets of relations in the world. Through practices, fields condition habitus, and habitus informs fields. Practices then mediate between the inside and outside of the fields.

Bourdieu's habitus concept can be broadly described by four assumptions:

- The habitus is understood as a set of habitualized social structures, as incorporated capital (capacity), leading to a specific thought, perception and action matrix.
- These (mental and emotional) structures affecting actions are not easily accessible for reflection and modification; they are present in the pre-consciousness.
- The habitus is particularly characterized by the constraints and manoeuvring space of the class situation present in primary socialization and is changed by the influence of a 'career' – therefore by a professional (secondary) socialization: 'An affiliation to a professional group actually acts as a type of censorship representing more than a mere institutional or personal constraint: certain questions are not asked, cannot be asked' (Bourdieu, 1991: 27).
- Habitualized thought, action and perception are geared towards field-specific objects of interest. In this context, social fields are the arenas in which actors fight for potential gains, for capital, following certain rules (in our case, the field of politics in the European Parliament).

The habitus can therefore be described as an incorporated, subconsciously effective, stable strategy, directing the perception and action of actors. These strategies are typical of the field; they presuppose certain skills and knowledge and give rise to certain expertise which distinguishes one profession from another and enables differentiation. Hence, if we return to Goffman's metaphor of 'theatre, stage and performance', the acquired habitus necessarily informs the enactment. The communities of practice, however, constitute the details of the performance on a particular stage in a specific field like the European Parliament.

Moreover, all actors also display their individuality, their *self* – otherwise, every professional in a specific field would have to act in the same way due to their position in the field and their acquired symbolic capital. Hence, the *identity*, the *self* of the actor influences the performance as well (see above and Goffman, 1959: 70ff.; I will come back to the 'presentation of self', i.e. discursive constructions of identity/ies in Chapter 3.4.2).

Suffice at this point to define this much and variously used notion briefly: the term 'identity' has two basic meanings: *absolute sameness*, on the one hand, and a *notion of distinctiveness*, which presumes consistency and continuity over time, on the other (see Grad and Martin-Rojo, 2008, for an extensive overview of theoretical approaches to 'identity', and Chapter 3.2). Approaching the idea of sameness from two different perspectives (sameness between or within), the notion of identity simultaneously establishes two possible relations of comparison between persons: *similarity* and *difference* (see also Ricoeur, 1992). All human identities are social in nature because identity is about meaning, and meaning is not an essential property of words and things: meaning develops in context-dependent use. Meanings are always the outcome of agreement or disagreement, always a matter of contention, to some extent shared and always negotiable (Jenkins, 1996: 4–5). Meanings, moreover, can be co-constructed (see Wodak et al., 1999). It follows from the above that identity is constituted in social interaction via communication and discourse. Hence, in order to understand identity, we have to analyse the processes of identity formation, construction and change. In this work, identity is viewed as a process, as a condition of being or becoming, that is constantly renewed, confirmed or transformed, at the individual or collective level, regardless of whether it is more or less stable, more or less institutionalized. As will be illustrated in detail through my data analysis (Chapters 3 and 4), the habitus which is performed and enacted on the political stage is realized in specific individual ways which, however, all display the norms and rules of the game (of politics).

As mentioned above, I introduce yet another concept at this stage: the notion of *community of practice* (Wenger et al., 2002; see also http://www.ewenger.com/theory/) which mediates between the habitus and the self – communities of practice provide ways to teach newcomers the routines of the organization in terms of specific expertise; in this way, communities of practice relate to the professional activities whereas the habitus relates to (subconscious) strategies and perceptions (see above). This means that every organization has many and very different communities of practice; Wenger et al. (2002: 7) define communities of practice in the following way:

> Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each

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> other cope . . . Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Three dimensions are characteristic of communities of practice: an identity defined by a shared domain of interest, a community, and practices (ibid.). Membership implies a commitment to the domain. In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. Members of a community of practice are practitioners: they share resources – experiences, stories, tools – and ways of addressing recurring problems.

