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## Postmodernism as discourse from Foucault to Habermas

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**ABSTRACT.** During the last decades, the term postmodernity has been highly invoked, on the one hand, or ignored, on the other hand. It is a term that can be found in the writings of various philosophers and sociologists, and is almost ignored and less meaningful within the economic thinking.

At first view and analysis, postmodernity is the successor of the modern age, modernity in other words. However, the concept has much deeper meanings; it regards the future, foreshadowing the new realities of today's world, which are very complex and dynamic, and come under endogenous and exogenous influences, activities and issues that are permanently under the influence of multiple and multidimensional challenges [7]. In fact, the period of globalization, of the new trends of the revolutionary ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), is believed to overlap the period of postmodernism.

From the philosophical point of view, but also in consonance with the economic life and realities, the individuals and entities of any nature should be characterized by adaptability, the ability to respond promptly and appropriately to the impulses and reactions that affect that system.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The most important thing, which we believe to be at the heart of postmodernity, at any level and in every field of activity, is represented by man, the human resource, the human asset, which consists of all the knowledge and relational skills within organizations and communities. We would like to outline the fact that without the human factor (at economic level, it is the factor of production called labour) no activity, action, progress or performance can be achieved. Either by itself or in relation with the others, within certain mainly socio-economic systems, this human factor has the ability to self-organize, analyze the alternatives and the ways of action and take the most appropriate (inspired) decisions in the given context, which can ensure the increase in the individual and collective performance parameters and, as a result, the increase in the productivity and profitability of the actions undertaken.

Among other representatives and supporters of postmodernism, Foucault and Habermas approach the spiritual part, the part related to communicative rationality, the symbols and codes of the human individuals' integration into the society. Here is the big problem that must be taken into consideration within the current institutional and organizational systems: on the one hand, one even speaks about the spiritualization of the strategies and tactics used for the well development of the specific activities envisaged; on the other hand, one should note that the products of the human labour, which help him reach the existential goals and aims, do not communicate, do not perform by themselves and do not progress.

### 2. Analysing the discourse of postmodernity in the view of Foucault and Habermas

In order to make a comparative study regarding the discourses of Foucault and J. Habermas, we must first carry out a brief overview of the concept of discourse: for the linguists, the concepts of discourse and pragmatics are sympathetic and the discourse is presented in various oppositions: on

the one hand, the discourse can refer to a linguistic unit consisting of a sequence of sentences [6], it can be a speciality discourse, such as: the scientific discourse or the communist discourse[6]. Quoting Maingueneau, Verde-Popescu Mihaela believes that the discourse can be defined through several characteristic features, such as:

- It is a transfrastic organization; in this context, the discourse must comply with certain rules of organization from a given community, which determine a variety of discourses;
- It is a form of action;
- It is interactive;
- It is designed and develops over time depending on the speaker's perspective;
- It is contextualized;
- It is based on general social norms and specific discourse norms;
- It arises within a universe of discourses among which it makes its way [6].

I shall further analyze the idea of discourse in the view of M. Foucault and J. Habermas.

Antonio Sandu believes that one of the most important findings of postmodernity is the merger between Ontology as Theory and Semiotics as a science of the signs and their interpretation[4]. People cannot access knowledge only through words, but also through statements, given that phrases are based on the E's – which are precursory of the phrases or sentences, that form words or objects. Foucault often uses the concept of discourse, which he defines as having: a common discursive subject, certain regularities and a relationship with other discourses [5]. Foucault reaches the conclusion that the discourse may draw the attention of the authorities, who may see it as a threat. Thus, it becomes dangerous and the authorities try to stop or control the distribution of the discourse [5]. In Foucault's view, the humanist discourse is the result of a process of coding the individuals and classifying them in terms of the individual and the population[4].

Discourse ethics is the second area of interest of J. Habermas. The first option of grounding discourse ethics involves the cognitive approach of morality as an alternative to metaethics - which reduces the descriptive sentences as expressions of living [3]. Another aspect regarding the foundation of Habermas's discourse ethics regards the delimitation of the true-false sense of the descriptive sentences, which can be approached using the model of the true-false associated descriptive sentences[3]. A major feature of the program that grounds discourse ethics regards the argumentation, starting from the remark that the argumentation theory must be promoted under the form of informal logic, where an agreement regarding the theoretical questions cannot be forced neither deductively, nor through empirical evidence[3].

