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INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND TECHNO-SCIENCE: JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Abstract: By emphasizing the relationship between techno-science and intersubjectivity, the present text critically explores some of Jürgen Habermas's central tenets of philosophical reconstruction. As the author of the "communicative turn" in Critical Theory, Habermas emphatically states that intersubjectivity as linguistic interaction provides the answer to the long dispute around subject/object relationship. From this point of view, modern philosophy of consciousness including here also Adorno and the first generation of Critical Theory seem to advocate an outmoded philosophical reflection. Despite the optimism in the communicative action's capacity to solve this old source of philosophical puzzlement, our contention is that Habermas remains caught up in a series of contradictions. Subject/object relationship cannot be answered by simply dissolving it in communicative practices. Moreover, we believe that Habermas's philosophical project continues to be haunted by Adorno's negative dialectic: nonidentity and self-reflection are still indispensable moments in facing these contradictions.

Key words: Intersubjectivity, communication, subjectivity, objectivity, technology, science, ideology, nonidentity, self-reflection

I. Overcoming Adorno? Habermas and Critical Theory

The standard story about Critical Theory or the Frankfurt School runs as follows: the early generation (Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse etc.) deviates Marxist analysis of capitalism, concentrating on the critique of political economy towards a critique of a techno-scientific social hegemony. Max Weber and György Lukács are, no doubt, the key figures of this shift of interest from capitalist economy to modern rationalization processes. Capitalism can reproduce itself as a global system only through the reifying effects of instrumental rationality: revolution, emancipation, etc., seem to be postponed, against Marx's own optimistic predictions, precisely because capitalism is reinforced by the social formation of a techno-scientific consciousness operating as the new hegemonic ideology.

The story continues, however, by adding a new important character usually associated with the "communicative turn" of Critical Theory, none other than Jürgen Habermas. As the leading figure of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Habermas changes once again the focus of Western Marxism by pointing instead to another social phenomenon, mostly ignored by critical theorists: communication mediated through language. From this new perspective, "critical theory" seems, ironically enough, to be enjoying the same status as "traditional theory" (Horkheimer): the first generation of the Frankfurt School almost unconsciously replicates classical and modern metaphysics (the philosophy of subject inaugurated by Kant) simply because the main source of philosophical puzzlement continues to be the relationship between subject and object. Instead of concentrating on *intersubjectivity*, the forefathers of Critical Theory remained stuck, even against their own wishes, in a "monological" rationality concerned only about the way a subject can engage with the objects around him. By lacking the key of intersubjectivity, modern philosophy (Critical Theory included) encounters a series of deadlocks summarized by Foucault in his famous *The Order of Things*, namely, the oscillation between transcendental and empirical subject, between a reflexive subject and his own non-predicative background which determines and eludes him, finally, between the past origin of the subject and an indeterminate future moment which supposedly would recover the lost origin.¹ According to Habermas, the result is a "structurally overburdened subject," a finite subject bearing on his shoulders the tremendous weight of an infinite knowledge.² As a reaction to this, Habermas's philosophical strategy is to disburden both subject and object by understanding them from the viewpoint of linguistic interactions.

Subjectivity and objectivity are, in a sense, the by-products of communication. Our contention, however, is that Habermas's intersubjectivity remains *haunted* by subject/object relationship giving birth to similar deadlocks already found in modern philosophy.³

The relationship between intersubjectivity and techno-science proves to be the perfect ground for shedding some light on these contradictions which silently accompany Habermas's philosophical evolution. Science and technology actually force Habermas to acknowledge the existence of something *transcending* the medium of linguistic communication whether subjective (human body) or objective (social totality, external nature) reality. Despite his communicative enthusiasm, Habermas remains aware of Adorno's lesson: in the absence of a "nonidentical" moment inscribed in linguistic interaction, communication becomes "tautology."⁴ The crucial problem is whether this (recent) awareness can actually save Habermas's philosophical project. On our part, we believe that the communicative turn of Critical Theory cannot dissolve the contradictions inscribed in subject/object relationship. Thus, Adorno's obstinate call for "self-reflection"⁵ emphasizing the constant need to disempower contradictions by acknowledging them as such and not by simply (di)solving them in communicative interaction, continues to be a vital philosophical reference. In this sense, the main specter haunting Habermas's "communicative action" is Adorno's "negative dialectic." The story of Critical Theory stays an "unfinished project," for adding a new chapter, a (re)turn to Adorno seems unavoidable.