Organizations depend on communities of practice because of the expert knowledge fostered in these communities which exclude all those who are not part of these communities. This specific organizational knowledge was also termed *power-knowledge* by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1981 [1976]). Foucault posits the interdependence between power and knowledge: power is based on knowledge; and power reproduces (and shapes) knowledge according to specific strategies, goals or interests. In his later work, Foucault used the term *governmentality* to conceptualize the many organized practices (techniques, rationalities, mentalities) through which subjects are governed (see, for example, Lemke, 2004, and this book, Chapter 2.2.2, on the complex links between organizations, discourse, text, power and knowledge). On the other hand, communities of practice also challenge hierarchical structures in organizations because expertise and shared knowledge become more powerful than embedded traditional relationships. In the European Parliament, the communities of practice are variously constituted by political parties, by a specific agenda (across party lines), by geographical belonging, and so forth. Some of them are stable; some are newly formed occasionally, by a new agenda or set of interests (see Chapter 4 for examples).

3 Looking behind the scenes: the 'backstage'

It is much more difficult to explore the 'backstage', the everyday life of politicians, than the staging of 'grand politics'. Once we enter the backstage, for example, in the European Parliament, we encounter the routines of political organizations which are – at first sight – non-transparent and seem chaotic as in any organization (Clarke et al., forthcoming; Holly, 1990; Iedema, 2003; Wodak, 1996). It takes a lot of time for new insiders to be socialized into a profession, into a new field and into new communities of practice, and to learn the explicit and tacit

rules. It is, of course, even more difficult for outsiders to understand the specific logic of any professional field and organization.[9]

Let us look at a first example, a tape-recorded conversation from an Austrian MEP – let us name him Hans (H) – whom we were able to follow through his everyday life in the European Parliament, in November 1997.[10] At this stage of the day, he had just missed an appointment with a photographer – which needs to be rescheduled – and is meeting with Slovenian delegates for lunch (S1), to discuss the EU enlargement (2004). His personal assistant (M) is also present.

Text 1.2

M: so so now we've taken care of that
S1: the most difficult part is behind us
H: the photographer has run away from us <Approval>
S1: well I actually came here to listen in a bit what do the headquarters expect from a new Europe, from Slovenia <Laughter> [11]

This was an informal conversational interaction during the everyday life of an MEP. Not that all MEPs always miss their photo appointments; it is an example of the predictable chaos which happens in every professional institutional life – however, we are not usually aware of such events in the life of politicians. Common sense presupposes that politicians are very well organized in spite of the many urgent and important events they must deal with which have an impact on all our lives. We all have cognitive models (*event models*, *experience models*, *context models*) which quickly and automatically update, perceive, comprehend and store such events. From this we might assume that politicians also routinely access their own set of cognitive models for 'doing politics' in order to rapidly respond in a rational and quite predictable way to the various events they encounter (van Dijk, 2003).[12] However, as will be extensively illustrated in the course of this book, this is in fact not the case; the everyday life of politicians is as much filled with accident, coincidence and unpredictability, as with well-planned, rational action. What we can therefore predict is that such chaotic situations are a necessary feature of 'politics as usual' and that experienced politicians simply know how to cope with them better – thus, I claim, there is 'order in the disorder' (Wodak, 1996), established *inter alia* through routines, norms and rituals. Politicians have internalized and stored the knowledge and experience of specific contexts and events, and thus, are able to recognize new similar incidents and situations. Moreover, I claim that politicians have acquired strategies and tactics to pursue their agenda more or less successfully. The 'success' depends on their

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position in the field, on their power relations and, most importantly, on what I propose to label *knowledge management* (see van Dijk, 2007: 87; Chapter 4.3):[13] much of what we perceive as disorder depends on inclusion in shared knowledge or exclusion from shared knowledge. Much knowledge is regularly presupposed in every interaction; we all depend on sharing and understanding presuppositions when communicating with each other (see Knoblauch, 2005: 334–40; Polanyi, 1967). Misunderstandings occur when presuppositions or other indirect pragmatic devices are either not available or differ significantly. Sharing presupposed and inferred meanings and hence including or excluding others in strategic ways is, I believe, constitutive of political power-play and of achieving one's aims in the political arena (see Chapter 2.3; Jäger and Maier, 2009; and above, *power-knowledge*). In this vein, Jessop (2001: 2130) emphasizes, according to his *strategic-relational approach* that:

> [a] major problem in many early institutional turns is that institutions were taken for granted, reified, or naturalized. A strategic-relational approach suggests that they should be analyzed as complex emergent phenomena, whose reproduction is incomplete, provisional, and unstable, and which co-evolve with a range of other complex emergent phenomena. Institutions must be deconstructed rather than reified. In particular, they have histories. They are path-dependent, emergent phenomena, recursively reproduced through specific forms of action. Institutionalization involves not only the conduct of agents and their conditions of action, but also the very constitution of agents, identities, interests, and strategies. Institutionalization constitutes institutions as action contexts and actors as their institutional supports.

