

Identity and paradox in Habermas' approach to critical reflection: metaphor as necessary other to rational discourse

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Abstract: Habermas' theory of communicative action is explored as an orientation to the question of understanding which negotiates a pathway between two opposing (and complementary) theoretical frameworks—namely, hermeneutical-relational and empirical-analytical frameworks. His perspective *grounds* speech, action and understanding in the ethics of human relations. In his approach, understanding is fixed by particular events or situations about which intersubjective agreement must be achieved through the offer and acceptance of reasons that simultaneously orient actors to three worlds: the objective, the social and the personal worlds. This approach raises the question as to whether the process of abstracting from the particular event to the general form, through such rational discourse, might create systems of understanding which silence individual expression and *naming*, particularly if such expression involves an identity that is not shared with others in the group. In other words, is the origin of an event or situation necessarily a null point for all actors? As this question is explored, metaphor comes to the fore as a complementary process of *showing* that which cannot be *grounded* in the dominant system of understanding. The pivot role of *naming* in the formal structure of Godel's First Incompleteness Theorem for Number Theory demonstrates the challenge to Habermas' theory.

Prologue

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

And they said to one another, Go to, let us make bricks, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

[Genesis 11:1-7]

This Biblical story highlights the notion that language is a medium for the social coordination of action. On one level of the narrative, language is related to technology as mastery of the environment. The form of this relationship is condensed into the image of the brick: a making of the earth into lifeless units for manipulation—an action that can be contrasted with God's creating of *adam* by breathing life into formed *adamah* (earth) [Genesis 2.7]. On another level, the nature of language, and specifically its unity, is raised as a problem that penetrates to the core of our relationship with God and with one another. The ethical dimension of this problem resonates more fully in recalling the story of Noah, immediately preceding this narrative, in which God said “for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” [Genesis 8:21]. In *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*, Kass [2003] provides an insightful interpretation of the significance of the concept of unity for the narrative when he focuses on the meaning of the phrase “of one speech”:

The Hebrew words are hard to translate because there is a grammatical paradox regarding number: the plural noun *devariym*, “words”, is modified by the general singular adjective “one” (*achad*), but “one” is *here written as a plural*: *achadiym*. A variety of interpretations have been offered: “few words”, implying simple thoughts and communication; “many words but one speech”, implying a single plan; or “single words” or “one set of words,” read as a synonym for a single language. But we wonder whether the strange construction, with the impossible plural of “one”, might be a literary hint that the human beings' confidence in their language was somewhat misplaced. It might suggest, in addition, that these people were confused about the being of the one and the many, and in particular about the existence and unity of the highest One. Such

confusion might, in the end, jeopardize the apparent simplicity, singleness of purpose, common understanding, and intelligibility of their thought [Kass 2003, 224].

In this paper, I attempt to explore the problem of unity in language through an interpretative exploration of Habermas' theory of communicative action. His theoretical perspective, which grounds speech, action and understanding in the ethics of human relations, opens to themes which resonate with the Biblical narrative as deep metaphor. This is both the method and the thesis of the paper.

A pathway between the mountains

Habermas' theory of communicative action is concerned with the question of "understanding". His approach can be oriented by first considering two oppositional (complementary) theoretical frameworks between which Habermas attempts to negotiate a pathway: *empirical-analytical* and *hermeneutical-relational*. While the complexities and nuances of these frameworks themselves are beyond the scope of this paper, bringing them into juxtaposition, if only coarsely, provides bearings for situating Habermas' theory. Crudely sketched below, these two frameworks suggest, what appear to be, contradictory notions of a transcendental vantage.

The *empirical-analytical* framework has been archetypal for the natural sciences and forms a relationship with an *objective* worldview. In a particularly simplistic, yet illuminating, formulation, an objective world or reality external to individual subjects is posited. In pursuing their individual interests, subjects grasp this reality for the purposes of technical control or mastery. Habermas calls this instrumental or strategic action. The empirical-analytical framework points to the transcendental structure of an individual "cogito" oriented to an objective world; individual (finite) ego-subjects in some sense participate in this transcendental vantage although perhaps only as a horizon that might be collectively constituted. Understanding is metaphorically related to processes of observation and cognition [McCarthy 1978, 64]. The deep metaphor of space rules here. This framework often tends to a correspondence theory of truth, in which linguistic structures "picture" reality, most notably as a grammar of propositions that correspond to "states of affairs". A significant problem with this framework for Habermas is that it fails to adequately address intersubjective relatedness. Individual (finite) subjects are always temporally and spatially embedded in a particular context that is symbolically pre-structured by language. The "myth of objectivity"—that finite subjects have access to a transcendental objective vantage—masks the prejudices and presuppositions that are implicit in our pre-structured lifeworld. The empirical-analytical framework therefore raises a significant ethical problem in that it tends to orient us to subjectivity as ego-consciousness directed to its own interests and instrumental control, even when interacting with other subjects.

The *hermeneutical-relational* framework recognizes the relational nature of language and is concerned with a *social* worldview. The dimension in which understanding occurs is articulated as an intersubjectively experienced tradition of shared meanings, norms and values. This

dimension is grounded in symbolic interactions that are “neither identical with nor reducible to instrumental action” [McCarthy 1978, 69]. Understanding is an intersubjectively achieved process of interpretation, or rather, continual re-interpretation that, according to Gadamer, is never fully completed [Gadamer, 2004]. The deep metaphor of time rules here. In the extreme, language is said to have the (non)structure of symbols pointing to symbols in a continual process of deferred meaning that never escapes the transcendental framework of language itself [Derrida 1982]. Within what I have called the hermeneutical-relational framework (which actually resists the spatial privileging of the label “framework”), language itself becomes the diffuse, holistic, transcendental vantage, within which meaning and understanding occur. A significant problem for Habermas is the totalizing aspect of this approach: there is no describable (or perhaps even nameable) “world” outside of language which might falsify the prejudices and presuppositions of the tradition that language makes possible. Habermas is concerned with the possibility of systemic distortions of language that can neither be manifested nor critiqued by the interpretative processes of hermeneutics. For him, the hermeneutical-relational framework problematizes truth by implicitly orienting us to tradition as infallible.