II. The Silence of the Body in the Midst of Communication

To uncover the spreading of reification in capitalist society, the first generation of Critical Theory combines Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis. For the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, human control over external nature becomes reflected in the repression of internal nature. The well known Freudian aftermath of this repression consists in the revenge of nature using dreams to disturb the comfortable sleep of bourgeois subjects. Habermas acknowledges the importance of psychoanalysis but not for the same reasons as the "dark writers" of Critical Theory (Adorno and Horkheimer): the solitary dreams through which internal nature forcefully comes back to haunt the subject is no longer a central issue. *Knowledge and Human Interests* can give us a glimpse of this reconsideration of psychoanalysis. Against the prevailing "technocratic consciousness,"⁶ Habermas identifies three

fundamental “interests” placed not in a transcendental subject but in the “historical nature of human species”⁷: “technical” interest, present in the medium of “work” directed towards the understanding and control of external nature, “practical” interest, expressed in the medium of “language” covering symbolic interactions, and “emancipatory” interest, taking place in the medium of “self-reflection.”⁸ What remains important for us in this tripartite taxonomy is the reconstruction of emancipatory interest, since Habermas makes the bold move of connecting it with psychoanalysis. More precisely, Habermas shifts the psychoanalytical therapy from the conflict between human instincts and social constraints towards the language mediated relationship between the therapist and patient. During the psychoanalytical session, the former does nothing else than to trigger in the latter the capacity to reflect upon his past⁹ and, thus, to free himself from the “ideology” embedded in the “dependence on hypostatized powers.”¹⁰ The therapy becomes, in a sense, the very medium of “unconstrained communication,” of freeing communication from the existing repressive social injunctions. The subject manages to filter his instinctive nature by translating it in self-reflection and undistorted communication.

The gradual farewell to first generation of Critical Theory can also be understood as a farewell to Freudian psychoanalysis. Habermas’s focus on communication makes him more aware of the importance of George Herbert Mead and his idea of a reflexive role taking induced by the social use of language. In his attempt to reconstruct a developmental logic of the ego gravitating around “communicative action,” Habermas also adds other two important names, the psychologists Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Let us sketch this (continual) philosophical reconstruction by pointing to its main inflexions.

(1) First of all, Habermas gives up the idea of an emancipatory interest traceable in psychoanalytic therapy while also attempting to understand technical interest as rooted in a broader communicative action.

(2) The psychodynamic problems analyzed by Freud are relegated to the background in favor of describing, along the lines developed by Mead, the “social-cognitive conditions of internalization.”¹¹ Because of its relatively stable and predictable meanings, language makes possible the reciprocal internalization of concrete expectations according to an abstract, social point of view (“generalized other”). The development of a social consciousness, thus, stabilizes individualistic tendencies around general expectations of social behaviour.¹²

(3) By this, Mead already paves the way for a developmental logic of human identity. Habermas takes the idea further by turning, however, to Lawrence Kohlberg’s (and also Jean Piaget’s) psychological theory of

the “stages of moral development” extending from childhood to adulthood: “pre-conventional,” “conventional,” and “post-conventional.”¹³ In a brief sketch of Kohlberg’s theory, children are mostly driven by strategic, selfish interests (pre-conventional) while adolescents and even adults tend to conform themselves to the rules of society (conventional). At the post-conventional stage, however, some individuals reach an almost Kantian universal moral consciousness which allow them to reject existing social norms in the name of more abstract while highly individualized ideals. Habermas thoroughly reconstructs Kohlberg’s theory of moral development from a broader perspective in the light of which an individual placed in the post-conventional stage has already developed expressive, interactive and strategic abilities in coping with three *differentiated* worlds: subjective (inner nature), social (society) and objective (external nature).¹⁴

Habermas speculates even further when trying to add an extra stage to Kohlberg’s theory. The stake is to overcome the troubling Kantian dichotomy between natural inclinations and abstract duties present in Kohlberg’s post-conventional stage. From this overly optimistic perspective which later will be abandoned, emancipation becomes effective only in the unity between moral autonomy and the communicative access to the internal nature of the self, in the unity between “worthiness” and happiness.”¹⁵ But in order to postulate such a unity, Habermas had to make a preliminary move, that of rendering internal nature entirely transparent and fluid for linguistic articulation.¹⁶ Bodily inclinations and aesthetic expressions are swallowed by language¹⁷. But in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas changes his mind once again when denying, at first, that anything “can be learned in an objectivating attitude about inner nature qua subjectivity.”¹⁸ Inner nature escapes any attempt of being rationalized. But Habermas also contends that aesthetic-expressive attitude (present, for example, in “countercultural forms of life”) is the only attitude capable of eluding “rationalizable” structures.¹⁹ Without further stress on Habermas’s highly ambivalent relationship with art,²⁰ we would like to focus now on another, no less problematic issue.

