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**“NEO-APPARENT” ACTIONS. SOME REMARKS  
ON CHANGES OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION  
AND ACADEMIC LIFE**

**Summary**

The times of the so-called ‘real socialism’ abounded with apparent actions. It would seem that such post-1989 changes as political democratization, market facilitation of the economy and introduction of the principle of publicity into the public sphere should have yielded a gradual marginalization of apparent actions. Instead, there are still plenty of apparent actions in Polish social life, even if their sources, mechanisms and functions have partly changed. The article addresses the two areas where apparent actions are particularly intense. In the fields of Science and Higher Education, a number of detrimental, and usually taboo, fictions have cumulated, especially in the domain of research, publications and mass education. The sphere of mass media, journalism, public debates and shaping of public opinion contains equally destructive illusions. Recent tendencies in apparent actions urge a theoretical reflection on apparent communication and apparent knowledge, and help to isolate ‘neo-apparent’ actions.

**Keywords:** apparent actions; public communication; Science and Higher Education; knowledge; trust; postmodernity; ethnomethodology

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It seems obvious that apparent actions (in Jan Lutyński’s sense) are present in areas of social life whose organization is based on the disparity between the facade of officially-declared, socially-important goals and the everyday experience of persons entangled in actual institutional practice. Lutyński emphasizes that such disparity perseveres against the commonsensical evidence, as the

‘concealment, duplicity and hypocrisy’ are guarded by ‘pressures’ and ‘coercion’ from above, which prevent this common knowledge from being made public [Lutyński 1990a: 107–108; cf. Piotrowski 1998: 41]. The author of the concept of apparent actions based his observations on the sociological qualities of ‘real socialism’ [Lutyński 1990a, 1990b, 1990c], although he also pointed out the universal afflictions of bureaucratic institutions, regardless of the socio-political system in which they function. Following this train of thought, one may expect apparent actions to transpire also within a post-communist reality (despite it being so unlike the realities of a ‘people’s democracy’), especially in such formalized organizations as public administration, political parties or public television, thus in places where the official, socially sublime goals are loudly proclaimed, albeit not necessarily realized.

It is beyond any doubt that the so-called ‘real socialism’ era abounded with apparent actions. It would seem that such post-1989 changes as political democratization, market facilitation of economy and introduction of the principle of publicity should result in a gradual marginalization of apparent actions. However, apparent actions still constitute a firm fixture within Polish social life, even if their sources, mechanisms and functions have partially changed. One aspect is particularly worth a closer study, namely the game of appearances within two selected areas: public communication and scientific life. These particular areas have not been selected because appearances and fiction are particularly frequent in these fields (the contemporary financial system is probably unparalleled in this regard) but rather due to the fact that they are responsible for the quality of social consciousness. A significant number of detrimental and usually tabooed fictions have cumulated in the fields of Science and Higher Education, especially in the domain of research, publications and mass education.

Another equally problematic area of destructive illusions is the field responsible for the shaping of public opinion – the so-called ‘public debate’, which includes mass media and journalism. The illusive nature of actions within the area of public communication as well as its destructive character are the subject of fierce, politically motivated and often futile public disputes, which bestow additional references (in part self-references) upon the issue of apparent actions. On the other hand, in this regard, the fields of Science and Higher Education approach the opposite, equally destructive extremity – matters about which “everybody knows” are not usually discussed.

This article combines the discussion of the empirical manifestation of new tendencies within the broad spectrum of apparent actions with theoretical reflection on the subject of apparent communication and apparent knowledge, with the aim of isolating examples of “neo-apparent” actions. This process entails phenomena which are to a large extent inevitable, although the sources of such inevitability are worth mentioning. Moreover, it is important to differentiate between destructive appearances and useful fictions as the latter (such as the counter-factual principle of publicity or the counter-factual principle of searching for the truth in scientific procedures) seem an indispensable point of reference for the criticism of the former.

### THE PRAISE OF APPEARANCES AND FICTION (WITH RESERVATIONS)

It would seem that the problem of apparent actions is not that the fields of appearance, illusion, pretending, insincerity and fiction are meant to be fundamentally dysfunctional, as opposed to the allegedly always valuable areas of truth, sincerity, rectitude and realism. On the contrary, a number of benefits can be traced, stemming from an adherence to appearances and values which exist solely to keep appearances. The positivist intellectual background of Jan Lutyński’s concept of apparent actions could obstruct the appropriate appreciation of the positive, and more significantly constitutive, role of illusion in social life. However, the praise of appearance and fiction cannot be without reservations.

Let us commence a short review of the positive outcomes of appearance with the basic structure of social life, namely the intersubjectivity. Alfred Schutz, founder of Social Phenomenology, insisted that the sense of the everyday world is largely dependent on maintaining two idealizations (and thus premises) which cannot be fulfilled, and which together constitute the principle of the reciprocity of *perspectives*; not even the opponents of social phenomenology have succeeded in refuting this thesis. According to the idealization of the interchangeability of viewpoints, it is assumed that we would perceive the world just as another person does if only we assumed his/her point of view. The point, however, is that it is never completely possible to assume another person’s point of view. Another idealization relates to so-called ‘relevance systems’, i.e. the hierarchy of issues seen as important or not important. Due to the differences in life experiences and different interests in the situation, our hierarchies of important and unimportant issues are not and cannot be congruent. We assume, however, that these differ-

ences can be sidestepped through a common denominator of temporary shared goals and issues to be addressed [Schutz 1973: 11–113].

