The Uses of Mead in Habermas' Social Theory.
Before the Theory of Communication Action
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3. **Article accepted for publication**
   Date: November 2018

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show how Habermas used the writings of George Herbert Mead. This subject has already been examined by the critical literature; however, the originality of this analysis with respect to previous studies lies in its philological approach. The result of the research proves that the interest of Habermas towards the American social psychologist originates well before the *Theory of Communicative Action* and accompanies the elaboration of Habermas' research programme for over two decades. It is interesting to observe that the references to Mead's writings continued to be very selective and focused on the same three particular areas: on the methodological level, around the problem of the foundation of the social sciences; on the theoretical level, around ontogenetic and phylogenetic development; on the moral level, around the justification of the discourse ethic and, more generally, the idea of a post-metaphysical concept of reason. This paper also shows the remarkable coherence with which Habermas is developing a general theory of society and a philosophy of rational discourse.

Keywords: Habermas, Mead, Social Theory.

1. Introduction

References to George Herbert Mead are frequent in Habermas' work and we can enumerate more than fifty writings in which there are more or less relevant mentions to the American pragmatist philosopher. Beyond the quantitative recurrences, however, if we consider the quality of the

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hermeneutic acquisition as a whole, we notice two interesting aspects that we can introduce in advance. First, in Habermas' writings we find only fragmentary analyses of Mead's thought. Not even the chapter 'The Paradigm Shift in Mead and Durkheim' of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) and the essay *Individuation through Socialization* (1988) can be considered complete reconstructions at the level of the history of ideas. In addition, we must emphasize that only *Mind, self and society* (1934) has been thoroughly examined. This is not surprising. All his interpretations are 'reconstructive', that is, they deliberately 'disassemble' and 'reassemble' concepts and arguments in a new form with the intention of better achieving the 'aim' that – in his opinion – a tradition of thought had set for itself (Habermas, 1976[1975b]: 11). This is a use of sources that, of course, can be criticized by those who believe that in so doing he betrays Mead's thought, provided that there is an authentic reading on the hermeneutical level. One cannot say, however, that Habermas is not intimately pragmatic. In the many passages of the history of ideas that accompany his more systematic analyses, he refers the *interpretandum* back to the fundamental questions to which he intends to respond with his 'research programme'. What we find is an extraordinary linearity and coherence, so it is only necessary to compose the pieces of a single constellation scattered both in the theoretical systematization and in the philology of the interpretations. There is no solution of continuity in the intellectual path of Habermas, at least from 1965 to the present day: the object of study and the questions that characterize his attempt to define the constituent elements and the mechanisms-processes of societal change remain unchanged. It is an ambitious project with which the German scholar tries to pursue a classical idea of sociology as a social theory posing the problems of the origin of the human species, of the constitution of social formations, of the mechanisms of material reproduction and symbolic reproduction in a double historical process of differentiation of social systems and rationalization of the world of life. This general theory of society must also justify, on an epistemological level, the validity of concepts and propositions and, on a practical level, ensure more solid normative foundations for social criticism. What has changed since the 'communicative turning point' of 1970 are the answers. To carry out his research programme, Habermas introduces the concept of 'reconstructive science' at a higher level of abstraction than the one of analytical and hermeneutical 'empirical sciences'. In order to elaborate a concept of two-level society, the reconstructive sciences he uses are the neo-functionalist 'system-environment' model, with which he reinterprets the assumptions of historical materialism, and the structural-genetic model of the 'logic of development'. The latter model is developed relying upon the Weberian approach to the theory of action of cognitive psychology by Piaget, Kohlberg et al., Freud's

