

# A HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF HEGEMONY GENERATION AND EXERCISE: A GRAMSCIAN READING OF HABERMAS' *STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE*

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...the abstraction of politics from the economy and the naturalization of a civil society of abstract individuals are historical conditions which are open to question and hence potentially to transformation. This transformation would necessarily entail (but not necessarily be limited to) the re-politicization and democratization of the economy and of civil society, such that they cease to be pseudo-objective and apparently natural conditions which confront isolated individuals as an ineluctable external "reality".

(Rupert M., 1995: 6)

## INTRODUCTION

This essay attempts to clarify the distinction between the normative and the analytical dimensions of Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (STPS)*. The study I intend to conduct is based on two different strategies. The first one is characterized by an immanent critique of Habermas' work, in an attempt to show the tensions present in the arguments expounded in the book that are supposed to provide the basis for his normative project. The second one is based on coupling the ideas of the German philosopher with implicit and potential objections but also completion embedded in the theoretical framework provided by Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

Habermas' project is a twofold one. On the one hand, he adopts a Marxist approach in order to provide a critical account of the bourgeois civil society and media practices in modern capitalist countries; on the other hand, as McCarthy (1990, p.51) maintains, following Kant, he seeks to "ground principles of justice in notions of practical reason and autonomous self-legislation" in order to revive liberal thought for a democratic project. However, whereas Kant

relies on supra-empirical ideas of reason, Habermas intends to rely on historically situated reasoning when he indicates implicitly a possible solution for democratic deficit of modern societies in re-adopting the critical rational debate as a discursive form of creating a new sphere for political participation.

In doing this, Habermas attempts to differentiate the ideal and almost utopian norms of the bourgeois public sphere (BPS) from its actual institutionalization because he wants to save the former and criticize the latter. Connected to such an operation the most important research question of this work arises: is it really possible to discern, dis-intricate and finally salvage the noumenon from the phenomenon without reifying ideals and idealizing history? In other words: does Habermas really manage to identify in a historically and materially determined way of thinking a meta object of history, one that can be considered as transcendental, morally universal mode of human inter-subjectiveness? I will try to prove that he is not able to do that. I will first argue that the normative claims of BPS cannot be de-contextualized from a functional bourgeois ideology which constitutes the most important sphere of interpretation and operation of such ideals. In other words, a historical situated reasoning can never really transcend scarcity, materiality and the human response to that: instrumentality.

Habermas suggests (*STPS*, p.1) that the liberal public sphere is a phenomenon historically and socially determined; therefore it cannot be abstracted by its distinctive historical specificity as *bürgerliche Gessellschaft* as Baker notices (1992). Nevertheless, the German author identifies in certain aspects of the liberal public sphere an ideal institution for reviving contemporary democracy. In the preface of *STPS*, Habermas sustains that ideal and ideological shares a common ground because the latter always contains a twofold nature: an oppressive and a utopian aspect. However, even if so, how can really that utopia be abstracted and extracted from its class-based interests and culture? Would not that utopia always reflect a specific worldview?

The introduction of the Gramscian notion of hegemony will, in the interpretation of the *STPS*, contribute to clarify the distance between bourgeois actual reality and bourgeois ideal political agenda sustained by Habermas. Habermas tries to engage in philosophical and sociological categories by raising conceptual barriers from this ideal sphere of communication and everything that could undermine it. The employment of Gramsci's analysis of hegemony as a serious and articulated engagement with the crucial historical category of power will enhance the argument that the only way to really preserve such a transcendental space is to actually idealize distinctions between different spheres and therefore de-historicize them. However, Gramsci will not be employed as "antidote" against Habermas' analysis but to conceptually reinforce the distance between that and his normative projects. Whereas stressing the separation between ideology and ideals does not really undermine the value of the historical and sociological account of the BPS, it problematizes Habermas' project of trying to capture transcendental ideals from a historically determined ideology.

I will argue that the institution of the liberal public sphere corresponds to the creation of bourgeois hegemonic leadership and therefore that the status of a bourgeois dominant class is not only based on the forces and the relations of production but it is rather enforced by "superstructural" moral. This implies that the universal nature of the utopian BPS corresponds to the capability of that ideology to naturalize class-based interests. Therefore the aspiration to capture universal ideals in a class-determined ideology can only happen within its hegemonic capability to naturalize particular interests and values.

This represents the most important theoretical knot that really expresses the implicit objection of Gramsci to Habermas. In Marxist terms, the courageous Habermasian project is to rescue the superstructural dimension from being the mere object of the almost ontological principle of reflection of the base because the BPS, despite its ideological aspects, is capable of producing ideals that transcend the material reproduction of social life. The relative autonomy of the superstructures is something that both authors would agree on; however, Gramsci as opposed to

Habermas, regards the superstructures as autonomous not so much in terms of being capable of creating a sphere free of power, but actually of being the major battlefield for symbolic power thus not being a mere reflection of the base. Therefore, the so called Habermasian “life-world” in Gramsci’s view does not represent the *refugium peccatorum* from power but a field in which power can consolidate.