These two idealizations constitute not only a normative reference frame for everyday life routines, which enables us to evaluate our own behavior as well as that of others, but also a foundation without which partial and fleeting understanding would not be at all possible. Therefore, fragmentary and inconstant real intersubjectivity occurs largely due to the illusory assumption that full intersubjectivity is possible. Habitual maintenance of the fiction associated with full intersubjectivity as well as the resources of common social experience give us a sense of grounding and of being together with others. Instances when one or the other of the aforementioned idealizations is undermined clearly illustrate how easy it is to lose such a sense. It has been demonstrated by the ‘ethnomethodological experiments’ [Garfinkel 1963], as well as the analysis of interactions portrayed in literary works by Kafka or Dostoyevsky [Schütze 1980].

It should be emphasized that as the basic structure of social relations, intersubjectivity is a double-edged construct, since it is intrinsically linked with the field of prejudice, stigmatization and social exclusion. The dark side of intersubjectivity should be remembered especially in the face of the apology of trust which has been present in sociological reflection in recent years. The concepts of social trust and social capital, formulated within ‘mainstream sociology’ [e.g. Coleman 1990, Sztompka 2007] could significantly benefit from the inclusion of phenomenological and ethnomethodological approaches to both the positive and negative aspects of this issue. Schutz never studied the problem of trust (German *Vertrauen*) as such but instead he focused on the “familiarity” (German *Vertrautheit*) [cf. Endress 2002: 17–19]. As Schutz’s conclusions seem to indicate, trust is contingent upon uncalculated “familiarity” (*Vertrautheit*) with the action and appearance of another person, based on common knowledge. Of course, familiarity is the opposite of the experience of strangeness, which is associated with lack of trust. Transforming the experience of strangeness into the experience of familiarity is not easy and the experience of familiarity can easily be undermined in the process.

In early Ethnomethodology, which developed Schutz’s ideas in this regard, trust is contingent on whether or not basic expectations are met as regards “normal appearance”, in other words, modes of being and action which are regarded as normal and can be interpreted as such. The point is not only about how to make an appropriate, “normal” impression, as the participants of social life treat the fulfillment of such expectations as the basis of common moral judgments. This occurs because according to common, conventional reasoning, the socially-defined

normality or abnormality of someone’s “appearance refers us to their ostensibly actual traits (“He has kind eyes, he is reliable” or “he is crazy, you cannot reason with him”). Thus, common conclusions on the subject of seemingly “objective” features are responsible not only for trust bestowed upon those whom we perceive within the socially defined norm, but also for the lack of trust towards people regarded as aliens, bringing the risk of uncertainty or threat [Schutz 1973, Garfinkel 1967].

In other words, sociological theory overlooks the fact that the social object called trust or “the culture of trust” is constituted by the structures of the experiences of familiarity and strangeness. The ambivalence of trust refers therefore not only to the sometimes problematic functions of trust but it is located in the area of its social constitution. It is the contrasting character of familiarity and strangeness that constitutes the ambivalent nature of trust which, on the one hand, provides the “familiar ones” with a sense of security and community while on the other, excludes “strangers”. Such a paradox, explored in numerous studies devoted to the so-called labeling theory, is the proverbial fly in the ointment produced by mainstream Sociology and Economy in praise of trust, social capital and so on.

Another positive outcome of adhering to appearances is the justification of scientific conduct as a procedure which should be differentiated from the principles governing common knowledge, the methods of media statement organization, political rhetoric devices or the rules of entrepreneurship. The issue is significant in a situation when the lines dividing the scientific study of reality from other methods of experiencing it become blurred; On the one hand, they are affected by the postmodern culture, advocating a skeptical view on the rule of reason and promoting the cult of mosaic-like arrangements, while on the other, being strongly influenced by the pressure of economic discourses dictating the criteria of practical application and profitability, which are external to Science.

The scientific image of the world as a particular variety of knowledge exists only inasmuch as researchers who follow specified procedural requirements pursue the goal of constructing a scientific, by necessity artificial, model of the studied reality. In case of the social sciences in the broad sense (such as Sociology, Psychology, Economy and History) where the field of study includes persons undertaking actions, the scientific image of reality may not be able to envisage real people in their whole complexity and uniqueness; instead, it must be somehow populated by artificial, unreal “puppets” created by researchers. They only meet the requirements of the theoretical model adopted by the researcher – they undertake actions and have experiences solely within the boundaries set by the

theoretical concept which created them [Schutz 1973: 40–142]. This occurs even when the theoretical concept is not assumed in advance but “generated” in the course of study, that is, according to the strategy principles of grounded theory [Glaser, Strauss 1967].

