THE HABERMASIAN CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

El concepto habermasiano de democracia

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Abstract

This essay presents an analysis of the relations between public space and democracy in the work of Jürgen Habermas. I begin by elucidating the way in which the concept of public space appears in Habermas' thought and the functions he assigns to it in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962). I then analyze how these aspects are systematically taken up and developed in his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) before going on to explain in some detail how public space and democracy are examined in *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (1992). Later, I turn my attention to *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essais* (1998) to see how the notion of public space and the democratic process in the globalized world is re-thought there in the framework of Habermas' conception of democracy. Finally, I propose some general considerations on the Habermasian understanding of democracy related, first, to the economic-social and material conditions that allow citizens to participate effectively in processes of deliberation, argumentation, and reasoning in the public space and, second, to the reduction of democracy to formal procedures instead of an expansion towards the democratization of a society's whole way of life.

Keywords: *Critical Theory; Theory of Democracy; Deliberative Democracy.*

Resumen

Este ensayo presenta un análisis de las relaciones entre espacio público y democracia en la obra de Jürgen Habermas. Comienza por dilucidar el modo en que el concepto de espacio público aparece en el pensamiento de Habermas y las funciones que le asigna en *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962). A continuación, se analiza cómo se retoman y desarrollan sistemáticamente estos aspectos en su *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) antes de explicar con detalle cómo se examinan el espacio público y la democracia en *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (1992). Luego se ocupa de *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essais* (1998) para ver cómo se replantea allí la noción de espacio público y el proceso democrático en el mundo globalizado en el marco de la concepción de la democracia de Habermas. Por último, propone algunas consideraciones generales sobre la concepción habermasiana de la democracia relacionadas, en primer lugar, con las condiciones económico-sociales y materiales que permiten a los ciudadanos participar eficazmente en procesos de deliberación,

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argumentación y razonamiento en el espacio público y, en segundo lugar, con la reducción de la democracia a procedimientos formales en lugar de una expansión hacia la democratización de todo el modo de vida de una sociedad.

Palabras clave: *Teoría Crítica; Teoría de la Democracia; Democracia Deliberativa.*

This essay presents an analysis of the relations between public space and democracy in the work of Jürgen Habermas. However, considering the amplitude, complexity and occasional difficulties involved in understanding the thought of this German philosopher who, moreover, continues to write on the topics examined, it must be considered as only a first approach to the problem. I begin by elucidating the way in which the concept of public space appears in Habermas' thought and the functions he assigns to it in his seminal book, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962) (I). Following that, I analyze how these problems are systematically taken up and developed in his monumental *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) (II). Next, I explain in some detail how public space and democracy appear in the argument of *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (1992), in an effort to show the place that these concepts occupy in Habermas' understanding of Law, popular sovereignty and deliberative politics, and how his proposal is delineated in relation to the liberal and republican traditions (III). Later, I turn my attention to the analysis that Habermas offers of how the notion of public space and the democratic process in the globalized world is re-thought, taking as my axis *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essais* (1998) (IV). Finally, I propose some general considerations on the Habermasian understanding of democracy.

I. In what may be considered his first great systematic work, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962), Habermas set out to analyze "bourgeois public space (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*)",

which is considered there as a category typical of an epoch that he situates in late 17th-century England and in 18th-century France. (Habermas, 1962, p. 51) More specifically, Habermas seeks to clarify the structure and function of the *liberal* model of public bourgeois space, its genesis and its transformations. It is in this sense that, at the outset, he recalls how "the public (*le public*)" was formed in 17th-century France by readers, spectators and auditors who were considered receivers, consumers and critics of art and literature, as well as by the court, sectors of the urban nobility, and an, initially, restricted stratum of the bourgeoisie. Originally, the milieu where this public came together consisted of the halls of the court with meetings that revolved around the figure of the monarch –the patron of the arts– in a space that, in the French case, gradually spread out from the court towards the city where, shifting to the case of England, it crystallized in salons and cafés where public reasoning and critique, initially esthetic but later economic and political, were practiced. (Habermas, 1962, p. 90ss.) Although diverse institutional configurations of this "bourgeois public space" can be distinguished according to the dimensions and composition of their respective publics, the types of interaction that took place, the atmosphere of reasoning, and thematic orientation, what is clear is that, for Habermas, they were all organized obeying the principle of ongoing discussion and reasoning among private individuals who were, first, interrelated on a basis of equality, subject only to the authority of public argumentation and reasoning. Second, the discussions articulated therein problematized and questioned issues, until then, had not been themes of debate. (Habermas, 1962, p. 98) Third, the public in those spaces was conceived, in principle, as 'unfinished' in the sense that, potentially, all those interested in discussing the topics placed on the table in each case could be integrated into it.

According to Habermas, historically-speaking, it was in late 17th-century England that this bourgeois public space began to take on specifically *political* functions, and that was moment when diverse social forces eager to exert influence on the decisions of state power began to appeal to the reasoning public as it sought to legitimize its demands in this new forum. However, it was in France that this process assumed a figure that would come to effectuate a lasting influence in the rest of Europe and the

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entire world. (Habermas, 1962, p. 133ss.) In effect, from the mid-18th century there, a reasoning public concerned with political issues emerged, though it was unable to forge a lasting institutional configuration for its critical impulses until after the revolution. In this respect, one cannot but think of "*les philosophes*", whose critique was directed, initially, against religion, literature and art. Indeed, it was only with the publication of the *Enciclopédie* (1751-1780) that a properly political intention was born, though only indirectly, and began to take shape in response to moral concerns. It was by virtue of a landmark event –the French Revolution– that, according to Habermas' analysis, a "politization" of this public space gained clear expression, where earlier, as mentioned above, only topics related to literature and art criticism were discussed.

Because of his special interest in clarifying this "structural change" in the function of the public space, Habermas delved deeply into the analysis of the separation between State and society, how that separation should be configured, and the framework of that rupture; that is, a relation between, on the one hand, a public power that guaranteed freedoms and, on the other, the economic domain organized in accordance with private Law. In effect, it is precisely in the sphere of this separation between State and society that the question of the participation of the latter in the decision-making power concentrated in the former is postulated; that is, by the institutional possibility of an active influence on decisions of the State. And this is exactly the point at which the *political* function of public space is situated, for it allows the members of society, in their capacity as citizens of a State, to express, condense, ponder, equilibrate and generalize their needs and interests in such a way that state power is made fluid and transformed into a means for society to organize itself. The separation between State and society is thus mediated through the idea of a self-organization realized through the public communication of the freely-associated members of society.