Hence, to be able to investigate, observe and understand the internal logic of any organization, which is continuously reconstructed and re-established by routines and rituals (Couldry, 2004; Durkheim, 1938) and by the frequently antagonistic tensions between structure and agency,[14] we need ethnographic methods (Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber, 2007; Muntigl et al., 2000). I advocate a particular discourse-analytic approach to organizational research that has been developed within linguistics, and more specifically in the sub-field of discourse studies, to provide a bridge between macro- and micro-structures involved in the processes of social interaction – the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA; Chapter 2.2.3). Issues of power, hegemony and ideology have been reconceived as central to social and linguistic practices in all organizations, since all organizational forms can be translated into language and communication, and because, as Deetz (1982: 135) concluded, talk and writing 'connect each perception to a larger orientation and system of meaning'. This distinction is useful since it moves us away from a

preoccupation with individual motivations and behaviours to the discursive practices through which organizational activity is performed in ritualized and also ever new ways.

To recapitulate briefly without going into too much detail at this point (see also Chapter 2.4), four prominent linguistic-discursive approaches have proven particularly influential in organizational research to date: ethnomethodology; conversation analysis (CA); sociolinguistic analysis; and (Critical) Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see Clarke et al., forthcoming; Wodak, 1996, for extensive overviews).[15]

Pre-eminent in this regard is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which integrates a range of discourse-analytic approaches and methodologies with theoretical concerns by drawing on key approaches in social theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).[16] CDA has gained ground because it provides researchers with the requisite ontological and methodological traction to look at how personal social power develops into the 'habitualizations' and 'typifications' written about *inter alia* by Berger and Luckmann (2002) in *The Social Construction of Reality* – that is, the processes that render semiotic devices 'objective', and therefore provide the basis for logics to be mobilized, (re)contextualized, and made manifest through hierarchy, values, symbols, strategies, and discursive as well as social practices within organizations.

In the context of meetings, for example, Mumby (1988) saw power being displayed through the organization's dominant ideologies, norms and values being reinforced, negotiated and contested. More recently, Wright (1994) has suggested that power is achieved through the continuous reassertion of micro-processes in the daily life of organizational interaction (see also Iedema, 2003; Muntigl et al., 2000). Thus, to understand how specific agendas or interests expressed in discourses gain or lose ground within an organization, it is critical to explore the ways in which and by whom meanings are construed and contested through micro-processes of discourse and which influence the perceived performance of social practices. In Chapter 2, I will briefly summarize the *Discourse-Historical Approach* and refer to salient discourse-analytic studies of the political field.[17]

4 Politics/politicians and the media

4.1 Media and crisis: broadcasting 'snapshots'

A lot of media coverage tends to generate and encourage rather unrealistic expectations among laypeople that politics or politicians are capable

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of solving urgent problems in rational and efficient ways. The media, especially news formats in television, seem to be reducing complex processes into brief spotlights, snippets or 'scoops'.[18] Indeed, Street (2001: 58–9) emphasizes that 'why reporters tend to ignore processes and favour personalities is not to be explained by the prejudices of journalists and their editors'. The answer lies, he continues, 'in the structure and organisation of the media, in the need to deal with events in a limited space and under the demands of tight deadlines'.

Thus, frequently, iconic images symbolize important events, and acquire the meaning of a 'turning point' in history while neglecting the socio-political and historical contexts: the developments which led to the events and their aftermath. Examples of such perceived quasi-sudden turning points in Europe include 1914, generally held as the beginning of a new age or the end of the old world, and 1945 – in particular in Germany – viewed as an 'Hour Zero'. 1956 with the Hungarian revolt or the 1962 Cuban crisis are condensed versions of complex and protracted international conflicts. Similarly, May 1968 is seen as the symbol of a general European (and beyond) generational revolt, and August 1968 in Czechoslovakia as a European icon of a very different kind from the May revolt in Western Europe. The condensation of events in connection with the 'Fall of the Berlin Wall' on 9 November 1989 is another case in point (see Stråth and Wodak, 2009; Triandafyllidou et al., 2009; Wodak, 2006a). All of us are still aware of the images of 9/11 (the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York) which have become iconic of the sudden and terrible attack by terrorists. The revolutionary events in 1789, 1848 and 1917 are other examples of condensed events with huge symbolic or iconic value. They are all closely connected through their intensity to the concept of 'political crisis' and to contentious value-mobilization (right–wrong, good–bad, friend–enemy, etc.). Experiences of crisis are thus mediated through appeals to specific values, which deal with dogmatic and normative concepts of 'right or wrong, good or bad' (see Koselleck 1992 [1959]).[19]

