



## The Relationship between Structure and Agency in Communicative Action Theory

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### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between structure and agency is one of the many unresolved core enigmas in social sciences and social theory. The intent of integration of structure and agency is to conceive within the same model the relation between individuation and socialization, between freewill and the principle of coexistence and, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, Antony Giddens's structuration and Margaret Archer's morphogenetics delimit its conceptual field. Habermas also develops communicative action theory, within which he attempts to integrate action-theoretical and system-theoretical sociological perspectives. He divides modern society into lifeworlds (micro) and systems (macro). The lifeworld is the realm of ordinary everyday experience and intersubjective understanding but it loses power at the expense of powerful forces Habermas calls "system". Examples are the monetization of transactions, markets, law, and bureaucracy. He attempts to reconstruct the relationship between lifeworld and system (or agency and structure) but some of the critiques did not consider his attempts successful or they considered it as an incomplete project. Many Habermasian critics see the theory's being problematic in its heavy reliance on 'idealizing suppositions'. Yet fewer attack the non-idealized assumptions of communicative rationality. The problem here is that the lifeworld of such agents, with their equal access and use of relevant information, requires something seemingly unavailable in the modern socio-political context because there are, in real world, effects of an instrumentalist rationality that distorts the lifeworld through the 'steering systems' of capitalism and bureaucratic power. It seems that this theory implicitly do not consider the danger of domination of power structures over agency and wills of agents and hence, this way of establishing relationship between structure and agency implicitly have danger of establishing relationship between structure and structure i.e. modern society structures or systems in habermasian view in one hand and dominant power discourse structures that define or even dictate rationality and shape socio-political norms of given community in other hand.*

**Key words:** Habermas, Communicative Action Theory, Lifeworld, System, Communicative Rationality.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between structure and agency is one of the many unresolved core enigmas in social sciences and social theory. It is connected to a network of related metaphysical and dualistic mysteries, such as micro/macro, mind/body, or reasons/causes [20]. The structure/agency approach draws on a long-standing philosophical and academic debate on structure and, more widely, on the man/world relationship [32]. But for the most part, it is social theorists who wonder about the relationship between agency and structure, without worrying much about their general connections [20].

Structure/agency is primarily a critique of past structuralist approaches, such as the Levi Straussian structuralism and Parsonian functionalism which deny individuals the capacity to affect societal structures [32]. This approach acknowledges people's reflexivity and (active) agency, in this view, Practices are conceived as the point of contact of actors' subjectivities and context forces [32].

So, attempts in integrating structure and agency has primarily emerged in critique of both a group of sociologists who have radical positivist/ structuralist views about social realities in one hand and those who, as Anthony King points out, belonged to the interactionist, interpretive or hermeneutic paradigm which understand society not as a structure, which precedes individual agents, but as an interaction order, in other hand [30]. In these two views, the interconnections between structure and agency are lost. Further, this contrast is often mapped onto another set of dichotomies common in social theorizing and interpreted to mean, for instance, that structure is systematic and patterned, while agency is contingent

and random; that structure is constraint, while agency is freedom; that structure is static, while agency is active; that structure is collective, while agency is individual [26].

The issue of structure and agency is not only significant in and of itself but the position which sociologists adopt in relation to this fundamental ontological question often determines their position on the other deep questions. Sociological understanding of the macro-micro link and time and space typically follows logically on from ontological presumptions about structure and agency [30].

According to Hays, these social theorists use structure and agency as contrast terms (agency is what structure is not, and vice versa), they neglect the interconnected nature of the two. In line with this, in one hand, are those conceptions of structure that focus on its constraining nature and fail to recognize its empowering aspects [8, 19, 38, 41]. On the other hand, there are those conceptions of agency that treat it as the creative, contingent, and therefore (implicitly) un-structured component of social life [34, 41]. To complicate matters further, some conceptions of agency tend to limit it narrowly to individual choice [1, 5, 15], while others expand it to include human action in general [6, 14, 21, 23, 26].

For example systems theory and network analysis dispense with "actor" and "agency" as basic sociological concepts. For Luhmann, persons are systems whose autopoiesis is accomplished by consciousness. This means they produce mental states from other mental states. In contrast, social systems use communication in their own autopoiesis. While there would be no communication without minds, communication does not follow from minds and cannot be reduced to it, as if minds entailed communication. Persons cannot really communicate; they can say or write something, but what happens next, if anything, is decided by the behavior of communication, not by mental states and consciousness [20].