The history of the dialectical decline of original democratic project becomes then the history of the dialectic (because hegemony is always negotiated) rise of hegemonic domination of bourgeois class. Whereas Habermas provides a positive initial thesis (the ideal public sphere) and the dialectical becoming the antithesis (its degeneration), in my analysis, the evolution of the public sphere is explained by a tripartite dialectical process where the thesis is represented by the previous form of domination (state authority) through force and coercion, the antithesis is represented by a new form of exercise of power through intellectual and moral hegemony, and then, the synthesis, in which power is exercised through a combination of force and consent which is represented by the alliance of state and capital.

The paper will be structured as follows: I will first examine the conceptual tensions inherent in the Habermasian discourse, then I will show how Gramsci can be employed to provide a more pessimistic, but also more realist, account of the bourgeois class’ historical development.

#### THE BINARY OPPOSITIONS IN HABERMAS’ BORGEOIS PUBLIC SPHERE

According to Habermas’ play of dialectics, elements, through historical development, tend to unveil their ambivalent nature. Civil society, following a bourgeois’ project, was meant to emancipate itself from the state but eventually ends being refeudalized by it; in the same way, individuals from having become active citizens involved in public use of reason end returning to the status of passive spectators; finally, publicity intended originally as a mechanism of scrutiny of the government activity becomes one of the major sources of legitimation of the latter. All those examples mentioned above constitute some of the negative narratives of modernity also typical of the critique of the mass society tradition. Nevertheless, Habermas’ dialectic cannot be defined

as negatively as the one conceptualized by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972). First of all, the liberal democratic society, in a plain Marxist perspective, is considered as an objective advancement from previous social and economic systems, as matter of fact those negative narratives, the re-feudalization of the civil society, the involvement of citizenry and the Kantian use of reason, before declining, emerge as positive change from feudalism.

Secondly, still in dialectical fashion, bourgeois ideology still contains for the German author a positive and emancipatory core. Instrumental rationality can turn into communicative action, a critical rational way of deliberating and managing politics in which individuals are not driven by selfish interests but inspired by concerns of the common good. Cohen argues (1992, p. 211) that these subjects, through such a rational mode, are capable of generating, at least in principle, “a collective will through the medium of rational, unconstrained communication”

Dialectics, as we said, changes the nature of the relationship between elements, introduces but also resolves contradictions. And how are the contradictions inherent in the institutionalization of the BPS being resolved in order to provide still space for its ideal redemption? As Cohen states (1992: pp. 220), Habermas “does not thereby manage to find an adequate locus, even in principle, for the activity of the citizens.” The German author is fully aware of such a tension between facts and norms and his precise objective to distillate out of historical and material conditions something transcendental, something “utopian.” Baker (1992, pp.183) confirms this point of view by arguing that “the great interest of Habermas’ book is that it presents the appearance of a bourgeois public sphere simultaneously in two registers: as the emergence of a normative ideal of rational public discussion from within the distinctive social formation of bourgeois civil society and as a realization, or rather the fleeting, partial realization, of this ideal within that society” as Calhoun notices.

As we mentioned previously, the most important research question of this present paper is how Habermas can justify the discernment of the noumenon from the phenomenon, in other words, how can he extract universal ideals from historical ideology? I believe he tries to conduct such an

operation by systematically building binary oppositions; fortified divisions between contradictory terms in order to create an autonomous sphere capable of creating and preserving from corrupting forces (the instrumental rationality of the “systems”)the normative conditions for the this disinterested public use of reason. Therefore, the dialectical process here seems to be artificially frozen, made it more rigid in order to preserve this Kantian publicity from economy, power and ultimately particularistic and instrumental rationality. In relation to that, my main argument is that distinctions cannot be maintained and what results is simply history, as a contradictory and indissoluble conflation of idea and power, ideology and historic materialism. Those listed below are the terms I see polarized:

Systems vs. life-world

*Techne vs. Praxis*

Matter vs. *Geist*

Economy (private sphere) vs. Family (intimate private sphere)

State vs. civil society

*Voluntas vs. Ratio*

*Veritas vs. auctoritas*

Throughout the book, Habermas points out several aspects that imply a “contradictory institutionalization” of the public sphere and those issues, whereas for him represent the distance between history and ideals, from my point of view, they represent the distance between history and ideology. The general binary opposition is between what Habermas defines as “system” and “life world”. The systems represent the sphere of material reproduction of social life and includes the state, economic and bureaucratic institutions. The “life word” represents the sphere of symbolic reproduction of the social and is also the realm in which not instrumental but communicative action can be performed. However, in order to preserve this area the author must produce powerful separations, a division that contains power outside this realm.

The distance between systems and life world can be also read as distance between the Aristotelian categories of *techne* and *praxis* as to say, two qualitatively different human actions, the former technical and pragmatically oriented towards the control of nature, the latter that tends to maintain and reproduce social interaction. The former is the typical action that characterizes the “systems” and the latter characterizes the “life-world”. The distance between “systems” and “life-world” follows also the important distinction such as base and superstructure or matter and *geist*, spirit, ideology not necessarily understood as a system of beliefs proper of particular class, not even as system of illusory beliefs, false consciousness but as the general process of signification, producing ideas. In this sense, Habermas enters in the Marxist debate concerning the relationship between base and superstructure. However, his position seems ambivalent because, on the one hand, by recognizing the simultaneous existence of ideology and universal ideals he is providing a dialectical perspective that overcomes pure materialism and pure idealism; on the other hand, in order to conceive those transcendental ideas he must imagine in turn a sphere completely alien to materialist and instrumental needs, thus turning back to a marked idealism.