psychoanalysis, particularly in Lorenzer's interpretation, and social psychology, in which Habermas includes Mead – whose study exhausts, with the exception of Goffman, his interest in Symbolic Interactionism. Habermas uses Mead because he incorporates him into his own theoretical framework, selecting the passages of the works and the most congenial critical literature. Although this may seem a hermeneutic limit to our critical reconstruction, we can say that it is not the first problem to assess – on an interpretative level – whether he has understood the overall meaning and more specific aspects of Mead's work. This would require a comparative analysis of their social theories aimed at verifying whether or not the two scholars have defined the identical problems, used the same methodological perspectives, adopted similar sensitizing concepts, developed analogous arguments and reached the same conclusions. This could be an interesting analytical objective but it presupposes that their works are systematic and internally coherent, that is, that they have elaborated two comparable general theories. From this point of view, we can evaluate our paper as preparatory to that investigation. In fact, the second aspect in Habermas' work that we want to underline – our real philological object – is the coherence of the research. I would like to show that the lines of Mead's habermasian interpretation had already been elaborated well before the *Theory of Communicative Action*. In fact, Habermas' coherence in the 'incorporation' of Mead – although limited to *Mind, Self and Society* – is an element not yet studied by critical literature, with the notable exception of Daniel Henrich (2007).

2. The initial references to Mead's writings

Textual references to George H. Mead appear in Habermas' intellectual trajectory already when at the Ruprecht Karls University in Heidelberg, where he had been welcomed by Hans-Georg Gadamer after Max Horkheimer's ostracism to Adorno's young assistant. He did not remain for long there, in the cradle of Hemermeutic philosophy: just from 1962 to 1964. Through the consultation of the documents kept at the Habermas Archive at the Archivzentrum of the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main we know that, on 21 June 1963, Habermas and Adorno met Siegfried Unseld, the publisher of Suhrkamp Verlag, to discuss the project of a philosophical series entitled 'Logos: Philosophische Texte' – the series was produced as 'Insel collection'. A few days after the meeting, in a letter to the editor, in addition to expressing some reservations about the composition of the editorial group, Habermas indicated a very detailed selection of philosophers and philosophical traditions that the series should have published, concluding that 'Finally, there is an urgent need for a reception of pragmatism, which is so far

entirely repressed and only admitted in the form of Heidegger's ready-to-hand: Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, Morris' (Müller-Doohm, 2017[2014]: 161-162).

In the summer semester of 1964, in Heidelberg, Habermas held a seminar (*Übung*) entitled 'Zu G. H. Mead: Mind, Self, and Society', of which preparatory materials are available. This is the first time Habermas deals with the ideas that the American social psychologist had developed in the courses held at the University of Chicago since 1900, and which were then collected by Charles Morris using stenographic materials and notes from 1927-1930. The habermasian interpretation dates back to this period. The extent and depth of knowledge of Mead's writings by Habermas will change over time, but his perspective about the question of the foundations of social theory will remain unchanged. Also in that summer Habermas began a series of lectures and seminars for students of philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt, in which he discussed in English the publications of American pragmatists including John Dewey, George H. Mead. The following year Habermas assumed Horkheimer's chair in philosophy and sociology at Frankfurt. In the speech given for the assumption of the academic position Habermas presented the research programme *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, which includes only the problems at the center of Mead's reflection – the origins and development of intersubjectivity – without any reference to his writings.

That same year, in *Arbeit und Interaktion. Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser Philosophie des Geistes*, examining 'work' and 'interaction' as fundamental categories of the philosophy of intersubjectivity of Hegel, Habermas mentioned a passage from Mead's posthumous work *Mind, Self and Society*. However he only drew a recurring parallel between Hegel and Mead, since for both of them the subjective identity is socially recognized and assumed through the 'internalization of the expectations of others' and the practice of social roles: 'G. H. Mead repeats Hegel's insight-though under the naturalistic presuppositions of pragmatism that the identity of the "I" can only constitute itself in the acquisition by practice of social roles, namely, in the complementary character of behavioral expectations on the basis of mutual recognition' (1974[1965]: 149).