Throughout this book, Habermas analyzes in great detail two structural transformations of the public space. The first has to do, as mentioned earlier, with the transformation of the structure of this public space caused by the emergence and

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development of broader strata of readers stimulated by the new forms of organizing, transmitting and consuming information, especially critical information in books, periodicals and magazines. The second deals with the growing fusion of information and diversion, the decadence of clubs, associations and societies formed by the free decision of their members in contrast to earlier times when political problems had long been framed and discussed rationally, and the ascent of the mass electronic communications media and the advertising industry; in short, the densification and spreading commercialization of the networks of social communication, etc., that came to govern more rigidly the diverse channels of social communication and so restrict the possibility of gaining access to them. It was by virtue of this, Habermas affirms, that the power of the mass communications media increased and began to structure and dominate the public space and, in that way, gradually undermine and, in the end, destroy the principle of bourgeois publicity. That reasoning public was transformed into a consumer public.[1] And this brings us to the transformation of a reasoning public space, initially determined by the ideals of bourgeois education and literary culture, into a sphere now dominated by the mass media and the culture of the masses. Instead of the normative sense of the self-organization of society that pointed towards a radical-democratic resolution of the separation between State and economic society, what appeared was a functional interlacing of both systems.

Towards the end of this book, Habermas outlines a model of a public arena dominated by the mass communications media where, however, the confluence of two counterposed tendencies is visible: on the one hand, the informal opinions and cultural traditions that constitute the context of the lifeworld and offer the terrain of public communication; on the other, formal public opinion, dominated by the mass media that seeks, at the same time, to think of how these two tendencies could be mediated through a critical publicity. (Habermas, 1962, p. 343ss.) To the degree that we are no longer dealing with freely-associated individuals but, rather, members of organized collectivities that competed to gain the favor of the passive masses in the public space, while struggling among themselves and against the state bureaucracy for

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[1] Habermas analyzes this process, especially, in Ch. V of his book. (Habermas, 1962, p. 225ss.)

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quotas of power, the bearers of this critical publicity appear to Habermas in that moment as only associations and internally-democratized parties.[2] The critical perspective that animates the composition of this work and breathes life into Habermas' proposal thus seems clear, for in the final analysis it offers a reconstruction of what could be called the "Dialectics of bourgeois public space" (Habermas) by virtue of which the ideals of bourgeois humanism that the understanding of both the intimate sphere and public space, and that were condensed and articulated in concepts and ideals of subjectivity and realization, of the rational formation of opinion and of will, of personal and political self-determination, have been decanted in the institutions of the modern Rule of Law to such a degree that they endure within it as an immanent horizon of critique that transcends any attempted factic realization of them.

II. Through the 1970s, Habermas sought to cement the normative foundations of a critical theory of society on a more profound plane. The potential of reason had to be found, anchored and grounded in the very praxis of everyday communication. This would pave the way for a social science that would proceed in a reconstructive way by identifying and analyzing the processes of social and cultural rationalization in a broader framework by tracing its emergence back to the beginnings of Modernity. It was to this ambitious task that Habermas devoted his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981), a work inscribed in a large-scale transformation orchestrated by philosophy during the 20th century. There, Habermas presents a shift from what he had called the paradigm of the "philosophy of consciousness" –which holds that the subject relates to objects either *theoretically* through the representation(s) that it is capable of making of them, or *practically* in the form of confrontation with them through *action*; one that, in Habermas' view, had characterized modern philosophy since Descartes– to what he calls the paradigm of the "philosophy of language" (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 518 ss.). This led Habermas to propose a reformulation of the project of a critical theory of

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[2] Later, in his Prologue to the 1990 edition, Habermas refers to the "actuality" of this pioneering work in light of the revolutions in Eastern Europe that brought about the collapse of socialism and rehabilitate the concept of "civil society" (Habermas, 1990, p. 11, 45). See in this regard also note 37.

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society from the conceptual framework of a philosophy of consciousness, adapted to a subject/object model of knowledge and action, towards the conceptual framework of a theory of language and communicative action. This led him to propose analyzing the concept of "communicative rationality *(kommunikative Rationalität)*" based on the role of linguistic understanding as a coordinating mechanism of action. (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 140ss.) It is this sense that the way in which communicative rationality remits, in the final analysis, to the practice of argumentation will be revealed, as an instance of appellation that makes it possible to follow communicative action with other media when a disagreement is generated that can no longer be absorbed by everyday routines and, however, cannot be decided, either, by the direct utilization, or strategic use, of power. (Habermas, 1981, Vol.1, p. 37-38). This leads Habermas to express his conviction that the concept of communicative rationality can be developed adequately through a *theory of argumentation*. (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 38, 44ss.)

The *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* also analyzes a second set of topics related to a methodological-analytical framework that is adequate for understanding society from a dual perspective: on the one hand, as a system and, on the other, as a lifeworld.[3] (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 8) This categorial reformulation introduces a theory of society on a double plane: first, that of the communicative understanding among subjects in the framework of *language* and, second, that of the spheres of action freed of all normative content and, hence, susceptible to being analyzed with the aid of resources from *systems theory* that will make it possible to clarify, precisely, the systemic forms of the material reproduction of society.[4] Habermas seeks to satisfactorily articulate these two conceptual perspectives and understand society as

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[3] This problem is analyzed in detail in the context of a discussion with the work of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, especially the excurse in section VI of volume 2 (cfr., Habermas, 1981 a, Vol. 2: 173 and ss.).

[4] In this sense, Habermas distinguishes *social* integration from *systemic* integration: if the integration of society is understood exclusively as *social* integration, it has communicative action in the center and conceives society as the lifeworld. In this view, the reproduction of society seems to be linked to maintaining the symbolic structures of the lifeworld. In contrast, if integration is understood only as *systemic* integration, society is represented by the model of a self-regulating system whose action systems are conceived as a special class of living systems that maintain their consistency despite an unstable, highly-complex environment by means of processes of exchange effectuated within its limits. (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 171ss.)