Such situations of crisis are reflected and reinforced by media in the respective public sphere (Koller and Wodak, 2008: 3–6). Complex processes in the media are then reduced to certain images; many other accompanying, often contradictory, processes and positions are simply not mentioned any more or swept under the carpet. History, thus, is reduced to static events captured by images and the agenda-setting by journalistic news production (see also Chouliaraki, 2006). In this way, several fields in society relate to each other and are linked in complex ways, and – in some ways – serve differing (also economic) interests.

To put it simply: journalists (*journalistic* field) want a 'good story', a story which will attract many readers due to the respective readership which the newspaper or broadcast or TV report is directed at (the criterion of *newsworthiness* plays a big role here). Politicians (*political* field) depend on reporting in the media – otherwise their political programmes would not be disseminated – and the media depend on the politicians for information/news stories. And finally, the media is also characterized by numerous other groups in society lobbying, at various times, for representation in the news. In this sense, the media is heteroglossic, representing multiple 'voices' in society (Lemke, 1995); or in Bourdieu's terms:

> [t]o understand what happens in journalism, it is not sufficient to know who finances the publication, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising, where the subsidies come from, and so on. Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects the people engaged in this microcosm exert on another. (Bourdieu, 2005: 33)

4.2 Disenchantment with politics: *fictionalization* of everyday politics in the media

Although the media focuses primarily on the kind of 'grand politics' specified above and well documented in Edelman (1967), specifically the orientation towards celebrities has led to huge interest in the private life of politicians (Talbot, 2007). Thus, scandals are perceived as newsworthy and set the agenda (Ekström and Johansson, 2008; Kroon and Ekström, 2009). News stories also try to trace the genesis of relevant decisions and claim to make intrigues and conspiracies transparent, specifically when problems arise about certain decisions (Machin and Niblock, 2006). Moreover, we observe that in recent years the boundaries between celebrities and – traditionally serious – politicians have become blurred, due to the pressure to appear on the TV as frequently as possible. Political personalities and celebrities seem to rely on similar advisory resources since both groups strive to appeal to large audiences. Street (2004: 441) summarizes very succinctly that '[p]oliticians become stars, politics become a series of spectacles and the citizens become spectators'. However, in many cases journalists typically rely on secondary (and often anonymous) sources and it is usually impossible to validate stories about the backstage of politics. Generally, journalists and the media do not have access to the *politics du couloir* and the everyday life of politicians and their advisers; hence rumours and speculations prevail.

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This widespread appetite for scandals and celebrities goes hand in hand with a decreasing interest in political engagement. Opinion polls detect a general disillusionment with politics; we are facing a so-called 'democratic deficit' in the European Union; and the number of voters at elections is constantly falling in many national elections which also seems to indicate less interest and participation in political issues. Alternatively, this discontent and dissatisfaction might not in fact imply political disinterest, but rather a growing cynicism about the power of national politicians to exert any real influence in decision-making processes in the context of globalization, and the diversification of social, economic and political forces that this entails (Hay, 2007; see also various *White Papers* of the European Commission 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, which propose a range of policies to counteract such disillusionment; Triandafyllidou et al., 2009).

Hence, representation and legitimation, two crucial concepts in our political systems, are changing and being challenged (Pollak, 2007). In their forthcoming book *Democracy without Politics? An Alternative History of European Integration*, the historians Hagen Schulz-Forberg and Bo Stråth conclude that '[t]he crisis of legitimacy of political Europe lies in the tension between rhetoric and the institutional cover, between expectations and imaginations of Europe and the actual politics negotiated on a European level. The urge to prepare a homogenous support for a European ideal that is somehow related to the institutions in Brussels is not a way to democracy' (Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, forthcoming: 341). They criticize the policies of the European Commission in that '[t]he efforts at legitimacy through a backdoor democracy are an effort at installing a strong focal point of political power in the thriving soft European public sphere' (ibid.). However, they claim that '[i]n the face of a lack of political will supporters of this step have triggered a top-down process of seemingly apolitical programmes on identity, culture, media, and communication in order to make Europeans share values and ideals'; this top-down procedure, they continue, is doomed to fail. In a similar vein, Neunreither (1994: 302) states, '[t]he very important function of the European Parliament to establish links with the citizens will only develop substantially when it gets more powers and when it becomes [...] a major decision-maker of the European Union'. Such a development would guarantee more representation, responsiveness and thus legitimacy. It would also guarantee more transparency (see Pollak, 2007: 242ff.). The attempt to institutionalize a new, more representative and legitimate distribution of power in the European Union was, however, again rejected by the referendum in Ireland (12 June 2008)