These are just the first references to the work of Mead that Habermas will deepen in the book *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (1967 [1988]), like many other Habermasian texts translated in the series 'Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought' of the MIT Press Cambridge, directed by his colleague and friend Thomas McCarthy, the first and main interpreter of Habermas' work in the United States. This was a preparatory study on the debate on the logic of the social sciences, in which the traditional question of the dualism between the orientations and research methods of the nomological sciences and of the hermeneutic sciences was examined. Through

the re-elaboration of the lessons and seminars of sociology held during the two years of the course, Habermas was looking for his own model to the problem of the foundations of empirical knowledge of historical-social phenomena, starting from the comparison with the phenomenological, linguistic and hermeneutic approaches. Habermas examined the traditions from which to draw the direction of research. As he will remember in the following *Zum Theorienvergleich in der Soziologie: am Beispiel der Theorie der sozialen Evolutionstheorie* (1974e), in order for social theory not to be a 'patchwork of concepts with an uncertain status', it is necessary to follow the analysis of the constituent elements of the symbolic experience with which cultural traditions, social solidarity and personal identities are reproduced and to go beyond their original context in order to allow a reconstruction of the 'formal concepts' underlying any form of reproduction of the vital world (Habermas, 1974e [1976]: 130). From the research on the 'logic transcendental structure' conducted by phenomenological, linguistic and hermeneutical currents, in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Habermas had taken the dimension of 'intersubjectivity' as an obligatory starting point in the analysis of possible experiences of the world (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 95).

Habermas followed the passage from the traditional problem of consciousness to the transcendental criticism of language. The interest in Mead's symbolic interactions, with the concept of reciprocal role expectations, was judged to be of crucial importance for the progress of what he would later call the 'turn towards linguistic pragmatics in sociology': 'The objects to be investigated were no longer subjective mental acts, but speech acts. The intersubjectivity of linguistic communication between several actors took the place of the subjective intentionality of individuals. And the concept of the life-world also gradually began to move to the centre of his social theory, which took on an increasingly complex shape' ((Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 117). *Mind, Self and Society* remains the main reference. In a first step, Habermas, states that Mead has not posed the problem of 'metaphysical opposition of nature and spirit' because 'he recognizes only the objective context of the natural history of the species' – an 'evolutionist context' (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 25). Nevertheless, Habermas recruits him among those who recover the dualism of the natural and cultural sciences at a methodological level. In fact, assuming that 'social action can take shape only under conditions of linguistic communication', then human behaviour 'has a special place within the class of all observable events, to which there corresponds a special method of scientific analysis' (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 25). This argument is decisive for the principle of subjective interpretation on which Mead, Weber, and Parsons based the theoretical framework of a theory of action. In contrast to the behavioural approach that limits the choice of theoretical hypotheses to

the association between stimuli and responses, the action approach establishes a categorical framework within which statements about intentional action are made. If we do not wish to abandon intentional action as data in the social sciences, the system of experience in which these data are accessible is linguistic communication:

> The methodological rule that result from this was established by W. I. Thomas as the principle of subjective interpretation of social facts: only the meaning intended by the acting subject provides adequate access to behaviour performed in a situation that he himself has interpreted […] The principle of subjective interpretation, or, better, of *verstehende* interpretation, concerns access to social facts, the gathering of data. Understanding symbols takes the place of the controlled observation, for the subjectively intended meaning is given only is symbolic contexts. Thus that principle defines the experiential basis of the sciences of action. Experience here is not tied to private sensory perception, the intersubjectivity of which is guaranteed only through monitoring the results of instrumental action (usually in an experiment), but to linguistic communication (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 54).

Secondly, for Mead as well as for Durkheim, the meaning that can be communicated and orients action has the form of an obligatory group expectation of situation-specific ways of behaving. In particular, for Mead, the social action is the observance of norms understood as expectations of a well-codified role in the cultural traditions of the in-groups:

> Social action is an adherence to norms. Norms that determine action are collective behavioural expectations. These expectations are a facet of cultural tradition that is relevant to institutionalized action. Cultural tradition is a symbolic context that defines the world view of a social group, articulated in ordinary-language form, and there with the framework of possible communications within the group. Thus social action exists only with reference to the system of traditional cultural patterns in which the self-understanding of social groups is articulated (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 55-56).

