Book Reviews

Buty, C. & Plantin, C. (eds.) (2009). Argumenter en classe de sciences. Paris: INRP.

In recent years, a growing number of studies is aimed at the analysis of argumentative discourse in a science learning context (Driver et al. 2000; Jiménez-Alexandre et al. 2000; Kelly & Takao 2002; Zohar & Nemet 2002). These works draw, among others, from two different frameworks. One of them focuses on highlighting the importance of discourse in the construction of scientific knowledge (Knorr-Cetina 1999; Latour & Woolgar 1986) and its consequences for education (Pontecorvo 1987). A second framework moves from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1991) by pointing out the role of social interaction in learning and thinking processes.

The eight chapters of "Argumenter en classe de sciences" represent a collection of empirical studies devoted to the analysis of argumentative processes in different science learning contexts. They belong to the research strand on the use of argumentation in the context of teaching of scientific disciplines introduced by Tiberghien and Plantin and further developed by the works of Douaire (2004), Kelly & Duschl (2002), Erduran & Jiménez-Aleixandre (2007). Nowadays, the *fée argumentation* (p. 244) – as she is

called by Buty & Plantin, the scientific directors of this book – is invoked as an approach that may answer many pedagogical issues. This is also pointed out by Muller-Mirza in the accurate preface to the volume:

"Fondées sur des recherches, évoquées tout au long de l'ouvrage, dans différent domaines – épistémologie des sciences, didactique des sciences, sciences de l'éducation, psychologie sociale du développement, etc. – les pratiques argumentatives apparaissent effectivement intéressantes dans l'enseignement des disciplines scientifiques, et ceci pour les trois raisons suivantes, tout au moins: les interactions sociales jouent un rôle central dans la construction de connaissances; l'argumentation est au cœur de la démarche scientifique; l'apprenant est acteur dans l'acquistion de nouvelles connaissances."

Considering the results of the empirical research, two main aspects come to light: the richness of argumentative exchanges realized by both students and teachers and the evolution of the argumentative debate aiming at the construction of real understanding.

The diversity of the data is the result of the variety of educational levels of students (ranging from elementary school to university) and to the types of class organization. These features allow to describe and analyse the use and effects of argumentation practices in teaching from different angles.

In the first chapter, Jimenez-Aleix-andre & Bustamante advance the idea that learning a science is to integrate a number of valid epistemic practices related the scientific community. They also provide a matrix of epistemological and practical tools useful to describe epistemic practices in the science learning context and to advance the development of content and the behaviour of teachers.

In their chapter, Orange, Lhoste & Orange-Ravachol investigate the conditions under which argumentation in the context of science learning can foster the learner's passage from common knowledge to scientific knowledge. This path is possible only if students have the chance to propose ideas and voice opposition within the debate. The educational commitment of teachers is two-fold: they should promote the production of arguments and control the dynamics of the argumentative debate involving students.

In chapter three, Simonneaux & Albe focus their research not only on students' ability, but also on their attitude towards such activities to analyse and express their opinion on controversial scientific issues. According to the authors it is a fundamental task of educational institutions to train students to produce sound arguments (see van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2003, 2005) about their position on current issues in research and in society (p. 117), while the educational system is in charge of defining the skills that each student should acquire by the end of compulsory schooling in order to position him/herself in society as an autonomous and responsible citizen.

How the characteristics of scientific thought, argumentative by nature, emerge in a science learning context, is the theme of chapter four, written by Bisault. Didactic work in a such a context, *"la pratique scientifique scolaire,"* can indeed be regarded as a reconstruction for learning purposes of certain aspects of scientific research (p. 153). Of particular interest in this chapter is the reproduction of a university department by elementary school pupils acting as a community of researchers. The analysis showed that communication and argumentation both play a central role both in research and in learning activities in the classroom.

Héraud, Clement & Errera in their chapter analyse how the ambiguity and referential plurality of statements may allow the construction of scientific concepts starting from common knowledge. Referring to the theoretical model of the *"jeux de langage"* (Clément et al. 2004; Durand-Guerrier et al. 2006), the authors carried out an analysis of a corpus of extended argumentative dialogues between teachers and students. This experiment shows how teachers use argumentative processes to help students overcome ambiguities in the discourse and build their own research questions, which are necessary conditions for creating scientific knowledge in the school context.

The chapter by Buty & Plantin gives an overview of some problems that science learning contexts might raise for the study of argumentation. The main research question of this contribution is: "Who validates the arguments produced in the classroom, and how does this validation take place?"

As already noted (see ch. 2 and 5), the teacher's role is crucial in guiding students to *argumenter valablement*. As the authors write: *"Les élèves ont besoin de suffisamment de connaissances, à la fois conceptuelles et pratiques, en meme temps que de méthodes argumentatives. Pour acquérir ces connaissances et ces méthodes, il faut du temps. Le rôle de l'enseignant, à la fois comme valideur et comme constricteur patient de ces compétences, est fundamental."* (p. 31)

In their contribution (ch. 7), Rebière, Schneeberger & Jaubert analyse the process of the gradual construction of a pertinent position by students. This is considered essential to the learning of scientific disciplines. The task of teachers is to make students aware of the criteria for the acceptability of a scientific proposition as well as to establish and guide the *dispositifs d'argumentation* that can accommodate the different positions announced and to allow their full development and understanding.

The eighth and last chapter, written by Fillon and Peterfalvi, takes on the issue of ambiguity in argumentative debates in classrooms (see ch. 5). The elements of the analysis mainly taken into consideration are both the effect of polysemioticity of terms and the misunderstandings about the nature of the problem to which the statement refers. The authors conclude by affirming that the argument context in which a linguistic expression is produced, strongly influences the dynamics of comprehension between interacting individuals.

This volume provides valuable insights on an impressively rich set of topics, also managing to link them in a unitary design.

