

## The Three Theses of Jürgen Habermas

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Following the far reaching changes in European societies since at least the first half of the nineteenth century, an intensive philosophical debate has been taking place on the question whether the narrow scope of the naturalist-scientific view is to be blamed for the “crisis of humanity”. Suggestions have been made to grasp scientifically various phenomena conceived as a mere corollary to the abstractions of the contemporary natural sciences. One of the resulting notions was the concept of lived life, i.e., life in the daily experience of the world. By looking at the origins of this concept, we will be in a position to examine its transformed nature in the critical social philosophy of Jürgen Habermas.

### Life-world and the crisis of European man

The concept of the life-world can be traced back to Edmund Husserl’s work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1936).<sup>1</sup> Though, the idea was closely related to his earlier works<sup>2</sup> and responded to contemporary questions of philosophy. It had been since the beginning of 1930s that Husserl became interested in phenomenology as universal philosophy. Probably as a result of the political situation in Europe, particularly in Germany, Husserl was driven to deeper thinking about relation between philosophy and society. A letter which Husserl sent to the International Congress of Philosophy in Prague in 1934 was devoted to the “mission of philosophy in our time”. It probably already contained an early formulation

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<sup>1</sup> E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1936). I paraphrase here from the Czech translation of the book: *Krize evropských věd a transcendentální filosofie*. (Praha: Academia 1996).

<sup>2</sup> See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 1983), §§ 27-31.

of the ideas later expressed in a lecture delivered in Vienna in May 1935, often referred to as The Vienna Lecture.<sup>3</sup>

The full title of the lecture was “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man”, pointing to philosophy of history as well as to philosophy of science. In the very beginning Husserl expressed the intention to develop “the philosophico-historical idea of European man” and he made it clear immediately: “The European nations are sick; Europe itself they say is in critical condition”. Despite this fateful situation, humanistic sciences continue to fail in their mission to provide us with a suggestion for reform.

It is in this lecture where Husserl coined the expression “environing world” as a predominantly spiritual structure to which our actions and concerns are directed. Dwelling in this environing world is characteristic for extra-scientific culture, not yet touched by science. Horizons of such cultures are limited, not yet opened to infinity. Another feature of this attitude is that the horizons, the world itself, is not thematized (*thematic*, in Husserl’s own words; that towards which man’s attention is turned) and life is lived as “naïve direct living immersed in the world”.

In Greek philosophy, for the first time, the limits of finitude were crossed and human thinking embraced infinity. This task was not accomplished for any vocational or professional purposes but as a purely “theoretical” activity which is “based on deliberate *epoche* from practical interests”<sup>4</sup>; as a consequence, the environment in which humans happen to live is of spiritual character, be it in terms of pre-scientific or of philosophical attitude. Unfortunately, later scientists attempted to understand it in purely naturalistic terms, and were necessarily dragged into the confusion. This is how “the crisis of European man” came into being.

Even though the Vienna lecture contained these important notions of

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<sup>3</sup> P.J. Bossert, “A Common Misunderstanding Concerning Husserl’s Crisis Text”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 35, Nr. 1 (1974), pp. 20-33.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Husserl also mentioned other universal attitudes, namely practical universal attitude and mythico-religious attitude which he considered basically interconnected. For both, world is a practical theme. This was the case of ancient Indian, Chinese, or Babylonian “philosophies”. Only in Greece do we see philosophers as disinterested spectators, overseer of the world.

“environing world” and “natural attitude”, we must turn to *The Crisis of European Sciences* in order to find a more detailed description of the process. Husserl explores ideas connected with the establishment of a scientific approach (whose fragments and beginnings can be identified in Greek natural science, mathematics, Euclidean geometry, and made explicit in Galileo’s mathematization of nature.<sup>5</sup> Husserl aimed his criticism at particular forms of theorizing, those allegedly building an objective, detached world. He reconstructs the basic idea underlying this development. Provided the world is given subject-relatively in pre-scientific experience (not assuming that such a multiplicity of worlds does not exist), should we not search for the “true world, true nature” which does exist independently from the subjects?<sup>6</sup> The final realization of this basic idea happened to be Western natural science.<sup>7</sup>

Husserl described how this objectivism came step-by-step to rule all the sciences, what is the most important in it, and how it became an ideal of the humanities and even a measure of our own understanding of the world as such. But it is a deficient attitude to the human world; for, as he wrote, “Sciences about mere facts are likely to produce people knowing mere facts.”<sup>8</sup> And yet another danger is subjection to science in its lowered form of specialized science: the art of *tekhnê*.<sup>9</sup>

The life-world (*Lebenswelt*) is employed as a means of “recalling” the spiritual uniqueness of human condition in which we naturally conceive of the world. It is also the methodological starting point for phenomenological analysis. Herein we are supposed to start from natural dwelling in the world and ask how the world is given to us in preliminary and immediate experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, § 8.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, § 9.