Thirdly, if social action is linguistically mediated, Habermas uses Mead to criticize the theory of the use of signs and symbols that Morris had published in *Signs, Language, and Behaviour* (1955), starting with the preliminary work of Peirce, Dewey and Mead himself. The problem is the genesis of semantic conventions, that is, the constitution of identical meanings necessary to the processes of understanding. Morris' approach functionally interprets the use of language as a part of the adaptive behaviour of organisms to their

environment as a result of the need-dispositions that cause the organism to react to signs, and the behavioural schemata in accordance with which the reactions proceed. Habermas then describes the distinction between 'natural signs', 'gestures' and 'significant gestures' (1967 [1988]: 95). In the framework of linguistic behaviorism, the identity of the meanings attributed to signs occurs if there is the same behavioral reaction to the occurrence of the same empirical conditions. Habermas argues that Morris uses the model of the individual adaptive process of the individual organism and he has no plausible way of distinguishing between 'coordinated monological responses' to a 'linguistically mediated interaction'. By contrast, Mead's theory of language

> assumed that the identity of meaning of symbols that was presupposed in linguistic communication is fulfilled not through the uniformity of responses as such but only by the reciprocal anticipation of the same behavioral response […] The identity of meanings is constituted not by uniform responses as determined by the observer, but by the expectation of a response on which the speech partners themselves are in agreement, that is, by the intersubjectivity of expectations about behavior (Habermas, 1967 [1988]: 64-65).

Habermas follows the Section 10 'Thought, Communication, and the Significant Symbol' of *Mind, Self and Society*. From this it follows that the understanding of the meanings of symbols is not a sign-controlled adaptive behavior but an intentional action that implies the assumption of the interlocutor's role (Habermas, 1967 [1988]).

Finally, Habermas examined the attempt by Anselm L. Strauss to cleanse Mead's linguistic pragmatism from its behavioral origins in *Mirror and Masks. The Search for identity* (1959). And this purpose is the leitmotif in the Mead's writings that Strauss collected in *On Social Psychology* (1956). The problems faced by Strauss concern the importance of language in human action, the symbolic value of belonging to a group, the relationship between generations, social interaction, all of which are decisive for the development of a dynamic identity, in mobile situational and spatio-temporal coordinates. This is the premise of personal changing acquisitions and turning points in people's social and living positions, of the perception of space and time, history and memory, which are central to the symbolisation of the self (1967 [1988]). The subjective world of experiences accessible in a privileged way is formed as the social world of normative expectations. Habermas observes that Strauss uses the two meadian components of identity, 'I' and 'Me', to follow the creative path of 'spontaneous' and 'unpredictable' expressions of needs, desires and sentiments by which subjects delimit themselves with respect to the external.

And in this regard, Habermas mentions a passage from Section 25 'The "I" and the "Me" as Phases of the Self' (1934: 197).

The methodological problem of this approach that Habermas intuits but is not yet able to solve concerns the limits of linguistically oriented interpretive sociology explaining social action in terms of motives that are identical with the actor's own interpretations of situations: 'A sociology that conceives motivation in this way must restrict itself to interpretive explication. The explanations it can provide are equivalent to linguistic descriptions and hermeneutic exegeses; it has to forgo causal explanations. Thus to represent motives does not means to identify causes' (1967 [1988]: 177-178). Only when Habermas will find a solution in the paradigm of the reconstructive sciences he will understand that Mead's theory of development could be interpreted as a complete example of this model.

In 1968, Habermas' interest finds expression in two summer seminars, one dedicated to Durkheim, Mead, Freud, the other, shared with Ullrich Oevermann, on socialization, from which the *Stichworte zur Theorie der Sozialisation* published in *Kultur und Kritik* (1973) are taken. This is an important text, inexplicably translated only in Italian. In the summer of 1968, Habermas matured the conviction that the question of the epistemological foundations of social theory and of the theory of knowledge can only find answers in a research programme that follows the example of the reconstructive model of the evolutionary theory of development. However, he mentions Mead only by referring to the Parsonian interpretation of the 'theorem of the taking the roles of the other' through identification as the mechanism of evolutionary learning (Habermas, 1973[1968]: 125). With respect to the functionalist hypothesis that in learned interactions there is a cognitive coherence between the social definitions and the subjective interpretations of roles, Habermas found in Symbolic Interactionism the origins of the criticism of the 'identity theorem' in favour of a 'discrepancy theorem'. The first excludes a differentiation in the degrees of rigidity of the definition of roles and of the relative spectrum of interpretation, ending up raising to a 'normal case' what represents a 'pathological limit case' – the reciprocal coincidence between the actors that requires the price of a renunciation of individuation only (*rigidity*). The discrepancy theorem, on the other hand, with the hypothesis of spontaneous performance of the ego and active role interpretations, it recognizes the capacity for adequate representations of oneself (Habermas, 1973[1968]: 84-85).