In conclusion, the merit of this work is that of highlighting how the use of argumentation practices in a science learning context ensure significant benefits:

- supporting the development of communicative competences;
- supporting the choice of theories or positions based on rational criteria;
- supporting the enculturation into the practices of scientific culture and the development of epistemic criteria for knowledge evaluation;
- supporting the acquisition of scientific literacy, both oral and written.

In the editors' opinion, the achievement of these benefits is not granted simply by the introduction of argumentation in the classroom, but requires a coordinated, complex and systematic set of pedagogical and curricular assessment initiatives which need to be supervised by teachers.

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Fioretti, Natascha, Russ-Mohl, Stephan (eds.) (2009): Merging Media, converging Newsrooms. Lugano: CFS-Casagrande editore.

L'ouvrage est issu d'un colloque réalisé en mars 2008 à l'Ecole suisse de journalisme à Lucerne (MAZ), organisé conjointement avec l'Université de la Suisse italienne et l'Observatoire européen du journalisme (EJO). Différents spécialistes européens des médias, aussi bien universitaires que praticiens, se relaient pour rendre compte de l'état actuel des rédactions des médias, bousculées par les évolutions technologiques et les pressions financières. L'ouvrage, structuré en quatre parties, permet au lecteur de se faire une idée précise des conditions de travail actuelles des journalistes. Ce point constitue la principale valeur ajoutée des actes de ce colloque, même si à côté des représentants des éditeurs, la voix des syndicats manquera aux lecteurs pour comprendre complètement les bienfaits et les menaces sur la profession de journaliste. L'un des constats majeurs est que le métier connait une évolution sans précédent, laquelle marquera durablement cette profession. Dans un contexte de fusions des entreprises médiatiques orchestrées par des multinationales de l'information, les journalistes sont ainsi obligés de s'adapter aux différents types de consommation de l'information (écrit, vidéo, audio) sur une multiplication des supports (presse, télévision, radio, internet, téléphonie mobile). A la lecture des différents articles, l'avenir de la profession de journaliste se révèle incertain, conséquence d'une dépendance croissante des médias envers le

marché publicitaire. D'une manière générale, l'ouvrage se révèle instructif sur ce que Patrick Charaudeau nomme la logique économique des médias. La logique symbolique de la contribution des médias à la construction de l'opinion publique est en revanche malheureusement trop peu étudiée, ce qui réduit un peu la portée de cet ouvrage par ailleurs très riche.

Dans la première partie, le lecteur comprendra la révolution médiatique en cours – *The media landscape has changed for ever* (Stone) – condamnant les dirigeants des médias à une adaptation permanente aux nouvelles technologies. Markus Spillmann résume le principal défi actuel des entreprises médiatiques: *parvenir à financer un journalisme de qualité sur différents produits*. Indépendants ou liés à des groupes politiques et/ou industriels, les médias, sont, dans les deux cas, soumis aux limitations financières du marché des médias et à celles de la publicité. S'il est évident qu'un modèle économique non rentable ne peut perdurer à terme, la question du profit dans le cadre des médias pose la question de la rentabilité des idées. En effet, les auteurs semblent admettre que les entreprises médiatiques sont des entreprises comme les autres, dans lesquelles, aujourd'hui, le profit est un objectif manifestement déclaré. On pourra regretter que les auteurs effleurent à peine la contradiction entre la logique du profit et le devoir principal des journalistes, informer. En effet, les nouvelles technologies de communication et, en particulier, Internet, ont-elles permis une meilleure information des citoyens? On pourra compléter avec des

réponses plus critiques chez Philippe Breton ou Henri Maler.

La deuxième partie, la plus dense de l'ouvrage, esquisse, à partir de différents médias (Presse, Radio, Télévision) et différents contextes géographiques (Allemagne, Autriche, Suisse, Pologne, Italie, Norvège, Danemark), les enjeux et les différents modèles de fusion des médias et de convergences des pratiques professionnelles. Un constat s'impose, les évolutions technologiques provoquent chez le public une attente envers des contenus multimédias. Les dirigeants des médias n'ont d'autres choix que d'offrir des contenus différenciés suivant les thématiques, la proximité de l'information, les approches neutres ou sensationnalistes. Les pressions technologiques et financières poussent les médias à des convergences dans les rédactions par rapport aux différents supports et à des fusions avec des partenaires pour limiter les coûts de production. A nouveau, la question de la qualité des contenus est sous toutes les plumes. La question de la séparation des rédactions entre celle destinée aux transmissions classiques (presse, télévision, radio) et celle centrée sur la diffusion sur le web et la téléphonie mobile est soulevée avec insistance par de nombreux auteurs, sans néanmoins parvenir à une réponse définitive sur le modèle idéal. Il n'y en a certainement pas un, mais plusieurs, destinés à évoluer encore davantage à l'avenir.

Dans une troisième partie dédiée spécifiquement à la qualité des contenus, Rober G. Picard souligne à propos des journaux que si, ceux-ci sont en crise, ce n'est pas à cause de la télévision ou d'internet, mais parce qu'il y un

échec dans la production de contenus suffisamment satisfaisants pour que les lecteurs paient pour ces contenus. Le public est devenu plus exigeant sur la qualité des contenus médiatiques par la multiplication des offres dans le champ de l'information. Pour répondre à ce défi, les multinationales de l'information et du divertissement comme *AOL Time Warner, Vivendi Universal* ou *Bertelsmann* ont conçu des synergies et des fusions avec des investissements financiers importants entre les différents médias des groupes. Picard rappelle que ce fut autant d'échecs cuisants. Il met notamment en cause l'absence de vision journalistique de la logique financière de réduction des coûts. Pourtant, d'autres médias parviennent à des résultats convenables. C'est le cas par exemple du journal *Financial Times Deutschland* qui collabore avec des stations de radios en Allemagne sur la base d'échange d'informations contre de la publicité pour le journal. C'est un cas de figure *gagnant-gagnant* pour les médias, qui ne fait appel à aucun investissement financier. Les stations de radio parviennent à offrir une information financière de meilleure qualité et le journal est davantage connu. L'augmentation de la qualité de l'information semble être la clé de la survie de la presse. Kurt W. Zimmerman, membre de la direction de *Tamedia,* insiste sur le fait que les rachats des journaux par des groupes financiers connaissent la plupart du temps des issues positives *(Berliner Zeitung* acheté par David Montgomery puis au prix fort par *Du-Mont Schauburg, The Times* acheté par Rupert Murdoch). A l'inverse, l'auteur souligne que la crise chronique du jour-

nal *Le Monde* est à chercher du côté de ses propriétaires. En effet, 60.4 % des parts de ce quotidien appartiennent aux journalistes eux-mêmes. Avec de tels propos, Zimmerman ne se fera pas beaucoup d'amis du côté des journalistes !