One first example of this idealized sphere is the family as opposed to economy. The very term “intimate sphere” seems to elucidate Habermas’ intention to raise boundaries for the family against the systems. As we know, the BPS constitutes a projection of the form of interaction of a new intimate sphere of the bourgeois family. According to Habermas, the family was regarded at the same time as both integrated in the civil society and representing an important factor of socialization and social integration and intimate space insulated from social and economic constraints. Integrated because social attitudes can permeate from the bourgeois family to the rest of society enhancing a public and diffused new social mode but also insulated because family meant privacy and autonomy for the individual to conduct his life according to his standards and meant physical and intellectual intimacy among the members of the family. However, even more importantly, the intimate private sphere is differentiated from the economic private sphere. Habermas’ intention in discerning the two spheres results clear because it is in the intimate sphere

of the family where he locates the source for the “non-instrumental” intersubjectiveness which in turn can make the communicative action possible.

The importance of the bourgeois family in relation to the public sphere is that they constitute a *conditio sine qua non* for bourgeois public sphere since it is the natal site for the specific subjectivity that Habermas considers so important in order to be able of express opinion critically and autonomously. This subjectivity can be defined as the result of educative intellectual exchange between family members. Moreover, it is characterized by specific religious life, independent from the church, individual eroticism and freedom of choice of marriage partner (STPS, p.255). The family is defined by voluntarism, community of love and cultivation. From the bourgeois family comes an intellectually autonomous individual who has already experienced freedom in the intimate sphere.

In this image of the family one can find at least two main contradictions that makes this insulation to say the least, arguable. First of all, as Habermas himself remarks, the family is still involved in the reproduction of capital by reproducing the labor force, since within its private sphere people must fulfill the basic material needs like eating, for instance, in order to be able to work. Furthermore, As Fraser (1992) already remarked, by looking at bourgeois family structure, its internal sexual division of the labor was completely functional to reproduction of capital in the private sphere

The second contradiction is represented by the fact that the family is considered as the locus of individual physical and intellectual freedom which is defined subjectivity but, at the same time, it is a patriarchal family, in which authority implies the superiority of will of the head of the family over the rest of its members. Even in this case, one can observe the presence of a fiction, since freedom and individual autonomy and “voluntariness” find their limits with the *pater familias*'s authority. The head of the family authority, as the very Habermas confirms (STPS, p.45) is justified by a sexual division of the labor in which the father has supposedly the most important task: reproducing capital through labor.

Those two contradictory points undermine the image of the bourgeois family being the site for the creation of an individual who has been trained in unconstrained critical rational thinking that will characterize the debate of those private individuals becoming a public. That is because of his reasoning would be still affected by economic constraints, still present within the family, and constrains from freedom of thought and expression, for the presence of the head of the family so *homme* and *bourgeois* are still identified. In fact, both the bourgeois family was in two main ways connected to economy: through labor in order to reproduce capital (the “*pater familias*”) and through labor in order to reproduce labor (the women at home).

I shall introduce the second contradictory aspect of the nature of the bourgeois public sphere defended by Habermas by examining its political agenda. The most important objective of the political public sphere was emancipating civil society and the market from power which was mainly represented by state authority. In the end, the bourgeois public sphere desired the confinement of state intervention within very narrow and specific functions and, according to Cohen (1992), the ultimate goal was the complete elimination of the state by arguing that the civil society could be harmoniously self-regulating through the market. Thus, principles such as free market of goods and free market of ideas did not represent only two claims related by the same freedom component in two separated levels of the private sphere. The two principles were rather casually and deterministically connected: under the assumption that market could regulate civil society, one could infer that a free market of goods constitutes a fundamental pre-condition for a free market of ideas according to the Milton’s *Aeropagitica*’s principles (2008).

Let us have a look the “cause” then: the demand for free market of goods. The bourgeois man demanded a market completely unconstrained by state-authority intervention in agreement with the physiocrats’ movement which was sustaining the *laissez faire* policy. Thus, behind such a request there was the conviction that the market forces, if set free, could interact with each other in such a way that the market was always in perfect balance. The contradiction here is that in order

to achieve the liberal economic project the state has to provide a certain legal framework, namely civic and private law, to guarantee the reliability of expectations of the economic subjects. In fact, the only factor that could guarantee the calculability of profit was represented by a *super partes* authority capable of obliging the contractors, for example, to respect the contract.

Cohen points out (1992) also that in the realm of the demand of free market of ideas, which constitutes the result of the “free market of goods-then-free market of ideas” equation, the contradiction present is still concerned with state intervention. According to the political agenda of the bourgeois public sphere, civil society could regulate itself with no need of authoritarian arbitrariness. However, the constitutional framework furnished by the state of right represented a fundamental guarantee for the existence of the public sphere. Thus, without the basic freedoms of the individual and those of expression, thought, assembly and press the critical public discussion could not have developed in the first place.