Thus, the condition of the scientific profession is the fictitious nature of the scientific image of reality. However, such a necessity entails a shadowy zone in the form of the risk of production of scientific artifacts as well as the excess of scientific lingo. The uncompromising deconstruction of Social Science methodology as the scientific production of facts can be found in Aaron Cicourel’s *Method and Measurement in Sociology* [1964], as well as in radical ideas of Harold Garfinkel, including the notion of “glossing”, which refers to abstract, and ostensibly explanatory scientific formulas failing to reconstruct the experienced reality [Garfinkel 1967].

The positive proposition of late ethnomethodology has been focused on the “unique adequacy requirement” [inter alia Garfinkel et al. 1986; also Garfinkel, Wieder 1992]. Regardless of the erroneous readings which appear in textbooks on modern sociological theories, the “unique adequacy requirement” does not postulate reaching the ostensible core nor a basic grammar of social action (nor, as Michael Lynch ironically puts it, does it mean the quest “for the Holy Grail”) but it should rather incite the emergence of many new hybrid research disciplines, appearing at the junction point of interpretation processes and ethnomethodological analysis [Lynch 1993: 274–1277]. Such a research program has never been fully realized and in these instances where it has been, it is located (according to Garfinkel’s intention) outside of Sociology as science and as institution. In other words, Ethnomethodology in its radical version has caused its own marginalization – at its own request. Although a consistently-comprehended ethnomethodology deliberately leads towards the destruction of standard scientific procedure, it nevertheless remains a source of inspiration for such varieties of Sociology which are not satisfied with the uncritical production of scientific artifacts. The dilemma associated with drawing inspiration from ethnomethodology is evocative of a moth circling a flame; Straying too close brings the risk of destruction while remaining afar entails lack of access to the light. In this situation, the concept of Science proposed by Alfred Schutz and heavily criticized by radical versions of Ethnomethodology gains value, as it guarantees that it will remain within the grounds of scientific procedure. This status seems particularly important, especially in the face of contemporary risks of blurred lines.

By necessity, the two further disciplines in which very valuable benefits of adhering to appearances are manifested will be only briefly outlined although

they deserve a much broader discussion. Democratic political order in a modern, complex society is possible due to partial consensus, the condition of which is that fundamental outlook differences be set aside and focus be directed on such aspects of the difference of opinion which can be reconciled. Political liberalism in terms of John Rawls [2005], which is meant here, is certainly a controversial concept of political order when treated as a normative ideal. Deep divisions can be observed between liberal supporters of shaping political reality according to an outlined, deliberate model and their anti-liberal adversaries (both left- and right-wing) who are opposed to excessive – in their view – cooling of political disputes or concealed exclusion of radically-alternative opinions. However, as a record of political “actuality” or a description of empirically-verifiable scenarios of political order, a partial consensus seems to be a more relevant scientific model. It is worth noting that the partial consensus principle could be considered as a representation of Schutz’s second idealization of the congruency of systems of relevance (see above).

Finally, the game of appearances and illusion provides the foundation on which, to a large extent, the quality and taste of interpersonal and intergroup relations are based. Georg Simmel [1992] and Erving Goffman [1971] pointed to the need to maintain fiction in social relations through such procedures as the preservation of purposeless “sociability”, tactful omission of “truth” when talking to another person, overlooking gaffes or “repairing” them together, irony and self-mockery, as well as interactive exercises of distancing oneself from the burdensome action routines and cognitive schemes. These aspects of social relationships can play a very positive role, not only in private dealings but also in institutional and public relations, which the theory of communication proposed by Jürgen Habermas does seem not to take into account, recommending instead distance and distrust towards communication practices that undermine the principles of (rational) discourse.

### APPARENT AND “NEOAPPARENT” ACTIONS

Given the reasons outlined above, it is worth stating that the apparent actions in Jan Lutyński’s terms are a particular, dysfunctional subset of the broader field of appearance and fiction, distinguished by the contrast between the official purpose and the real uselessness, the lack of positive public disclosure of such uselessness despite general awareness, as well as socially-harmful consequences. Among the latter, Lutyński points in the first place to “the lowering of civic and



professional morale of their [apparent actions] performers, observers and even commissioners” [Lutyński 1990a: 117].

Following the initial praise of appearance and fiction, the issue of apparent actions can be, therefore, formulated as follows: What makes it possible for a value to be transformed into anti-value, something worth striving for into something to be avoided; order into disorder; conditions which ensure smooth functioning into a dysfunctional pathology; characteristics determining the integrity of such areas of social reality as everyday life, public sphere, politics, and scientific life into traits negating essential requirements of their integrity?