Habermas’ interest is in sociology, which he argues cannot avoid the divide between these two frameworks. However, rather than treating them as coming from two transcendental vantages, he approaches them as two orientations to reaching understanding that are rooted in different systems [McCarthy 1978]. The empirical-analytical framework becomes an orientation to nature in which events or situations can disturb routine interactions. This disturbance is seen as a failure of purposive rational action. The response is to regain pragmatic control of the rules for instrumental action through experiment or testing. In this way, understanding is rooted in systems of action. The hermeneutical-relational framework becomes an orientation to other people in which a disturbance of consensus is seen as lack of agreement regarding reciprocal expectations. The response is to regain pragmatic control of reciprocal expectations through interpretation. In this way, understanding is rooted in systems of interactions mediated by language. Habermas’ theory of communicative action then seeks to connect systems of action and systems of interpersonal interaction. By reclaiming the event-in-the-world (or situation) as formative of meaning that must be worked out intersubjectively through the use of language, he proposes a more fundamental engagement of world and language than is available in many hermeneutical approaches, particularly that of Gadamer. At the same time, he reclaims intersubjectivity as constitutive of knowledge formation by focusing on the role of speech acts in reaching understanding and thereby he moves beyond the prejudice of individual ego-consciousness and cognition implicit in empirical-analytical orientations.

Formal pragmatics: Building on the level plain

In an approach called formal or universal pragmatics, Habermas directs his attention to the question: *How do we come to understanding through communication?* [Habermas 1979, 1-68]. The intention of formal (universal) pragmatics is “to identify and reconstruct universal conditions for possible understanding” [Habermas 1979, 1]. To begin, Habermas takes

communication to be a form of social action, which he calls *communicative action*, and which he differentiates from other forms of social action, such as instrumental action oriented to achieving personal interests. Communicative action is aimed at the intersubjective definition of a situation (event) in order to coordinate action in the world. It is constituted through speech acts, which are its elemental units. Through communicative action, two or more people seek to “come to an understanding”, which is a process involving intersubjective mutuality of “reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust and accord with one another” [Habermas 1979, 3]. The process of coming to understanding involves using reasons to arrive at an agreement or consensus concerning criticisable validity claims. In idealized communicative action, all participants have the freedom and obligation to take a position—either yes or no—regarding any validity claim, a position that is based on reasons which can be provided if needed. According to Habermas’ theory, this (idealized) process opens a space for mutual critical reflection that is unconstrained and non-coercive, relying solely on the force or strength of rational arguments.

Critical reflection brings the social world of language into relationship with the objective world of action. In so doing, it provides a vantage for unmasking systemic distortions in language, rooted in tradition, that Habermas claims are inaccessible to many hermeneutical-relational approaches. At the same time, it broadens the narrow focus on objective truth-conditions, as articulated in many empirical-analytical approaches, to include validity in social relations. However, more than providing another orientation to the question of understanding, Habermas claims *universality* to formal pragmatics. This paper is a response to that claim. So by way of apology, I admit that I do not adequately address the strengths of Habermas’ theory which I think are significant. Rather I focus on the significance of its possible limitations.

The formal structure of Habermas’ three world-concepts

In the theory of communicative action, understanding is fundamentally experienced as intersubjective. Understanding is achieved when “two or more speaking and acting subjects understand a linguistic expression in the same way” [Habermas 1984, 307]. Rooted in action, the theory of communicative action involves an analysis of the *use* of language in speech *acts*. Drawing on speech act theory, the analysis is based on the idea that the expression inherent to any speech act simultaneously orients actors (speakers and hearers) to three world-relations. The expression of propositional content orients actors to a relationship with the *objective* world of states of affairs by representing or pre-supposing states and events. The expression of an offer of interpersonal relationship orients actors to the *social* world in which interpersonal relations are established and renewed. The expression of the intention of the speaker manifests experiences (represents oneself) which orient actors to the subjective or *personal* world to which the speaker has privileged access.

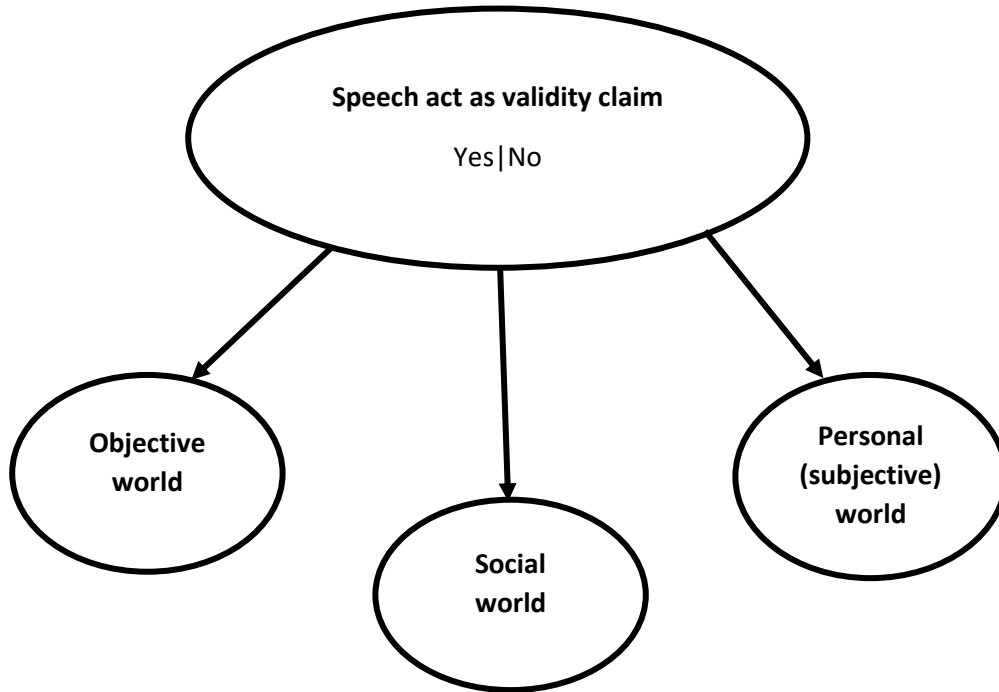
Communicative action has the following formal structure. With every speech act, a speaker establishes the three world-relations by simultaneously taking up a relation to three things: something in the world of states of affairs (objective world), something in the world of social