Network analysis goes to work without "person" also, although much network analysis thinks of networks as networks among persons, but this is just a special case. There are networks of theories, cultures, instruments, and reputations. Rarely or never are entire persons, in their full biographical richness, linked as totality to other such complete and unified individuals. Rather, what are being linked are roles, statuses, and expectations [20].

Contrary to Systems theory and network analysis, the conceptual core of most agency theories and microtheories is the human person. Humans are special. They come equipped with certain mental faculties lacking in the rest of the world, specially its inanimate or physical parts. Humans are knowledgeable and capable. They may have certain natural rights, entitlements, and privileged mental states. With their mind and conscious experiences, human actors are the ultimate source of social and cultural meaning and reality. It is persons who mean something, intend this or that, and then do something about it [20]. Persons have internal conscious states, such as wants and beliefs. Their world is will and representation. Consciousness allows humans to think about what they are going to do, to compare various alternatives, and to anticipate possible outcomes. Unlike inanimate nature and lower animals without minds, human actors have considerable leeway and discretion. By nature, humans are flexible and adjusting. Human action is driven by reasons; animal behavior by causes. Humans have free will; they can always do otherwise or nothing. In this lies their responsibility [20].

Indeed, today, the individual- society debate has been renewed with increased vigor; however, the language of the debate has changed. Substantially as a result of Anthony Giddens work on social theory

In the 1970s and 1980s, social theorists have been engaged in intense debates about the question of the relationship between individual and society. Partly following Giddens's utilization of a new continental vocabulary, these theorists increasingly wrote not of the individual-society divide but of structure and agency...structure refers to large-scale social institutions and realities which frame individual experience; in short, structure refers to society, though it may imply stronger and more static organizational patterns. And agency is specifically used to refer to the powers of independent individuals. It is contrasted with the organizational capacities of structure [30].

#### **Attempts to integrate structure and agency**

Once the social world splits up into two such essentially different realms, attempts follow to "bridge" the resulting gaps, to "translate" between micro and macro or, more ambitiously, to claim that one of the realms does not really exist and can be "reduced" to the other one. In rational choice [12], macro structures are aggregate outcomes of individual actions. In ethnomethodology [11], they are accomplishments and "summary representations" of microrealities [20]. There are many theories about both agency and structure, plus many different suggestions on how to integrate the two [20]. But as Lacroix believes, the intent of this approach- integration of agency and structure - is to conceive within the same model the relation between individuation and socialization, between freewill and the principle of coexistence and, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice [7], Antony Giddens's structuration [23] and Margaret Archer's morphogenetics [3] delimit its conceptual field [32].

Pierre Bourdieu makes use of Heidegger's philosophy to renew Levi-Straussian structuralism and rescue it from essentialist drifts. Bourdieu focuses on the mental mechanisms that underpin the appearance and functioning of objective structures of society. The concept of structure is not an objective reality that is the cause of actual practices of people. It is a methodological tool explaining social patterns [7]. Yet Bourdieu's habitus retains precisely the agent-proof quality that the concept of the duality of structure is supposed to overcome. In Bourdieu's habitus, schemas and resources so powerfully reproduce one another that even the most cunning or improvisational actions undertaken by agents necessarily reproduce the structure [37].

This implies that the causal relationship between structure and agency is reciprocal and mutually dependent, rather than characterized by the domination of structure and the subordination of agency, or vice versa. For example, actors are socialized and have internalized habitus and the matrix of dispositions it includes, but when they enter the social world and participate in fields, they actively perpetuate the recreation and transmission of habitus, by virtue of the way the provisions and guidelines of habitus are followed in practice [29]. As Bourdieu explains, habitus shapes social action into a 'system of circular relations that unite structures and practices, objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn tend to reproduce objective structure' [7].

The most sustained effort at reconceptualizing in recent social theory has been made by Anthony Giddens, who has been insisting since the mid- 1970s that structures must be regarded as "dual" [23] 1981, 1984). By this he means that they are "both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems" [23] structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other. Structures are enacted by what Giddens calls "knowledgeable" human agents (i.e., people who know what they are doing and how to do it), and agents act by putting into practice their necessarily structured knowledge [37]. Hence, structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing constraints on human agency, but as enabling [23]. This conception of the social subject grounds the fundamental assumption of the structuration theory, namely the *ontological continuity* of structure and agency. The theorem of duality of structure assumes that structures are both the medium and outcome of agency. Structures are produced and reproduced through actors' practices [32].