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an entity that, over the course of evolution, is differentiated as both a *system* and as a *lifeworld*. It is in this way that *capitalism*, on the one hand, and the *modern state institution,* on the other, were included as sub-systems that by means of *money* and *power* are differentiated from the institutional system; that is, from the social components of the lifeworld. The domain of the lifeworld, in turn, sees the formation – in relation to the domains of action of the *systemically*-integrated *economy* and the *State*– of spheres of *socially*-integrated action: on the one hand, that of the *private sphere* and, on the other, the *public sphere*, which are related complementarily The institutional nucleus of the private sphere is formed by the *family*, now detached from productive functions and entrusted only with the tasks of *socialization*. The institutional heart of the public space, meanwhile, is constituted by the communication networks that make possible the participation of both the consumer public of art in cultural reproduction –that is, of a *cultural* public space (*kulturelle Öffentlichkeit*)– and the public made up of citizen in social integration, which is a *political* public space (*politische Öffentlichkeit*). (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 470ss.)

In this framework of analysis, both the public cultural and political spaces seem to be considered from a perspective that takes the State system as the relevant environment for achieving legitimacy. Here, while the economic system exchanges wages for work (as *input*) goods and services for consumers' demand (as *output*), the administrative system exchanges organizational tasks for taxes (as *input*) and political decisions for the loyalty of citizens (as *output*). In this way, the actors that assume the role of *workers* (in the economic system) or of *clients* (in the political-administrative system) are detached from the context of the lifeworld and situated in domains of action that are organized formally and regulated juridically. They make their own contribution to that system (for example, work in the case of the economic system), and obtain, in return, a remuneration (wages or fees), or benefit from a certain service that they pay in the form of taxes. The *political* system, meanwhile, ensures the required loyalty of citizens through two means: one positive, the other selective. The positive pathway entails the performance of its programmatic tasks as a social welfare State; the selective one operates by excluding certain topics and proposals from public

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discussion –perhaps by filtering access to the public political space, perhaps through a bureaucratic deformation of the structures of public communication, or by virtue of its ability to manipulate flows of communication.

It is precisely on the basis of this dual construction that attends to both the perspective of the system and that of the lifeworld that Habermas delineates –and this constitutes the third and final complex theme analyzed in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 8)– the framework of his *diagnosis* of modernity. In effect, during a discussion with Talcott Parsons, Habermas came to the conclusion that only those spheres of action that fulfill economic and political functions can be subjected to regulation by means of money and power and, in that way, be systemically re-structured. Those means, however, fail in the spheres of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization, for they can neither displace nor replace the coordinating mechanism of action that linguistic understanding offers, much less lead to symptoms of crisis and social pathology. The crisis of the present cannot be explained, according to Habermas, so much by the existence of the forms of the organization of social life configured totally in accordance with rationality related to ends –as Max Weber or, even more emphatically, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, thought– but, rather, by the penetration of these into the domains of society that are constitutively, and ultimately, dependent on the processes of communicative understanding among subjects. In this sense, Habermas speaks of a "colonization of the lifeworld" that now offers the nucleus for diagnosing the pathologies of modernity. (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 232ss.)[5] The unjustified extension of systemic dynamics into the communicatively-structured spheres of the lifeworld, and the monetarization and bureaucratization of the lifeworld are thus key to explaining the pathologies of modernity that today appear in the form of unilateral styles of conducting life, the bureaucratic undermining of the political public space and, in general, the displacement and repression of the practical-moral and practical-political elements of both the private sphere of the conduction of life and the political

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[5] In this context, Habermas analyzes the juridification processes (*Verrechtlihung*) as the figure that the conversion of *social* integration to *systemic* integration takes on (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 522 and ss.).

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public space. Thus, for example, to the degree that the economic system subjects the way of life of the family and the conduction of the life of consumers to its imperatives, consumerism, possessive individualism, etc., begin to acquire greater strength, and everyday communicative praxis is rationalized unilaterally in favor of utilitarian lifestyles that privilege the orientations of action determined by instrumental rationality and cause, as an extreme reaction, more or less radical hedonistic or expressivist lifestyles. Analogous to this, just as the domain of private life is undermined by the effect of the imperatives emanating from the economic system, so too the public space is gradually eroded under the influence of the dynamics of the administrative system. Bureaucratic domination and the undermining of the spontaneous processes of the formation of will and opinion broaden, precisely, the space for a planned mobilization of the loyalty of citizens and favor the dissociation of political decisions from those legitimizing resources that come from the concrete contexts of the lifeworld where identity is forged. (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 478ss.)

The analysis of the pathologies of modernity must, however, Habermas notes, elucidate not only the tendencies but also the *countertendencies* to those pathologies. Without doubt, the democracies of the masses typical of the Welfare State of western Europe have achieved an institutional contention and resolution of the class conflicts that once characterized capitalist societies. But this does not entail, in any way, the disappearance of all potential for social protest. Here, Habermas claims that conflicts no longer develop in the form of disputes over redistribution, or in the domains of *material* reproduction –work– nor are they channeled exclusively through associations and parties. Today, rather, conflict emerges in the milieus of *cultural reproduction*, *social integration* and *socialization*, and is manifested in forms of extra-parliamentary protest. "In short", he writes, "new conflicts erupt not due to *problems of distribution*, but to questions of the *grammar of the forms of life*" (Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 576). It is in this sense that we can speak of a shift from the "old politics" centered on problems of economic and social security, both internal and military, to a "new politics" more concerned with problems related to the quality of life, gender equality, individual self-realization, participation, and human rights. This opens a broad

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panorama where we find ecological, pacifist and feminist movements, as well as those of diverse minorities (the elderly, homosexuals, people with some disability), as well as movements that fight for regional, linguistic or cultural autonomy; all articulated organizationally in very diverse ways through the initiatives of citizens, civil associations and non-governmental organizations, among others.