(*Reform Treaty*, Lisbon 2008); scepticism has thus remained en vogue, ever since the negative referenda on the *Draft Constitutional Treaty* (from 18 July 2003) in France (29 May 2005) and the Netherlands (2 June 2005) (Chapter 3.2.1, 3.2.2).

This growing disenchantment with politics, the exclusion from the backstage, and the growing interest in celebrity politicians and their personalities, are probably some of the reasons explaining the rising popularity of fictional genres that depict the everyday lives of politicians and the intricacies of political decision-making: fiction films, like *The American President*, soaps, such as *The West Wing*, *Commander in Chief* or *Im Kanzleramt*, and parodies like *Yes Minister*. Although different in salient aspects, these 'big screen' dramas and TV series have drawn huge audiences; for example, the series *The West Wing* has attracted between 13 and 17 million viewers every week since its pilot in 2000 on CBS in the United States (Riegert, 2007a). The series presents the everyday events, routines and crises in the staff of the American president in the White House. What makes such series so attractive? Which interests and needs of large audiences are addressed and satisfied? As Rollins and O'Connor (2003) elaborate, there is no simple answer to these questions. In any case, the motives range from pure curiosity to the identification with 'alternative' politics (see Chapters 5.5, 6.5).

I quote one sequence from *The West Wing*, Season 3, *Posse Comitatus*, 4th cut, as an example. Josh and Amy, both advisers (or perhaps better labelled as spin-doctors) to the president of the United States are having lunch. They have just ordered egg-white omelette and (burnt) toast, and are discussing the upcoming presidential campaign for President Bartlett's re-election:

Text 1.3

J: We're gonna win the vote
A: We'll see
J: We will but we're gonna. I've got a nine vote margin
A: I think you're gonna lose Burnet, Bristol and Keith
J: They're on the fence
A: Yeah
J: You understand we have to authorize welfare one way or another, you have to do it every six years...
A: Have I done something to make you think I'm dumb?

This text sequence illustrates the kind of casual conversations full of fast and arcane/non-transparent strategic decision-making which advisers and the so-called spin-doctors enjoy while having their quick lunch. We can also observe the rapid frame shifts between work-related talk and

interpersonal communication which hint at the specific relationship between Josh and Amy. There is a constant shift between these different frames, interspersed through humour and – as has been investigated in detail by Lane (2003) – gendered discourses. In her chapter 'Narratives Journalism Can't Tell' (2003: 26–7), Donnalyn Pompper summarizes some of the viewers' needs very well indeed:

> The *West Wing* teleplay writers enable viewers to eavesdrop on the Oval Office, witnessing a myriad of contemporary social issues and dramatic complications faced by policy workers on the job. For example, plots involve love-hate relationships between White House staff and press corps, partisan backbiting, and personal sacrifices for public service, as well as issues like substance abuse, interracial dating, and gender issues in the workplace. Through it all, White House staffers are portrayed as witty, sarcastic, and intelligent, yet frail, vulnerable humans who sometimes ride their bike into a tree while on vacation, humbly pray to God for guidance, argue with their ex-wives, work at being involved with their children in spite of hectic schedules, suffer from debilitating diseases, are jealous of their spouse's former lover, and solve crossword puzzles over morning coffee.

Hence, politicians are portrayed as normal human beings; their advisers as well. However, Levine (2003: 62) rightly states that 'curiously, it [*The West Wing*] turns a blind eye to the stories of staff politics and factionalism inside the White House'. This indicates that although politicians are depicted as emotional, irrational and ambivalent human beings, they all seem to identify with the 'noble cause' and do not compete with each other or contradict each other. Levine (2003) claims that this representation of everyday political life does not resemble the 'real' everyday life of White House staff or of any other political organization.