Responding to the philosophical school of 'critical realism', Margaret Archer seeks to re-assert the concrete existence and objective influence of social structures, while preserving an individualist conception of social agents. She elaborates a sophisticated model in which the dynamics of material and cultural structures play a role as important as human agency in the making of social processes. Under the aegis of critical realism, Archer establishes a hermetic barrier, which protects actors from deterministic forces of the structural environment [20].

Margaret Archer insists, reflexivity is an inherent ability that all social actors possess and it takes place within and throughout the internal dialogues that social actors have with themselves, when they consider their own social position, identities, action and thoughts in relation to other social actors [3]. By borrowing from Archer's morphogenetic approach, it is possible to view social reality as stratified between several different levels in order to analytically distinguish structure from agency, whilst also distinguishing the different elements that exist within both structure and the mental constitution of the actor [29]. For example, Archer lists the human subject, the psychic realm, the self, and the social and cultural dimensions, each of which exist separately along a continuum between objective and subjective realities [3]. Each level should be considered analytically distinct if it is to be possible to understand the respective influence of each and its inter-relationship with other levels. Habitus and the causal powers of structure are still critically important, but the engagement between structure and agency is not viewed as an a priori inevitability, as the two are not one and the same; there must be a mediator, or bridge, that facilitates the engagement between the two [29]. Reflexivity acts as this bridge between structure and agency effectively; 'mediating deliberately between the objective and structural opportunities confronted by different groups and the nature of people's objectively defined concerns' [3].

It is not my purpose here to develop a full critique or appreciation of Bourdieu, Giddens or Archer. This overview of the three main structure/agency theories highlights the different ways authors have sought to address this relationship. The three models are based on the idea that human action is not the mere outcome of structural conditioning, but that both terms maintain reciprocal relationships. It derives from an effort to relocate actors (and human voluntarism) in the making of socio-historical processes [32].

#### **Attempt of Habermas to integrate structure (system) and agency (life world)**

Like these theorists' attempts to integrate structure and agency oriented approaches in sociological theory, Habermas also develops a two level theory of modern societies within which he attempts to integrate action- theoretical and system-theoretical sociological perspectives [31].

Habermas is one of the most renowned philosophers and social theorists of our time and undoubtedly the best known German philosopher. His stance as a "critical theorist"—the most famous of the "Frankfurt School"—and his ideas of communicative action and the "public sphere" are known to many intellectuals in a variety of disciplines. There are many books and essays, and extensive traffic in messages on electronic mailing lists, expositing, interpreting, and criticizing him, and scholars apply his theories to politics, law, philosophy of science, education, theology, literary studies, even the performing arts [39].

Habermas attempts to understand society from the vantage point of language...society is to be explained by referring to the structures of discourse [25]. Taylor point out the approach is very different from an atomistic conception of society and has clear implications for the role of the individual in society: the individual's plans are limited by "what has been handed down by the linguistic community" ... "The notion of a self centered individual presupposes the community and consequently a framework of customs and norms within which s/he acts" [25].

In *communicative action theory*, Habermas attempts to show how actors in society seek to reach common understanding and to coordinate actions by reasoned argument, consensus, and cooperation rather than "strategic action" strictly in pursuit of their own goals [25]. This theory is about connecting the 'language-theory foundation with social sciences' [25]. Habermas himself presents it as a social theory rather than a meta-theory, or as he concludes the analysis of basic concepts and social reconstructions belong inseparably together [25]. This means trying to bridge the theories of constructivism and structuralism, trying to bridge 'lifeworld' and 'system' [24].

Communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement [25]. According to Habermas In earlier stages of rationalization, it is communicative action that has the functions of "cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization" [25].