In *The Future of Human Nature*, Habermas takes a serious stance on the unsettling possibility of scientific interventions into the genome of an embryo for selecting in advance the biological features of a person. This techno-scientific prospect combined with “liberal” ideology pushing towards the enhancement of individual choices²¹ opens up the possibility of parents unilaterally deciding the biological traits of their child: brown hair, blue eyes, talented in music etc. For a German liberal leftist like Habermas, this possible evolution triggers, of course, the fear of a new type of “eugenics,”²² not a Nazi-type one, but still eugenics. If

this were not enough, genetic manipulation might also radically transform the very perception of humans as a species,²³ which could undermine some fundamental assumptions lying at the very basis of our modern identity: (a) the idea that everyone is the author of his life history or (b) that there is a symmetric process of mutual recognition between persons.

(a) For Habermas, socialization goes along with individualization. That is to say, individuals understand themselves as being able to continually reconstruct their life history according to the meanings acquired through social interaction.²⁴ Individuals can revise and criticize their own past precisely because this past is not already modeled by a unilateral, heteronomous intervention. Genetic manipulation, however, does precisely this, it introduces a non-revisable moment in the individual's further development.

(b) But in the same time, biotechnology radically questions the perceived equality between humans because the asymmetry, e.g., between children and their parents can still be revised later on when children help their aging parents when they are old or sick.²⁵ This kind of socially based symmetrisation is blocked by genetic intervention as a moment which cannot be reversed but must "resentfully" or "fatally" be accepted by those modeled by it.²⁶ But there is an additional consequence, even more radical than the previous ones.

(c) This kind of injunction which treats human body as an *object* manipulated by a private will, determines the collapse of some fundamental distinctions for building human identity: "being a body"/"having a body,"²⁷ nature/culture, subjective/objective, born/constructed,²⁸ and so forth. The contingency implied in natural reproduction (male and female chromosomes combining in non-predictable way) works as a universal background untouched by human control or design. Autonomy and equality make sense only by accepting the opacity of this background. Ironically enough, Habermas admits that in order to secure the *same* starting point for all humans, the formation of human body must remain radically contingent and, thus, *beyond* tradition and social interaction.²⁹ In the absence of this nonidentical moment as the perceived *difference* between nature and culture, a new Pandora's box could be opened with the chilling prospect of transforming everyone in a possible material for arbitrary manipulation.

III. Technology and Science as (Post)“Ideology”

When joining Adorno's team in the 1950s, Habermas also agreed to embark on Critical Theory's most important project, that of criticizing contemporary positivism. From the very beginning, Habermas makes a clear distinction between techno-science and its ideological expression placed under the heading of a scientific or technocratic consciousness. The most striking feature of this “false consciousness” is the compulsive tendency to evaluate society and individuals according to the standards of an instrumental reason usually employed in natural sciences. In *Technology and Science as “Ideology,”* Habermas contends that positivism is the source for the contemporary blurring of the (old) distinction between “praxis” and “technique”³⁰: modern society reproduces itself by dissolving moral-practical judgments to instrumental, quantitative reasoning. As Herbert Marcuse formulates the problem, political power no longer maintains itself through technology, but *as* technology.³¹ This already testifies for the social impact of techno-science taking the form of a technocratic consciousness which favours a neutral, depoliticized perspective,³² purged from any moral or emancipatory considerations.

However, in *Technology and Science as “Ideology,”* but even more strikingly in *Knowledge and Interests,* Habermas attempts to distance himself from the program of Critical Theory by introducing interaction or symbolic communication as a fundamental human interest next to the technical interest dealing with external nature in terms of knowing and controlling it. But the dualism between interaction and labor seems to be reconciled by a third interest covering the human need for emancipation and self-reflection, which presumably cuts across the other two interests. Emancipatory interest has a bizarre status since it comes into play only in modern class society as a need to unmask ideological injunctions in the name of an unconstrained consensus. Ultimately, any form of knowledge whether technological or moral-practical have to incorporate an emancipatory reflection.³³ If we try to rephrase this philosophical move, Habermas seems to negatively relate to the *diffuse* character of technocratic consciousness which functions as an all encompassing ideology with an equally diffuse human interest, that of emancipating through self-reflection from ideological instances. By rooting, however, techno-science in the human interest of controlling external nature, Habermas comes dangerously close to a form of relativism which seems to dissolve objective world in the name of an anthropologically and historically defined transcendental background.³⁴ In addition, Habermas also becomes concerned about the prospect of being trapped in a new version of Kantian philosophy of

consciousness gravitating around the subject-object relationship. Thus, he turns away from the project of finding a transcendental basis in “knowledge, nature, or history,”³⁵ and moves towards a transcendental account of a linguistically mediated communication guided by the ideal of an unconstrained consensus around the “best argument.”