Contrary to the utilitaristic and pragmatic connotations of the concept of apparent actions proposed by Jan Lutyński, it is worth noting that a significant normative turning-point in the operative field of the problem is not between actuality and fiction, but between fictions which are useful (nay, even desirable) and those which are useless or even harmful. Stressing the contrast between fabricated fiction and reliable actuality can be misleading because the positivistically perceived values of effectiveness and usefulness are susceptible to allegations from critical theory, exposing the narrow practicisism of instrumental reason. Granted, in the frame of reference of real socialism, which abounded in grotesque facades and was afflicted with a wearisome scarcity of efficiency, it seems abundantly understandable to dream of making actions “real”, of banishing the artificial staffage of propaganda servitudes and improving the organization of social life. But it is commonly known today that the reality of the capitalist economy, democratic order and the shaping of political institutions of civil society is by no means freer from apparent actions. In fact in many areas, although this may sound like heresy, the role of illusion and appearance seems much greater than in real socialism – suffice it to mention the increasing role of PR and marketing in the economy, the transformation of the modern financial system into a global one, an Internet “casino” based on virtual money including the so-called derivative instruments, or a far-reaching medialization and staging of political life. It should be stressed again that the transformation of public communication and scientific life, a subject of a closer interest in this text, is only a fraction of an overall trend toward the “de-realizing” of reality which in this case consists in the constant staging of public debates or the alleged “professionalization” of Higher Education.

One of the basic properties of apparent actions in Jan Lutyński’s terms relies on the fact that it is widely known that apparent actions are useless (or harmful) as regards the achievement of the official goal but such knowledge is not publicly disclosed. Nowadays, the situation seems to be different.



Firstly, because of the freedom of expression and independent media presence, public disclosure of apparent actions is possible and – considering the normative principle of publicity – even desirable. What is more, the disclosure of apparent actions, as well as other grotesque anomalies, becomes a media product corresponding to the media’s demand for communications to attract audiences. However, the disclosure usually stops at the level of such a “collation” of information, so that it can cause superficial indignation or amusement but is not accompanied with a message of thorough knowledge about sources and mechanisms of detected pathology, nor an incentive to consider it. Furthermore, the general attitude of the media to mass production of communications “engaging” the audience leads to indifference to the content of individual messages. As a result, it sometimes results in “banging one’s head against a brick wall”: the media can relentlessly talk about one or another apparent action to no actual avail. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the case of public debates, including those which relate to specific apparent activities, such as within administration or social welfare. Debates are of course permitted and even desirable but themselves are often illusory, since they generally consist in delivering different statements without establishing a real dispute and without coming to any conclusions.

Secondly, a hypothesis can be formulated that in the conditions of contemporary forms of capitalism and democracy, aside from the traditional, typical apparent actions (e.g. administrative absurdities) apparent actions of a new type appear, namely “neoapparent” actions. *They do not meet the definitional requirement of apparent actions, which speaks of their widely recognized uselessness (and sometimes even harmfulness) in terms of formal objectives, and knowledge on this subject is purely private and cannot be made public. The image of “neoapparent” actions, both in the private and public domains, can enjoy universal regard as at least “so-so”, or having at least some degree of usefulness, although the action itself can in fact be useless or even harmful.* Knowledge of the uselessness or harmfulness of “neoapparent” actions is not universal and is often the subject of (not overly profound) public disputes and controversies. The question is thus, so to speak, about apparent actions in the circumstances of false or at least foggy consciousness. The type of “neoapparent” actions is disseminated in many areas of social life. Contrary to apparent actions, neoapparent actions are surrounded only by a relatively limited range of insincerity. However they can also have a morally-corrupting influence on their performers, observers and commissioners.

The scope of the dissemination of knowledge on “neoapparent” activities and the degree of transparency and distinctiveness may vary depending on the

area of occurrence; As it turns out, the situation in the area of public communications differs from the one in scientific life. In each case, however, the blurring of boundaries occurs between what is real and what apparent, and between truth and falsehood as well as good and evil. These boundaries, hitherto seen as sharp, become blurred. At the same time, the field of ambiguous phenomena is growing: neither real nor apparent, neither true nor false and neither good nor bad. The Internet obviously contributes its part to the social production of such ambiguity. Another example can be observed in the relatively new, hybrid formats of television production whose common feature is an inclination for sensational, quasi-realistic effects which would be compelling for the audience, such as police-detective series which are supposed to be based on facts but are in fact somewhere between the formula of a documentary and fiction and feature mostly professional actors (e.g. the originally German format *K11 – Kommissare im Einsatz*, and its Polish version *W11 – Wydział Śledczy* [*Investigation Office*]), assorted and ubiquitous varieties of *Reality TV*, where participants, the so-called ordinary people, are placed in unusual circumstances (such as *Big Brother*, *The Real World*, *Fear Factor* and their derivatives) or where amateurs in a given field are persuaded to take on the role of professionals (e.g. *Pop Idol*, *Strictly Come Dancing*) and related formats. But the point is not only about the various formats of media production, they are merely an illustration of the overall process of the diffusion of ambiguous patterns of behavior in many spheres of economic, political and social life.

Moreover, the application of the distinctive criteria of reality and appearance, truth and falsehood and good and evil for this type of phenomena gives the impression of anachronism. These criteria have in fact originated from before the fundamentally postmodern cultural change and are to supposed to refer to the phenomena emerging in the course and under the influence of that change. It can be best illustrated by the pattern of four phases within the image proposed by Jean Baudrillard [1994]<sup>1</sup>.