This is what allows us to say that on the plane of the theory of democracy and the understanding of politics in general, the *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* introduces important modifications into Habermas' reflections.[6] No longer do we see the image of a society instituted and administrated on its own in all domains –intuiting that of its economic reproduction– and that should be integrated through the political will of the sovereign people, which seems to capture the mode of thought in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit.* This image of society as an association on a grand scale, Habermas notes, has lost plausibility in light of the growing degree of complexity of functionally-differentiated societies. This manifests itself as soon as one analyzes the realities of the market-directed economy and the administrative system governed by power. It is, precisely, in an effort to explain this that Habermas proposed interlacing the concept of *lifeworld* with that of *system*. The repercussions of this for the theory of democracy are considerable. First, the economy and the state apparatus are no longer analyzed in the framework of a theory of action,[7] but come to be considered as systemically-integrated domains that *cannot be transformed democratically from within*, cannot be placed under *political* forms of integration without altering their systemic dynamics and, in this way, injuring their functionality and efficacy. Habermas holds that clear proof of this is the collapse of the socialist regimes.[8] Radical democratization is today characterized by a shifting of forces, for it no longer seeks to suppress a system of autonomized economic and bureaucratic dominion but, instead, to contain the colonizing interventions of the imperative

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[6] On this topic, see Habermas' own interpretation in Habermas (1962, p.35ss.).

[7] As he had attempted, for example, in *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (1968).

[8] The collapse of socialism, among other events, strengthened Habermas' conviction that a modern economic system directed by the market and money cannot be simply and abruptly transformed and subsequently directed by administrative power and the democratic formation of will, without its functional efficacy suffering irremediable damage.

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systemics in the spheres of the lifeworld. The democratic process now points towards establishing a balance among the powers of social integration that will make it possible to preserve the integrating force of solidarity, and of communication, in the face of money and administrative power, and so postulate the demands, needs and interests that arise from the lifeworld.

III. In Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaates (1992) Habermas set out to present a detailed response to the objection to Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns which held that it was blind to the reality of institutions –an objection of Hegelian hues raised in Germany by, among others, Rüdiger Bubner– or would have consequences of an anarchist nature by subjecting irrevocable principles of the modern Rule of Law to a communicative justification, a critique founded on the Kantian perspective by philosophers like Otfried Höffe (Habermas, 1992, p.10 and ss.)[9] Habermas recognized in Faktizität und Geltung that the proposal he developed through discourse theory had centered, up to that point, on the individual formation of will that he situated in the domain of ethics and moral philosophy. A moral ruled by principles, he now notes, actually remits to a complement that must be supplied by positive Law. The reflection developed in the framework of moral philosophy must now be continued into the field of the philosophy of Law or, more precisely, the framework of a discursive theory of Law, of the Rule of Law, that escapes the opposition between normativist proposals dissociated from social reality, on the one hand, and, on the other, objectivist-style analyses that are blind to normative aspects. (Habermas, 1992, p. 21, 135ss.) This venture is animated by a central proposal; namely, to show the connection not of a historical-contingent character, but one that is conceptual and internal between the Rule of Law and democracy: "The democratic process bears the total weight of legitimation. It must ensure, at the same time, both the private and public autonomy of the subjects of Law (Rechtssubjekte); in effect, subjective-private rights cannot even be adequately formulated –much less imposed politically– unless those concerned

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[9] Habermas refers, especially, to Bubner (1992) and Höffe (1987).

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have clarified through public discussion the topics of each relevant case for the equal and unequal treatment of typical cases, and mobilized the communicative power to consider their newly-reinterpreted needs. The procedural understanding of Law thus stipulates the assumptions of communication and the conditions of the procedure of the democratic formation of will and opinion as the only source of legitimation" (Habermas, 1993, p. 664).

In this sense, Habermas reformulates the principle of "popular sovereignty (*Volkssouveranität*)" from the theory of discursive argumentation; that is, a "proceduralization of popular sovereignty" that, expressed in summarily, holds that "all political power derives from the communicative power of citizens. The exercise of political domination is directed and legitimized by laws that citizens themselves provide in a formation of discursively-structured will and opinion" (Habermas, 1992, p. 209-210). A praxis of this kind secures its legitimizing strength from a *democratic procedure* that must guarantee a discursive-rational treatment of political issues: "The rational acceptability of the results attained in conformity with procedure is explained on the basis of the institutionalization of reticular forms of communication that ensure, in ideal form, that all relevant questions, topics and contributions can be postulated and elaborated in discourses and negotiations based on the best possible information and reasons" (Habermas, 1992, p. 210). This refers to a juridical institutionalization of certain procedures and conditions of communication.

According to this view, in this understanding mentioned above, legitimation and popular sovereignty relate in a way distinct from the liberal or republican variants. In the liberal tradition, popular sovereignty, the democratic formation of will, has the exclusive function of *legitimizing* the exercise of political power; whereas the republican form assigns it an even more substantive function: that of *constituting* society as a political community. For the Habermasian variant, in contrast, the procedure and communicative assumptions of the democratic formation of will and opinion function as the most important means of achieving the discursive rationalization of the decisions of a government and an administration whose activity is developed in the framework of the Law and the law. (Habermas, 1992, p. 364) The

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proceduralization of popular sovereignty and the interlacing of the political system with the peripheral networks of the political public space, Habermas observes, go hand-in-hand with the image of a "decentered society (*dezentrierte Gesellschaft*)", and it is for this reason that the theory of democracy that emerges from it can no longer work with the concept of a society centered around the State. (Habermas, 1992, p. 362) Hence, the discursive concept of democracy that Habermas proposes questions the premises of a concept of the State and society that sets out from the image of the whole, its parts, and their interrelation, where the whole is constituted by either a sovereign citizenry or a constitution. Instead, Habermas proposes the image of a "decentered society" that through the political public space is able to differentiate an arena for the perception, identification and treatment of problems of the society as a whole. The "*Selbst*" of the juridical community that organizes itself, he writes, disappears, ceding its place to the forms and networks of communication and interaction that regulate the flow of the discursive formation of will and opinion. In this way, the concept of sovereignty is reformulated in the framework of an intersubjectivist conception. (Habermas, 1992, p. 365)

It is in this same sense that Habermas considers the procedure of "deliberative politics (*deliberative Politik*)" as the nucleus of the democratic process. For Habermas, this understanding of the democratic process is distinct from both the *liberal* and *republican* proposals. In contrast to the liberal understanding, it does not consider the democratic process as a commitment of interests whose rules are, in the final analysis, based on fundamental liberal rights. At the same time, and distinct from the republican tradition, it does not understand the democratic formation of will as an ethical-political self-understanding in which deliberation is supported by a deep consensus of citizens anchored in a, presumably, shared culture. Habermas' proposal shifts away from the idea of abstract universal human rights and from the ordering of a concrete ethnic or religious adscription or way of life of a given society to center, rather, on the rules of discourse and the forms of argumentation that take their normative content from the base offered by action oriented towards understanding and, ultimately, from the very structure of linguistic communication and the