orders (social world) and something in the speaker's private or subjective world (personal world). Through the speech act, the speaker makes a validity claim that has three aspects or levels corresponding to the three world-relations: a claim to propositional truth (objective world), a claim to normative rightness (social world) and a claim to expressive authenticity (personal world). The hearer(s) can either accept the speech act as a valid claim or reject the speech act. Any other response would not be considered communicative action. When the hearer accepts the speech act, an intersubjective agreement comes about at all three levels of the validity claim. Through shared propositional knowledge, the hearer accepts the knowledge of the speaker and the validity claim is taken as propositionally true. Through normative accord, the intersubjective social relationship is recognized as legitimate and the validity claim is taken as normatively right or authoritative. Through mutual trust the hearer gives credence to what the speaker says and the validity claim is taken as sincere or authentic. Rejecting the speech act means the hearer takes issue with at least one aspect of the validity claim. The rejection of a speech act therefore involves a failure to achieve mutuality in at least one of the three world-relations, which means failure to agree with at least one of the three respective worlds. In rejecting the speech act, the hearer is expressing the fact that the speech act "has not fulfilled its function of securing an interpersonal relationship, or representing states of affairs, or of manifesting experiences" [Habermas 1984, 308].

In the theory of communicative action, the intersubjective process of "reaching an understanding" involves bringing about an agreement (*Einverständnis*) concerning a situation (event) in the "lifeworld". Ideally, the agreement must involve all the actors for whom the situation is relevant. The agreement terminates in intersubjective accord with respect to validity claims. The accord is based on intersubjective recognition of the three aspects of validity. *Einverständnis* is achieved through the use of reasons. Reaching an understanding occurs through a process of argumentation in which problematic validity claims are thematized, criticized and defended by the actors in communicative action. The meaning of the speech act is "inherently connected to the conditions for redeeming these validity claims". To understand what a speaker intends with a speech act, a hearer must know the conditions under which it can be accepted [Habermas, 1984, 307].

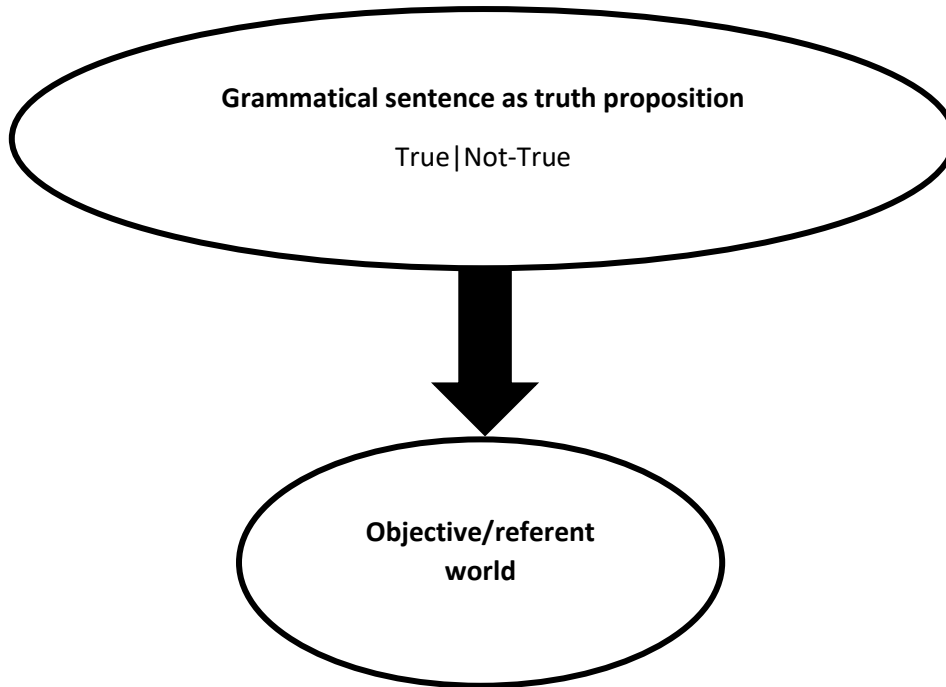
The formal structure of world-relations in communicative action might be represented by Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Formal structure of world-relations in communicative action theory