La dernière partie se penche sur la complexité actuelle du métier de journaliste. Si tel n'est pas déjà le cas, l'avenir des entreprises médiatique est à chercher du côté de la diffusion de contenus multimédias et de la polyvalence des nouveaux journalistes (Saltzis). Ce qui n'est pas sans poser de problème pour les journalistes issus de la vieille école. L'adaptation et la nécessité pour le journaliste d'avoir des compétences multiples sont mises en avant par l'exemple de la nouvelle catégorie des journalistes vidéo (Dickinson/Bigi). L'avenir ou le salut du journalisme est finalement énoncé sur la base de cinq propositions (Prinzing) : une amélioration des informations locales pour que le média représente un référent identitaire pour son public ; le réseautage entre ses pairs et le public par le biais des nouvelles technologies, notamment internet ; la voie entre la spécialisation sur une/des thématique(s) tout en étant généraliste ; des compétences dans les différents canaux de diffusion médiatique ; une compréhension interculturelle de l'actualité. Certaines de ces remarques vont de soi, car contraintes par les évolutions technologiques, d'autres sont moins faciles à développer, car elles sont en lien avec l'éducation. En effet, les journalistes ne constituent pas une communauté à part avec une représentation idéologique du monde identique. Ils fonctionnent suivant les mêmes cri-

tères de socialisation que les autres individus. Enfin, l'ouvrage se conclut sur un court texte de Verena Lugert sur le journalisme converti en chef d'entreprise, proposant des sujets à différents médias. La fin du salariat du journalisme avec la généralisation du journalisme *freelance* est-elle la solution aux problèmes actuels de la profession? Verra-t-on demain des médias sans journalistes? On ne manquera pas de méditer encore longtemps sur ces questions dans les cercles médiatiques et ce livre aura largement contribué à cette réflexion.

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Eemeren, Frans van & Garssen, Bart (eds.) (2008). Controversy and Confrontation – Relating Controversy Analysis with Argumentation Theory. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

The volume "Controversy and Confrontation," published in 2008 by John Benjamins Publishing Company, is edited by Frans van Eemeren and Bart Garssen. Van Eemeren is Professor of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric and director of two research programs at the University of Amsterdam and the leading scholar of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation which he developed with Rob Grootendorst and extended with Peter Houtlosser. Bart Garssen is an emerging figure in the pragma-dia-

lectical theory of argumentation and an Assistant Professor in the department for Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric at the University of Amsterdam. The volume belongs to a promising series started in 2005 called Controversies and whose series editor is Marcelo Dascal, professor of Philosophy at the University of Tel Aviv and the most prominent scholar in the study of controversies.

"Controversy and Confrontation" is a collection of essays analyzing important cases of controversies, both in present-day and in historical contexts, and theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of confrontation. In their introductory text, van Eemeren and Garssen provide a really useful overview and guide for a more fruitful reading of the essays. They start by pointing out how the authors deal with controversies with a theoretical and an empirical perspective and how most of them adopt some concepts of the pragma-dialectic theory among which, in particular, the key-notions of *critical discussion, reasonableness, rules for critical discussion, strategic maneuvering, argumentative activity type.* Finally, they conclude by stressing how the Dascal's notion of *controversy,* also shared by many of the contributors, could be seen as a specific and prototypical case of polemical disputation and, as such, suitable for a full application of insights from argumentation theory "to achieve a more precise and more systematic analysis of the argumentative proceedings involved" (van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 23).

Dascal's *controversy* is a type of debate that allows to de-dichotomize

the still dominant discussion/dispute dichotomy. Indeed, the aim of a controversy is not to prove a truth, as in a discussion, or that of winning, as in a dispute, but it is to persuade the other party about the validity of one's own position through the use of argumentation without necessarily rejecting the other position as totally wrong and, accordingly, de-dichotomization consists in "showing that the opposition between the poles can be constructed as less logically binding than a contradiction, thus allowing for intermediate alternatives" (Dascal, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 35). Dascal points out how a dichotomy is subjective because there is no precise criterion for cutting a concept in two and most of the times the "opposite concepts" at least partially overlap (e.g. pure science/applied science). Thus, since "the phenomena par excellence in which dichotomies [...] are invoked and therefore play some observable role are argumentative episodes" he suggests a "constructivist" and "pragmatic" approach to investigating "the argumentative aims and moves that either construct or deconstruct an opposition as a 'dichotomy'" (Dascal, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 34).

Beside that of *dichotomy,* other argumentative key-notions are *disagreement space* and *ad hominem fallacy,* while another broadly-shared point is the application of the study of controversies to scientific debates. Ferreira, for example, considers a debate between researchers on system theory to show how the use of language in scientific controversies is not simply instrumental, but constitutive of the development of scientific theory (Ferreira, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 125). Regner analyzes the scientific debate between Darwin and Mivart about whether to include religion in scientific discourse. She adopts the pragma-dialectical approach and notices a peculiarity of the debate: the two participants are not trying to solve their difference of opinion but, rather, to persuade the scientific community by using argumentative strategies (Regner, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 52). The application of the pragma-dialectical approach to scientific discourse is also proposed by Zemplén in his analysis of the Newton-Lucas correspondence about light consisting of differently refrangible rays, in which he discusses the moves of the historical actors but also of the analysts of the debate. In particular, he criticizes the rhetorical approaches to studying scientific discourse which cannot account well for the discursiveness of the different contributions in a controversy (Zemplén, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 253). Although on a more theoretical level, the aim of Kutrovátz is parallel to Zemplén's, proposing and evaluating the application of the pragma-dialectical model to the study of scientific discourse. The proposal does not regard controversies among scientists only, but also the communication between scientist and the public, criticizing the view that conceives of the public only as a passive receiver of scientific knowledge and stressing the importance of the social dimension of the scientific process and its temporal dynamics (Kutrovátz, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 231).