<sup>7</sup> “From the art of surveying develops geometry; from counting, arithmetic; from everyday mechanics, mathematical mechanics; etc. Now, without anyone forming a hypothesis in this regard, the world of perceived nature is changed into mathematical world.” (Husserl, *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*)

<sup>8</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, § 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., § 56.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., § 43.

## Jürgen Habermas and the public sphere

The concept of life-world, despite being developed in relation to epistemology, was rooted in a particular conception of modernity and in a persistent feeling of crisis. The same can be said about its application in social and critical theory. The transfer of the life-world concept into explicitly socio-political terms, and the comprehensive interpretation of modern society around it, is associated with German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.<sup>11</sup>

Being a member of the younger generation of the Frankfurt School, he is often counted among philosophers working within the tradition of critical theory. However, it should not be forgotten how much his social critique differs from his Frankfurt School predecessors, namely Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno. Their attitude, as articulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, fitted into a chain of works, represented also by Husserl and Heidegger, whose critical edge took aim at the narrow and meaningless use of reason. In the *Dialectic*, for example, Enlightenment reason was blamed for being the source of manipulative potential inherent to contemporary society. With perceivable hopelessness, they were occupied with dangers brought about by the amalgam of consumerism, power, and organization which seemed to lack any possible cure. For society appeared caught between the Scylla of private selfishness, and the Charybdis of overwhelming power concentrated in public institutions, always ready to assume totalitarian rule.

It was Jürgen Habermas who cleared the way for a less pessimistic view. His habilitation, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (originally published in 1960 but with its English translation coming as late as in 1989), identified a missing link omitted by Horkheimer and Adorno between private selfishness and public tyranny. This structural component of modern societies is the public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is admitted, of course, that Habermas was not the only one who did so. To name at least the most influential, we cannot omit Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, who worked in the context of phenomenological sociology.

<sup>12</sup> The fact that the *Habilitationschrift* was rejected in Frankfurt shows how

Habermas' concept of the public sphere refers to the sphere of the sociability of *private* persons who are involved in a debate about *public* matters. This special kind of sociability established itself in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a continuation of the literary public. It contained readers gathered around "purely human" questions taken up by early-modern novelists. The scope of debate, Habermas suggests, later shifted and focused not only on literary production but on political activities as well. The principle, however, remained similar: free discussion of independent private persons interested in public questions. Crucial achievement of the public sphere is the implementation of *ratio* (reason, argument) as the guiding principle of public affairs in contrast to *voluntas* (will), representing intellectually inert power politics. The *ratio* is reached by means of public debate within which normative claims clash in the institutions of the public sphere (e.g., the press, coffee-houses, salons, etc.).<sup>13</sup> Though these claims and opinions may differ, the debate remains rational and, most importantly, equal and free of power compulsion. It is meant to be a clash of arguments, not of powers. Moreover, the political sphere is interpreted by Habermas as consisting of persons representing humanity as such, not particular interests. That was an illusion behind what Habermas called *bourgeois* (because it was based on the fictional identity of bourgeois and universal human ideals) or *liberal public sphere* (for it was rooted in political liberalism and separated from the sphere of formal politics):

The fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on a fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human being pure and simple.<sup>14</sup>

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contradictory it was to the opinions of his predecessors. Habermas then finished it in Marburg under Wolfgang Abendroth.

<sup>13</sup> Public debate was supposed to transform *voluntas* into a *ratio* that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all" (italics by Habermas).

<sup>14</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

There are two important points to be added: first, that the normative attitudes taken in the public sphere be binding for public authorities; second, that the unique character of public debate be a device for mutual understanding, i.e. coming to terms. The public sphere thus provided for mediation (on the rational grounds) between the private and the public. Though, in *Structural Transformation*, this communicative aspect was not systematically explored.

Instead, a transformation is explored which took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which distorted potential for the consensus. The liberal public sphere was exposed to double pressure from public regulatory policies on the one hand, and from economically grounded private interests on the other, i.e. just what Horkheimer and Adorno had feared. According to Habermas, the nineteenth century saw the entrance of numerous newcomers into the originally *bourgeois* public sphere: workers, women, peasants, artists, etc. The increasingly fragmented character of the public sphere meant that it must have suddenly embraced both bourgeois and non-bourgeois participants in public debates. *Bourgeois* members could no more sustain the flattering self-image of being the representatives of all humankind.