Another important tension is in the capability of the *homo economicus*, the *bourgeoisie* to achieve dis-interested concern for the common good. There are several principles that characterize the political economy typical of capitalist systems (Varoufakis, 1998), the main ones being: our environment is characterized by scarcity; people have relatively stable preferences and those preferences are transitive (if the actor prefers A to B and B to C, she will always prefer A to C); their action is rational in the sense that it is motivated by an attempt to maximize the realization of their preferred states of affairs and they choose the best means for bringing forth this output; provided that external factors do not interfere, their maximizing transactions bring forth the state of equilibrium; finally they act in a state of perfect and costless information.

Scarcity, as a primary economic reason, causes another contradiction between *homme*, *citoyen* and *bourgeois*. Habermas notices that the identity between the universal *homme* and *bourgeois* represented the emergence of ideology meant in modern terms. This is connected to a

general process of differentiation associated to modernity because the attempt to universalize class-based interests requires the precondition of existence of a civil society differentiated in classes. As Habermas notices, entering in the public debate of the saloon and coffee shops required being property owners, *bourgeois*, but not all men were bourgeois. However, besides such a fiction, the requirement of being wealthy was a condition justified by the fact that only men not moved by primary needs, due to scarcity, could develop a disinterested attitude towards discourse of the public good.

What seems problematic is the fact that satisfaction of material primary needs does not necessarily guarantee the absence of instrumental rationality because as Hegel (1992) argues, one of the main reasons to explain the tendency of market economy to grow, to articulate itself through more efficient organization of the social labor is based on the capability to abstract previously immediate and material needs, therefore capable of producing new needs requiring fulfillment. This implies that the property ownership of the *bourgeois* does not require the disinterested attitude that allows people to approach with Kantian rationality the public good.

Finally, there two binary oppositions present in STPS very much connected and dealing with general principles of human social order: *ratio* vs. *voluntas* and *veritas* and vs. *auctoritas*. *Ratio* and *veritas* represent two elements of the Kantian universal principle on which human social order should be constructed, *voluntas* and *auctoritas* represent Schmidt's view of society constituted by historically based conflict and power. Habermas sustains that political life should and could be founded on rational debate rather than about antagonism and fight. This constitutes a synthetic manifesto of the normative project of the German author in which the public sphere represents the locus and the expression of citizen active membership in both state and civil society institutions. It is true that in its original meaning, politics as Aristotelian *politeia* represents the base for civic social life but as long as one considers social life materially bound and materially produced, politics cannot transcend particular interests and instrumentality. It is evident, when Habermas privileges *ratio* and *veritas* as attainable principle for human society then Habermas

assumes that politics can be de-politicized and transformed into political rational debate within certain boundaries and according to certain procedures. Unlike Habermas, Schmitt argues that antagonism cannot be eliminated from politics because politics is always characterized by a logic of clash and negotiations between conflictual interests. This implies that society does not originate from a natural order of things but by the *voluntas*, the instrumental will of sacrifice part of their liberties in order to limit the conflicts at non destructive level. Furthermore this is a contractualist model of society because what guarantees the order and peace is not the truth but the *auctoritas*/authority which uses physical and legal power to pursue social control.

In sum, I have tried to show that if Habermas is really looking for an historically situated locus for this normative thrust, those conceptual distinctions can guarantee the integrity of such a locus only when idealized, when abstracted from history.

## AUCTORITAS ET VOLUNTAS (NO VERITAS ET RATIO) FACENT LEGEM: A GRAMSCIAN READING OF HABERMAS

I want to start with a very illuminating passage taken from Williams' *Marxism and Culture* :

*"Hegemony goes beyond culture, as previously defined in its insistence on relating the 'whole' social process to specific distributions of power and influence. To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society these are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process."* (1977: pp.108).

Hegemony represents the permeation of power from the system to the life-world, from the materials to the symbolic and cultural. The contradictions present in the institutionalization of the BPS imply a missed resolution of the question of power which constituted since the very beginning of the liberal movement, the core principle of that civil society/market emancipation.

If bourgeois power and not Kantian *ratio* and Miltonian *veritas* shapes society, i.e. *facent legem*, then the structural institutionalization and transformation of the public sphere becomes as

the gradual expanding process of bourgeois hegemonic ruling over the rest of the society. Thus, under this perspective, the BPS actually did resolve the question of power, not by trying to eliminate it but rather by replacing obsolete forms of domination through violence and coercion, with intellectual leadership and, to a certain extent, creation of consent. In his analysis Habermas acknowledges that the bourgeois public sphere functions narrowly to serve the “critical debate” needs of the bourgeoisie so that “public opinion,” in Habermas’ reading, is by definition “bourgeois public opinion.” This does not make it any less “public opinion” it simply means that the relevant “public” was the bourgeoisie. There is already a consistent literature that has critically engaged with the level of inclusiveness and exclusiveness (Fraser, 1992; Meehan, 1995; Holub 1991; Asen 1999; Benhabib 1996; Hauser 1997; Mouffe 2000) but it still seems to me worth to question how a public sphere that essentially hides class based socio-economic interests can in the fictitious identity of *homme*, *citoyen* and *bourgeois* produce politic free and power free universal ideals.