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communicative patterns of socialization and the formation of identity. (Habermas, 1992, p. 359ss.) In this way, the understanding of politics and its relations with the State that Habermas offers is, once again, distinct from both the republican and liberal variants. Indeed, Habermas reminds us, the republican variant understands the political formation of the will and opinion of citizens as the means through which society is established as a politically-constituted totality, and it is also in this sense that society is, in principle, a *political* society. Democracy is conceived here as equivalent to the political self-organization of society in its totality to which, therefore, is attributed the revitalization for the public space of a central role to revert the citizen privatism of a depoliticized population and, in this way, counteract the tendency towards the creation of legitimacy through stratified and/or bureaucratized parties, such that a regenerated citizenry can become capable of re-appropriating the power of a bureaucratically-autonomized State through decentralized autogestion.[10] The liberal current, in contrast, does not propose a dissolution of the separation between the apparatus of the State and society but, rather, on the basis of this separation, assigns the democratic process the function of establishing a bridge between them. Instead of citizens identified on the basis of a shared cultural and political tradition, what appear here are individuals with determined interests whose aggregations, differences and conflicts must be channeled in the framework of the Rule of Law. For the liberal variant, the democratic formation of will among citizens who pursue their own interests is only one interior element of an architecture that limits the power of the State through a normative framework presented by fundamental rights, the division of powers, and the Rule of Law, where the State considers the diverse interests and valorative orientations that exist inside the society, through either the struggle among diverse parties or by virtue of the relations between government and opposition. What seems to be in the center of the democratic process for the liberal tradition is, then, no longer the democratic self-determination of deliberant citizens, but the containment

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[10] Here, Habermas proceeds in accordance with the political writings of Hannah Arendt. (Habermas, 1992, p. 360)

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and limiting of the action of the State and of citizens within the framework of the Rule of Law.

Habermas seeks to enlace the democratic process with stronger normative connotations than those employed by liberal discourse but, at the same time, weaker than the ones utilized by the republican tradition by taking up elements from both and fusing them in a proposal of his own. Thus, in a way analogous to republicanism, he places the process of the political formation of will and opinion in the center of his proposal but without dismissing the importance of the framework offered by the Rule of Law. The principles of the Rule of Law appear to him as a response to the question of how the conditions and forms of communication and argumentation of a democratic formation of will and opinion can be institutionalized. The deliberative politics he defends seems, then, to remit to both citizen activity in the public space and to the institutionalization of procedures and conditions of communication and argumentation, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the unceasing play of institutionalized argumentations with informally-developed networks and forms of public communication. The Habermasian theory of discourse thus places in the center of the democratic process the processes of intersubjective understanding, communication and argumentation that develop either through democratic procedures or in the informal network of communication characteristic of political public spaces (*politische Öffentlichkeiten*). These are processes of communication inside and outside the parliamentary complex, in diverse forums and arenas where the formation of will and opinion takes place in relation to socially-relevant questions that require regulation. Analogous to the liberal model, Habermas sustains the separation between "State" and "Society", but introduces into it the public space and civil society as social foundations of autonomous public spaces (*autonome Öffentlichkeiten*), as domains distinct from both the economic system of action and public administration. (Habermas, 1992, p. 362ss.)[11] This understanding of democracy expresses the

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[11] This understanding of the public space is linked –and this is very important– to the re-discovery of civil society, now discussed in a historical and conceptual constellation distinct from Hegel's. In effect, current discussions no longer speak of the "civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft)" of the liberal tradition that Hegel understood as a "system of needs"; that is, a system of social work and the

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normative demand to shift the center of gravity in the relation among the three sources –money, administrative power and solidarity– whence modern societies extract the resources that allow their integration and direction. In this line of thought, the integrating force of solidarity must be deployed through institutionalized procedures of the democratic formation of will and opinion in the framework of the Rule of Law, and through extended and differentiated networks of public communication that, through the means supplied by Law, are reaffirmed in the face of the other two mechanisms of social integration; that is, money and administrative power. (Habermas, 1992, p. 363)

The public space is understood, here, as a kind of "periphery" that "sieges (*belagert*)" the "center" and provides a whole repertory of arguments that can be transformed into a "communicative power". This "communicative power" is exercised by "sieging (*Belagerung*)" the political-administrative system without, however, any intention of "conquering (*Eroberung*)" it; that is, an unending "siege" (Habermas, 1996, p. 626). Through this mechanism, the new actors that appear at each moment in the public space can always reorient the development of society as a whole. (Habermas, 1996, p. 290) The public space is thus a kind of resonance box of social problems whose *functions* include not only *perceiving and identifying* problems, but also *discussing* them in a convincing, reasoned manner that allows it to exert an influence on the rest of society such that these problems can be taken up again and elaborated by the parliamentary complex and, more generally, by the political system. What resonates in the public space, then, are the echoes of personal and social experiences, of life histories, that express society's pathologies, experiences of affronts and exclusion where social suffering is articulated and condensed, first, in personal

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exchange of commodities. Today, civil society is understood as the polymorphic set of voluntarily-constituted non-state and non-economic associations that allow the structures of communication of the public space to be anchored in the social component of the lifeworld. Civil society is thus delimited from the State, the economy and other functional systems of society, and linked to the nuclear domains of the lifeworld. Understood in this way, civil society is composed of organizations, associations and movements –that emerge more-or-less spontaneously– that perceive, take up and condense social problems found in the private spheres of life and channel and re-direct the political public space. (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Habermas, 1992, p. 443).