The interests of newcomers, and also their ways of expressing those interests, were far from naturally harmonious. Mutual incompatibility of the world-views led the actors of public debates not to seek understanding but to use certain means to bypass troublesome discussions in order to make way for their interests. One possible way was to summon the state for back-up. In the case of workers, it meant to counter-balance employers' superiority by legislative measures and tariff agreements; in the case of entrepreneurs it brought about police protection of private property from popular unrest and riots. As a result of the transformation, the public sphere ceased to be an arbiter to the state activities, but the state became an arbiter to competing interests within the public sphere. Communication, too, lost its deliberative character for which Habermas praised the liberal forum. Public debate was alternated by persuasion and deception, mostly mediated by advanced PR strategies.

### **Habermas and communicative action**

We can see that the distortions of public debate and communication had already been thematized in Habermas' early work. But it is formulated explicitly only later, in his comprehensive two-volume book *The Theory of Communicative*

*Action* (1981). This book took its inspiration from Max Weber's concept of rationality, the one that in visions of the first Frankfurt thinkers had allegedly permeated modern technocratic societies. The second volume also comprised the distinction that I intended to study here, that between life-world and system.<sup>15</sup> This distinction is now grounded in Habermas' theory of action. Drawing upon speech-act theories and Weber's typology of social action, Habermas distinguished two distinctive types of communication: *strategic* and *communicative*.

Basically, Habermas conceived of human action as divided along two axes: first, *social* and *non-social* (i.e., whether action is directed at/by others); second, *orientation to success* and *orientation to understanding*. While non-social action oriented to understanding is obviously impossible, non-social action oriented to success is labelled as "instrumental" (the use of non-human resources or objects). Social action oriented to success is the one called "strategic"; treatment of other people is involved here but they are taken as mere means to one's success. And the last form of action is then "communicative action".<sup>16</sup> Roughly, Habermas explains:

I shall speak of *communicative* action whenever actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but of acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual success; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. In this respect the negotiations of the definitions of the situation is an essential element of the interpretive accomplishments required for communicative action.<sup>17</sup>

One could, of course, ask for a more precise meaning of "reaching

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<sup>15</sup> Both concepts, of course were present in Habermas earlier, though in less comprehensive form. See: "Technical progress and Social Life-World" in *Toward a Rational Society* (orig. 1967), *Legitimation Crisis* (1973).

<sup>16</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p.285.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.285f.

understanding” but it is not “coming to terms” that occurs among people. The condition necessary for communicative action is the absence of outside pressures. Communicatively achieved agreement must be accepted as valid by all participants, it must be based on common convictions.<sup>18</sup>

Further, in the second volume, Habermas proceeds by interpreting other authors, like George Herbert Mead and Émile Durkheim, in order to explore the possibility of social theory built as theory of communication.<sup>19</sup> With respect to Durkheim, Habermas draws on his opposition between traditional societies integrated via basic *normative consensus*, and modern societies integrated “via the *systemic interconnection* of functionally specified domains of action”. By analogy to these two poles, we can distinguish on the level of individuals between harmonizing their *action orientations* and regulating *action consequences*, and on the level of society between *social integration* and *systemic integration*. What must be emphasized here is the thesis that a society is to be *simultaneously* conceived of as both *life-world of a group* and as *a system*.<sup>20</sup>

I believe we can read this theory as a turn quite similar to what he attempted in his habilitation thesis. Again, mediation is involved. Why? We need only recall that the crucial words for the Frankfurt critics of capitalism was “control”, “mastery”, and “compulsion”. These words clearly belong to strategic objects (to persons) as well as to instrumentalist objects (to non-human objects). However, if one postulates the possibility of communicative action, as Habermas did, the “instrumentality” of social action can be overcome. In both works, separated by a twenty-year period of time, we can trace a similar theme: overcoming power and compulsion by unrestrained public consensus.

The liberal public sphere, for sure, is idealization; life-world is used as an abstract construction. Public sphere is represented by its institutions; but where does the life-world actually exist and how is it represented in reality? Is it a sphere of action, a world-view, or an event? Similar questions have since been

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 287.