In the following writings, Habermas continues a fragmentary use of Mead's work and of the tradition that, starting from Blumer, we define Symbolic Interactionism. In *Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik*, Habermas still uses *Mind, Self and Society*, in particular Section 41 'Obstacles

and Promises in the Development of the Ideal Society', in a field of reflection that will become the core of the Habermasian reconstruction of the pragmatic conditions of the theory of argumentation and, specularly, of the critical analysis of systematically distorted communication. In Mead he finds the distinction between understanding and discursive agreement, and a definition of the 'principle of rational discourse', 'according to which truth would only be guaranteed by that kind of consensus which was achieved under the idealized conditions of unlimited communication free from domination and could be maintained over time' (1990 [1970]: 267). Mead emphasized that human communication takes place through such significant symbols, and the problem is one of organizing a community which makes this possible. If that communication could be made theoretically perfect, the individual would affect himself as he affects others in every way. That would be the ideal of communication, an ideal attained in logical discourse wherever it is understood. The meaning of that which is said is here the same to one as it is to everybody else. The hermeneutical understanding can lead to the critical ascertainment of truth only to the extent to which it follows the regulative principle, to try to establish universal agreement within the framework of an 'unlimited community of interpreters':

> Universal discourse is then the formal ideal of communication. If communication can be carried through and made perfect, then there would exist the kind of democracy to which we have referred, in which each individual would carry just the response in himself that he knows he calls out in the community. That is what makes communication in the significant sense the organizing process in the community (1934: 327; Habermas, 1990 [1970]: 267).

It is only the formal anticipation of an idealized dialogue, as the form of life to be realized in the future, which guarantees the ultimate supporting and 'contrafactual' agreement that already unites us; in relation to it we can criticize every factual agreement, should it be a false one, as 'false consciousness'.

3. A generative theories of society

In February 1971, Habermas was visiting professor at Princeton University. From that American academic experience, we have the text of 'Christian Gauss Lectures', *Vorlesungen zu einer sprachtheoretischen Grundlegung der Soziologie*, not yet translated into Italian and which, on the other hand, have attracted the interest of the international community since they were the first

systematic attempt to define le outline of a linguistic foundation for social theory. In the United States they were translated by Barbara Fultner with the title *Reflections on the Linguistic Foundation of Sociology*, in the book *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction. Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, in 2001, although some extracts had been published. In this essay we can find references to Mead's *Mind, Self, Society*, in two complementary contexts.

By addressing the theme 'Objectivist and subjectivist approaches to theoretical training in the social sciences', first of all, Habermas classifies the generative theories of society that interest him, excluding behavioral models and rational choice, which reduce the logic of the situation to characteristics too limited and referable to already defined principles of social conduct or operational criteria. Considering, therefore, only the sociological theories that take the generation of meaningfully organized structures of life as a key concept, Habermas examined the four approaches: a) the phenomenological model of the knowing or judging subject that from Kant arrives to Alfred Schutz through Husserl, aimed at reconstructing the constitution of the objects of experience and the everyday world of lived experience ('lifeworld') in which we can have experiences, relate to objects and persons, and perform actions. The epistemological origins of this phenomenological theory of society are evident in the title of the well-known study by Schutz's students Berger and Luckmann. They conceive of the generative process of society as producing an image of reality in relation to which subjects orient their behavior toward one another; b-c) The second and third models of generative theory, structuralist anthropology and systems theory, conceive society in a holistic mode, as a set of rules independent of the sense attributions of the actors. In the first case, these are the grammatical rules of a natural language and in the second case, these are the cybernetic rules of a self-regulating machine. The limit of these two models, according to Habermas, is that