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experiences of life that can be articulated in a literary way in literature, art or even religion. Thus, the system of public administration concentrates a power that must be generated time and again by "communicative power (*kommunikative Macht*)". This political formation of will culminates with decisions on politics and laws that must be expressed in the language of Law. (Habermas, 1992, p. 207ss.) Law thus appears as a constitutive element not only of the legitimation of political power but, at the same time, as the means of transforming communicative power into administrative power: The idea of the Rule of Law, Habermas observes, can, therefore, be explained through the principles according to which legitimate Law is produced out of communicative power and this, in turn, is transformed into administrative power through legitimately-established Law. (Habermas, 1992, p. 209)

IV. The works collected in *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essays* (1998) place Habermas' reflection on the public space and democracy in a new dimension; namely, the *global* dimension. In fact, as Habermas himself points out, in the Prologue to this book, the task now is to respond to the question of whether the democracy of the Welfare State can be sustained and develop beyond national borders, and if it is possible to propose a political alternative to the neoliberal project that escapes from the rhetoric related to a supposed "third path", separate from both neoliberalism and social-democracy. (Habermas, 1998, p. 7-8) Especially in the essay from which the book takes its title, *Die Postnationale Konstellation und die Zukunft der Demokratie* (Habermas, 1998, p. 91-169), Habermas analyzes the whole set of phenomena that characterize what we call today "globalization" and how, within the framework of this constellation –precisely the post-national constellation– the conditions of the functioning and legitimation of national democracies are altered to open the possibility that politics can be re-adjusted in response to the uncontrolled dynamics of markets.

In reality, the modern European State has emerged as an administrative (*Verwaltungsstaat*) and fiscal (*Steuerstaat*) State, though it was born as a territorial State (*Territorialstaat*) endowed with sovereignty and, in the framework of a Nation-State (*Nationalstaat*), was able to develop as a Rule of Law (*Rechtsstaat*) and, later, as

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a Welfare State (*Sozialstaat*). (Habermas, 1998, p. 97-98) In the final quarter of the 20th century, however, this configuration underwent a transformation in the context of the phenomenon of globalization; that is, the increasing extension and intensification of economic, social, political, cultural and communicative relations far beyond the limits established by national borders. The challenges and problems that this presented to the national State are of great importance. For example, the effectiveness of the administrative State confronted new risks generated by the problems that emerged, for example, in the field of ecology that, because of their scope and intensity, cannot be resolved in the strictly national domain. With respect to the specific issue of sovereignty, the growing network of interdependencies that has developed among diverse nations in recent decades raises the question of whether national politics can continue to be thought in the framework of a clearly-determined spatial territory; that is, a territorial State. It is here that Habermas turns to the emergence of organizations that, on the regional, international and global planes, partially compensate the loss of the capacity for action by the national State in some arenas, and have made a "government beyond the national State" possible. Here, economic and political institutions and organizations of diverse scope, like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, GATT, and European Union, among others, may come to mind. More important, however, in the context of this work, are the problems that globalization presents to the democratic legitimacy of the national State. In reality, the strength of the modern democratic State resides in its capacity to close gaps that open in social integration, not by recurring to a national identity based on a community of values and a destiny of a pre-political character but, rather, through the political participation of its citizens. This is precisely where we find one of the fundamental challenges that globalization presents to democracy, and to politics more generally, in the milieu of the national State. Globalization has brought with it –and this seems to be Habermas' diagnosis– "the repression (*Verdrängung*) of politics by the market", as can be perceived in the national State's increasing difficulty in collecting taxes, stimulating growth and cementing an essential foundation of legitimacy without the simultaneous emergence of equivalents that are not on either the national or supranational plane to

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compensate these losses. (Habermas, 1998, p. 120) To this we must add the destruction of the social assumptions of broad political participation, where we find one of the very bases of the modern democratic State and the support it possesses to attack the deficit in social integration and, in that way, the loss of credibility in its democratic decisions, even when they are taken following the procedures established in the framework of the Rule of Law. This leads to renouncing any attempt at a political configuration –or reconfiguration– of social relations and a growing willingness to banish all normative components of politics and subject politics to the systemic imperatives of the world market. (Habermas, 1998, p. 121)

Habermas attempts to contest all forms of resignation or impotence in the face of the dictates emanating from the unbridled logic of the market by outlining a "transnational politics that confronts and limits global networks" (Habermas, 1998:124), one sensitive to the aperture generated by market dynamics, the development of the means of communication, trafficking in money, people and information, and cultural networks. "Globalization pressures, so to speak, the National State to open internally to the diversity of strange or new forms of cultural life. At the same time, it limits the sphere of action of national governments such that the sovereign State has to open itself towards the outside, with respect to international regimes. If the renewed closure is to be achieved without collateral effects of social pathology, a politics that is up to the challenge of globalized markets can only occur in institutional forms that do not lag behind the conditions of legitimacy of democratic self-determination" (Habermas, 1998, p.128). The aim is to find and develop, in the post-national constellation, new forms for the democratic organization of society.

Habermas develops the conditions of this democratic politics beyond the national State by turning to the example of the European Union. In accordance with the foregoing, it must be clear that this cannot be reduced to a space of the uncontrolled force of the market, but must be considered, instead, as a project of *political* and *juridical* integration on a supranational plane. What is, of course, central to this project is the development of European institutions and the parallel stimulation of a common European political identity. But this does not suffice, for it also requires a democratic

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formation of will, now at the level of Europe –or to be more precise, of the member nations of the European Union– that rests, in turn, upon a foundation of solidarity. It is this democratic formation of will that must support the coordination of regional politics of redistribution. This amplification of the capacity for political action is accompanied by an amplification of the foundation of legitimation of European institutions through a European constitution combined with a democratic process that, in turn, will need to be sustained by both a party system at the level of Europe – susceptible to be formed to the degree that existing parties discuss the future of Europe in their respective national arenas and become capable of articulating interests that go beyond their respective borders– and a political public space, also at the level of Europe, where these discussions can resonate, and where they encounter a European civil society through associations of distinct kinds, non-governmental organizations, citizens movements, etc. (Habermas, 1998, p.154ss.)