Because there are three independent aspects to validity, the speech act simultaneously establishes relationships with three “world-concepts”. This formal structure provides a shared coordinate system that allows actors to define a situation in the lifeworld, where the lifeworld is taken to be a common background that cannot be formalized conceptually, which is to say it cannot be thematized as a “world-concept”. While the speech act has *three* aspects of validity, it has only *two* possible “truth values” (to use the language of propositional logic): the validity of the speech act can be accepted (Yes) or rejected (No). This is the formal trope Habermas uses to bring the three world-concepts, as otherwise independently coordinated systems, into a unity that *essentially* involves the intersubjective process of agreement. It can be contrasted with the formal structure of world-relations in propositional logic, for example, as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Formal structure of world-relations in propositional logic



With propositional logic, the grammar and the formal world-concept are *directly* connected: there is no reflexive possibility. In Habermas' formalism the three world-concepts form a system that is coordinated in the dynamical unfolding of speech acts. Independently, through other forms of action (teleological, dramaturgical, normatively regulated), actors take up direct relations to one or two of the three worlds. This offers the possibility of critical reflection because the three, otherwise independently coordinated world-concepts can be triangulated through the different systems of action.

Speakers integrate the three formal world-concepts, which appear in the other models of action either singly or in pairs, into a system and presuppose this system in common as a framework of interpretation within which they reach an understanding. They no longer relate *straightaway* to something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds; instead they relativize their utterances against the possibility that their validity claim will be contested by other actors. [Habermas 1984, 98-99]

Because speakers and hearers, as actors, use a reference system of three worlds as an interpretive framework within which they work out their common situation definitions,

communicative action opens up a process for reaching understanding that is not immediate to the interests of actors in their relationships to the separate worlds. By getting beyond or beneath immediate interests, Habermas claims critical reflection is non-coercive, concerned only with understanding for the sake of understanding and driven by the force of the best rational argument.

Lifeworld and Origin

The three formal world-concepts coordinate and, in a sense, overwrite the *Lifeworld*, which is a more nebulous (non)concept in Habermas' theory. The Lifeworld is intersubjectively shared and forms a diffuse and *unproblematic* background for communicative action [Habermas 1984, 70]. It is present to actors "only in the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills" [Habermas 1984, 335].

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social and subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements and arrive at agreements [Habermas 1987, 126].

I have called the lifeworld a "(non)concept" to stress that it is categorically different from Habermas' formal world-concepts. According to Habermas, formal world-concepts, along with criticisable validity claims, "form the frame or categorical scaffolding that serves to order problematic situations in a lifeworld that is already substantively interpreted" [Habermas 1987, 125]. Formal world-concepts describe the plain or field, as it were, that is present to communicative actors and within which possible referents for speech acts are "located". The lifeworld, by contrast, is always infused throughout, beneath, behind actors; they cannot refer by it to "something" in the lifeworld. "Communicative actors are always moving within the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step out of it" [Habermas 1987, 126]. The lifeworld stores "the interpretive work of preceding generations" [Habermas 1984, 70] and "language and culture are constitutive for the lifeworld itself" [Habermas 1987, 125].

Key to Habermas' treatment of Lifeworld is his complementary notion of the *Situation* (event). The Situation (event) troubles the otherwise unproblematic background of the Lifeworld and brings about the need for communicative action in order to restore accord. Through communicative action, actors attempt to mutually *define* the Situation in terms of criticisable validity claims and the reasons or grounds for accepting them. The Situation (event) itself becomes "a segment of *lifeworld contexts of relevance* that is thrown into relief by themes and articulated through goals and plans of action." The Situation (event) forms, as it were, an *origin* for the actors in the lifeworld as the "null point of a spatiotemporal and social reference frame" [Habermas 1987, 123]. Around this origin, "contexts of relevance are concentrically ordered and become increasingly anonymous and diffused as the spatiotemporal and social distance grows" [Habermas 1987, 123]. For the actors involved, the actual situation (event) is "the

centre of their lifeworld” [Habermas 1987, 123]. It should be noted that the Situation is always particular.

In discussing the dual relationship *Lifeworld-Situation* we are entering into, what I will call, the *deep metaphor* of Habermas’ theory. By deep metaphor I mean, among other things, the quasi-transcendental orientation of the theory. The deep metaphor reaches into the pre-structured and presupposed background aspects of the theory which enable the theory to be formulated, or structured, but are not part of the formulation. It does this by drawing attention to how the “transcendental” is imaged, where transcendental is taken as a term that functions by pointing to or hinting at or suggesting a *beyond* of the theoretical foundations in the way that the term “lifeworld” functions within Habermas’ theory. In the exploration of the deep metaphor above, an important inference emerges that cuts to the core of what it might mean to take Habermas’ theory as universal. Namely: *the vantage of critical reflection always originates in a particular situation or event.*

Bringing into view the deep metaphor of communicative action theory, articulated in the dual image *Lifeworld-Situation*, also allows us to relate Habermas’ theory to other theories or approaches to the question of meaning or understanding. For example, we can relate *lifeworld-situation* to the following images: *tradition-language* in Gadamer’s hermeneutical approach [Gadamer 2004], *chora-symbolic* in Kristeva’s embodied approach [Kristeva 1984], and *saying-said* in Levinas’ ethical approach [Levinas 2002]. In all four cases, the first term of the duality points to a diffuse, holistic background within which understanding or meaning occurs. This background infuses all subjects and never directly comes into view, although it is indirectly inferred by virtue of the complementary component of the dual image. The second component of the image functions as the source or origin or enabler of the structure in which meaning and understanding occur.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a formal comparison of these deep metaphors, it is important to note that the same conclusion is drawn by Gadamer, Kristeva and Levinas in their explorations: *the deep metaphor is heterogeneous in an irreducible way.* For example, for Gadamer the heterogeneity is manifested in the multiplicity of languages and the discontinuity of historical (temporal) separation. For Kristeva, the heterogeneity is manifested in the eruption of the (nameless) chora into the thetic structures of the symbolic. For Levinas the heterogeneity is manifested in the betrayal of *saying* through the structures of the *Said*. Because Habermas’ treatment of language is different than these three other authors, it is difficult to make any direct conclusion. However, Habermas does *explicitly* rely on the assumption that reaching an understanding through communicative action occurs within the background of a common and unproblematized Lifeworld which has no apparent relation to the *Other*.