In the first phase of a cultural definition, an image is a “reflection of a profound reality”, which is possible assuming the optimistic and naive idea of a sign reference to reality. If, however, we feel that the picture “masks and denatures a profound reality”, then we apply the skeptical and suspicious optics of ideology criticism, typical of the second phase, and following the footsteps of Marx, Freud and Mannheim we will search for social, political, economic or psychological causes of the distortion of the image of reality. In the third phase

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted after: Baudrillard 1994: 6.

of the image, we still remain within the circle of skepticism and doubt, but this time we are inclined to notice that the image "masks the *absence* of a profound reality" – in other words, we search for manifestations of artifice, simulation, exaggeration, pretense, public relations tactics, political marketing, care about the image, hypocrisy, omissions and lies. It is here, I think, that the perspective designated by Jan Lutyński's concept of apparent actions lies, whose message consisted in opposing the illusory and harmful, politically-forced facade of real socialism. The fourth phase "marks a decisive turning point" as until now we have thought that, one way or another, we have been dealing with the signs that conceal "something" (refer to "something", distort "something" or pretend to be "something"), while now we are surrounded with the signs which "dissimulate that there is nothing", since the image "has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum". What begins to surround us is not the reality with which earlier cultural eras had to do, nor is it, strictly speaking, a "virtual reality", nor the traditionally conceived "unreal", but rather a vague and chaotic chain of phenomena located within the unclear horizon beyond the division of reality and unreality. It is in this area – or rather at the transition point leading to it – that neoapparent actions are located, as it seems.

Lucien Febvre [2002], one of the masters of research on the history of mentality, argued with the standard reading of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Francis Rabelais as a supposedly brave, precursory manifesto of atheism, stating that in the Renaissance the meaning of modern atheism (disbelief in God) had not yet existed as a cultural form. Thus, an earlier era of cultural categories cannot be forced into the subsequent categories of interpretation without committing an error of ahistoricism. Reversing the vector of time, it can be said that application of outdated categories of interpretation to the new reality is sometimes a similar error. The attachment of contemporary Western societies to the traditional binary categories of reality and appearance (as well as to the criteria of truth and falsehood and good and evil) is indeed still strong but it does not change the fact that in the Western cultural milieu, a far-reaching erosion of such categories can be observed which, in specified regards, gives way to the ambiguity of surrounding phenomena. At the same time, the forced binary classification model of 'yes/no' moves, it seems, on to such spheres which have so far been of secondary importance in the hierarchy, such as efficiency, profitability and perceptual attractiveness.

While, therefore, apparent actions as defined by Jan Lutyński are surrounded by an ominous aura or grotesque hypocrisy, "neoapparent" actions are rather foaming in an atmosphere of banality, coarseness and alleged "practicism" which overrides the trivial faces of its emissaries and followers. The cult of trivial

values has not yet gained full cultural legitimacy and still requires the game of appearances in the spirit of traditional values. This purpose is served by media-staged moral scandals. Baudrillard formulated instructive comments on the so-called Watergate scandal. In his opinion, "Watergate succeeded in imposing the idea that Watergate was a scandal" which rendered "a large dose of political morality reinjected on a world scale" [Baudrillard 1994: 14]. Thus, the staging of the Watergate scandal was to serve as a demonstration that the political order is fundamentally sound and the illegal and immoral practices have been swiftly eliminated. Brave journalists, nipping the evil among political elites in the bud are in fact an image in the classic western film poetic, where a noble sheriff wins the fight with a band of cutthroats and order and peace are restored in the town. Here, the secret is not only the widespread degeneration of politics, in the light of which Watergate was not and by no means is an isolated case, but above all the disappearance of politics as a field of reality and its transformation into a chaotic game of images and illusions.

The beginnings of the postmodern cultural transformation in the West are usually seen as more or less the last quarter of the twentieth century. It can be assumed that on a larger scale this transformation has arrived in Poland and other former Eastern Bloc countries along with the advancing processes of system transformation. According to the thesis proposed here, one of the manifestations of postmodern transformations is the dissemination of "neoapparent" activities at a different pace and intensity in the circle of the Western civilization. Due to the fact that in the new, emerging "reality" obsolete, binary criteria are still applied, ones which the new "reality" eludes, one can hardly agree with the postmodernist vision that a completely different era of post-modernity has simply already begun. It seems a more accurate diagnosis to speak of "a pre-postmodern era characterized by a desperate adherence to modernist conceptions of truth and rationality, and to the institutions that enforce them, while at the same time bearing witness to their disruption and decay" [Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 248].

#### **COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC LIFE AS A SCIENTIFIC AREAS OF "NEOAPPARENT" ACTION**

In both selected areas, neoapparent actions are not only useless but also harmful for official purposes. Quite often, public communication fetishizing the value of "information" not only fails to contribute to the shaping of public opinion as a result of a real public debate but blocks its development. Neoapparent actions

in the field of science not only fail to serve the search for scientific knowledge and education of new generations but interfere with these objectives, although they are carried out under the banner of “knowledge” or “knowledge society”.