Finally, a discussion on science at a meta-level in a scientific-political context is entertained by Lessl. According to him, in a metascientific vacuum, i.e. when a discourse dealing with a science-related topic does not comprehend a definition of science to refer to, individuals will retrieve formerly-encountered definitions of science, which can be unsuited for the actual context (Lessl, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 87). In particular, Lessl studies the possible negative consequences of a publication by the National Academy of Science, dealing with the teaching of biological evolution in schools, on the interpretation of another publication of the same institution about the problem of greenhouse effect.

The historical perspective is another common point of several essays: for instance Saim's contribution in her analysis of the debate about the integration of the Jewish in Prussian society in 1799 (Saim, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 93–108) and Fritz's aimings at identifying principles governing communication in general and controversies in particular by means of empirical observations. According to Fritz, rationality alone is not enough to define rules of communication and how they vary according to the historical period, the context and the textual genre (Fritz, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 110).

Other types of debate taken into account are those arising in conflictual situations about socio-political issues (Marras & Euli) and in an informal meeting of a community in the US regarding a housing development (Aakhus & Vasilyeva). According to Mar-

ras & Euli, the traditional "Dissuasion Model" adopted in the practice of conflict management leaves room for a hidden violence since it usually implies an asymmetry of the participants regarding power relations. The proposed "Nonviolent Dissuasion Model" considers six scenarios, or steps, composing the "dialectic ladder" and in which agreement is more and more difficult to achieve and in which especially the last steps requires cooperation to avoid violence and to opt for a more desirable "disagreement in agreement" (Marras & Euli, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 142–144). On the other hand, Aakhus and Vasilyeva analyze how the parties manage the *disagreement space* which is, according to Jackson, a "structured set of opportunities for argument" (Jackson 1992). The authors notice how, while the opening speech of the land developers could be seen as a proposal, the community members re-frame it as an incomplete proposal to avoid committing themselves to the obligations which would be implied in an official situation (Aakhus & Vasilyeva, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 212). Also the Jackson's essay deals with her notion of *disagreement space.* According to her, every speech act presents possible argumentative expansions which can be exploited by the opponent "with devastating effect." This is the case of predicaments, i.e. situations "in which all moves available to a participant seem to lead away from resolution of disagreement" (Jackson 2005, quoted in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 218).

An argumentative key-notion considered by the scholars of argumenta-

tion theory is the *ad hominem fallacy.* Van Laar's essay deals with accusations of pragmatic inconsistency to arguers characterized by a certain behavior who advance particular standpoints. The author tries to discriminate conditions under which this move is a sound *personal attack* and not an *ad hominem* fallacy. After pointing out that a charge of pragmatic inconsistency is an instance of strategic maneuvering linked to the confrontation stage, he clarifies that the move is not a fallacy when it is part of a metacomment regarding the validity of the arguer as such in the actual discussion. Eventually, several conditions are specified under which the accusation of being pragmatically inconsistent is legitimated. "According to these conditions, the manoeuvring is sound only in dialectically austere circumstances where the arguer clearly is not fit to play the part of protagonist" (van Laar, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 177). Adopting an empirical approach, van Eemeren, Garssen & Meuffels focus on *ad hominem* fallacies and in particular they demonstrate how users reject them because they lack argumentative value and not because they are instances of impoliteness. The study is part of a broader project which was developed from 1995 until 2005 aimed at testing the conventional validity of the rules for the critical discussion. They used five different methods in order to comply with a convergent operationalism and the research consisted in presenting a set of discussion fragments and asking people whether they deemed a certain move reasonable, in some cases asking them to explain the answer. There are

three variants of the argumentum *ad hominem* each of which was investigated: the *abusive* variant, in which "one party denigrates the other party's honesty, intelligence, or good faith" (van Eemeren, Garssen & Meuffels, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 183); the *circumstantial* variant, which is related to special circumstances which could bias the opponent and the *tu quoque* variant, "directed at revealing an inconsistency in the positions that the opponent has adopted on various occasions" (van Eemeren, Garssen & Meuffels, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 183). The remaining argumentation theory scholar contributor of the book, Johnson, deals with the process of responding to objections analyzing the ways in which an arguer can "defend" her argument. When responding to objections, it is common to slightly change one's own argument, and the objections can be weak or strong depending on the type of change of the original argument they require. An argument being characterized by the content of its components and by their inferential relationships, its *identity* is preserved when changes in the formulation of the argument do not affect these two aspects. Weak objections can modify the form of an argument (e.g. requiring more information or specifications) but not really its "intellectual core" allowing the arguer to keep the argument *integrity* if not its identity. Finally, strong objections are those who require a formulation of a new argument which is its *dialectical successor* since it derives from the first one (Johnson, in: van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 159).

In conclusion, this volume represents a really stimulating read which shows how argumentative analysis and the study of controversies can be applied to a broad range of new fields, issues and perspectives but also used to revisit traditional ones. In particular, many studies have still to be conducted in contexts other than the scientific one and this review ends by recalling the editors' claim that "this particular choice of object does not really exhaust the possibilities for a fruitful application of insights from argumentation theory to the analysis and evaluation of actual cases of argumentative discourse" (van Eemeren & Garssen 2008: 24). Indeed, they wish a further integration of insights of the analysis of argumentation into the study of controversies and other argumentative activities, which would allow to reconstruct a complete analytic overview to conduct a critical assessment of many interesting argumentative exchanges.