In sum: *The West Wing* produces a specific perspective (*event model*) on how 'politics is done' for the American lay audience (and because the series has been dubbed in many languages, for a much bigger global audience). In other words it offers a model of how all of us are supposed to believe politics is done! However, while watching this series (and similar productions in other countries), we might ask ourselves if this is *the* only way, or if it is *one* of the ways of 'doing politics' and of how significant political decisions are handled. We might even question whether the story (the representation of 'doing politics' in soap operas such as *The West Wing*) resembles 'real' everyday (political) life at all? And if, as some authors suggest, it does not, we need to ask the question *why* 'the media' represent politics in this way.

If we look through the abundance of web pages related to *The West Wing*, the clever marketization of this series, and the broad range of reception modes, it becomes obvious that such series are situated

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between the fields of politics and fiction media. Advisers and staff of the Clinton administration were consulted by the series producers. The film crew was welcomed at least once a year in the White House by then President Clinton; however, this positive attitude towards the series changed significantly once G. W. Bush became president (O'Connor and Rollins, 2003). The series has been identified largely with the Democratic Party in the US and as opposed to the Republicans. In this way, watching *The West Wing* might even be interpreted as wish for a new government. Some critics have, however, pointed to the many myths constructed through the series: the characters are depicted and constructed as 'noble' characters fighting for 'noble causes'. In this way an 'ideal world' is constructed. Thus, another reading suggests that the series complies with wishful thinking and visions of what politics *should* be, serving as a distraction from the 'real' everyday life of (US) politics.

5 Relevant dimensions for the study of everyday politics

The three quotes from Romano Prodi, Hans, and Josh and Amy all relate to ongoing interdisciplinary research which I have been involved in for more than fifteen years: studying decision-making in EU organizations by parliamentarians, experts and bureaucrats; investigating the genesis and production as well as recontextualization of policy documents in committees and their implementation in various EU member states; analysing visionary speeches by prominent EU politicians, searching for European identities or the *one* hegemonic European identity; studying the European convention both on its website as well as ethnographically and through interviews with MEPs (attempting to draft a constitutional treaty for the EU); following the everyday life of MEPs in the European Parliament from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.; and finally, trying to understand and explain the many, multilingual and cultural, local, regional and national as well as gender induced tensions in the work of MEPs, EU politicians and organizations (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Of course, I will not be able to present or even summarize all these studies and their results here, which have been published elsewhere. Rather, I would like to integrate these seemingly fragmented findings from many ethnographic case studies into a theoretical, interdisciplinary framework which could throw light on the *discursive construction and representation of politics in action*, on the backstage as well as on the *modes of transition* from backstage to frontstage ('the middle region'); a framework which should elaborate and develop the discourse-historical

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approach in CDA as most recently documented in my work with Gilbert Weiss and Martin Reisigl (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak and Weiss, 2007[2005]). Hence, I propose to apply Bourdieu's social 'microcosm' conceptualization to the field of politics, explicating the manifold dimensions that account for its complexity, *combined* with the concepts of *performance*, *communities of practice*, and *identity* introduced above. We need to turn to the backstage of politics, to investigate the intricate mechanisms of decision-making processes and to the inside workings of the political field which, due to problems of access, has hitherto been severely neglected in social science research (important exceptions include Abélès, 1992; Fenno, 1996; Hitzler, 1991, 2002; Holzscheiter, 2005; Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber, 2007; Kutter, forthcoming; see also Chapters 3 and 4). Once we thus have some insight into 'doing politics', it might be possible to link this to macro-theoretical propositions more carefully, *albeit* of a different sort with a different outcome. Hence, politics, media and economics follow their own logic in the respective fields and thus, I claim, construct different (virtual) realities which correspond to specific political, media, economic interests and formal constraints (of the genre, format and so forth). I proceed in this endeavour by focusing on the following dimensions of our object under investigation, which systematize the many aspects of politics summarized in the introductory sections above:

1. The *staging/performance of politics* (the 'field of politics' and the 'habitus' of politicians; front stage);
2. The *everyday life of politicians/politics* (the backstage; communities of practice; *politics du couloir*);
3. The impact of the *personality of individual politicians* on their 'performance' (active/passive politicians; proactive/reactive politicians; charisma/attraction/credibility/persuasion);
4. The *mass production* of politics and politicians ('making of politicians' through advisers, the media, spin-doctors and so forth); this dimension necessarily interacts dialectically with the first two dimensions;
5. *Recontextualization* of everyday politics in the media (fiction);
6. *Participation* in 'politics' (issues of power, ideology, gate-keeping, legitimacy, representation, etc.)