Public communication is influenced by a number of negative conditions, both external and internal [Czyżewski 1997]. Among the internal conditions, the issue of excessive staging stands out. Increasingly, television debates do not consist in the consideration of the arguments of different parties but in interactive games focused on concern for a participant’s own self-image and undermining the image of the adversary. However, viewers do not mind since such television debates are generally treated in part as a variety of an entertainment program. A new format has entered into Poland, one long known in the West, the format of podium discussions involving prominent personalities who simulate a real debate before the gathered audience. Soon, Jürgen Habermas’s reflections on the subject, formulated fifty years ago in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, may prove to be accurate in our part of Europe:

“So-called debates were formally organized and at the same time compartmentalized as an element of adult education. Religious academies, political forums, and literary organizations owe their existence to the critical review of a culture worthy discussion and in need of commentary; radio stations, publishers, and associations have turned the staging of panel discussions into a flourishing secondary business. Thus, discussion seems to be carefully cultivated and there seems to be no barrier to its proliferation. But surreptitiously it has changed in a specific way: it assumes the form of a consumer item [...] Today the conversation itself is administered. Professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions, and round tables shows – the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a salable package ready for the box office; it assumes commodity form even at ‘conferences’ where anyone can ‘participate’. Discussion, now a ‘business,’ becomes formalized; the presentation of positions and counterpositions is bound to certain prearranged rules of the game; consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by that concerning form. What can be posed as a problem is defined as a question of etiquette; conflicts, once fought out in public polemics, are demoted to the level of personal incompatibilities. Critical debates arranged in this manner certainly fulfills important social-psychological functions. Especially that of a tranquilizing substitute for action; however, it increasingly loses its publicist function” [Habermas 1989: 163–164].

The question therefore arises: what serves what? Do theatrical aspects, inevitable in communication and not without valuable qualities, serve the consideration of arguments, or is it *vice versa* – that the socially-recognizable definition of “considering the arguments” is a tool used for the purposes of media or podium staging of the so-called “public debate”? An additional aspect of theatricality and public communication is associated with a specific variety of language emerging in the television and radio, sometimes known as “media talk” [see Hutchby 2006,

Tolson 2006]. Its striking features involve: the method of conducting interviews (in many respects different from daily routine and often artificially intensified), characteristic lexical and phraseological varieties, as well as seeking the applause of the audience present in the studio.

Internal determinants of public communication are reinforced by the external environment, especially through commercialization. Medialization combined with commercialization means a demand for sharp, unproductive disputes between parties who in a way speak different languages and lead nowhere – that is, the ritual chaos<sup>2</sup>. Ritual chaos and the destructive variety of conflict communication, which consists of inconclusive highlighting the insurmountable differences of opinion, often poses as social drama, that is, a model of constructive conflict transformation, which it certainly is not. What is interesting, in the bustle and chaos, a ceremonial and apparent agreement between the conflicted parties is often hidden, excluding such views which are alternative to all parties involved in the dispute. Indeed, alternative views threaten the covert doxa which is secretly shared by ostensible adversaries. Thus, the so-called public debates of our time are often multi-layered productions based on a complex game of appearances.

The apparent nature of these and other political activities (identified as the uselessness or harmfulness) is often the subject of especially bitter, unproductive disputes. These disputes are often staged and played tactically as they are generally based on changing political interests rather than deep differences of opinion. Quarrels of this kind (both radio and television provide new examples every day) stop at the surface of the problem and do not cross the boundary condition of a concordantly constructed, quasi-theatrical performance, involving the integrity of the underlying assumptions about matters which cannot be problematized. The result is a vicious circle: a lot of noise and strong words, while sources and mechanisms of “pre-postmodernity”, including neoapparent actions, are ignored. The contemporary, medialized and commercialized sphere of public communication is not able to promote reflection and knowledge about itself.

The result of this situation is its resistance to change and correction, a non-subvertability of sorts. Parliamentary committees of inquiry may serve as an illustration of the problem. They are mostly unproductive in the sense that they do not (and cannot) bring clarification and resolution of the matter. On the contrary, they seem to result in generating only the appearance of “insolvability” of the case. In this respect, the analysis of Michael Lynch and David Bogen

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<sup>2</sup> See the characteristics of discourse mechanisms of ritual chaos, social drama, ceremony and agreement in: Czyżewski 1997.

[1996] concerning the 1986-1987 commission of inquiry in the Iran-Contra affair is quite informative. This commission was meant to examine the relevance of information (widely publicized by the media) concerning the suspicions of high representatives of the Washington administration as to their entanglement in the illegal sale of arms to the embargoed Iran. Arms sales were to be aimed at a "behind-the-scenes" easing of the strained relations between the US and Iran, as well as the clandestine financial support of Nicaraguan anti-communist guerrilla, the so-called Contras. In their description of the procedure which was subject of the commission's inquiry, Lynch and Bogen employ the concept of "sleaze" – in its general use relating primarily to illegal or immoral practices of political elite concealed behind the veil of an alleged rule of law, high moral standards and dedication to the common good.<sup>3</sup> An important feature of political sleaze is its "slippery" nature, suggested by onomatopoeic qualities of the word and referring not only to the morally dubious and in some sense "shady" (devoid of good style) character of the aforementioned actions but also to its "elusiveness", i.e. the systematically occurring impossibility of determining ultimately whether and to what extent the raised objections are real.