> The constitutive model no more shows the way out of the monadic shell of the active subject than the systems model can incorporate speaking and acting subjects and, especially, their interrelations. For the system of grammatical rules requires competent speakers for its actualization, whereas the machine regulates itself and has no need of any subject at all. In neither case is the paradigm suited for giving an accurate account of how intersubjectively binding meaning structures are generated (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 16);

d) The analysis of the subject meanings, of the social norms and of the cultural values is the object of the fourth approach that Habermas defines as

the model of 'ordinary language communication (speech and interaction)'. This is the generation of interpersonal situations of speaking and acting together, that is, the form of the intersubjectivity of possible understanding (*Verstdndigung*). In this model, the abstract systems of rules must explain two phenomena: 'The first is the pragmatic generation of the common basis of intersubjectively shared meaning. The second is the more specifically linguistic generation of sentences that we use in speech acts for purposes of both cognition and action' (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 17). The main examples are Mead's social psychology of role-taking and the later Wittgenstein's theory of language games, in which the generative rules include not only symbolic forms such as sentences and actions, but also the subjects of speech and action itself, which are formed through normal linguistic communication. For Habermas, these models are 'communicative theories of society' and prefigure the universal pragmatics that he takes to be the right kind of foundation for social theory and whose basic tenets he should like to develop. However, they are not appropriate for the logical reconstruction of the historical development of the active subject or the underlying rule systems (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 18).

In the second lesson, 'The Phenomenological Constitutive Theory of Society: The Fundamental Role of Claims to Validity and the Monadological Foundations of Intersubjectivity', we find the second context in which Habermas uses Mead (and Wittgenstein) regarding the genesis of semantic conventions, that is the social construction of identical meanings that are the basis of shared intersubjective experiences:

> To account for the identity of semantic conventions, Wittgenstein proposed the model of a rule that at least two subjects must be able to follow. Mead recommends the model of a role that establishes reciprocally interchangeable expectations about behavior for at least two subjects. Concepts such as 'rule' or 'role' must be defined from the outset in terms of a relation between subjects. They circumvent the notion of anything like a private consciousness that only subsequently enters into contact with another conscious being […] Communicative theories enjoy the advantage of being able to take as their starting point the intersubjective relation that constitutive theories attempt in vain to derive from the activity of monadic consciousness (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 43-44).

According to Habermas, Mead goes one step further. Wittgenstein reduces the uniformity of meaning to the intersubjective recognition of rules, but does not examine the mutual relationship between the two subjects who accept a rule. The fact that each partner must be able to anticipate the expectations of others is not obvious. Mead was the first to analyze this

'foundation of intentional action' (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 59).

Compared to *Vorlesungen, Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Niklas Luhmann* – inexplicably not yet translated into English – fits entirely into the framework of the genetic-constructive approach, but instead does not add anything to the Habermasian interpretation of Mead's thought. Habermas repeats his criticism of Morris' proposal to empirically recode the identity of the meaning that actors attribute to the signs to the similarity of behavioral reactions to equal stimuli. And, as already seen about *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, firstly, Habermas considers that the identity of the meaning derives rather from the intersubjective recognition of rules. Secondly, the validity of the rules towards which actors orient their behavior requires the possibility of verifying their correct application. Thirdly, mutual criticism between actors presupposes not so much reciprocity of behavior as 'expectations of behavior' that the participants in the interaction intentionally recognize each other. In the process of role-taking from which the identity of meanings arises, there is a double structure of expectations, whereby the participants seek a consensus at the level of the 'objects' on which they agree and at the meta-communication level of their 'relationship' in which A and B interact with each other (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 190-191). Finally, Habermas re-proposes the paradoxical relationship of intersubjectivity analyzed by Hegel and Mead. Subjects who recognize each other as such must be considered as 'identical', as persons equally provided with the same generic predicates, as well as 'different', because the identity of the ego requires full individualization. However, he deepens the intersubjective relationship of mutual understanding through the system of personal pronouns of communicative acts (Habermas, 2001 [1971b]: 193).