If the emancipatory interest or technocratic consciousness as false consciousness still remain (partially) indebted to the Marxist heritage of conceiving society as a *totality*, the theory of communicative action is correlated to a historical evolution going through the already known stages: pre-conventional (“paleolithic” societies), conventional (“traditional” societies) and post-conventional (“modern” societies).³⁶ Even more importantly, however, is that this process entails a progressive social *differentiation* which seems to prevent any attempt of returning to the idea of a social totality. For Habermas, Paleolithic or traditional societies are, in a sense, closed or quasi-total societies: the “lifeworld” which fuels intersubjectively acquired symbolical or moral-practical meanings³⁷ has not been differentiated yet from systems such as politics or economy operating according to a strategic or instrumental rationality. Only in a post-conventional, reflexive society as ours, systemic operations are detached from the social and cultural background of the lifeworld. Moreover, Habermas correlates modernity with the development of techno-science understood as an autonomous enterprise freed from religious or metaphysical chains and devoted solely to the knowledge and control of external nature.³⁸ After the communicative turn and the disappearance of emancipatory interest, technical interest is dissolved in the grammatical position of a third person perspective, while practical interest is replaced by the first and second person perspective.³⁹ The *dualism* between strategic and communicative reason, between a neutral observant and a participant in social interactions is, thus, rooted in the very pragmatics of human communication.

At this point, two additional observations ought to be made:

(1) Against the legacy of early Critical Theory to unmask the false consciousness of late capitalism, Habermas contends that “we today have a ‘fragmented consciousness’ that blocks enlightenment by the mechanism of reification.”⁴⁰ The main threat for contemporary society is the “*colonization of the lifeworld*”⁴¹ by systemic operations which seem to act like an autoimmune disease by attacking their own source: the lifeworld. In this sense, communicative practices coming from the lifeworld are more and more under the pressure of adopting strategic attitudes based on treating other participants only as means to attain some specific goals. The prospect of genetic intervention in modeling the embryos of human offspring or the contemporary debate over

recent neurobiological experiments which seem to prove that there is no free will since the human brain decides in advance the course of an action before conscious deliberation comes into play,⁴² both of them seem to be perfect expressions of this type of colonization of the lifeworld. From their position of participants in rich networks of social interaction providing them with a sense of identity, humans are now reduced to genetic material or brain activities. By leaving, however, classical ideological critique in favor of the even more problematic distinction between lifeworld and system, Habermas can no longer address an important question: how is it possible that genetic manipulation or “hard” naturalism are progressively accepted as being “natural”?⁴³ In any case, it is difficult to imagine that such an acceptance is the result of an alien injunction (the systems) into the lifeworld simply because these two social realms are much harder to distinguish than Habermas thinks.⁴⁴ Without a more pervasive and diffuse social consciousness, all we are left with is an almost schizoid individual who continually oscillates between (less and less) free communication at home and strategic attitude at workplace.⁴⁵

(2) Because of its transcendental program, which is designed to strive towards an ideal consensus, communicative action is the source of another thorny problem, i.e., the status of external nature. On the one hand, objective reality in techno-scientific sense is the result of a social evolution based on communication which at its peak (post-conventional stage) has already differentiated between objective, subjective and social worlds. On the other, however, an act of communication generates consensus only if a statement can also pass the test of objective reality. Basically, reality is out there, but it can be discovered only through a (transcendentally) constructed consensus. Habermas advocates a “nonscientistic” or “soft” naturalism⁴⁶ in the light of which a scientist should not consider construction and discovery as two radically different approaches, but as moments of the same process in reaching truth.⁴⁷ Still, a nagging question haunts this seemingly inclusive philosophical position: isn’t Habermas facing the risk, by putting so much weight on transcendental grounded communicative consensus, whether to *erase* or, on the contrary, to *deepen* the *difference* between construction and discovery, subject and object, culture and nature etc.? Isn’t Habermas paying a too heavy price for leaving dialectic in favor of a new version of Kantian formalism?