The theory is primarily a critique of the notion of *instrumental rationality* used by Max Weber and his followers. He calls 'instrumental rationality' the principle according to which action is intended to achieve personal ends with available means within the limits of a moral framework. He argues that this model focuses on individuals and fails to explain the dynamics of action coordination. Habermas coined the term *communicative rationality* to name an alternative form of rationality. This concept is posited on the idea that an action requires the mediation of an external observer to be acknowledged as a rational behaviour. Rationality cannot be purely assessed as an internal relation between personal ends and available means. Rationality, according to Habermas, is a mode of pretension to truth. He distinguishes three orders of reality, three 'worlds' (the objective/natural world, the intersubjective sphere delineated by meanings and norms, and the subjective representations that individuals nurture) and, from there, three possible forms of pretension to 'truth': conformity with objective facts, normative and moral rightness, and subjective truthfulness. Communicative rationality is the relation to the world that people endorse to assert validity claims with a view to achieve mutual understanding [25]. Communicative rationality makes actions meaningful to observers, and this meaningfulness makes them assessable as rational or irrational. Hereby, Habermas develops a conception of *relational rationality*, which is not exclusive to but complements and frames the instrumental (means to an end) rationality of individuals [32]. The consequence, for Habermas, is that human beings are defined as democratic beings [17].

He divides modern society into "life worlds" (micro) and "systems" (macro). The lifeworld or micro is the realm of ordinary everyday experience and inter subjective understanding. This is a transparent world, known and familiar to those who inhabit it. They can make sense of this world and change it by redefining and negotiating meaning. In the lifeworld, persons act, interact with others, and interact with themselves. Persons have intentions and goals and do something [20]. Persons make their microworlds but not their macroworlds. Actors do act, but they do so under circumstances not of their own choosing. Actors do define, and redefine situations, but there are structural limits on what can be accomplished and changed in this way [20]. With his theory of life world and system, Habermas tries to move beyond the fragmentation between theories of social action and theories of social structure. There are four stages in his development of the theory of lifeworld and system:

1. Action-theoretical foundations in the notion of communicative action.
2. Habermas's construction of concept of the life world as the social background to communicative action.
3. His critical review of systems-theoretical concepts
4. His construction of a model of society that can integrate insights from both the action-theoretical and systems theoretical approaches [4].

Hence, one of major subjects of The Theory of Communicative Action is the lifeworld and the relationships between lifeworld and communicative action, the two being highly complementary. Habermas says: Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld formed

from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. It serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic.... The lifeworld also stores the interpretive work of preceding generations [25].

Lifeworld refers to those interpretive patterns that are culturally transmitted and linguistically organized, which for Habermas includes the formation of group identities and the development of individual personalities [9]. According to Habermas himself, the 'concept of communicative rationality does not just apply to the processes of intentional consensus formation, but also to the structures of a state of pre-understanding already reached within an intersubjectively shared lifeworld.' This lifeworld, Habermas's 'context-forming horizon', according to him is not a state of idealization but 'an unproblematic and prereflective background' that 'plays a constitutive role in the achievements directed toward reaching understanding' [25].

The lifeworld loses power at the expense of powerful forces Habermas calls "system". Examples are the monetization of transactions, markets, law, and bureaucracy. Originally designed to reproduce the lifeworld materially, these grow increasingly complex, uncoupled from the lifeworld, and accomplish more and more of the coordination necessary in society. The lifeworld "gets cut down more and more to one subsystem among others" [25].

System is seen as encroaching into or colonizing the lifeworld, to the extent that given ways of thinking are hidden "in the pores of communicative action" [25]. The imperatives of system are variously understood as owing their features to the structures of formal or instrumental rationality, growing specialization and expert systems, a process of rigidification of norm-free ways of seeing the world "steered" by media subsystems, resulting in a fragmentation of consciousness and a loss of meaning [22]. As Taylor notes, for Habermas, system theory represses "the discursive structure of social life," and system represses "processes of reaching understanding in favor of systemic forms of integration" like the market and bureaucracy [40]. The result is a widespread feeling of a loss of freedom and a loss of meaning in life.

Habermas has drawn on systems theory to analyze the functional systems of the modern economy and state administration. These systems are not governed by will and consciousness, but by the anonymous steering media of money and power, which obey only the logic of efficiency and instrumental reason. In contrast to social coordination and integration by way of communicative action, this type of social coordination goes on systemically 'behind the backs' of actors. Coordination by the non-linguistic media of money and power is not achieved directly or solely through shared meanings and does not depend on achieving consensus [16]. So, as mentioned above, systems like market and bureaucracy represses "processes of reaching understanding in favour of systemic forms of integration" [40]. This in result caused a widespread feeling of a loss of freedom and a loss of meaning in life. Given this reality Habermas attempts to reconstruct the relationship between system (structure) and lifeworld (agency) and reconstruct this relationship in the way that reduce repression of system on lifeworld and strengthen it in front of overgrowing systems of modern society.