In everyday life we start from a background consensus pertaining to those interpretations taken for granted among participants. As soon as this consensus is shaken, and the presuppositions that certain validity claims are satisfied (or could be vindicated) is suspended, the task of mutual interpretation is to achieve a new definition

of the situation which all participants can share. If their attempt fails, communicative action cannot be continued [Habermas 1979, 3].

While alterity may bring particular situations into troubled focus for Habermas, it does not penetrate the Lifeworld with deep, epistemic fault lines as is the case with the dual images of Gadamer, Kristeva and Levinas.

Therefore, the potential failure of communicative action in an encounter with the Other may be more problematic than Habermas acknowledges. Using the language of Levinas, Habermas seems to assume that reaching understanding occurs in a homogeneous background that reduces to the *Same* and excludes any rupture of alterity. Based on the work of Gadamer, Kristeva, Levinas and others, we might have reasonable grounds to *question* that assumption. We can locate the tension of this question in the *origin* of the Situation. Habermas assumes the origin, *as Origin*, is the same for all situations, which is to say it is universal and therefore stripped of the identity that comes with the *particularity* of a given situation. It is this quality that ensures a particular situation can be assumed into generalized discourse. Habermas' assumption brings to mind the Newtonian notion of spatiality, in which origins are embedded in absolute homogeneity and passivity. Perhaps another path open to us is to see in the origin of the situation a *brokenness* of identity. With this view, universality is not found in the sameness of the origin, but rather in the singularity of the event which, through its brokenness, enables actors to originate particular situations in critical reflection. Formal pragmatics might then be said to point towards, or signify, the Other by way of an absolutely singular event in the (historical) Lifeworld, an event of brokenness around which human reasoning originates or comes into definition. This would further imply that the formalism of formal pragmatics is not *universal*, contrary to Habermas' claim.

Authenticity and Identity

Communicative action is based on the notion of criticisable validity claims. Validity claims have three aspects—truth, rightness and authenticity—which relate to three worlds—objective, social and personal. Reaching an understanding comes about by grounding validity claims in reasons, such that to understand what a speaker intends with a speech act means that the hearer knows the essential conditions under which he could be motivated by the speaker to accept the speech act as a valid claim [Habermas 1984, 298]. It is remarkable, therefore, that Habermas also claims that authenticity cannot be criticized [Habermas 1984, 41]. This raises the question: To what extent, if at all, does expressive authenticity play a role in the process of coming to an understanding?

Habermas uses the term expressive speech act, or expression, to define a speech act in which the speaker's *primary* intention is to establish a relationship with the personal (subjective) world. Expressive speech acts contain elementary experiential sentences in the first person, such as "I am in pain" [Habermas 1984, 309-13]. Habermas develops a nuanced notion of authenticity or sincerity that distinguishes the propositional validity of what is expressed from

the guarantee or warrant of sincerity in the intention of the speaker. Thus, if a speaker says “I am in pain”, there is a difference between the propositional aspect of the validity claim and its aspect of authenticity. To critique the propositional aspect of validity, the utterance might be taken as: I, as a person in the objective world, am experiencing the inner state of pain. The speaker, as “I”, is thereby objectified and brought into a relationship of the same with other persons in the objective world. The authenticity aspect of the utterance, however, relates to whether or not the speaker means what s/he is saying, that is to say it relates to the speaker’s attitude or *intention*. For example, I may make this utterance when I am not in pain, in which case my speech act is not authentic or sincere. Authenticity, therefore, is primarily concerned with *trust* in the relationship or bond between speaker and hearer(s) that is established in the offering of and the response to a speech act. From this treatment, an important inference emerges that might bring into view the limits of Habermas’ analytic approach: *Authenticity is concerned with an attitude towards the Other; it is an intentional quality of relatedness itself.*

Habermas’ discussion of authenticity as an aspect of validity is revealing in that he moves from the notion of “grounding” validity claims in reasons to the notion of “showing”.

The sincerity [authenticity] of expressions cannot be grounded but only shown; insincerity can be revealed by the lack of consistency between an utterance and the past or future actions internally connected with it [Habermas 1984, 41].

Here authenticity (sincerity) is said to be “shown” through consistency in actions, which presumably also includes speech acts. How might *showing* be different from *grounding*? For Habermas, the grounding of validity claims in reasons leads to a process of argumentation or *discourse*. In this process actors work through the (in)formal logic of theoretical or legal frameworks, for example, in which reasons are embedded or systematized. They come to experience the frameworks from within, as it were, and therefore come to know the conditions under which a validity claim can be accepted. Through this process, validity claims become *grounded* in frameworks of reasons. A clue to how *Showing* might be a different process from *Grounding* comes from Habermas’ reference to consistency as instrumental to the judgement of authenticity. Consistency is a property of a complex when viewed *as a whole*. To perceive consistency is to see a series of elements as an interconnected unity or wholistic gestalt. To show, then, involves bringing a complex form or gestalt into presence such that the relationship of parts and whole is manifested. In the case of expressions, the unifying origin is the personal identity of the speaker. However, Habermas also acknowledges that the notion of Showing extends to an aesthetic experience of the hearer, since it is a process of leading another to the *possibility of an experience*. In discussing aesthetic criticism, he writes:

the peculiar role of arguments in [the case of aesthetic criticism] is to open the eyes of participants, to *lead* them to an authenticating aesthetic experience [Habermas 1984, 42].