IV. Haunting Habermas: The Specter of Negative Dialectic

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity leaves us with a strong impression that Habermas wants to settle the accounts with his early mentor. Adorno belongs not only to the long line of modern thinkers trapped in the philosophy of consciousness, but he is also guilty for furthering Nietzsche's legacy, thus fuelling the contemporary trend of postmodern or poststructuralist thinking.⁴⁸ More recently, however, Habermas no longer portrays Adorno as some sort of "dead" philosopher, but more of a "ghost" escaped from oblivion. This change of mood is to be explained by recent scientific brain experiments which bring to life "the hollowed controversy over freedom and determinism."⁴⁹ As a result, Adorno's criticism against Kant regains a striking actuality. Adorno's famous passage, also quoted by Habermas ("[t]hat reason is different from nature and yet a moment of the latter is its prehistory become its immanent determination"⁵⁰), can give us a glimpse on his critique against Kant. Against the famous division between transcendental and empirical subject, Adorno takes subjectivity back to "nature"⁵¹: abstract thinking is no longer the expression of a transcendental realm, but an extension of human body while, in the same time, different from it.

As a dialectician, Adorno remains very much aware that despite any classical rationalist attempt or precisely because of it, there is a structural *ambivalence* which marks the relationship between rationality and (internal and external) nature. Since nonidentity expresses an irreducible difference between subject and object which, in fact, opens up the *mediation* between the two, the same ambivalence is now handled differently. As such, the main task of philosophy and social critique is not simply the flight from ambiguity as in the (in)famous "intolerance of ambiguity" defining an "authoritarian personality," but precisely the opposite: the acceptance of ambiguity through immanent self-reflection which never loses sight of the nonidentity between subject and object.⁵² By extension, a critical theorist understands the reification of individuals by reference to a social totality. But we must be careful, the latter is not simply a "total subject"⁵³ envisioned as being "the sum of all parts"⁵⁴ or as something "infinite."⁵⁵ On the contrary, "it is closed and finite, despite its *elusive* nature."⁵⁶ For Adorno, social totality is, in a sense, virtual, it has no substantial reality, but still exists. That is why the hegemony of abstract social relations can be critically met only by relentlessly emphasizing society's ambivalence in its attempt to erase all individual differences while, in the same time,

admitting their existence in the very gesture of marginalizing or excluding them.

Let us now return to Habermas and to the possible charges that Adorno could level against him.

(A) First of all, Adorno would probably point to the Kantian assumptions discernible in Habermas's mature philosophical position. No doubt, Habermas remains aware of the risk to create an unbridgeable gap between the transcendental structure of linguistic communication and the empirical manifestations almost always distorted by subjective or systemic manipulative interests. That is the reason why he rejects Karl Otto Apel's strong transcendentalist communicative option: the danger of falling into relativism cannot justify a position which would simply reproduce the Kantian paradox of something placed both inside (empirical) and outside (transcendental) the world. Instead, Habermas employs a more flexible approach when talking about "quasi-transcendental" interests or, later on, about a pragmatically filtered "weak" transcendentalism.⁵⁷

Habermas seems to be looking for an "impossible" reconciliation between Kant and Hegel which actually was already attempted by Adorno. Except for a small difference: Adorno, unlike Habermas, takes very seriously the moment of "impossibility" as such. To preserve nonidentity, without creating an unbridgeable gap between transcendental and empirical (as Habermas does in his Kantian moods) or, on the contrary, erasing the gap by engulfing it in some sort of evolution (as Habermas does in his more Hegelian moments), the very distinction between transcendental and empirical must be replaced by a (non-Hegelian) negative dialectic. Adorno could also add that Habermas seems to be advocating an *abstract, disembodied* subjectivity constituted through cognitive internalization of human language and through the internal constraint of looking for *consensus* around the best argument⁵⁸. In order to reach consensus, humans must be prepared to suspend their subjective, embodied interests and enter in the *pure* space of intersubjective reasoning. What if, however, in a communicative situation someone has only an "intuition" which cannot be entirely defended because it is too *vague*, but it *feels* as being important and far reaching? Or: what if someone "speculates" about an issue without, of course, having enough information to support it, but this speculation *might* prove to be valuable in acquiring *new* knowledge? And so on, so forth. To be guided by a rationally achieved consensus on the best argument means to disregard such indeterminate and experimental, yet extremely important moments in the process of reaching truth. For Adorno, this would simply prove that "identity-thinking" continues to prevail over individual *qualitative* differences. The obvious irony is that

Habermas in his recent intervention on brain experiments, uses nonidentity as a tool to fight back hard naturalism and genetic manipulation: subjective nature *is* and *should* remain impossible to be entirely grasped by science and technology because without such a difference, humanity would no longer be the humanity that we know, but a simple statistical material to be manipulated by whoever is in the position to do that.⁵⁹ But for Habermas, nonidentity makes sense *only* in a communicative medium in which participants behave themselves as *free* agents since they can always demand “an account” from others regarding the motives of acting in certain way or accept the same demand coming from them.⁶⁰