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Muller Mirza, Nathalie & Perret-Clermont, Anne-Nelly (eds.) (2009). Argumentation and Education: Theoretical Foundations and Practices. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer.

Nathalie Muller Mirza and Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont's edited book *Argumentation and Education* is an achievement in the effort of integrating two fields of tremendous importance, theoretically, methodologically and last but not least, ethically.

Thanks to the collaboration of different research groups from six countries, both editors and authors, throughout the eight chapters, cast a well documented and critical gaze at the amplitude of argumentation theory in the scientific arena, its methodological implications and detailed empirical evidence.

The book exemplifies what can be achieved by academic groups, when they share not only a wealth of experiences, but a specific way of considering the scientific, cultural and social relevance of argumentation. I just quote from the Rigotti & Morasso's first chapter: *"Argumentation is the substance of democracy, which is different from other social systems exactly because its only legitimated power is that of the word, since words are the only tools we [humans] have, in order to build free consent and live together freely."* (p. 29)

Honestly speaking, it is a tremendous claim and a *manifesto,* that Democracy's inventors of the fifth century B.C. had grasped as the milestone of public, shared, and necessary consent for community choices and as well as

the critical attitude allowing Athenian citizens to defend themselves from every kind of logical and practical manipulations, comprised the various kind of tyrannies.

I was so struck by this reference to the social, political, and ethical implications of argumentation that I immediately remembered a contribution of a colleague, Josiah Ober (at Stanford University), who has been suggested by my daughter (working on a Ph.D in Classics – sorry for this unusual form of personal communication).

According to Ober (2007), democracy has a root meaning of "the power of the people." But power in what sense? In modernity, democracy is often construed as being concerned, in the first instance, with a voting rule for determining the will of the majority. The power of the people is thus the authority to decide matters by majority rule. This reductive definition leaves democracy vulnerable to well-known social choice dilemmas. A better way to approach this issue is to interpret democracy as originally referred to "power" in the sense of "capacity to do things." "Majority rule" was an intentionally pejorative diminution, urged by democracy Greek critics. Reducing democracy to a voting rule arguably elides much of the value and potential of democracy. *Demokratia* is not just "the power of the demos" in the sense "the superior or monopolistic power of the *demos* relative to other potential power-holders in the state." Rather it means, more capaciously, "the empowered *demos*" – it is the regime in which the demos gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm. And so it is not just a matter of control of a public realm but the collective strength and ability to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action. The *demos* capacity was first manifested during a popular uprising that sparked the democratic revolution of 508/7 B.C. But revolutionary moments are fleeting. If the *demos* requires a collective capacity to do things over time – to form plans and carry them to completion in ordinary circumstances – then *demokratia,* as a form of popular self-government, required institutional forms. Notably, the institutions of Athenian *demokratia* were never centered on elections. The demos was composed of a socially diverse body of individuals, each capable of choosing freely in his own interests. Its members were not unified in their desires by an "all the way down" ideology. Many of them required some sort of subsidy if they were to participate on an equal basis. All of this meant that in order for the *demos* to be politically enabled, in a regular and sustainable way, some difficult collective action and coordination problems must be addressed. The Athenian regime did not try to address those problems by voting rules alone. Lotteries for offices and agenda-setting deliberative bodies were primary Athenian democratic institutional forms. But even these institutional forms do not fully capture the meaning of *demokratia* as capacity to do things. A fuller sense of *demokratia* is offered in a passage from a court case of the mid-fourth century B.C. by Demosthenes, who employs a rich vocabulary of strength, control, ability, and protection; summing up

the democratic relationship between law, action, and public goods: *"For in fact, if you [jurors] cared to consider and investigate the question of what is that gives power and control over everything in the polis to those of you who are jurors at any given time – you would find that the reason is not that you alone of the citizens are armed and mobilized in ranks, nor that you are physically the best and strongest, nor that you are youngest in age, nor anything of the sort, but rather you'd find that you are powerful through the laws . And what is the power of the laws? Is it that, if any of you is attacked and gives a shout, they'll come running to your aid? No, they are just inscribed letters and have no ability to do that. What then is their motive power? You are, if you secure them and make them authoritative whenever anyone asks for aid. So the laws are powerful through you and you through the laws. You must therefore stand up for them in just the same way as any individual would stand up for himself if attacked; you must take the view that offenses against the law are public concerns."* (Ober 2007: 6)

Why do I chose to quote this passage? Rigotti & Morasso remind us that argumentation has a long past (dialectic, rethoric, and political philosophy) and a relatively recent "Renaissance," with its scientific and academic development, about fifty years ago, and its interest in relationships to practice and everyday life.

As in the Renaissance European age, since mid '50s, a huge amount of approaches, or schools, blossomed with their emphasis on critical discussion, dialogue types, zone of agreement, strategic manoeuvring, and the nosog-

raphy of rules governing the fair-play moves to reach a standard of reasonableness. At the heart of this scientific and cultural effort I find the dilemmatic couples of truth and opinions, argumentation and reason, which echo the classic Greek dilemma between *aletheia* and *doxa,* which has been approached by the *power of words,* the *capacity of doing things,* instead of the power of weapons, dictators, tyrannies.

The variety and richness of everyday practices where argumentation has been studying and applying does integrate evidence of the unceasingly dynamics between the arguers' (protagonist, vs. antagonist) personal desire to win the causes (business, legal, scientific, religious, advertising, political discourse, therapeutic discourse, etc.) and their commitment to maintain a standard of reasonableness.