In both spheres of action, what I defined as the demand of free market of goods and the demand of free market of ideas, no one can really prove that the people making the demands could have been understood by someone who was not a property owner and educated enough. Even Habermas himself, when discussing the issue, is quite cautious to state firmly that the contents of the debate of the bourgeois public sphere were a matter of common interest. As he puts it: “class interest was the basis of public opinion. During that phase it must also have been objectively congruent with the general interest at least that this opinion could be considered the public one, emerging from the critical debate of the public, and consequently rational” (*STPS*: p. 89).

The bourgeois public sphere was sustaining the general interest nature of the liberal market because each man with skill and luck could attain private property and ultimately business success. According to Habermas, the requirements to become a member of the public sphere represented a guarantee to avoid that direct particular short term interests could have become matters of the debate. In other words, the already achieved economic success and the education of those *bürger*

were supposed to safeguard the debate from becoming instrumentally used for specific individual interests rather than common interest. That was possible because the members of BPS could be considered less dependent on the system of needs.

Probably, a more convincing argument is provided by the author when he claims that the common interest was the final result of a process engineered through practical discourse. He argues that the participants in practical discourse, by adopting a moral stand point, were able to transcend interested-oriented and valued -based perspectives. The moral position was attained by becoming impartial: giving to someone else's opinions the same relevance and weight that he gives to his own according to a sort of egalitarian reciprocity. This argument seems more convincing than the first one. However, Benhabib (1996) and McCarthy (1992) provide considerations good enough to debate Habermas' position. First of all, we may consider that Habermas conceives interests as well as needs as being internally related to cultural values that provide the fundamental framework to understand them.

The cultural framework for the members of the public sphere was constituted by bourgeois culture. If necessities are to be related to values then they cannot be directly shaped by the force of arguments (Benhabib, 1996). Therefore, impartiality becomes difficult to sustain. Even if the general agreement is reached with full consent, the common interest is identified with the common interest of a class, the bourgeois class, not with the totality of the society because the needs and the interests of the liberal public sphere are understood through values belonging to a specific cultural heritage, the bourgeois one. Therefore, that means that the distinction between public issues of "justice" and private conception of "good life" cannot completely be achieved and maintained.

Habermas claims that the subjective economic perspective had to be excluded from the debate but, on the contrary, the only notion of common interest that was present within the public sphere was that one of a class that was becoming aware of itself and becoming dominant as well. The public sphere was in the end the site of production and reproduction (after the bourgeoisie was

already well installed in power) of a new common sense characterized by specific rationality and morality which was the one of the socially and economically dominant class.

As we have already seen, in Habermas' work the private property ownership is one of the conditions that guarantee the incorruption of the public common interest from private particular ones. By having already attained private property, the bourgeois would not be so focused straightforwardly on its interest. Moreover, private property, according to liberal thought, does not constitute an actual discrimination because of the fiction that each man would have equal chance, with ability and luck, to attain the status of property owner. This was, according to Habermas, a sufficiently approximate (*STPS*: p.58) reality that justifies the identification with *homme* and *bourgeois* and the whole society as bourgeois society. I will argue that the rate of approximation to reality of those two fictions corresponds to the process of negotiation of hegemony between the dominant class and the rest of the society.

Before examining in detail how the idea of hegemony can be applied to the analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere it is worth examining the common base that unites Gramsci and Habermas. First of all, both Gramsci and Habermas come from an Hegelian Marxist tradition that provides the cultural sphere, the symbolic aspect of social life with much more relevance compared to the so called orthodox Marxism with its "ontological" materialism. As Jay argues (1984, pp.161) the re-discovering of the *lebenswelt* ( the original definition of the Husserlian life-world) meant also the enhancement of the perspective on language considered as " a social process in continuing development, a source of commonly accepted cultural conventions." Language then, in both Gramsci and Habermas, is considered as a crucial tool to construct a community founded on common values.

From this common base, we can identify two fundamental aspects that distinguish the Italian from the German author. First of all, whereas for Habermas it is possible to perform a universal communicative action, for Gramsci, as he maintains when he discusses the importance of journalism (1971, pp.224. ) the idea that clear ideas can be assimilated by whatever consciousness

is an Enlightenment myth since, language and way of thinking are class-bound. Secondly, whereas for Habermas this universal communicative action is regarded as an emancipatory tool from the oppressive side of modernity, for Gramsci, social consensus is considered much more ambivalent, in the sense that hegemony is always conflated with power at least in two possible ways. First of all, hegemony implies both coercion and consent; Secondly, compared to Habermas' communicative action, hegemony is almost purely strategic and instrumental action, it implies negotiation for instance between capital and state (thus the civil society is always considered intertwined with state activity) or between classes.

Thus to sum up, the communicative action that characterizes the normative view of the BPS replaces power relations with *ratio* and *veritas* which represents Habermas' faith in the common morally universal understanding. Conversely, hegemony and counter-hegemony implies a re-politicization of all spheres, both the systems and the life-world. Therefore, whereas for Habermas the ideal speech is one *praxis* completely depurated from the *techne*, Gramsci would actually advocate a conflation of the two.