The logic of sleaze is transferred partly to the activities of commissions of inquiry involved in tracking political sleaze and it is by the activities of these committees reinforced, willingly or not. Charges relating to "sleaze" demand a clear decision on the grounds of legal discourse but face complex defense strategies which effectively seek to establish legal undecidability of all accusations [Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 243–248].

Although the inevitable by-product of the committee of inquiry is, as it seems, the support of the convoluted "logic of sleaze", commissions of inquiry are still appointed in different countries, perhaps mainly because of the political capital that can be made out of them because of media publicity (this principle operates in all directions of the political scene) and due to the demand for the legitimacy of the political system as a whole. This does not mean that no committee of inquiry would be better than the "sleaze" which the very committees generate nor would it be better than tolerating the "sleaze" afflicting political elites here and there. It is, however, worth being aware of what the activities of a committee of inquiry actually entail, so as not to confuse the official statement on the matter

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<sup>3</sup> The category of sleaze was commonly used in the nineties in the UK in connection with a series of media corruption and moral scandals whose heroes were the politicians of the conservative Tory party. The so-called *Tory sleaze* has contributed to Tony Blair's Labor Party coming to power in 1997.



with the qualities of the social construction of “reality”, in which committees are involved.

Moreover, taking into account the role of the sleaze in public life, thereby drawing attention to an important sector of “neoapparent” actions leads to general theoretical issues. While “trust” within the meaning of sociological theory “fills the essential gaps between stable normative order and situated conduct [...], sleaze enables actors to exploit equivocality and indeterminacy when asked to comply with the binary terms of moral regulations. Where trust is cited as the quintessential mode of precontractual solidarity, sleaze refers us to inadmissible machinations that make the system work through secret deals, official lies, and transgressive alliances” [Lynch and Bogen 1996: 246]. Thus, “trust” and “sleaze” are somewhat parallel phenomena. With trust, a social “ceremonial of truth” is possible which (referring to the ideas of Michel Foucault) is based on the “regime of truth”, specific to a given society<sup>4</sup>. Its counterpart is a “regime of sleaze” which “works in a more obscure fashion as a lubricant that enables slippage and reduction of friction at points of contact within the interior channels of the machinery of state” [Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 246–247].

**Scientific life** is filled with “neoapparent” actions, especially in the field of empirical research and Higher Education. Scientific analyses, by necessity, feed on the “pigeonholing” of reality and by definition must use models of their object of study. These unavoidable properties of scientific inquiry undergo excessive sharpening within large, bureaucratic research projects, which deserves a sociological and political science analysis. Striking is the lack of public debate on the “project science” and “project knowledge” in Polish sociology. Polls, the most widely known form of social research, are a separate issue. Due to society’s growing awareness of polls being largely useless from the standpoint of official purposes (which is associated with awareness of weaknesses of the poll methodology, their medialization and political instrumentalization), polls are increasingly seen on the one hand as apparent actions, on the other hand as a necessary ingredient of an attractive media communication on political topics. The knowledge of the partially-apparent character of polls is not widespread among sociologists, who are generally confident about their “so-so” suitability for achieving official objec-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. notes by Foucault (1984: 73: “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.”

tives, giving them the attributes of “neoappearance”<sup>5</sup>. On this occasion, it is worth noting that the criterion of knowledge about the uselessness and harmfulness of activities, determining the qualification of actions as apparent or neoapparent, must be relativized to the social subjects of such knowledge. The same action may be of a more apparent nature in one social environment and rather “neoapparent” in another.

A new quality in the dissemination of “neoapparent” actions appears along with the wave of research in the field of the so-called knowledge-based society, social capital and human capital, governance and civil society, and thus phenomena and processes assumed to be determinants of modernization and democratization. In this area a dominant discourse evolved, which does not allow alternative and skeptical viewpoints. In their light, one could consider for example overt and hidden functions of the dominant sociological discourse. According to one possible hypothesis, such discourse is reduced in the theoretical dimension to an open promotion of a society based on exchange networks, and in the mental dimension – to covert and unreflective reproduction of the principles of “governmentality”, a neoliberal formula of managing society by means of self-government of workers and citizens<sup>6</sup>. A related skeptical viewpoint results from the analyses of “the new spirit of capitalism” based on networks and projects [Boltanski, Chiapello 2007]. Mainstream Polish sociological theory lacks serious references to these and other alternative perspectives. In other words, a reflection on any negative aspects of the above-mentioned determinants of modernization and democratization, as well as the dominant sociological discourse which promotes them, is virtually absent from the sociological environment while among Polish sociologists, support for these determinants is generally taken to be a so-so usefulness at least and sometimes even fully useful.

Similar changes have appeared in Higher Education. Knowledge of its negative aspects is not widespread. High rates of school attendance in Poland after 1989 is treated by the media and influential sociologists as one of the major, if not the most important, unquestionable successes of the Polish transformation. However, mass education cannot but lead to a lowering in the intellectual level of students and a decline in the quality of education, as well as to reorienting the curriculum for allegedly practical skills (confusingly called “procedures”) and to the withdrawal into the background of the critical and distanced analysis

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<sup>5</sup> See more on the role of polls in: Czyżewski, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault developed the concept of “governmentality” in his lectures from 1978–1979 [Foucault 2004]. See the introduction to this concept: Czyżewski, 2009.

of reality. Mass education must also lead to a lowered intellectual level of the teaching workforce – by increasing the number of teachers, increasing their teaching workload and by the mechanism of the weak hiring the weaker to work at universities. A number of outstanding students do not stay at university, not due to better life prospects elsewhere, but because they are felt to be too strong intellectually and too independent mentally of their potential superiors.