One can note that both the work of Foucault and that of Habermas include different approaches to the idea of discourse. On the one hand, Foucault places the discourse in the field of social politics - more specifically, in a legal context – while Habermas places the discourse in the sphere of sentences, of the delimitation between true and false, or the sphere of validity. Habermas makes a distinction between communicative action and discourse : "let us take into consideration what the subjects of communication assume as being implicit within an act of communication in which the claims of validity are not systematized [3].

In Habermas's view, the transition from communicative action to discourse involves "the promise that reaches a rational consensus"[2]. Regarding the relationship between discourse and communicative action, the discourse exerts a decisive role, operating a dual virtualization of the action's coercions[1]. Bărzescu Ilona believes that in Habermas's work communicative competence is specified within certain performances that the speakers assume when they turn the sentences into statements – sentences are linguistic units, while statements are pragmatic units of the discourse[1]. Hence, the differences between communicative action and discourse: within the communicative action, linguistic statements are included in the context of extra verbal statements, while within the discourse only linguistic expressions are thematically allowed" [1]. Communicative action involves an exchange of information where the validity of sense is implied; alternatively, the discourse does not involve exchanging information. It involves using telematics regarding the claims of validity of the systematized agreement existing within the communicative action[1]. For Habermas, the

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discourse is a primary form of human conciliation, the only solution in the context of the legitimacy and motivation crisis. Therefore, Habermas develops a discourse ethics that relieves argumentation as a suitable procedure for solving moral-practical issues[1]. So, the argumentative process involves a competition of arguments in order to reach a consensus” [1].

### **3. Rationality and action in J. Habermas’s view**

In the first part of his theory of rationality, Habermas proposes the reinterpretation of the analysis of the individuals’ views and actions, trying to amplify the social dimension around the phenomenon of communication within human interactions. In this context, the philosopher refers to the need for sociology as a discipline that is capable of explaining the structural forms that determine the subjects’ behaviour, especially at symbolic level, as determining factors of the action. It is particularly important to note the relationship established between sociology and the community’s cultural anthropology and the concept of culture. Habermas makes a distinction between these spaces and believes that the community space or the social life responds to a type of action that is defined within the societal integration.

We may say that communicative rationality lies at the border between the democratic political institutions and the world of life; deliberation as a mechanism of collective decision-making involves the institutionalization of communicative rationality, which cannot be marked down to what we call strategic rationality: while the motivated communicative agreement is based on the persuasion exerted by reasoning, strategic negotiation is based on coercion and force: even in this case, the communicative principle operates within the regularization of the negotiating conditions that must be perceived as being fair.

The legitimacy and strength of a democratic society’s social integration is reflected by the capacity of the political institutions to institutionalize the communicative action through the process of rational deliberation.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

We believe that the aspect we need to keep in mind after analyzing these ideas is the primacy of the human factor in everything that surrounds us. This is due to appealing to the philosophical discourses of the two great scholars and opinion makers analyzed above.

Communicative rationality and all that results from it are specific attributes of the human factor, a bio-psycho-social entity that holds knowledge and know-how, capacities, aptitudes, skills, qualifications and abilities.

This human factor, the labour force in economic terms, is integrated in institutions and organizations, gives life to the activity and participates in the multilateral exchanges of goods, services, information, ideas, concepts and competences between those entities and other components of the socio-economic system in question.

Postmodernity itself involves organizing, coordinating and finding certain specific objectives to be achieved in this strongly interconnected, globalized and globalizing, knowledge and information-based world.

Remodelling the patterns, finding the means and the will to change and adapt to what is new and viable means implementing, Habermas's ideas from the socio-economic perspective; these ideas outline the reinterpretation of the individuals’ actions and opinions regarding the challenges and the need to ensure the survival or sustainability of the individuals, organizations and institutional forms, in the context of the permanent challenges and stress.

Moreover, we would like to carry further this first insight into the vast and difficult analysis of the concept and significance of postmodernity, an institutional cultural anthropology, and move the centre of the analysis towards the area of the economic and social discourse, whereas everything around us is represented by economic fact and rationality.

The world of ideas, signs, codes and everything we think, express and relate to is a special world, which must however be known and understood.

Why this? Because the homo faber, the man who reasons, creates and relates, cannot be understood in the complexity of his materialization and his role in the society and community without the overlap between the spiritual, conceptual level and the practical, decisional level, the level of achieving the chosen variants and reaching the proposed goals.

Translating and customizing the philosophical and sociological discourse according to the structure of the real economy through relevant examples and demonstrations is, in our opinion, a requirement and an intrinsic characteristic of postmodernity.

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