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Title: *The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual*

Author: **Ruth Wodak**

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In *The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual*, Wodak conducts an elaborate and enlightening investigation whose starting point echoes Michel Foucault's statement: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what *what* [sic] *they do* does" (in Wodak 2009). In this light, the main directions pursued in the book are, on the one hand, exploring and explaining "what they [the politicians] do", and, on the other, articulating "what [their action] does" for/to everyone else, or what consequences politicians' decisions may have upon various developments and communications in our society.

Chapter 1 - *Doing Politics* - establishes the theoretical premises for the discussion by elaborating on the concepts of 'performance', 'frontstage' and 'backstage,' 'politics', 'performance of politics and politicians', 'habitus', and 'communities of practice'. References to politicians' personalities are associated with an increasing "disenchantment with politics" (Wodak 2009) as well as with the general public's higher level of interest in fictionalized lives of political figures. Also, this section explores discursive devices which contribute to the construction of identities and addresses the correlation between the structure and agency. In this introductory chapter, Wodak offers a preview of her entire study: "Politics seems to have become a matter that is decided at the top only, with participation by citizens often perceived as lacking. [...] Our analyses should, therefore, also contribute to making politics more transparent and closing the considerable gap between 'those at the top' and 'everyone else'." (27)

The theoretical grounding is further defined in Chapter 2 - *The (Ir)rationality of Politics*. The primary method used is the Discourse-Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, which enables complex investigations of political communication in a variety of political contexts. One of the salient benefits of using the Discourse-Historical Approach is that it aids the process of inter-weaving the study of "micro-interactions and macro-structures". Important concepts addressed in this chapter are 'power,' 'knowledge,' 'knowledge management,' and 'presuppositions.'

Chapter 3 - *'Politics as Usual' on the 'European Stage': Constructing and Performing European Identities'* – explores everyday politics in the European Parliament, MEPs' perspectives on their own activities as well as external observers' perspectives on MEPs' activities. This section also examines the notions of individual, social, and collective identities in typical contexts, identities which are then related to a 'professional habitus' and to 'communities of practice,' and often entailing complex ideological tensions. In addition to data compiled through interviews with MEPs, other relevant information provided in this chapter comes from synoptic graphics, such as a flow charts illustrating the organizational flow of proposals or the co-decision procedure, pictures inside of the European Parliament's building, or tables summarizing MEPs' regional or national identities.

An extension of the previous section, Chapter 4 - *One Day in the Life of an MEP* – presents ‘the backstage’ of everyday politics through a “critical ethnographic and discourse-analytic case study” (Wodak 2009), documenting an MEP’s activities throughout his daily routine. As readers gain access into the ‘backstage’ dynamics of this politician’s day, they can now experience the demystification of the MEP’s daily routine. The corpora used contain interactional and organizational patterns that can be further studied by analyzing discursive features present in this section.

The ‘fictionalization of politics’ (with its ‘backstage’ access) is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 - *Everyday Politics in Television: Fiction and/or Reality?* - , where the concept of the ‘politicization of fiction’ is also discussed. If Chapter 4 follows a real MEP throughout his daily parliamentary routine, Chapter 5 analyzes two episodes of *The West Wing*, a soap presenting the everyday, virtual lives of American politicians. Using the tools of critical discourse analysis, Wodak argues that depoliticization is a consequence of viewers’ disappointment in and frustration with politics.

Chapter 6 - *Order or Disorder - Fiction or Reality? The Implications of 'Power and Knowledge Management' on 'Politics as Usual'* - de-constructs the steps by which depoliticization takes place. As illustrated through *The West Wing* soap’s selected episodes and their analyses, we resort to fiction or fictionalization when the reality is disappointing. However, if the complications of everyday politics in fictionalized form shed an even more ambiguous light on reality, then confusion and subsequently disenchantment with politics ensue. The solution proposed here is an invitation to critical reflection and self-reflection, by adopting interdisciplinary approaches to frontstage-backstage political interaction, which are meant to challenge the audience and to enable a deeper and more systematic understanding of current political processes.

The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual is a captivating and thought-provoking ethnographic study, coalescing the interdisciplinary approach, precise theoretical elaborations and germane corpora. Through its insightful examination of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary discourse and behavior patterns, the book is an indispensable resource for those pursuing discourse analysis and political studies.

Reviewer: Izabela Lazar