Nonetheless Habermas dismisses *Showing* as potentially constitutive for communicative action because it is always particular to a context and does not admit “universal validity claims that

can be tested in discourse” [Habermas 1984, 42]. As a result, his notions of authenticity and the nature of the personal (subjective) world-concept are not well developed.

The dismissal or subversion of *Showing* may be more problematic for the theory of communicative action than Habermas expects. Showing and Grounding, as Habermas develops the notions, involve two different takes on unity. Grounding means grounding separate validity claims in systemic frameworks of reasons. It is an analytic orientation to understanding, rooted in the notion of elementary speech acts. More complex structures are built from the elementary units as towers are built from bricks. As Habermas argues, higher level validity claims, relating to higher-level cultural systems of action like science, law or art, are built from elementary speech acts and their corresponding validity claims through a process of institutional stabilization of arguments. These higher-level validity claims “are attached not to individual communicative utterances, but to cultural objectivations—to works of art, to moral and legal norms, to theories.” [Habermas 1984, 40]. The key assumption here is that nothing is lost or gained in the process: “no validity claim appears at the level of cultural objectivations that would not also be contained in communicative utterances” [Habermas 1984, 40]. The notion of authenticity troubles this assumption because it relates to validity in *relations themselves*, over and beyond the validity of the elementary units. Showing, by contrast to Grounding, presents a gestalt in which parts are in relationship to a whole. The act of Showing draws attention to the patterns of relations as the essential aspect to be understood. Showing can bring two systems, as gestalts, into relatedness by pointing to their similar (and dissimilar) interior patterns of connectivity in a process that foregrounds unity as identity. With Grounding, thingliness is privileged over relatedness; with Showing, relatedness may be privileged over thingliness.

In his theory of communicative action, Habermas needs a notion like Showing because different cultural objectivations and their corresponding higher-level validity claims can be discrete and incommensurate systems. If actors do not share enough common knowledge of these systems as they relate to a situation, then they cannot engage in mutual argumentation or discourse.

The background of communicative utterances is thus formed by situation definitions that, as measured against the actual need for mutual understanding, have to overlap to a sufficient extent. If this commonality cannot be presupposed, the actors have to draw upon the means of strategic action, with an orientation toward coming to understanding so as to bring about a common definition of the situation or to negotiate one directly—which occurs in everyday communicative action in the form of “repair work” [Habermas 1987, 121].

Habermas’ concepts of communicative action and discourse seem to work *within* systems of understanding. These concepts do not appear to provide a reliable mechanism for moving between discrete systems, movement which may be neither rule-bound nor amenable to argumentation except *after the fact of its having been understood*. It is this type of movement which particularly concerns Gadamer, Kristeva and Levinas, for example.

Habermas addresses the resolution of this disconnection between Grounding and Showing using the notion of *strategic elements*. Strategic elements have perlocutionary effects whereby “the speaker gives the hearer something to understand which he cannot (yet) directly communicate” [Habermas 1984, 331]. Strategic elements fit within the same category as speech acts aimed at Showing.

These strategic elements within a use of language oriented to reaching an understanding can be distinguished from strategic actions through the fact that the entire sequence of a stretch of talk stands—on the part of all participants—under the presuppositions of communicative action [Habermas 1984, 331].

Thus, Habermas appears to assimilate *Showing* into his theory as a strategic element that can be used within the larger framework of communicative action. If Habermas’ assumption about the homogeneity or sameness of Lifeworld is valid, then his approach may be well grounded. However, if alterity is constitutive for Lifeworld, as I will discuss in the next section, Habermas’ theory falters in that it doesn’t address the potential violence to personal identity that might occur if actors do not recognize and accept strategic elements *as strategic elements*, rather than as criticisable validity claims, for example. Hearers must accept strategic elements *without refusal* until if they are to be led to the experience of understanding that which the speaker cannot directly communicate (through systemic frameworks of understanding, for example). My claim is that Grounding and Showing should be given the same epistemic status in theorizing about reaching an understanding.

Discourse and Totality

The process of argumentation is a constitutive component of the theory of communicative action. Understanding is based on “acceptability conditions” through a formalism that is loosely connected to the formal account of “truth conditions” as the basis of the meaning of sentences in representational semantics [Bohman and Rehg 2001].

We understand a speech act when we know the kinds of reasons that a speaker could provide in order to convince a hearer that he is entitled in the given circumstances to claim validity for his utterance—in short, when we know *what makes it acceptable* [Habermas as quoted by Bohman and Rehg 2001].

However, for Habermas argumentation is not a logical formalism that aims at absolute certainty, like Number Theory for example. Rather, argumentation provides plausibility for acceptance of validity claims which depends on multiple factors such as how well all the relevant information is accounted for and how well possible objections have been addressed. Plausibility is not a truth condition, rather it is a qualitative feature which Habermas calls the *strength* of an argument. There is always a fallibilistic character to the redemption of validity claims [Habermas 1984, 318].

The logic of argumentation does not refer to deductive connections between semantic units (sentences) as does formal logic, but to nondeductive relations between the pragmatic units (speech acts) of which arguments are composed [Habermas 1984, 22].

Like formal logic, argumentation connects reasons in a systematic way to contested validity claims. However, unlike formal logic, argumentation is an intersubjectively achieved form of (ideal) communication. Argumentative speech, or *Discourse*, has three inter-related aspects [Habermas 1984, 25]:

- a process of “reflective continuation, with different means, of action oriented to reaching understanding”;
- a procedure that is “subject to special rules”;
- a production of cogent arguments that are “convincing in virtue of their intrinsic properties”.