From Gramsci's perspective, *STPS* must be reformulated as the historical and sociological description of an economic class which, after having become economically dominant, creates social/cultural institutions that allow the dominant class to vehicle the transmission of their values and beliefs and attain their internalization and naturalization among the rest of the society. Those sets of values and beliefs, universally accepted and then appearing as common sense, construct the identification with the general interest.

The strategy I will adopt to suggest this interpretation via Gramsci is to try to reconstruct the historical development and consolidation of hegemony by the dominant bourgeois class. Since the Italian thinker provides a description of a process that comprises different stages to such an achievement, we will be able stage by stage to construct this parallel dimension with the structural transformation of the public sphere. The process mentioned above can be presented as follows:

I) Initial passage from economic to political class consciousness in which a moment of superstructure is built up out of the base or structure. This corresponds to the passage from the preconditional phase for the future public sphere, namely the emergence of the market and the bourgeois class as economically ruling one, to the creation of the public sphere.

II) A single combination of ideas becomes dominant and pervasive throughout society. This, according to Gramsci, forms a historical bloc: a synthesis of economic, intellectual and moral hegemony. This is the phase of universalization of interests of dominant group which are presented as not its own narrow corporate-economic interests, but national interests shared by subordinate groups.

III) Then, the state mediates or fashions the hegemony by representing the unstable equilibria of compromises between the dominant and subordinate groups so that the interests of the dominant group prevail. In this stage, the attainment of hegemony is complete in all its three dimensions: moral, intellectual and political.

Within the concept of hegemony one must distinguish between before and after the attainment of political power. In the first stage hegemony corresponds to intellectual and moral leadership, in the second stage hegemony combines force and consent since it is institutionalized in the state. As Gramsci (1971: p 57-8) argues: "The methodological criterion on which our own study must be based is the following: that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well."

Since both Habermas and Gramsci consider the terrain between civil society and state as the fundamental political battleground, I will organize my interpretation by distinguishing two fundamental stages: pre-political hegemony stage with a pre-welfare state, and a political hegemony stage with welfare state. In this sense, Habermas' dialectical process to describe first the arising of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit* antithesis as opposed to *arcana imperii* thesis), then its decline with the socialization of the state and the statalization of the society (the synthesis) is replaced by dialectical evolution of hegemony from mere intellectual and moral leadership to a political one. The most important dialectic feature of my view is determined by the fact that hegemony is never completely attained and above all, once acquired cannot be preserved as a stable and continuous power relation. Thus hegemony can be seen as process rather than a product that needs constant re-negotiations.

The transformation of the public sphere, understood as process of attainment of power, implies a tripartite dialectic, so I identify three stages instead of the two presented by Habermas. The thesis is constituted by the social feudal social political system, the spectacle of the court and the authoritarian arbitrariness where political representation was realized before the people that sit down as audience. The antithesis is constituted by constitution of the bourgeois society in its pre-welfare stage that, even though it does not differ in terms of exercising power over the rest of the society (as I said the bourgeois society did not eliminate it), it is characterized by a new form of domination that at this stage relies only on intellectual and moral leadership. Then, the synthesis is constituted by the statalization of the civil society and the socialization of the state, the welfare stage, in which the dominant bourgeois class reached the final achievement of hegemony where consent is recombined with state authority that becomes an apparatus of domination.

However one can notice that only two of the three stages mentioned above will be examined, since I believe that my interpretation of what I identified as the thesis, the previous feudal regime in Habermas, does not really differ from Habermas' reading of it. On the contrary,

my construal differs in the last two stages, what I defined the pre welfare stage and the welfare stage, since by considering the latter as synthesis I mean to show the realization of a combination of two different and previous forms of domination to which corresponds a higher achievement of hegemony, whereas, for Habermas, here takes place the decline of the public sphere.

#### PRE-WELFARE STAGE AS MORAL AND INTELELCTUAL HEGEMONY

The concept of hegemony analytically comprises three dimensions: intellectual, moral and political. The first two dimensions are mostly concerned with its employment within the civil society, and the third one is mostly concerned with the political society, the state. The “spontaneous consent” given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

So, for Gramsci, the fundamental condition to gain intellectual ascendancy is still a structural one: the ruling group controls the relations of production and the forces of production. Anderson (1977) argues that hegemony, although ethical-political, must be ultimately based on the economic function performed by the fundamental social group in production. This first condition is recognized by Habermas as a fundamental pre-requisite for the formation of the public sphere: the bourgeois entrepreneurship gains private property and emerges as the dominant economic subject within the framework of the market. The economic point of departure described by Habermas can be related to Gramsci's definition of the passage from an economic-corporate level or trade consciousness where trades groups and professional groups identify with their own narrow self-interests, but they do not yet identify with their entire class, to an economic class consciousness where the solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class is still purely economic.

Therefore, private individuals, as property owners, do recognize themselves as belonging to a same class but without any political involvement.