But from the point of view of social psychology, as the Editors (with the collaboration of Tartas and Iannaccone) appropriately remind us, a huge amount of historical, institutional, and cultural resources and constraints moderate and modulate the give-and-take (is it always – only – a conversation?) between arguers. Different levels of analysis of psycho-social processes are needed for a better understanding under which conditions the rules of critical discussion are followed or disrupted. The editors in their original chapter (ch. 2) offer a precious overview both of these levels and their relationships to teaching-learning activities, in the realm of arguing to learn and learning to argue. I would only suggest, as complementary issues, the dynamics of social influence (which should not be

reduced to the persuasion studies, as Rigotti & Morasso [ch. 1, p. 33] seem to refer to) and the approach of social representations (Moscovici 1976; Mugny & Carugati 1985; Selleri & Carugati 2004), that seems to be useful for understanding under which conditions teaching-learning goals, different representations of the partner and of the learning task could influence the "why" arguers should be committed to maintain a standard of reasonableness.

Chapter after chapter, Schwarz, Baker & Andriessen outline and detail the complex relations between argumentation and learning, allowing the reader a specific conceptualization of what should not be naïvely interpreted as a rethoric word game: learning to argue and arguing to learn. In fact, thanks to concrete examples from several school subjects (mathematics, science, history, physics, civic education), reader is progressively accompanied to a detailed evidence that teaching-learning practices, processes and outcomes even in the realm of argumentation, are two sides of the same coin, and they are immerged in the complex combinations of the above-mentioned psycho-social dynamics. It seems that the social representations of school subjects (Selleri & Carugati 2004), in terms of a latent scale from Mathematics (truth) to civic education (opinions, values, goals), parallel the Greek dilemma between *aletheia* and *doxa,* and justify the optimistic (the *optimism of the will* in Gramsci's terms, compared to the skepticism of the reason!) efforts of stakeholders and policy makers overall the world to design specific programs devoted to implement participatory

methods focusing on issues with direct relevance to participants' daily life (cf. Schwarz, ch. 3, p. 121).

We are at the core of the education side of the book: the educational design of argumentative activities. I would only mention what it seems to me the central tenet of the issue, with its fundamental pedagogical implication: the creation of the *space of debate.* According to Baker, (ch. 4, p. 135) students should not only know sufficient argument in favor of their position, but also they should know the argument against, and even they would reply to those counter-arguments, with the mastering of the internal coherence between arguments and positions. What a tremendous amount of individual, interactional, and institutional requirements should be met for reaching this virtuous critic mass of conditions!

No surprise therefore when Andriessen (ch. 7) at the end of his detailed presentation of the university students actual practices with argumentation computer-based tools, honestly admits that *"Students were serious and motivated to do the required task. nevertheless, they did not argue very much, and much argumentation lacked depth. Most students repeated what was stated in the scientific texts [...] This was not due to their exceptionally poor qualities with respect to argumentation. we propose that causes lie in the meaning (for the students) of the activities that we asked them to do [...] assignments that require more than elementary comprehension are extremely hard to do. Using technology merely serves revealing this problem, but supporting student reasoning requires a different design of the technology."* (p. 210)

The previous quotation from Andriessen is at some extent paralleled/moderated by Mercer's contribution on the effectiveness of his *Thinking Together* practical programme, designed to encourage the *Exploratory Talk* in children of different ages. Here an interesting issue is touched on, but it could merit a further investigation: the influence of peer culture (Corsaro 2004) and of classroom culture (teachers-pupils relationships: didactic contract) on learning outcomes. In fact Mercer adds a complementary condition to the panoplia of psycho-social ones: "*the guided development of children's argumentation skills is best pursued through a careful balance between teacher-led, whole-class sessions and 'talk groups' in which children work and talk without constant teacher supervision.*"(ch. 6, p. 192)

A final remark should be devoted to the *Argumentum Experience,* presented and discussed by Greco Morasso: students should be allowed *time,* or in another terms, for the production of *space for debate* (I would suggest this form, instead of *space of debate,* but it is only a minor semantic preference) the *chronogenesis* of argumentative practices should be respected. It is not a matter of "waiting and see," but the individual and group pace of appropriating the taste, the curiosity, and the playful valency of learning by arguing and arguing by learning.

In this sense the magisterial lesson of Kurt Lewin's work on the positive influence of democratic climate on performance and emotional quality of group activities is still a topical issue.

Thus since the ancient Greek legacy that democracy is the capacity of doing things, thanks to this precious book, we now dispose of a wealth of theoretical and empirical evidence that children, students and teachers *could do good things,* and this is a welcome piece of news from academy for the young citizens of our countries.

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Petersen, Thomas & Schwender, Clemens (eds.) (2009). Visuelle Stereotype. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag.

This book is the product of a 2007 conference organized by the working group "Visuelle Kommunikation" of the German Gesellschaft für Kommunikation und Publizistik (DGPuK) in Constance, Germany. The theme of the conference itself was chosen because it reflects a current research concern with contemporary issues in the field of visual communications. The conference papers, collected here, deepen our understanding of these issues. The first impression is that the collection presents good to very good work, filling a very real and important research gap. We have witnessed a constant increase in the number of images which surround us daily, without developing a concomitant understanding of how these images affect us. Social psychologists (Hamilton & Trollier 1995; Steele 1997), political scientists (Lippmann 1922), and linguists (Amossy & Herschberg 1997) have studied the notion of stereotype from many angles. However, only recently have specialists of the visual image deepened their explorations of this subject, even creating a new word – "Visiotyp" (a contraction of the words "vision" and "stereotype") (Pörksen 1997) – to show the links between visual and written stereotypes (Schierl 2001; Scheufele 2006). This book is a welcome addition to that earlier research.

In their introduction the two editors, Thomas Pertersen and Clemens Schwender, provide a brief summary of past work on stereotypes, noting its chief characteristics: a simple, unchanging form that at once avoids complexity and is widely understood. The editors thus argue that stereotypes have real values, even as they also may create problems. They insist rightly that stereotypes may be positive, negative, or neutral in character. And finally, they note that, given the importance of stereotypes in creating opinions, it is important to analyze them in the larger context of the media, whether visual or verbal, and especially in news reports.