Discourse is normatively regulated. Through Discourse, participants thematize a problematic validity claim and “test with reasons, and only reasons, whether or not the claim defended by proponents rightfully stands or not” [Habermas 1984, 25]. Key to the notion of Discourse is the requirement that participants assume a performative, hypothetical attitude. Through this attitude, participants remain open to mutual criticism of their positions with respect to the validity claim and the discursive redemption of that claim. “The same structures that make it possible to reach an understanding also provide for the possibility of a reflective self-control of this process” [Habermas 1984, 121]. In the reflective attitude, a subject turns back on itself as an object:

I argue for the following thesis: the predicative self-identification that a person undertakes is in certain respects a presupposition of others being able to identify with him generically and numerically [Habermas 1987, 102].

Habermas’ hypothetical attitude transposes the identity of the subject in order to effectuate the reflective moment of return. To whom is this identity transposed? Because Habermas does not develop a clear notion of *You* as a form of interpersonal relatedness that is different from a generic third person relationship, my claim is that his theory relinquishes the identity of subjectivity and the authenticity of expressive speech entirely. In Discourse, the subject makes of itself (and others) a generic identity, an identity that is given over to systems of argumentation. From the normative regulation of argumentation, an important inference emerges that impinges on the ethical foundations of Habermas’ theory: *The hypothetical attitudes of participants engaging in Discourse do not originate in authenticity*. In fact, hypothetical attitudes have no necessary relationship to authenticity. Neither can authenticity be criticized according to Habermas. It can only be *recognized*. Therefore, the claim of authenticity is *undecidable* within Discourse. It’s undecidable status comes from the *essentially incomplete relationality* of authenticity. Authenticity is *intentional*.

The problem of authenticity is crucial in Discourse theory because, unlike communicative action that centres around the definition of a particular situation-in-the-world (event), through

Discourse subjects give themselves over *to the strength of argumentation*. As Habermas recognizes, through cultural systems of action, arguments can become “institutionally stabilized and professionally organized” [Habermas 1984, 40]. These entrenched systems, through cultural objectivations such as theories, gain argumentative power and can impinge back upon the identity of subjects. The entrenched systems orient subjects to what counts as significant. When cultural systems are transgressed, the strength of argumentation may become a matter of aesthetic choice, because a particular cultural system in which an argument is embedded has no grounding.

The ‘strength’ of an argument is measured in a given context by the soundness of the reasons; that can be seen in, among other things, whether or not an argument is able to convince the participants in a discourse, that is, to motivate them to accept the validity claim in question. Against this background we can also judge the rationality of a speaking and acting subject by how he behaves as a participant in an argumentation, should the situation arise [Habermas 1984, 18].

What happens if subjects are entrenched in different systems of cultural objectivations and these systems are incommensurate or lack “sufficient overlap”? When communicative action is directed to the surface level of validity claims, an appeal to the *particular* situation (event) as the centre or origin is always possible. But as deeper levels of Discourse are entered, which focus on the grounds of reasons, there is no longer common origin. Won’t the systems of cultural objectivations begin to compete to become the dominant origin? Such movement towards Totality is not the same as domination through personal interest. Subjective identity itself is dependent on systems of cultural objectivations and is pulled into the system, as it were. Those who resist are *silenced*.

The potential incommensurability of “cultural objectivations”, such as different theoretical frameworks, is taken up by Kuhn in his theory of scientific paradigms [Kuhn 1962]. Habermas does not appear to adequately address this problem of non-analyticity because he works from the assumption that the background consensus is unproblematic, that identity is ultimately grounded in the same, and perhaps also, that rationality is absolutely uniform. He seems to struggle hardest against the problem when discussing interpretation. In the end, he imposes “unity” through yet another deployment of the image or metaphor of world:

A definition of the situation by another party that *prima facie* diverges from one’s own presents a problem of a peculiar sort; for in cooperative processes of interpretation no participant has a monopoly on correct interpretation. For both parties the interpretive task consists in incorporating the other’s interpretation of the situation into one’s own in such a way that in the revised version “his” external world and “my” external world can—against the background of “our” lifeworld—be relativized in relation to “the” world, and the divergent situation definitions can be brought to coincide sufficiently” [Habermas 1984, 100].

From my perspective, this is a serious weakness to his theory. Moreover, I fear that a claim of universality for Habermas' formal theory masks the potential violence to identity that the totalizing movement of formal Discourse can cause.

By way of analogy, I will attempt to show the problem that appears to be sublimated or masked if Habermas' formal theory is taken as universal. In the theory of mathematical logic, axiomatic systems can be created to formally deduce the truth of theorems that are validity claims about the relations of the natural numbers. An axiomatic system provides a powerful, rule-governed procedure for proving the truth of a theorem, that is to say, for grounding the validity claim of a theorem in reasons. However, for any such system in Number Theory, there will always be validity claims about the natural numbers that are true but are unprovable within the system [Hofstadter 1980]. That is to say, the validity claim is *undecidable* within the system and so neither a position of "yes" nor "no" can be taken with regard to the validity claim within the system. This is known as Godel's First Incompleteness Theorem. What is illuminating about the structural proof of Godel's Theorem, in the context of this paper, is how it is formulated. The proof involves a demonstration that the Incompleteness Theorem's identity, its *name*, lies beyond the infinite horizon of accessible Discourse within the logical system [Hofstadter 1980]. The trick Godel used in his proof was to give names to each true theorem about numbers, where the names were themselves numbers. This reflexive move then allowed him to look for something similar to "the name that names itself". The Godel theorem (validity claim) that can be named but not proven within the formal system has the *self-referential* form: "This theorem cannot be proven within the formal axiomatic system." Godel's reflexive move pulls the interpretation of the theorem out of the formal axiomatic system—because it can be proven by the system that the Godel's theorem cannot be proven by the system, the theorem must be true. The observation I want to draw attention to in this example is the following: *The turning point for Godel's reflexive move comes from the identity of a name. Yet the formalized system excludes this name because its truthfulness is undecidable.*