This volume will elaborate the complex relationships between these six dimensions – from the impact of personality on politics and decision-making, to the staging of politics and the construction and

representation of politics in the media. This sequence of phenomena listed above is, however, not to be understood as uni-directional or even causally related. On the contrary, media also construct media personalities; politicians choose this job nowadays only if they are also successful media personalities; the staging of politics is closely linked to the range of information channels and access to those channels – thus to *knowledge management*. It is also of interest to investigate who chooses to run as a parliamentarian and how inexperienced politicians are socialized into the field and into what is a very stressful job, as will be shown in the course of this book.

The latent order behind the apparent chaos in the professional field of politics will become evident, revealing common features with other social fields (Wodak, 1996). Moreover, the salient gap between public perception and image-making of politicians, and their everyday behaviour will be conceptualized. The role of the media in the production and reproduction of specific constructions of everyday politics, particularly in fiction TV, needs to be closely investigated; the dialectics between the field of politics and the field of journalism to date frequently remains opaque.

The opening up of the field of politics to such an approach should lead, I believe, to a necessary demystification on the one hand, while at the same time this might allow a first step towards reducing the much lamented *democratic deficit* by uncovering the many causes of current disillusionment with politics in the European Union and beyond. Incorporating the six dimensions listed above, I have decided to focus on three general areas related to the overall research problem, while taking a case study on the backstage of the European Parliament as point of departure:

(1) What does the backstage, the everyday life of politicians (MEPs) consist of? How do MEPs acquire their professional habitus, how do they cope with their multiple and multilingual identities, and the ideological dilemmas due to their regional, national and European identities? How are these identities performed?

(2) Related to these issues, I consider some aspects of the 'mass production' of politics and politicians (*Politikindustrie*) and how this might influence media representation(s) of everyday politics. What are the functions of specific media representations? How is the everyday life of politicians constructed or recontextualized in the media?

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(3) And finally, what does this kind of qualitative interdisciplinary research imply for the understanding of the complex interaction and mutual (inter-)dependency of politics, politicians, and the media? Which power struggles become apparent?

These foci lead to my central theoretical claims in the context of this research: in contrast to mainstream theories in political science which argue for predictable and rational outcomes in political negotiation and decision-making, **I assume that 'doing politics' is highly context dependent, influenced by national traditions and political systems, by the habitus of politicians, the modes of performance, the many embodied personality features, organizational structures, and antagonistic political interests.**

I claim, moreover, that there is **order in this complex disorder** which necessarily calls for, apart from and in combination with 'grand' theories, qualitative ethnographic and historical, interdisciplinary research that is capable of detecting and explaining the subtleties and intricacies of everyday politics. **Establishing order, I claim, is linked to 'knowledge management' which implies the power to include and exclude, form coalitions and alliances; in sum, to 'play the political game'.** I propose to study **knowledge management** by analysing the **negotiation of presuppositions** (and of other indirect pragmatic devices) as indicators of 'shared knowledge' or of inclusion/exclusion from knowledge: those who 'know' also share the same assumptions, meanings and presuppositions. The distribution of knowledge is, of course, a question of hierarchy and power, of access, in organizations.

Furthermore, I claim that the **representation of everyday politics in the media fulfils important functions, constructing and reinforcing *myths* about 'doing politics', reassuring the public of the rational and good intentions underlying political decisions; which in turn should convey feelings of security and of being protected** (in a necessarily broad sense); in sum, of being able to trust wise *men* to make adequate decisions. Myths here are understood in Roland Barthes' sense of constructing a second semiotic 'reality' which mystifies contradictions, ideologies, and so forth (Barthes, 1957; Edelman, 1967: 16).

Finally, I believe that understanding politics and the procedures of decision-making are not only theoretically of interest as an interdisciplinary endeavour between political science and other disciplines; understanding everyday politics is also of eminent relevance for

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practice. Politics seems to have become a matter that is decided at the top only, with participation by citizens often perceived as lacking. This state of affairs has generated vehement criticism about the lack of democratization, representation and legitimacy in Europe and other parts of the world. Our analyses should, therefore, also contribute to making politics more transparent and closing the considerable gap between 'those at the top' and 'everyone else'.

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