<sup>19</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Life-World and System*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p.3f.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.117f.

raised around the concept of public sphere which Habermas had used in the *Structural Transformation*.<sup>21</sup> Life-world, Habermas holds, is the notion complementary to the one of communicative action.<sup>22</sup> Habermas was inspired on this point by one of Husserl's followers, Alfred Schutz. This sociologist and philosopher (and, curiously, banker) developed the concept of life-world as a means of social science. He understood life-world roughly as "...that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything that we experience as unquestionable."<sup>23</sup>

### **Emergence of System and Colonization of Life-world**

Habermas contrasts his using the term "system" to the one popularized by Talcott Parsons. While Parsons used it for all segments of society, Habermas reserved it for the institutions connected with the purposive attaining of goals; other aspects of society, like "culture, society, personality" are counted among components of the life-world. They are not for him, as they were for Parsons, subsumed under systems theory. That is why systems theory is not sufficient for social analysis; the structures of the life-world have their own inner logic, which can be grasped only by hermeneutical approaches aimed at pre-theoretical knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Both life-world and system are relevant for social analysis. But there is a difference between undifferentiated and complex societies in relative to one another. In undifferentiated societies, systemic integration was closely interrelated with social integration. Life-world and system were closely related. Political organization, for example, is rooted in kinship, and therefore respects the norms appropriate for the familial segment of the life-world. In modern societies, the system integration consists of institutional

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<sup>21</sup> See C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, passim.

<sup>22</sup> J. Habermas, *ibidem*, p.119.

<sup>23</sup> A. Schutz, T. Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*. London: Heinemann, 1974, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative action, Volume 2*, p. 153. I refer here to the paragraph followed by footnote 10, which shows that this methodological imperative is already used by Husserl.

structures that are objectified and consolidated as independent, norm-free *systems*. Instead of social norms based on shared life-world, these systems are integrated via value-independent “media”: power and money. Habermas holds that this is what we know as “organizational reality”. One’s action is no more directly related to the life-world but has to handle this organizational reality first.<sup>25</sup> I call this claim the *uncoupling thesis*, for it concerns uncoupling the life-world and system.

Politics and kinship can hereby serve as an example, again. The political power in undifferentiated societies had been tied to social integration, as mentioned above. Then a new sphere was constituted: the State. Leadership of societies ceased to be based on prestige of the descent groups; as a result, the control started being exercised by institutions disposing of judicial power detached from the kinship with which it is incompatible.<sup>26</sup> We could similarly study the unchaining of the economy (i.e. of exchange), and show how that particular sub-system developed a distinctive logic independent from restraints of non-economical values.

From the point of view of everyday knowledge, rooted in the life-world, the growing complexity of systems is troubling. System, represented by organizational reality, becomes increasingly counter-intuitive for actors whose everyday communicative practice is made irrelevant.<sup>27</sup> “The transfer of action-coordination from language to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from life-world context. Media such as money and power... encode purposive-rational attitude... and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus-oriented communication”.<sup>28</sup> Instead of communication practice they use symbolic rewards and punishments rooted in systemic imperatives

To put it simply, those who dispose of steering the media can bypass the hardships of seeking consensus and may proceed using the systemic means to reach their goals. Life-world loses its overwhelming character and is replaced by functionally defined and relatively separated spheres of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 153 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 165.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

action, all guided by purposive rationality. And after all, the systemic pressures start disrupting the world itself:<sup>29</sup>

Under these conditions it is to be expected that the competition between forms of system and social integration would become more visible than previously. In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas where a consensus-dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the life-world is at stake. In these areas, the *mediatization* of the life-world assumes the form of a *colonization*.<sup>30</sup>

Such is, briefly stated, what I label Habermas' *colonization thesis*. But the question might be raised as to why this very process could be negative. After all, classical sociology described the transition from traditional to modern society in terms quite close to Habermas' view. It starts with Marx and Durkheim, respectively, continues in concepts of rationalization by Max Weber, and is intellectualized by Georg Simmel. All of them commented on the growing reification and abstract character of modern institutions that developed into new spheres of practice, ignoring - even negating - the validity of traditional visions of good and evil. But they usually found the tendency positive with respect to the efficiency of production. On the contrary, Habermas' diagnosis concerns a threat which is present behind the rational facade, and which is identified to be a chronic tendency of the systems-based societies to crises.