For Habermas a communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents...What comes to pass manifestly through outside influence...cannot count subjectively as agreement. Agreement rests on common *convictions* [25]. So, according to Habermas Final decisions were quite different from the initial opinions expressed, and opinions changed reflecting improved levels of information, and broader perspectives on a clearer and more specific definition of issues [25]. Ideas enter into social reality via the idealizing presuppositions innate in everyday practices (lifeworld) and inconspicuously acquire the quality of stubborn social facts (system). Similar presuppositions are implicit in political and legal practices, too [25]. So, political choice, to be legitimate, must be the outcome of deliberation about ends among free, equal, and rational agents [15]. This requires that both the process of lawmaking and the utilization of administrative power (which produce structures of society or systems in Habermasian view) be tied to the discursive processes of generating the best reasons within the public sphere (agency or lifeworld in his view). The informal public sphere plays an essential role in 'cultivating normative reasons' and the legislative process can be viewed as the procedure for transforming arguments and reasons into law [16]. The public sphere is constituted wherever and whenever any matter of living together with difference is debated. When talking of *the public sphere*, Habermas is not talking about a specific, bounded public, but the whole array of complex networks of multiple and overlapping publics constituted through the critical discourse of individuals, community groups, civic associations, social movements, and media organizations. By *the public sphere*, Habermas is also referring to the idealized form of public reasoning [13]. By mobilizing citizens' communicative freedom for the formation of political beliefs that in turn influence the production of legitimate law, illocutionary obligations of this sort build up into a potential that holders of administrative power should not ignore [25].

In fact, Habermas's theory provides orientation to structure human communication and reflection. In particular, the validity claims (including rationality standards) serve as a set of clarification issues for critically evaluating information and communication actions [42]. As for the validity claims is defined as consequences without force: "a contested norm cannot meet the consent of the participants in a practical discourse unless...all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual". Habermas (1990) calls this validity the '(U)', the 'universalization principle', of discourse ethics. The only 'force' used in ideal speech situations is 'the force for better argument' [24]. Furthermore, in Habermas' work the participants in speech situations all respect five discourse ethics:

1. No party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse (the requirement for generality)
2. All participants should have equal possibility to present and to criticize validity claims in the process of discourse (autonomy)
3. Participants must be willing and able to empathize with each other's validity claims (idea role taking)
4. Existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus (power neutrality)
5. Participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and in the connection desists from strategic action (transparency) [24].

To achieve this situation- ideal speech Situation- there is a mutual wish to understand and believe the other. Furthermore, there is no power, status, prestige, ideology, manipulation or other form of mischief that influences the base for developing ideas. Decision-making becomes based on the strength of good, well grounded arguments provided in an open forum [2].

Hence, according to Habermas argumentation is open to all participants potentially affected by the claims under consideration [25]. Furthermore, each participant is given equal opportunity to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever and to express attitudes, desires, and needs [25]. In this sense, dialogues are thickly layered textures of political struggles concerning power and authority, cultural negotiations over identities, and social constructions of the 'problems' at hand [18]. "By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted." [25]. The outcomes and effects of the communication include the generation of normative reasons, public opinion, and influence. This notion of 'public opinion' should not be confused with the idea of the aggregation of individual pre-deliberative opinions, but is already connected to the idea of 'good reasons' generated by deliberating citizens in an open, egalitarian process [16]. The production of the best reasons, by citizens themselves, is essential. The quality of public opinion depends upon the degree to which citizens' proposals and the flow of information and reasons are being more or less rationally dealt with [16].

### **Criticism of Habermas' attempt to integrate structure (system) and agency (lifeworld)**

Some of the critiques did not consider Habermas's attempts to integrate structure and agency oriented approaches successful [] (Outwaite, 1994), or they considered it as an incomplete project [9]. And Habermas' detailed arguments about the primacy of communicative action for the integration of these two spheres were not taken entirely successful [4].