(B) Still, the irony doesn't end here. Already in *Minima moralia*, Adorno critically points to “the liberal fiction of an automatic and universal communication”⁶¹ as an expression of contemporary ideology to reduce individuals and objects to exchange principle and statistics. But Adorno's remark can open up a broader critique against Habermas: how can we be sure that someone engaged in free communication is not, in fact, driven by a selfish, competitive desire to deliver the best argument?⁶² Or: how can we be certain that a participant in a debate is not simply acting out of social conformism without, however, “really” believing in the necessity of undistorted communication? As an honest (quasi)transcendentalist, Habermas thinks, no doubt, that when we enter in an undistorted communication, the ideological injunctions should simply vanish into thin air. What Habermas misses, however, is that ideology can prove to be much more elusive and ambivalent since it can easily *mimic* free communication and use it as a vehicle of reification.⁶³ For example, we can imagine a scenario in which a multinational corporation allows, in the need to improve its image or motivate its employees to feel more at “home” and, thus to be more productive, the formation of a space where people can debate freely on issues concerning internal organization. Meanwhile the decisions are, most probably, still taken somewhere else according to internal hierarchy and external pressure to turn a certain profit. Since undistorted communication is not immune to ideological injunctions, to dissolve *self-reflection* in language interaction, as Habermas does, runs a serious risk, namely that of erasing the individual's capacity to have a *critical distance* towards communicative reasoning and its possible ideological reversal.⁶⁴

V. Some Conclusions

Habermas's communicative turn, emphatically announcing the overcoming of those contradictions which undermine the program of (the first generation of) Critical Theory and of modern philosophy remains, in fact, haunted by more or less similar tensions. The way modern techno-science is integrated in this ambitious philosophical reconstruction can forcefully bring to the surface the ambivalence of Habermas's own position:

- (1) He oscillates, for instance, between the attempt of integrating *internal nature* or human body in communicative processes and, on the contrary, of extracting internal nature from these very processes. Genetic manipulation makes it very clear: to reduce the body to a human design (and we might add, to a communicative construction) jeopardizes the very understanding of human identity.
- (2) Moreover, Habermas seems to ambivalently move between the idea of an *external nature* as the by-product of communicative differentiation and the "realist" prospect of the objective character of this very nature.
- (3) This also has bearings on the relation between techno-science and human society because positivism or naturalism as the reduction of human identity to some physical properties is seen, at first, as an ideological expression of a pervasive hegemonic consciousness while, later on, the post-ideological Habermas reduces naturalism to a one-sided rationality which colonizes from outside our life-world.

From my point of view, Habermas cannot escape Adorno's negative dialectic. In contrast to Habermas, Adorno is aware that any attempt of finding a transcendental basis as a way to reject ambivalence and contradictions generates further ambivalence. Ambivalence can be met only by acknowledging and disempowering it through self-reflection and not by simply (dis)solving it. In this sense, Habermas remains to be haunted by some of the contradictions which stubbornly have refused to die after the communicative turn in Critical Theory or in modern philosophy.

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Notes:

- ¹ J. Habermas, *Discursul filosofic al modernității (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity)* (București: ALL Educational, 2000), 252-254.
- ² Here, Habermas follows here Foucault who points to the self-reflexivity of the Kantian subject's which can be detected, under different guises, in almost entire modern philosophy. See Habermas, *Discursul filosofic al modernității*, 252.
- ³ For Helga Gripp, Habermas's reduction of object to communicative processes is not the key to the subject/object relationship, but simply an avoidance to really accept this challenge. See H. Gripp, *Theodor W. Adorno* (München: UTB Schöningh, 1986), 15,17.
- ⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Minima moralia. Reflecții dintr-o viață mutilată (Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life)* (București: Univers, 1999), 128.
- ⁵ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 31.
- ⁶ J. Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 81.
- ⁷ Idem, 161.
- ⁸ Idem, 155, 162-163.
- ⁹ J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press), 228.
- ¹⁰ Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"*, 159.
- ¹¹ J. Habermas, *Conștiință morală și acțiune comunicativă (Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action)* (București: ALL, 2000), 146-147.
- ¹² G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 162.
- ¹³ Habermas, *Conștiință morală și acțiune comunicativă*, 118-120.
- ¹⁴ J. Habermas, *Communication and Evolution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 100.
- ¹⁵ Idem, 21.
- ¹⁶ Idem, 93.
- ¹⁷ D. Cook, *Adorno and Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 85. J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 220-221.
- ¹⁸ Habermas cited by D. Ingram in *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 56.
- ¹⁹ Idem.
- ²⁰ Idem, 56-59, 183-185. With and against Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer points to the awkward status of aesthetic experience inside communicative action "without aesthetic experience and the subversive potential it contains, our moral discourse would necessarily become blind and our interpretations of the world empty." (Wellmer cited by A. Honneth in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 172).
- ²¹ J. Habermas, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur: Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 47.
- ²² Idem, 42-43.
- ²³ Idem, 49-51.
- ²⁴ For Habermas, Kierkegaard remains a central reference for post-metaphysical thinking since he describes individual development in the context of a contingent world with a plurality of options. Only this contingent background makes possible for an individual to be responsible for his actions and to feel as being the author of his life. Contingency delivers the basic material (bodily predispositions, social