### **Legitimation Crisis**

Habermas' understanding of the process of the colonization of life-world by systems is specific. He holds that the society that failed to sustain the vital life-world is inherently unstable and displays tendencies to crises. The triumph of the systems is far from being ultimate, for by distancing itself from the life-world, and in contrast to it, systemic integration has lost the taken-for-grantedness - to use Schutz's term to express Habermas' idea.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

Or, to translate it into more genuinely Habermasian terms, unlike the life-world, system is in constant need for legitimacy. Complex societies with advanced division of labor and scientifically-upgraded exploitation of nature may seem advanced from any systemic point of view. And it is unquestionable that they are better off in terms of material production. But at the same time, their development is accompanied by growing inequalities and moral dilemmas that call for legitimacy.<sup>31</sup> Despite this need, neither the economic system, nor the other systems, are capable of it, for their values and principles do not show themselves as taken-for-granted, they *are* questionable. This, Habermas' diagnosis, is what I call the *crisis thesis*.

We can clarify the very concept of life-world now. The idea itself is therefore based on the distinction between social integration (ensured by institutions "in which speaking and acting subjects are *socially related*") and system integration (society as a system, self-regulating and aimed at *mastering environment*). If we talk about the life-world of a society, we have in mind its values and culturally-based institutions. When society as system is involved, we thematize technocratic steering and the governing of society.<sup>32</sup>

When writing about the reality of late capitalism,<sup>33</sup> Habermas shows that his model entails social critique. Members of societies have certain social identities that are rooted in their life-world, i.e., in a system of values and institutions; if life-world becomes inappropriate with respect to what is going on in their society, the result is anomia, as described by Durkheim. Consequently, the society is perceived by its members as being in crisis. That was, according to Habermas, the case with late capitalism. The

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the growing disproportion between the extremely poor and the extremely rich calls for justification of the inequality. Or, technologically attainable option to clone people requires we find it morally acceptable.

<sup>32</sup> J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*. (orig. 1973) London: Heinemann, 1980, p.4f.

<sup>33</sup> And it must be mentioned here that Habermas wrote the study at the beginning of 1970s, at the period of "organized or state-regulated capitalism", and, as analysts later will call it, at the breaking point between the first and second modernity. The energy crises of 1973 and 1979 were still to come, as well as restructuration of economies, large organizations of Fordist fashion prevailed in both private and public sector, and the dismantling of the welfare state was not yet taken into serious consideration.

*uncoupling*, *colonization*, and *crisis theses* are interconnected, for the crisis is primarily caused by interaction between the uncoupled life-world and the system. In other words, Habermas shows societies as unstable due to the difference between the logic implied in world-views (represented by the life-world), and the logic of the growing complexity and power of the system.

Modern capitalist society developed in a way that it is about to undermine its own foundations. Habermas studied this problem in his earlier work *Legitimation Crisis* (1973). Functional subsystems, meant for maintaining system integration, fail to produce required outcomes; the economic system does not produce consumable values; the administrative system does not produce rational decisions; and the socio-cultural system does not produce culturally rooted meanings and motivations in the interests of the members of society to function as systems units. Each of these drawbacks entails a kind of crisis.<sup>34</sup>

There are principles, inherited from earlier stages of social evolution that are exploited by recent forms of capitalism. We can even say that certain components of the life-world are necessary for the system's smooth functioning. They are closely related to liberal societies of the nineteenth century, or even to Protestant ethics, as described by Weber. Habermas shows that these values are profoundly affected by the very functioning of the systems. For example, one of them - the so called "civil privatism" - complemented with "family-vocational privatism" means that the system requires citizens interested in public affairs but only to a certain extent. Their motivations should consist of "family orientation with developed interests in consumption and leisure on the one hand, and in a career orientation suitable to status competition on the other". These orientations, originally of pre-capitalistic or bourgeois origin, are being systematically destroyed by the requirements of the modern economy. And for worse, capitalist societies are unable to reproduce the traditions on which they depend: "... they fed parasitically on the remains of tradition".<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Habermas, J., *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75f.

## Conclusion

My proposal hereby was to interpret Habermas' concept of systemic colonization as a crucial trait in his social analysis. The three theses, *uncoupling*, *colonization*, and *crisis* are formulated gradually in his works from the 1960s to the 1980s. They can be identified at the beginning of this period in his habilitation thesis *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1960) and find their detailed articulation in his *opus magnum*, the two-volume *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984). What changes is the material on which he demonstrates the main idea contained in these respective theses. While the first one is deeply rooted in historical material, thus putting Habermas in the sphere of social history, his *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) conceives of the problem in terms of systems theory; *The Theory of Communicative Action* grounds the theses in the theory of communication. It should not be omitted that Habermas also paid much effort to the normative implications of his social analysis. They were out of the scope of my consideration here, despite the fact that they create living inspiration for many contemporary readers.