This process, however, must be developed in the long term and beyond the borders of the European Union in the direction of a cosmopolitan position where there is an internal world politics, but one without a world government. Such a politics would, however, have to be restricted, Habermas argues, to a reactive politics of security and human rights, and a politics of a preventive character with respect to the environment. (Habermas, 1998, p. 161) This would suppose a restructuring of the UN in which its three powers –legislative, judicial and executive– would be institutionalized at the *global* level. In this regard, Habermas holds that the following tasks would be required: a) creating the status of cosmopolitan citizens (*Weltbürger*) who would be represented in the legislative domain not only by their respective national governments; b) a cosmopolitan Law (*Weltbürgerrecht*) that goes beyond state Law and would have to be applied by an international Penal Court; and, finally c) an executive power that must have much broader competencies and possibilities for implementation than those of the current Security Council. (Habermas, 1996 b) Also on this plane, politics would need to be adjusted to democratic criteria of legitimation. It is precisely in this sense that the model of deliberative democracy that Habermas defends emphasizes the extent to which the inclusion and participation of, for example, non-governmental

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organizations, in the deliberations of international organisms and institutions would contribute to increasing the legitimation of decisions by postulating and discussing a broad spectrum of problems that would stretch from the destruction of the environment to the debate over the interpretations and applications of a politics based on human rights; a series of problems that, without this public thematization, would not be perceived in all their importance and would never be included in the political agenda of international organisms. (Habermas, 1998, p.166s.) A project of this kind would need to take as its first recipients –Habermas would say– not so much governments as citizens and civil movements, social movements, that crystallize as soon as they are capable of coming to grips with conflicts that, at first sight, seem to have no satisfactory alternative perspectives on the normative plane. (Habermas, 1998, p.168)

It is clear, I would say in conclusion, that one function of the "political public space (*politische Öffentlichkeit)*" as the sum of the conditions of communication under which the formation of the will and opinion of a public of citizens can be realized through public argumentation and reasoning is central to Habermas' project of elaborating a normatively-oriented theory of democracy. This led Habermas to introduce his concept of a "deliberative democracy (*deliberative Demokratie*)" in which citizens resolve their problems through public reasoning, and consider their basic institutions legitimate to the degree that they establish a framework for public deliberation. The intention is to show that there must be a way to rationally regulate social issues and problems that may potentially generate conflicts through debate and public argumentation. This is the juncture where Habermas' proposal interlaces with those developed in recent decades by John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, as well as Bruce Ackermann, Paul Lorenzen and Karl-Otto Apel. Apel and Habermas, especially, have developed this idea in the framework of a consideration that conceives argumentation as the adequate procedure for solving practical questions, both moral and political in nature. In the case of Habermas, more specifically, the idea is not only to extract a universal moral principle from the normative content of the pragmatic assumptions necessary for

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argumentation, but also to establish a way in which this principle makes it possible to evaluate and settle, discursively, pretensions of normative validity by linking the validity of the norms to the possibility of an accord established by all those concerned. Political questions and democracy thus come to be linked with the establishment of a public praxis of argumentation. With this, Habermas establishes an indissoluble nexus between the Rule of Law and democracy by underscoring that only communication and the conditions of the procedure for the democratic formation of will and opinion can be justly considered as the only source of legitimation in modern societies. This understanding of politics and deliberative democracy seeks to link the activity of citizens in the public space with a) the institutionalization of procedures and conditions of communication and argumentation; b) the incessant flow of institutionalized argumentations; and c) informally-developed networks and forms of public communication. This perspective reappears in Habermas' final essays on the post-national constellation, where he attempts to respond to the challenges generated by the processes of globalization that have so dramatically transformed the conditions of the functioning and legitimation of national democracies, as a result of which politics has been displaced and then replaced by the uncontrolled dynamics of the market that impede the possibilities of democratic organization. To this "repression (*Verdrängung*) of politics by the market" Habermas seeks to oppose a transnational politics that does not renounce the possibility of configuring –or reconfiguring– the politics of social relations and reintroduce a normative horizon into politics by discovering new forms for the democratic organization of society on the international plane that do not, once again, lag behind the conditions of legitimacy of the democratic self-determination characteristic of Modernity. As noted above, Habermas initially developed the conditions of this democratic politics beyond the National State by taking the example of the European Union, which is no longer considered a space of economic integration subjected to the uncontrolled dynamics of the market but, rather, as a project of *political* and *juridical* integration on a supranational plane. A central piece of this project is a democratic formation of will and opinion in a supranational domain where a European constitution, a democratic process across Europe, and a political public

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space also on the European scale become interlinked. A project of this nature cannot, however, be circumscribed –and here Kant re-appears in Habermas' works– to the plane of the European Union, but must be extended to the level of the world, where politics must remain linked to the processes of communication and deliberation of the citizens of the world (*Weltbürger*). In this way, the project is inscribed in a normative perspective that delineates a horizon capable of guiding both enlightened philosophical reflection and the action of reasoning citizens in the contemporary world.

Final considerations

The understanding of deliberative democracy proposed by Habermas opposes the idea that democracy is a mechanism for the aggregation of individual interests, needs, and preferences that, in the best case scenario, establishes distinct alliances that tend towards cooperation which would allow each party that intervenes in it to achieve, in the most efficient form possible, the realization of their interests. Habermas, in contrast, places at the center of the democratic process the practice of reasoning and argumentation among free and equal citizens in the public space, so that only those norms, rules, and decisions that result from accords based on reasons will be accepted as legitimate and binding by those citizens. A similar conception of democracy, however, presupposes a series of conditions of diverse order: first, certain cognitive capacities (that is, the ability to articulate, present, and recognize reasons that cannot be reciprocal and are generally susceptible to being rejected); second, political virtues (the respect for law that all human beings possess –regardless of their class, gender, or racial adscription, and beyond pertinence to a certain political community); third, the opportunity to expound their reasons publicly and offer justifications of them to other citizens; and, fourth, certain cultural conditions that are anchored in the world and the form of life in which those citizens exist (a shared meaning of justice expressed in the conviction of all citizens that each one owes the others a justification of the reasons on which they base their needs and desires, to which they turn to defend their interests in the public space). (Scanlon, 1998; Forst, 2001) The central element of this democratic

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ordering is, for Habermas, the assumed institutional scaffolding of deliberative democracy. It is here that Habermas inserts the concept of the public space as a space of information, enligthenment (*Aufklärung*), argumentation, and critique, made up of distinct actors, groups, and associations with diverse social and political alignments and vectors; a space constituted by a multiplicity of spaces –some informal, others less so– of diverse extension and composition. Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, for example, directed their attention to precisely this kind of public counterspace in opposition to the "bourgeois public space" (*bürgerliche Öffentlichket*) upon which Habermas fixed his gaze, underscoring the distinct paths along which the social experiences generated in diverse milieus are processed; that is, the production, circulation, and consumption of goods, and the production of subjects in primary and secondary agencies of socialization, such as family, school, occupation, etc. (Kluge & Negt, 1972) It is true that Kluge and Negt focus their attention, especially, on the processes of exclusion and repression of those other public spaces so as to attend, primarily, to the perspective of *class*, while largely setting aside issues of *gender* or *ethno-racial* perspectives, the latter of which is of special importance in countries in America, more specifically in Latin America (in relation especially to Afro-Indo-American populations).[12]