Scientific life in the conditions of bureaucratization of universities and mass education is an area particularly susceptible to the influence of “sleaze”, such as plagiarism of academic articles and student undergraduate and graduate theses, as well as illegal or morally questionable administrative practices and teaching. The scale and mechanisms of these phenomena are not subject to public, in-depth discussion. The focus of media audiences are mobilized occasionally by more or less spectacular “scandals”, the staging of which is meant to make an impression that the grounds for a legal and moral order are respected.

Another fiction which is surrounded by the belief in its accuracy is the so-called “professionalization” of sociological and economic academic courses. Within the academic structures and with university staff, it can rarely result in acquisition of practical skills needed to deal with specific problems in the so-called ‘life’. The real effect of “professionalization” may rather be the assimilation of the “language of the field” (categories of public language for naming a given discipline), which is usually accompanied by the lack of analytical distance to this language. An additional dimension of “professionalization” is associated with the demand for courses such as European affairs, journalism, organization and management, PR and marketing. In these scientific and “practical” hybrids, the academic character of study is largely lost but it is not replaced with the professional mode of education seen in vocational high schools in the West.

The aim of the scientific sphere, according to the traditional definition, is the search for truth through theoretical and empirical research as well as education (seen as *Bildung*, education which serves the intellectual and moral development of individuals). The degree of implementation of these objectives is a measure of independence of the scientific sphere. The significant loss of independence is evidenced by the transformation of the university in recent decades. Under administrative, financial and media pressure, the institution of the university is transformed into a factory producing research project reports and an enterprise competing in the market of Higher Education<sup>7</sup>. Society *en masse* has no knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> Devastating effects of thinking in terms of entrepreneurship in Higher Education in the United States was analyzed by Thorstein Veblen nearly a hundred years ago [1918].

of these matters but for most students and academic employees, the situation, though not comfortable, seems acceptable or at least unlikely to change. This gives rise to strong opportunist tendencies in the form of enjoying the prestige and financial benefits from the *status quo* and suppressing doubt, not to mention the desire to protest. Life and intellectual opportunism go hand in hand as well as, in a sense, with political and institutional opportunism.

The most serious adverse effect of the transformation of university into a production and service institution (euphemistically called the “firm”) is, as it seems, the increasingly common lack of distinction between the “language of field” and the “language of analysis”, and more broadly – the language and the reality. Languages of the disciplines which have colonized universities, the languages of administration, business and media, are progressively being treated by students and researchers not as discourses, but as languages describing reality. This trend can hardly be changed, regardless of whether it is based on naivety, cynicism or a mixture of both these components, which, as noted by Erving Goffman [1971: 31–32], is the basis at performer’s “so-so” faith in his/her own performance. Another consequence of the lack of the discourse awareness is the lack of reflection on the reverse impact of scientific life on so-called practice (politics, economy, media). These problems specifically relate to Sociology, the demand on whose rebel capital, expressed in the past through providing impetus to subversive thinking, is disappearing today. Sociology, rather than analyzing reality, becomes its part and requires a critical analysis itself.

To recapitulate – public communication within the institutions of Science and Higher Education is based on the discourse mechanism of ceremony, along with apparent agreement while omitting inconvenient points of view. Interestingly, the ceremonies of academic life hide substantial differences of opinion in the scientific community, the disclosure of which would very likely bring the launching of a pattern of ritual chaos.

## CONSLUSIONS

The essence of “neoapparent” actions (as opposed to the typical apparent ones) is the lack of both private and public knowledge of them among people involved in them. This quality may not be surprising in the instrumentally-oriented sectors of the economy and politics but it must be unsettling if it applies to areas which have the development of social consciousness written on their banners. Public communication is, after all, meant to serve the shaping of public opinion and

scientific life is meant to contribute to the development of in-depth and adequate knowledge. If these areas abound in “neoapparent” actions and thus suffer from the lack of self-reflection, it is twice as disheartening.

The observations outlined provide the background for a postulate of further reflection and empirical research on “neoapparent” actions. This is not an easy task. Neoapparent actions, as components of “pre-postmodernity”, are located in a field between two extremities: the inevitable actual ambiguity and the requirement of using unambiguous, binary criteria. Therefore, a reasonable analysis of “neoapparent” actions can, it seems, neither exclusively rely on the conservative return to sharp, anachronistic criteria, nor on the intellectually opportunistic concept of “floating downstream” in the form of accepting the post-modern blurring of boundaries. Guidelines can rather be found in interpretative orientations, which have the tools of sociological *re*-construction of the social construction of reality at their disposal and can be applied to the study of “pre-postmodernity”. The analysis of the “neoapparent” actions may also contribute to completing the sociological picture of apparent actions.

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