The eleven contributions in the book vary by subject (TV series, politics, advertising, illustrations, press photographs, political cartoons, …), medium (posters, television, newspapers, film, …), and approach (analytical, methodological, theoretical, …). Thus, although all the chapters may not equally tempt all readers, there is something here for everyone interested in the topic. Among the essays that seem most innovative, we note that of Sabine Reich and Franziska Spitzner on the successful television series "Türkisch für Anfänger." Using a simple but effective methodology, the authors conclude that the media is incapable of changing opinions, contrary to what other research has shown (Shiappa 2005). Reich & Spitzner are well aware that they were only measuring the direct and short-term effects of the media even though its influence is often measurable only over a longer period of time during which the perceived meaning may change.

Clemens Schwender, an expert on the representation of old-age in the media, focuses in his article on the

elderly and advertising. He dismisses the idea that the media reflect reality, recalling that, on the contrary, audiences clearly recognize the difference between types of communication (fiction, advertising, non-fiction, news reports, …). Clemens begins with an analysis of all ages represented in ads, which provides a broad context for his real subject. He then goes on to describe the various visual and verbal elements that make up the stereotypes of people over 65 and shows how they are used in advertising to create positive, negative, or neutral images of the elderly. He concludes that the elderly are under-represented in advertising.

Flavia Beuel writes about how a press photo can effectively serve to catch the attention and interest of a reader: to act as the "eyecatcher" for an article. Relying on the theory of Just & Carpenter (1980), which posits that it is interest that determines where we focus our attention, she demonstrates that negative emotions conveyed through body language are more compelling than positive ones. Sorrow and danger are more effective than joy or a neutral expression. Mass market magazines have long understood this bias toward the negative, and Beuel provides an explanation for it.

Unlike the other authors, who do not bother to deal with the issue of when an image becomes a stereotype, Katharina Lobinger tackles this problem head on. For her, no image is *a priori* a stereotype, but it becomes one by repeated use in the same context and by its association with a standard accompanying text. She argues that a stereotype relies on an iconic image, and to make the icon speak to people in the present it is essential to undertand its changing manifestations and meanings over time.

Valentin Bauer is interested in diagrams representing quantitative data. He suggests that such diagrams, while appearing to be an objective array of figures, can hide a subjective argument. Elke Grittmann and Ilona Ammann focus on the need for quantitative studies on images. Thomas Peterson et al. lay out the comparative advantages and disadvantages of laboratory versus field work for studies on the perception of animated images and do not hesitate, based on a real experiment previously reported in another publication, to show the limits of the scientific validity of both approaches.

Finally, it is important to note that this book showcases the work of young researchers. Thesis research is often considered to be of lesser importance than that undertaken later on, but this collection of articles demonstrates that young academics can make important contributions to the field and suggests that many have promising careers ahead of them.

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Jedlowsky, Paolo (2009). Il racconto come dimora. *Heimat* e le memorie d'Europa. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

The author explains the role of storytelling while going through the plot of the movie *Heimat,* created by the German director Edgar Reitz. Actually the plot of *Heimat* is strategic in helping to understand that storytelling is like a place where it is possible to elaborate experiences of individuals and groups. Narratives are like a "home," where you can recognize yourself, where the various plots of life can come together, and storytelling can be considered as a preferred moment to enter into intimacy with one's self.

Heimat is a perfect example to show the relevance of storytelling. The movie is constituted by twelve episodes that encompass the life of a German family from 1919 to 1982. Successively, Reitz decided to produce other episodes, *Heimat 2* and *Heimat 3,* so as to represent the history of this family until the end of the twentieth century. The meaning and also the success of this movie are strongly rooted in the particular historical context of Germany in the last century, and especially in the events connected with the two World Wars. Nazi fascism and the massacres in the concentration camps heavily influenced the history of Germany in the second half of the century: German people had to cope with a heritage very difficult to accept, understand, elaborate and tell. *Heimat*'s main characters, even if they are inhabitants of a small country village, are also touched by all these tragic events, and this is why in their lives the importance and the im-

possibility to tell these stories is always emerging.

One of *Heimat*'s episodes provides the first steps for the author's argumentation: Paul, the main character, returns from the First World War. His family is sitting around him, waiting for him to say something, but he is silent, he will never tell anything about his war experience. Many years later, he will again be silent when his wife asks him the reasons why he escaped to the US.

We can try to understand this attitude only through a deep reflection about the meaning of storytelling. When we tell something about our life, first of all we put to the forefront our personal experience, and we disclose ourselves, but, more important, we also establish a contact with ourselves, with our own consciousness. Storytelling permits us to become conscious of our experiences: it is like taking possession of these experiences. Moreover, only through storytelling it is possible to create a plot, to reorder events that otherwise could seem completely disconnected with each other. Narratives are essential to elaborate one's own experience. Jedlowski reminds us that the concept of "elaborating" originates from psychoanalysis, and it refers to the capacity to manage different and multiple stimuli, or to handle stimuli that cause a resistance in the person.

Only keeping in mind this last point we can try to understand why Paul, coming back from the trenches, closes himself into a silence. To tell something about these events it would have meant to go back to experiences that have caused a very deep rent in

Paul's identity: it would have been like to accept something completely extraneous to his self, a story where Paul cannot recognize himself, or probably, Paul does not want to recognize himself in such a story. These reflections permit us also to realize how much it was difficult for an entire generation of Germans to think about the period of the Nazi dictatorship and of the Holocaust.

The impossibility to tell a story does not simply end in the impossibility to elaborate experiences. Storytelling presupposes someone who is listening: in fact, storytelling is an interaction, where different people can contribute to the same narrative. Even in the case of a monologue the presence of another person, or of an imaginary person, is crucial. A group of people who share a strong relationship are also able to recognize themselves in some narratives, and they constitute a narrative community. A family, a group of friends, a sport team, they all can be narrative communities, and each person can belong to different narrative communities.