Habermas notices that the emergence of the market beyond local arenas (town economies toward national economies) implied the increase of trading between different geographical areas. In turn, the traffic of commodities implied traffic of news since merchants, in order to maintain and create business needed reliable information about prices and demands. As Calhoun (1992) points out, the commercial newsletters began to carry also other types of information besides the market environment. This tendency determined both the literacy/education requirement for traders and the creation of what will be developed as newspapers. The institution of newspapers and the widespread literacy among the middle class contributed to its involvement in literary discussion about books and other forms of art, emulating for a certain extent the literary court of the old nobility. The sites of this public sphere of letters became the sites of production and discussion of ideas. Media, in turn, vehicle and disseminate those ideas and by doing so, they serve the civic purpose of providing matters of discussion for public debate. They set an agenda of discussion organically constructed around the needs and the interest of the bourgeois class.

The attainment of the control of means of communication by the bourgeois class represents the conceptual shift from the bourgeois class (and not the whole citizenry) being audience-spectator of the theatrical representative publicity to being the performers, the actors. Thus the bourgeois class becomes gradually a class *per se* and *in se*.

In this new scenery, one can foresee the conditions that will eventually identify a new passive audience with the subordinate class. Gramsci notices that the bourgeois class attains power, in most cases not by a violent rupture with the old aristocratic regime but by achieving compromises and obtaining a gradual passage of power. He argues that, while France went through a ruptural revolution, other European countries did not do so, but went through a passive

revolution in which the old feudal aristocracy was not destroyed, but compromises were made between the rising industrial class and the aristocracy.

The notion of passive revolution can find some employment in the description that Habermas provides of the emergence of the bourgeois society. For instance, the fact that the literary public sphere inherited the rhetoric art of critical discourse from the noble court may represent an evidence to support that Gramscian theory. That is because, the preservation of the same critical approach shows a certain degree of continuity in cultural terms as opposed to a radical change which, in Gramscian terms, would have implied a full cultural and moral reform of the society. What characterizes the notion of passive revolution is a process of profound changes in terms of power relations in a given society but without popular participation involved in this transition (1971, pp. 118-120). Again, this aspect of the absence of popular participation seems to provide another reason to think about the attainment of power by the bourgeois class as a passive revolution. In fact, the bourgeois public sphere, inclusive in principle, was exclusive *de facto* since a member of the public sphere had to meet two fundamental criteria: being a property (and men) owner and being educated. Evidently those two requirements entailed the exclusion of the masses.

#### WELFARE STATE AS A POLITICAL HEGEMONY

The question of popular participation is fundamental in Habermas since in his conception of the dialectical historical process, a crucial structural transformation concerns the relationship between people and political life. In the first stage, the thesis is represented by the market and the emancipation of civil society in which (a portion of the) people could express themselves and could deliberate, then the antithesis of the state and civil society, the welfare state where people return to be mere audience. This final stage described by Habermas contains something paradoxical since it is understood also as the moment when the inclusiveness of public sphere is realized. In the time when the liberal public sphere could become the “social” public sphere, the

only situation in which it could be considered representative of society as whole, public sphere degenerates since the price to pay for democracy was the loss of what used to constitute the force of it, the critical rational debate. Along with the quantitative enlargements of public sphere goes its qualitative impoverishment.

Public opinion ceased to be the result of critical rational discussion and the *ratio* of popular sovereignty; on the contrary, consent becomes the product of manipulative media. People come back to its original status of passive audience: instead of criticizing the authority they “remain stupefied in front of the TV screen”. In agreement with the Frankfurt School, Habermas claims that entertainment becomes a strategy to stupefy and so divert the attention from real issues. The political public sphere, the parliament, is not anymore a place for discussion but just for finding compromising agreement between different conflicting interests (Habermas, in this critique of representative democracy and parliament, seems to reveal his debt to Carl Schmitt).

Gramsci explains this ambivalence between democratic inclusiveness and democratic losses in terms of the dominance of one class. The bourgeois establishment at power is distinguished from “previous dominant classes, [since] they were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to elaborate an organic passage from other classes to their own” (1971: pp.217). This kind of enlargement of the state in transition presupposes a certain historical capacity to absorb and assimilate all the levels of society, creating a global and universal formulation. The enlargement, as I was mentioning, is twofold. On the one hand, it comprises an enlargement from the base, a democratic one based on hegemonic expansion from the masses. On the other, it takes place from the top: domination reigns over consent by reintroducing state power. Civil society loses its freedom: force and violence are reintroduced within civil society through the instrumentalization of the state by the dominant group. This is defined by Habermas as the refederalization of civil society by the state authority.

The welfare state stage then corresponds to the combination of force and consent which characterizes hegemony after a class has become the politically ruling one. Gramsci talks about the “two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur, half-animal and half- human. They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization, of the individual moment and of the propaganda, of tactics and of strategy. In actual fact, it often happens that the more the first 'perspective' is 'immediate' and elementary, the more the second has to be 'distant' (not in time, but as a dialectical relation), complex and ambitious. In other words, it may happen as in human life, that the more an individual is compelled to defend his own immediate physical existence, the more he will uphold and identify with the highest values of civilization and of humanity, in all their complexity". (1971, pp.169-170).