environment etc.), but only the individual chooses the way to shape this material. Habermas, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur: Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?*, 29.

²⁵ Idem, 31.

²⁶ Idem, 31, 108-111.

²⁷ Habermas makes reference to Helmuth Plessner's distinction between "Leib sein" and "Körper haben". Idem, 89-90.

²⁸ Idem, 77.

²⁹ Idem, 103.

³⁰ Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"*, 91.

³¹ Idem, 52.

³² Idem, 78.

³³ Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*, 13.

³⁴ Idem, 17.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Habermas, *Communication and Evolution of Society*, 104-105.

³⁷ J. Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 96, 98.

³⁸ A. Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), 217-219.

³⁹ J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2008), 168.

⁴⁰ J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 355.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 151.

⁴³ The communicative turn in Critical Theory can also be interpreted as the replacement of ideology critique with a post-ideological one. "Habermas' views about ideology stand in sharp contrast to this assessment of the ideologically suffused culture of the West. Offering a novel definition of ideology as the conflation of the good, the true, and the beautiful – or the three spheres of validity corresponding to the social, objective, and subjective worlds described in *The Theory of Communicative Action* – Habermas proceeds to endorse Daniel Bell's proclamation of the end of ideology". (Cook, *Adorno and Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 101).

⁴⁴ "We might say, then, that there is an empirical error behind Habermas's abrupt reversal. Modern political and economic life are never simply instrumental. They are always coded by deep structures of cultural life. To mistake this is to confuse the fact of differentiation, which allows relative strategic freedom from ascribed value positions, with the absence of moral foundations. Nor are the modern worlds of values, norms and solidarities ever such simple, intimate and intuitive lifeworlds as Habermas describes. They are themselves also systems subject to organization on levels that individuals scarcely intuit. Moreover, they are interpenetrated with cultural and strategic areas of social life through processes which can be analytically reconstructed as exchange". See J. Alexander, "Habermas and Critical Theory: Beyond the Marxian Dilemma?" in *Communicative Action. Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, edited by A. Honneth, H. Joas, 61 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ "Despite Habermas' attempts to refine his distinction between lifeworld and system, it remains in some important respects a distinction without a difference (to borrow a phrase from Hegel) because the boundaries between system and lifeworld are actually

very porous. The same individuals who inhabit the lifeworld also work as employees within the economic system, or as civil servants within the political system. Their perpetual "migration" between system and lifeworld will inevitably compromise the integrity of each". (Cook, *Adorno and Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 34).

⁴⁶ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 153.

⁴⁷ Idem, 169.

⁴⁸ Habermas, *Discursul filosofic al modernității*, 114-135.

⁴⁹ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 182.

⁵⁰ Adorno cited by Habermas in *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 182.

⁵¹ As Habermas carefully notices, Adorno's "nature" requires a much more complex understanding than the idea of simply returning to some substantial reality. As Schelling (or, later on, Benjamin) already acknowledges, nature has a history, is a dynamic reality. In addition to this "first" nature, there is a "second" one located in the psycho-social level of the human mind which, usually, tends to reduce social relations to "natural", objective facts. For Habermas, psychoanalysis proves to be indispensable in Adorno's theoretical construction precisely because of its capacity to account for both determinism and freedom: nature determines human mind to unconsciously function in certain ways while admitting that this very unconscious can still be brought to light through self-reflection. See Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 183, 193.

⁵² Adorno portrays philosophy as an impossible enterprise forced to "utter the unutterable" (Wittgenstein). We might add, however, that the impossibility of philosophy is, in the same time, its very possibility: the non-identity between subject and object denies any attempt of reducing an object to a concept while it allows the concept to indicate towards something outside itself. Without such a distance, no relation between subject and object could be imagined. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 9.

⁵³ T. W. Adorno, „Introduction,” in T. W. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot, K. R. Popper, 33, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976).

⁵⁴ T. W. Adorno, „Sociology and Empirical Research,” in T. W. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot, K. R. Popper, 81, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976).