Many Habermasian critics approach the problematic of communicative action through its heavy reliance on 'idealizing suppositions'. Yet fewer attack the non-idealized assumptions of communicative rationality. It is exactly these assumptions of agent communicative rationality that Habermas needs as a precondition to even consider communicative action as a normative framework [35]. According to Flyvbjerg (1998) the basic weakness of Habermas' project is its lack of agreement between ideal and reality, between intentions and implementation. Habermas describes to us the utopia of communicative rationality but not how to get there [24]. The problem here is that the lifeworld of such agents, with their equal access and use of relevant information, requires something seemingly unavailable in the modern socio-political context. It requires heightened agent understanding of reflexivity and publicity and universal adherence to these norms. It requires recognition and suspension of private reasons in a world dominated by self-interest. It requires the suspension of that same self-interest which economic and policy spheres are seemingly built upon [35]. According to Johnson without a more completely theorized view of agents and agent expectations within Habermasian interchanges, talk about "deliberative rationality," "communicative democracy," and so on, remains significantly incomplete, as much a promissory note as a warranted commitment [28].

one might want to retort that Habermas has very strict procedures about equality of power and absence of threat in his construction of conditions for communicative action, because according to him, deliberative politics ensures that 'all relevant questions, issues, and contributions are brought up and processed in discourses and negotiations on the basis of the best available information and arguments' [25], but he says

very little about the qualities required of his agents, of the socio-political reality that actually meet his heroic requirements [35]. Because there are, in real world, effects of an instrumentalist rationality that distorts the lifeworld through the 'steering systems' of capitalism and bureaucratic power, the discussion of which preoccupies the second volume of the Theory of Communicative Action [25]. This raises the issue of how actors can penetrate the ideological within the lifeworld and resist colonization of thought and practice by systems that are driven by money and power [22]. The next heroic requirement of deliberative/Habermasian agents is their requirement to abandon personal perspectives if somebody can provide a better argument that *their* view of the good life, is not *the* view of the good life [35]. Quite simply, Habermas is reliant on agents who, while explicable in theoretic terms, are practically unavailable in psychological terms [25].

The lifeworld of cultural assumptions and pre-existing knowledge can also be a potential prison in which the naive perspective of the natural attitude dominates. Paradoxically, Habermas sees those very same rational processes and structures which define our universal humanity as the mechanisms whereby we can free ourselves from the natural attitude through the process of discourse and subject aspects of that lifeworld to a more rigorous process of truth, validity and authenticity claims [22]. "With this model of action we are supposing that participants in interaction can now mobilize the rationality potential expressly for the cooperatively pursued goal of reaching understanding" [25].

but if argumentation requires rational agents shifting positions under the weight of 'the better argument' with regards to particular means-ends relationships, Habermasian agents need to possess (universally), the cognitive predisposition to release certain preconceptions about exactly the means-ends relations they are contesting. That action is a necessary pre-condition of communicative reason [35]. So, although Habermas emphasizes inter- subjectively meaningful dimension of social life, he dismisses the possibility that an interpretive sociology can account for the institutional realities of modern society. Institutions finally transcend the understanding and interpretations of individuals and must be analyzed by sociologists as terms which are independent of meaning [30]. Niklas Luhmann has similarly argued that the social system cannot be comprehend merely by reference to individual understanding of it [33]. Social integration, in Habermas' view, because it operates through intentional channels, must be a form of normative integration, involving a system of shared values. But since values cannot be imposed upon agents, they must be brought about through consensus. In order to merit this general approval, they must in some form embody generalizable interests. Since class societies are ones in which the fundamental material interests of different groups are in opposition, social order in such cases cannot be secured purely through normative integration. The alternative, according to Habermas, is the selective application of force or coercion, with the goal of keeping these underlying conflicts *latent*. An official value-consensus can be attained once these conflicts are sufficiently repressed or out of sight. In cases where social integration is achieved in this manner, the value-consensus is ideological in the classic Marxian sense [27]. However, because social order is not possible among agents who adopt purely instrumental orientations, society cannot shift organizational objectives over to systems of instrumentally rational action simply by abolishing normative controls. In order to harness the potential of instrumental rationality, it is necessary to design a set of institutions that will specifically channel and regulate these interactions [27]. By making the information that agents require much more accessible, steering media create the possibility of sustained strategic interaction. But because these media are backed institutionally, they also provide a mechanism for external control of strategic interaction systems [27].