The state in Gramsci is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favorable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. However, the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of “the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups. (1971, p.182).

The welfare state, since it is considered by Gramsci as an ideological apparatus controlled by the bourgeois society through political hegemony, appears to take care of the welfare in a way in which social contradictions are partially covered and partially resolved in order to not lose consent. Furthermore, the intervention of the state means a fundamental discursive move of social conflicts out from the matter of public discussion. "Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that

the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic—corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential..." (1971, p.161).

In occasion of the capitalist crisis of the 1920s and 1930s the welfare state was constituted: "In the 1930s the reorganization of capitalism took a variety of political forms from the New Deal to fascism in which state intervention in the economy and society increased dramatically and some elements of planning was attempted to overcome the effects of anarchy in market relations." (1971: pp.134). In relation to that, Buci-Glucksman (1979 pp.226) sustains that "the passive revolution arises, as does hegemony, in the factory itself. It is here that the originality of Gramsci's analysis of Taylorism and Fordism lies: he discovers the countertendencies of capitalism in the forms themselves of the organization of labor; he re-explores the political dimension that is a central feature of the Factory Council strategy in the light of new developments in capitalism; in short, he studies the relations between productive forces and political forms. In fact, the vehicles of the American type of 'passive revolution' are the reorganization of the wage-earner (the politics of high wages), the development of differential practices within the working class, and the creation of a new, fragmented proletariat, which is parcellized and interchangeable."

Gramsci registers the occurrence of a passive revolution concerned with the fact that through the legislative intervention of the State relatively far reaching modifications (reforms) are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the 'plan of production' element; in other words, that socialization and co-operation in the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching...individual and group appropriation of profit.' "(Sassoon; 2000: pp.134). Thus, the welfare state allows the dominant group to overcome crisis and structural changes without really involving popular participation. The usefulness of the concept of the passive revolution, Sassoon argues (2000), as an interpretative device thus consists in measuring the adequacy of a political strategy and helping to explain the durability of bourgeois rule despite economic and political crises. The social reforms adopted by the welfare state serve to

capitalism to overcome its continuous crisis and contradictions. Buci-Glucksman (1979: pp.209) states: “It is as if the relations of capitalist production were possessed of a certain capacity for internal adaptation to the developments of the forces of production, a certain plasticity, which allows them to 'restructure' in periods of crisis”. The welfare state implies the acceptance of certain demands from below, while at the same time encouraging the working class to restrict its struggle to the economic-corporative terrain is part of this attempt to prevent the hegemony of the dominant class from being challenged while changes in the world of production are accommodated within the current social formation.

As Held (1980) maintains, the welfare state as political hegemonic power of bourgeois class has meant the conceptual passage of politics as mere superstructural phenomenon to a new constellation of economics and politics, since the expansion of the state leads to an even greater involvement of administrators and technicians in social economic affairs. This leads in the end to the empowerment of bourgeois original ideology, since the equation between *bourgeois* and *homme* (and ultimately *citoyen*) increases in proportion until it becomes the equation between political economy and welfare state: the social order is based on a technocratic economic justification.

#### CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Jay (1984, p. 466), reflecting on the overall Habermasian project, argues that the German author's intention is to reconstruct a Marxist holism, a sense of totality that, first of all, does not demise the relevance of each “stage” of the historical development, secondly that does not succumb to pure materialism. Habermas criticizes Marx for having reduced the simultaneous existence of instrumental and communicative action to the former, in other words, for having reduced the normative thrust of socialism to a socialization of economy.

This is evident in Habermas' will to go not dismiss bourgeois culture as entirely organic to an ideology and therefore, related to the social whole, being considered as false consciousness. Thus, according to him and according to a dialectic dynamic, the BPS can offer us an inheritance not only worth to be studied but also revived as vital thrust for a better society, a socialist one, paradoxically enough. This view implies an attributing to the *Geist*, to the symbolic sphere of social reproduction, a remarkable level of autonomy, so that the Kantian *ratio* and *veritas* can be preserved in their universality. The problem that I have tried to describe in this present paper is that this operation implies in turn a forced separation between united but distinct spheres which is completely a-historical.

One of the reasons why Habermas' project is so appealing is because, as Peters notices (2001; 2005), Habermas talks about an extremely normative aspiration that in a sense moved all media scholars, the "dream of communication" as an intersubjective response to all social issues. However, returning to the totality to which Habermas aspires by trying to overcome the pure materialism of orthodox Marxism, this move can easily fall into the other extreme, idealism.

In relation to Habermas, as I have already mentioned, Gramsci does not really solve a general pendulum movement that characterizes western Marxist between the tendency towards essentializing the expressive totality of the economic base and the tendency, more connected to a so called Hegelian Marxism, to underrate that and to privilege the social and cultural praxis of humanity. Gramsci for instance, on the one hand, criticizes the former of being an idealism in reverse but, on the other hand, he himself falls in the idealist trap by attributing what Habermas attributed to the BPS, to the proletarian class. Nevertheless, Gramsci's idea of hegemony still can be considered as a more accomplished version of Marxist totality because, instead of separating the symbolic and the material, it conflates them in an analysis that seems to me more faithful to history.

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