⁵⁵ Adorno, „Introduction,” in Theodor W. Adorno, Hans Albert, Ralph Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot, Karl R. Popper, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, 38.

⁵⁶ Idem. My emphasis.

⁵⁷ J. Habermas, *Truth and Justification* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), 10-17.

⁵⁸ "Against the Freudian project of bringing our rational powers into harmony with the instincts – the project that Adorno embraced – Habermas suggests that reason and desire have already been reconciled: desire is just the subjective expression of disembodied needs that are rational, at least in principle, because they cannot be divorced from their articulation in speech. Even as desiring beings, then, we are always already rational. Inverting Nietzsche's claim, "body am I entirely, and nothing else; and the soul is only a word for something about the body," Habermas apparently believes that human beings are entirely mind (or "soul"); and "body" is only a word for something about the mind". (Cook, *Adorno and Habermas, and the Search for a*

Rational Society, 86). For Joseph Dunne, one of the main problems of Habermas's mature philosophy lies in its formalism. By adopting such an approach, Habermas's critique against instrumental reason runs the risk of replicating this very reason since the more or less indeterminate character of the lifeworld or human identity comes to be reduced to rather abstract and rigid distinctions (subjective, objective, social worlds etc.). J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: "Phonesis" and "Techne" in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, 224-225.

⁵⁹ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 203-205.

⁶⁰ Habermas criticizes Adorno's solipsistic argument held in front of his students, namely, to lift a book and let it fall to the table. This gesture can be interpreted both as a free choice and as an event which can be explained by the chain of past events. For Habermas, however, this example is caught up in third person perspective since this argument makes sense only because Adorno can also explain his motive to act this way in front of other participants, in this case, his students. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, 185-186.

⁶¹ Adorno, *Minima moralia*, 81.

⁶² This critique has already been employed by Maeve Cooke who "also tries to demonstrate that these ideal presuppositions perform critical work by exposing latent strategic action. Measured against the presupposition that speakers are motivated by the force of the better argument alone, strategic actors may be shown to be motivated by their personal interest in success, in the form of profit or power. Against the ideal of being willing to reach understanding, strategic actors fall short because they are not concerned ultimately with arriving at agreement about the issues under discussion but with winning the argument to achieve their own private ends." (Cook, *Adorno and Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 121).

⁶³ The *formalist* stance adopted by Habermas (there are three validity claims which should be followed in a communicative act: the truth of an objective phenomenon, the rightness or the equality of those engaged in communication and the sincerity of the participants) doesn't help at all in avoiding the prospect of mimicry. Habermas makes it very clear that philosophy should abstain itself from offering substantive guidance in our pluralistic modern society. But as such, communication cannot create a "deeper" commitment in individuals. The simple fact that we communicate through language is a necessary, but not a sufficient reason to really strive towards consensus. In the absence of a *substantive* commitment, communication can easily fall prey to the mimicry of those preoccupied for social conformism or hidden strategic intentions. As Nietzsche, Habermas's great German counterpart, already knew, any message, no matter how pure, could be replicated and distorted. The ridiculous "Yes, yes" (*Ja, Ja*) of the donkey imitating Zarathustra's double affirmation of life remains a powerful testimony of this danger. Adorno would consider this kind of mimicry close to a "mimesis of death". See Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1989), 73.

⁶⁴ Habermas contends that an "ideal speech situation" presupposes a deeper reflexive capacity than simply to debate around some specific issues, that of questioning the underlying principles of an argument. The beliefs, ideas etc. are no longer "natural", but must be justified in front of the other participants. It seems to us, however, that this reflexive ability still goes only half-way insofar it continues to be unilaterally related to participants engaged in communication. What if someone questions the very possibility of ever reaching an undistorted communication cut off from ideological injunctions? This implies a *distance* not in communication, but from

communication itself. Contrary to what Habermas would reply (namely that someone cannot have such a distance since he must communicatively justify it), this very distance is not meant to simply reject communication, but rather to point to the structural *impossibility* of entirely defining an individual from the perspective of communicative processes. In the absence of this irreducible difference, individuals could never question communication as in the case of manipulating it by ideological injunctions. To be entirely caught up in communication, would mean that communication would remain for an individual a totally opaque background, something that could not be thematized since there is no distance from it. Moreover, the fact that Habermas talks about an “ideal speech situation” doesn’t help either since he collapses again in the Kantian distinction between transcendental and empirical. In this case, Adorno would point once again to the very *gap* between the two realms and not to the regulative, idealized character of communicative action. Only by assuming this gap, we can actually talk, like Habermas, about a transcendental realm which can guide us in our empirical existence.

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