How might the totalizing movement of formal logical systems like Number Theory, combined with their essential incompleteness, be relevant to Habermas' theory of communicative action? In Habermas' theory, participants in communicative action must take a position of "yes" or "no" with respect to each validity claim. This ensures that participants are required to ground their positions in reasons that are in turn criticisable. The notion of "proof" from formal logic is superseded in communicative action theory by the normative notion of "conviction":

Agreement rests on common *convictions*. The speech act of one person succeeds only if the other accepts the offer contained in it by taking (however implicitly) a "yes" or "no" position on a validity claim that is in principle criticisable [Habermas 1984, 287].

Binary values for validity claims (yes|no) also play a crucial role in uniting the three formal world-concepts as discussed earlier. *Undecidability* of validity claims poses a significant problem that could undermine the formal structure of Habermas' universal pragmatics, similar to the way that undecidability undermines (or rather, *breaks open*) the formal axiomatic structure of Number Theory. Here we are pushing at the limits of binary thought.

More profoundly, what is at stake is the nature of ethical intersubjectivity. In the hypothetical attitude, participants are assuming their identities are interchangeable. Assent to validity claims means agreement to this interchangeability. Agreement, or *Einverständnis*, thereby becomes rooted in denial. Habermas writes: “any explicit agreement thereby has something of the nature of a disagreement that has been avoided, excluded” [Habermas 1987, 73-4]. Beyond the background of implicit agreement, *participants can only engage in communicative action by rejecting the validity claims of the other.*

The binding effect of illocutionary forces comes about, ironically, through the fact that participants can say “no” to speech-act offers. The critical character of this saying “no” distinguishes taking a position in this way from a reaction based solely on caprice [Habermas 1987, 74].

There is no offer of hospitality to the stranger. There is no notion that the Other has something to *say*, something that must be heard in its particularity in order to be understood and brought into dialogue with reasons. Reaching an understanding through communicative action has the form of rejecting the alterity of the Other unless s/he provides reasons, reasons that can be grounded in argumentation, argumentation that can be considered strong, strong in the sense of whether or not s/he can convince us, we who are entrenched in institutionalized Discourses which normatively orient us to what ought to count as convincing. Those who are excluded are silenced by the insignificance of their claims to validity, claims that can never be embedded in argumentation because the speaker “can only give the hearer something to understand which he cannot (yet) directly communicate.” The Other can only resort to strategic elements which must be received in openness, in a gesture of affirmation. *Yes, yes. They must be heard.*

“Gestalts don’t *have* reasons; they announce themselves ... There is, however, no simple recipe of communicating gestalts; or, rather, there is only the roughest and readiest: point and hope” [Zwick 2003, 92].

And so, it would seem, *Discourse itself* seeks to totalize understanding from within given systems or frameworks. The totalizing movement that Habermas ultimately locates in the material colonization of the Lifeworld, and which he tries to overcome through universal formal pragmatics, is also already epistemically embedded in the bricks of his theory of communicative action. A theory whose end *in-itself* would make absolute the power of negation.

Metaphor and Attunement

What is apparently missing from Habermas' theory of Discourse is the movement or process that allows a return to an authentic attitude towards the Other. This type of movement is manifested, for example, in metaphor. Metaphor is relation that opens to an experience of the transcendent as *Other*.

Metaphor is one way of showing how patterns of meaning in the world intersect and echo one another.

Strictly speaking, 'x is y' is not a metaphorical claim unless 'x is not y' is true. In the general case, an expression is not metaphorical unless it implies—or insinuates—a claim of the form 'x is y' where 'x is not y' is true.

The implied 'is not' in a metaphor points to a gap in language through which we glimpse the world. That which we glimpse is what the 'is' in a metaphor points to.

We may say: a metaphor is the result of seeing the role of a word or concept in one language-game as that of the role of another word or concept in a different language-game.

The 'experience' of truth is always the experience of resonance, that is, of the attunement of various distinct components of a whole.

That is not to say that everything that is true is also resonant. The sorts of truths pursued in analysis, for example, generally lack resonance.

To say that an utterance is not resonant is not to say that it is not true. Rather, it is to say that it has no phenomenology.

The explicit 'is' of metaphor is its lyric aspect. For this reason, a metaphor is true to the degree that it is resonant.

Reference is the gesture that paradigmatically attempts to establish distinctness.

To be distinct, however, is not the same thing as to lack resonance. A thing that is distinct may or may not be, itself, a resonant whole.

And, of course, there are different forms and different degrees of distinctness. Just as there are different forms and degrees of resonance.

In a metaphor, a gesture that takes its life from one context is suddenly manifested as a gesture in a context in which we had not noticed its possibility before.

That is: there is what Wittgenstein would have called an internal relation between the two contexts.

Reductionism says connectedness is sameness; the contemporary academic version says further that sameness is revealed through analysis. Metaphor understands connectedness as resonance, revealed in the shift of gestalts.

[Fragments from Zwicky's *Wisdom & Metaphor*, 2003]

Epilogue

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled
all the house where they were sitting.*

*And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of
them.*

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as
the Spirit gave them utterance.*

*And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under
heaven.*

*Now when this noise was raised abroad, the multitude came together, and were
confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*

[Acts 2.1-6]

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