Jedlowsky explains that the concept of community, during the twentieth century, became in fact imbued by very ideological notions. Referring to Roberto Esposito[1], he invites us to etymologically analyze the word "community" which originates from the Latin "munus," i.e. present and reciprocal obligation. "Communitas," in Latin, implies a context where there is a network of exchanges, where all the

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[1] Esposito, Roberto (1998). Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità. Torino: Einaudi.

participants are continuously under obligation to the others. This is the most adequate connotation for narrative communities. When there is not the right interlocutor, or the right narrative community, storytelling is impossible, and if we think of Paul's experience, how would have it been possible to find the right interlocutors to tell about life in the trenches?

Everyday life is full of storytelling practices, especially in the present period, where the quantity and variety of media bring to a plurality of narratives, which provides inputs also for the development of other stories. Mediated experiences, as for example the vision of *Heimat,* contribute to offer a starting point to elaborate known narratives or to tell new ones. Referring to this point, the author underlines that *Heimat* succeeded in telling stories that otherwise would have been silenced or forgotten. Speaking about narrative communities and narrative practices can make emerge an apparent connection with the concept of public sphere, but the author underlines that the public sphere presents very different relations among the participants, and can be better considered as a "network of interlocution," or a "narrative town" than a community (p. 61).

Cinema in general has always had an important role in storytelling and in helping to elaborate events: as an example we can refer to the huge quantity of movies about the Holocaust which have been produced from the seventies to the present times. *Heimat,* the plot of which develops also in the second half of the twentieth century, aims to make people think about the most re-

cent events, as the Sixties protest movements and the fall of the Berlin wall, to focus finally the attention on the incertitude and disorientation of Paul's young grand-daughter at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Heimat 2 and *Heimat 3* did not encounter the same success as the first episodes. For sure some reasons lay in very practical issues related to the resources invested, but there is also another explanation: we can infer that probably the last episodes did not meet the expectations of the public, or rather, there was not the right public. In fact, there are periods that can be more or less appropriate to raise certain issues. The first episodes gave the viewers what they were looking for at that moment. Jedlowsky, referring to other researchers, writes that the process of elaboration of past experiences firstly needs a pause in which to take some distance from the past situations. Only after this pause it is possible to develop strategies and resources to recall an event or an experience. Probably, in the eyes of the public, *Heimat 2* and *Heimat 3* present a very different connotation compared to the first episodes because of the historical proximity of the themes treated. This closeness has created a more controversial relationship with the public.

Time seems to be the key of storytelling, first of all because this practice is inextricably linked to time and it develops in time: a plot exists thanks to events that follow each other in time. Moreover, time to reflect is needed also before and after the narrative. The acceleration of time in contemporary life, that was already object of study at the

beginning of the past century when Walter Benjamin spoke about the "atrophy of experience,"[2] makes more difficult the narrative practices, not only because of the time factor but especially because of the excess of stimuli. People can resist these overwhelming stimuli by remaining indifferent or by rationalizing the experiences. The process of rationalization is in part counterbalanced by the offer of media, especially by the entertainment industry, but also in this case an excess of stimuli is present.

It seems that in our period storytelling is less easy than in the past, and consequently the elaboration of the experience is more arduous. Paradoxically, from one point of view today we have a lot of stimuli that could be perfect resources for storytelling, and mediated experiences could also facilitate the process of becoming conscious of the events we live; but, on the other side, the quantity of stimuli can constitute an obstacle, and the participation to narrative communities does not follow directly from mediated experiences. It is necessary to notice that the quality of storytelling depends on the quality of the relationships with the interlocutor. Anyway, the capacity to tell a story, and to tell about one's self, is highly important in making people conscious of their personal experience and in the development of the ability to recognize himself and to recognize others. Consequently the author sug-

[2] Benjamin, Walter (1939). Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire. (English translation 2006). The Writer of Modern Life. Essays on Charles Baudelaire. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

gests that the word *"Heimat,"* that in German means "homeland," does not correspond only to a geographical place, but to a symbolic one. *"[...] Homeland does not refer so much to a 'safe' place, and essentially it is neither a 'place.' It is the space where we project our desire to recognize ourselves and to be recognized. There is the risk to give a false answer if we consider homeland as a physical place. It would be like to definitely cancel the inner disorientation of human existence, as if it were a problem of residence"*[3] (p. 116).

The feeling of being at home corresponds to the capacity to think about one's own experience, to the ability to tell about one's own history: thanks to storytelling it is possible to observe life and also to observe one's self. Actually the author focuses attention on the word "experience," that originates from the Latin "experire:" it means "to go out from," and "to go through." The verb "to exist" also originates from "ex-sistere," i.e. "to stay outside." It is the movement toward the outside that brings people to meet something different, and consequently to think about one's self. In the storytelling process the self estranges itself, and only in this way it is possible to observe the inner self. A person can know herself only thanks to this movement from the inside toward the outside, to finally come back to the inside, and the storytelling is the instrument that makes the process feasible.

Now we can understand that considering storytelling like a home is a highly meaningful similitude, which is

very near to our existence. We can build our home through storytelling, because it permits us to put together different experiences and events in a consistent plot, while becoming more and more conscious of ourselves and our life. These thoughts open a perspective on the present everyday life that can help us better appreciate the relationships with the others and with ourselves, the importance of thinking about our own experience, the necessity to be able to tell and to listen to a story.

Paolo Jedlowski, sociologist, has dedicated a lot of studies to the dynamics between storytelling and experience. The elegant and flowing writing style will bring you through the author's arguments in the most perfect way. The topic is of interest to everyone studying communication, since it is a perspective that can be applied to different domains, like social psychology, education, studies about media and new technologies. Moreover, it offers also a starting point to reflect about our work experience: as academics, we are always analyzing the narratives of other people, and building our own narratives, trying to make sense of various information, experiences and events. Reading this book can provide you with a new viewpoint to see your everyday activities and to consider the flow of information that pervades contemporary life.

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[3] Translation of the author.