## CONCLUSION

Habermas has according to Flyvbjerg (1998) little to say about the relations of power that create barriers and how power may be changed in order to begin the kind of institutional and educational changes and improvements in welfare [24], so, while many individuals such as Waters, believe that Habermas' theory is fundamentally grounded in agency, in actors. Choices about how they establish their social relationships [] (Waters, 1994:43), but it seems that his theory implicitly have danger of domination of power structures- dominant power discourse structures- over agency and wills of agents. The basic question according to Flyvbjerg is that one can not in a meaningfully manner distinguish rationality and power from each other in communication and whether rationality can be viewed in isolation from power, as does Habermas [24]. In this sense, With Habermas' theory of communicative action we are able to see that our language is playing a central role as an alienation force in our social lives [10]. Of course Habermas has sought to answer these criticism by proposing validity claims for communicative action and specially this point that existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus [] (Habermas: 1990) and for instance Dahlberg writes in defense of Habermas that as well as showing that various validity claims are raised for discursive validation in argumentation, Habermas demonstrates, by way of formal pragmatic analysis of everyday communication,

that every participant attempting to undertake argumentation must make reference to a number of idealizing presuppositions. That explication of these idealizations provides a set of normative conditions or critical standards of the public sphere by which to evaluate and improve the democratic quality of existing communicative acts [13], but Habermas's validity claims have, by for example Saiedi (1987), received the following critique: the validity claims have neglected the relevance of professional knowledge and facts for the choice of ends. Secondly, the claim of legitimacy in Habermas' theory has according to Saiedi overlooked the phenomenon of conflicts between different norms. Finally, the claim for sincerity has been accused of being presented as far too uniform, assuming a homogeneous subjective self, neglecting the duality of identity (conscious and unconscious) and without historical bonding [36]. According to Habermas, a claim that refers to the social world is valid if it has been honestly presented and if it recognizes the commonly agreed social norms. This means that it is the task of the culture to supply the reason why an existing political order deserves to be recognized [25]. But culture is not necessarily homogenous and uniform phenomenon and we see that in modern societies there are different subcultures and identity groups who have very different attitudes about socio-political norms and they all honestly believe to their beliefs and attitudes.

Whether the communicative or rhetorical positions (successful or distorted) are 'correct' is not the question since both positions are possible at the same time. Rather there are according to Flyvbjerg (1998) other issues that are far more important to ask, they are:

- 1- How does communication take place and how politics and democracy operate?
- 2- Is communication characterized by consensus-seeking and absence of power?
- 3- Is communication the exercise of power and rhetoric?
- 4- How do consensus-seeking and rhetoric, freedom from domination and exercise of Power, eventually come together in individual acts of communications?

[24]. So, the essence of the criticism is that Habermas overstates the possibility of rationality and the value of consensus. Therefore he puts too much weight on the clarity and rationality potential of language and human interaction [2]. In a discussion we want to know who seeks what ends, and what purposes, interests, wants and intentions the speaker has [24]. Furthermore, as Forester (2003) suggests we want to know much more than that as we enter discussions; we want to know about the other actors, their allegiances and loyalties, their trustworthiness and integrity, in general about their political and social identities. We want to know how the speaker in shaping attention, and neglecting, selectively, shapes our sense of what is and what is not. As actors pursue ends, they refashion social and political relations, and when decisions are made, and texts written, relations of power are also refashioned [18]. But this discussion is not completely away from influence and power exercise of existing power structures in that environment and undoubtedly agents of dominant power discourse will attempt to direct discussion in such a way to do not treat their interests and their position in socio-political hierarchy. Furthermore, we should not forget that dominant power discourse has powerful influence on definition and redefinition of rationality and its implementation. So, as mentioned earlier it seems that communicative action theory implicitly have danger of domination and exercise of power structures- dominant power discourse structures- through rationality and its special reading under influence of these structures over agency and wills of agents, and hence, this way of establishing relationship between structure and agency and reconstructing the lifeworld-system relationship has its special shortcomings and problems, because establishing relationship between structure and agency in this manner have danger of establishing relationship between structure and structure i.e. modern society structures or systems in habermasian view in one hand and dominant power discourse structures that define or even dictate rationality and shape socio-political norms of given community in other hand.

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