The central *function* of the public space in the Habermasian understanding of deliberative democracy is clear: it constitutes both the *input* and *output* of the democratic process. It makes up the *input* because it is in diverse public spaces that the needs, problems, and interests of citizens are proposed –linked, as they are, to class, gender, race, or concerns about the environment, etc.– and the reasons for articulating and expounding them publicly are adduced, thus permitting their possible thematic dissemination beyond the group and social actors who posit them and, in this way, perhaps finding their way into the publica agenda in the broad sense and, eventually, into the political agenda, in the narrow sense. At the same time, the public space constitutes the *output* because to the degree to which the reasons are posited

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[12] My thanks to the anthropologist Rocío Gil for drawing my attention to this problem (see, for example: Gil, 2013).

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and thematized there they may find their way into more formal, institutionalized processes of deliberation and decision-making (for example, in Parliament) and thus influence the course of policy. Once this occurs, the public space –or diverse public spaces– once again assumes a central role, but now as *output* that serves as the basis for evaluating the procedures of discussion that have taken place on the formal-institutional plane and, as a result, so determine whether the needs proposed were dealt with effectively and the reasons adduced evaluated adequately or, instead, ignored, repressed, or silenced.

Some lines of critical reflection regarding this understanding of democracy, however, still need to be addressed. Here, I refer to only two. The first remits to economic-social and material assumptions, the second to the restricted character of this understanding. Due to space limitations, I take up these two points only briefly.

In order to function adequately, deliberative democracy must satisfy a series of economic-social and material conditions that allow its citizens to participate effectively in the processes of deliberation, argumentation, and reasoning in the public space. Referring to his liberal model of democracy, John Rawls has pointed out that the value of freedom is unequal and will continue to be so as long as some citizens have available to them greater material resources, personal abilities, and more ample opportunities than others to exercise their rights. (Rawls, 1993, p. 327) Analogous to this, Charles Taylor has expressed concern over the material presuppositions of a democratic society by emphasizing that this type of society assumes a certain degree of economic and social equality among its citizens. (Taylor, 1985, p. 314) The ideas of both authors in this sense is that social inequalities, economic asymmetries, and the concentration of economic power in a reduced group within the society represent a serious danger for democracy by undermining one of its most basic conditions of existence and functioning; namely, the assumption of equality among citizens. The design of the social Welfare State in countries in central and northern Europe sought to respond to this challenge by implementing policies that involve specific institutions, fiscal policy, and social security, accompanied by a set of laws and norms in diverse areas enacted to alleviate and/or compensate for the social and material inequalities

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among their citizens and, in this way, make it possible for all of them, without exception, to propose their needs, interests, and desires in the public space. But it is now clear that the advance of the neoliberal model of capitalism over the past forty years has had as one of its consequences the gradual erosion of this institutional design and, with this, intensified social inequality. In Latin American countries where no institutional design similar to the Welfare State in the strict sense of this term has ever existed, the very dynamics of capitalism have eroded the social tissue and potentiated social and economic inequality exponentially, severely undermining the economic-social and material assumptions of democracy in the sense expressed above and, therefore, positing the urgent need to indissolubly link deliberative democracy to a project of *social* justice that guarantees minimal conditions of equality among citizens and allows their symmetrical participation as actors in the public space.

The second point has to do with the danger that arises with an understanding of deliberative democracy that is restricted to the milieu of the reasoning process in the public space –whether as *input* or as *output*, in the sense elucidated above– centered, above all, on the formal procedures for articulating reasons and legitimizing decisions in that space. With this, of course, comes the need to smooth the path towards an understanding of democracy, specifically, and of the political, in general, on the horizon of the fluid configurations and constellations in which they intertwine in a dynamic interplay of relations. The political as the institutionally-defined field understood as administration in the framework of the principles and procedures of the modern rule of law, with its diverse configurations of the public space, processes of communication, interaction, and elaboration of social experience, ways in which these are articulated and opposed, reaffirmed and displaced, deployed and repressed –on the horizon of relations of struggle and power among diverse social actors and groups differentiated in terms of class, gender, or ethno-racial adscription, of projects of subjection, but also of emancipation and resistance from and among them– diverse modes of articulating individual and social experience, of the public formation and expression of interests and sentiments, of desires and needs, of the practical incorporation and interpretation of ideals and values, of the public elaboration and

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processing of reasons and convictions, and of the unfolding of diverse forms of protest, of resistance to powers not democratically-legitimized, and of emancipation. Perhaps from this perspective society and democracy can be conceived in the framework of fluid relations, changing constellations whose orderings and juridical, political, and institutional figures could never be considered as finished or separated from any possibility of reconfiguration by reasoning citizens, and would need to be forever linked directly to the demands, desires, and interests that emerge from citizens organized along diverse fronts and in distinct constellations and struggles. A similar conception has to establish clearly that democracy must be understood in a broader sense than that of a mere mechanism for elaborating and processing reasons, and for legitimizing and controlling the political decisions of the State. Democracy, the struggles to achieve it, and the processes of democratization must all be understood as something more than simply the set of institutions and diverse planes that make up a society. The task proposed on the political plane is to ensure that this is not restricted to democratizing the State –that is, an exclusively "political" democratization, it might be said– but includes the democratization of the entire set of social institutions under the guiding idea that democracy, and the political in general, cannot be exhausted in, nor reduced to, the milieu of the State, but traverse the entire set of social institutions. This demands extending democratic struggles and spaces from the plane on which social agents intervene in their status as citizens (*political* democracy) to other planes that constitute the social body, and even to a form of life in and of itself (*social* democracy). (Pereyra, 1988, p. 100; Dubiel, Rödel & Frankenberg, 1989; González Rojo, 2007) In this way, democracy will be revealed not so much as a state in which a society exists, nor as an already-achieved conquest from which there is no point of return but, rather, as a march, a –perhaps always unfinished– road that is capable, nonetheless, of orienting our projects and struggles in the present.

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