In the essay *Notizen zum Begriff der Rollenkompetenz* (1972), only translated in Italian, Habermas is directly involved in the elaboration of a first version of the evolutionary theory of ontogenesis and phylogenesis starting from: a 'system of rules' formally reconstructible *ex-post* that define the final stage of a normal formation process in the different dimensions of development – cognitive, linguistic and role competences; a 'general interpretative model' according to which the logic of development can be conceived as a hierarchically ordered differentiation of fundamental structures; the 'mechanisms' and the 'marginal conditions' that allow to empirically describe and causally explain both normal and deviant formation processes. In this research programme the reference to Mead is limited but not occasional. We can consider it a consolidated acquisition in Habermas' social theory. In the context of the ontogenetic development of linguistic competence, he distinguished, in that period, three levels corresponding respectively to early

childhood, childhood and adolescence: the 'system of syntactic and phonetic rules' with which to form propositions; the 'universal pragmatics', that is, the active possession of cognitive schemes and linguistic categories (quantity, space, time, substance) through which understanding at the level of concrete operations becomes possible; and the reflexive acquisition of the 'difference between communicative action and discourse', with the genesis of hypothetical thought at the abstract level. The integration of linguistic and cognitive competences, on which the development of role competences depends, is at the origin of the 'communicative self' characterized not only by the objectivity of the experience but also by the ability to create interpersonal relationships:

> The structure of intersubjectivity allows: a) for the participants the reflexiveness of the expectation [*Reflexivität der Errvartung*] (the expectation of the other is predictable: Mead); b) the validity of identical meanings (i.e. linguistic symbols); c) the formation of a symbolic identity for those who, through identical meanings, exchange reflexive expectations (the identity of people with respect to the identity of things or organisms) (Habermas, 1972a: 200-201).

If the process of linguistic understanding is not reduced in a behavioral sense, the conditions of the subject-subject-object-relationship are placed, as in Mead's social thought, at the centre of the communication theory.

Examining the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner, Habermas ascribed to the Mead's evolutionary theory the merit of having placed the structure of Cooley's 'looking-glass self' on the level of linguistic communication (1981[1972b]: 139-140). And still in *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*, Habermas simply recognizes that – as Freud, Durkheim, and Mead have shown – the theorems on the motivation crisis are based firstly on the assumption that motivations are shaped through the internalization of symbolically represented structures of expectation (1976 [1973]: 95). A year later we can find the paper *Moralentwicklung und Ich-Identität*, a reading given by Habermas at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt am Main for the celebration of the Institute's fiftieth anniversary, in which Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, Oskar Negt and Alfred Schmidt also participated. The essay was included in the collection *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*, translated by Beacon Press under the title *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, certainly correct in content but without any reference to the Habermasian project of revision of historical materialism. Habermas begins the essay by referring to an empirical investigation into the potential for conflict and apathy among young people that he was conducting with Rainer

Döbert and Gertrud Nunner-Winkler at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg. The research hypothesis was that there is a relationship between the patterns of socialization, the typical developments of adolescence and the corresponding solutions to adolescent crisis; and that this complex of problems concerning moral development and ego identity has consequences on the politically relevant attitudes. In a meeting dedicated to critical theory, Habermas focused on this theme because he wanted to demonstrate the normative implications of fundamental concepts used with critical intention in the social-psychological works of the Institut für Sozialforschung: 'I mention those utterances only to draw attention to the fact that critical social theory still holds fast to the concept of the autonomous ego, even when it makes the gloomy prognosis that this ego is losing its basis' (1979[1974a]: 72). In the writings of the first generation Frankfurt School this normative reference had remained without credible foundations both on the ontological and anthropological levels. Habermas' intent was 'to interpret this dialectical concept of ego identity with the cruder tools of sociological action theory and without fear of a false positivity; and I want to do so in such a way that the (no-longer-concealed) normative content can be incorporated in empirical theories and the proposed reconstruction of this content can be opened up to indirect testing' (Habermas, 1979[1974a]: 73). Looking for convergence between the different theoretical traditions that have reconstructed the processes of development of the ego's identity, alongside the analytic ego psychology of Sullivan and Erikson and the cognitive developmental psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg, Habermas took into consideration the symbolic interactionist theory of action. Six 'fundamental conceptions' that Habermas adopted in the attempt to elaborate a more 'convincing' theory of ontogenetic development can also be found in symbolic interactions:

> 1. The ability of the adult subject to speak and act is the result of the integration of maturational and learning processes […] We can distinguish cognitive development from linguistic development and from psychosexual or motivational development. […] 2. The formative process of subjects capable of speaking and acting runs through an irreversible series of discrete and increasingly complex stages of development; no stage can be skipped over, and each higher stage implies the preceding stage in the sense of a rationally reconstructible pattern of development. […] 3. The formative process is not only discontinuous but as a rule is crisis-ridden. The resolution of stage-specific developmental problems is preceded by a phase of destructuration and, in part, by regression. The experience of the productive resolution of a crisis, that is, of overcoming the dangers of pathological paths of development, is a condition for mastering later crises. […] 4. The developmental direction of the formative process is characterized by increasing autonomy. By that I mean

the independence that the ego acquires through successful problem solving, and through growing capabilities for problem solving, in dealing with – a) The reality of external nature and of a society that can be controlled from strategic points of view; b) The non-objectified symbolic structure of a partly internalized culture and society; and c) The internal nature of culturally interpreted needs, of drives that are not amenable to communication, and of the body. […] 5. The identity of the ego signifies the competence of a speaking and acting subject to satisfy certain consistency requirements. […] Identity is produced through *socialization*, that is, through the fact that the growing child first of all integrates itself into a specific social system by appropriating symbolic generalities; it is later secured and developed through *individuation*, that is, precisely through a growing independence in relation to social systems […] 6. The transposition of external structures into internal structures is an important learning mechanism (Habermas, 1979[1974a]: 73-75).

In the same year, Habermas presented a seminar in Starnberg whose text circulated for a long time in a pirated edition under the title *Universalpragmatische Hinweise auf das System der Ich-Abgrenzungen*. The only partial English translation available so far ('Some Distinctions in Universal Pragmatics: A Working Paper', 1976) has been taken from this version. The author then decided to include the essay completely rewritten with the title *Notizen zur Entwicklung der Interaktionskompetenz* in the anthology *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1984). In the first version, Habermas explicitly used Mead to describe the three levels of development of communicative competence with respect to the degree of differentiation between speaking and acting as well as according to the degree of integration of speaking and knowing:

In the first stage the child learns to master symbolically mediated interactions (and the proto-forms of a cognitive language use which is not systematically tied in with interaction). In the second stage, the maturing child can not only perform communicative acts in a general sense, based on the already but can choose among interactive, cognitive, and expressive language use, on the basis of an already developed system of speech acts. In the third stage, the adolescent acquires the ability to pass from action to 'discourse' (1976[1974b]: 162).

This last phase of development is formally characterised with the help of the 'mutually inter-defining' concepts advanced by Mead: 'the reflexive attitude' and 'identical meaning'. In particularly, Habermas takes from the social psychologist the mechanism of the 'taking the attitude of the other toward oneself' with which the 'perspective of the speakers' (you and I) is formed at the communicative level. It is this process of decentralization that

makes possible the genesis of the 'semantic conventions'. The repeated 'internalization' of another one's position on the wrong use of symbols is the mechanism that determines the genesis of 'identical meaning' as a medium of understanding. In a synthetic form, Habermas thus describes its logic, mentioning a passage from Section 18 'The Self and the Organism' by *Mind, Self and Society* (1934: 138), on which he will return extensively in the *Theory of communicative action*:

> In symbolically mediated interaction, A can anticipate the behavioral reactions which his gestures call out in B. Moreover, he knows that, in turn, B can anticipate the behavioral reactions which he would call out in A with corresponding gestures. With this awareness, A can not only anticipate B's behavioral reactions, but also his symbolic utterance-regardless of whether this is an immediate social act or whether it is the symbolic expression for the anticipation of a social act. Mead therefore speaks of a reflexive intelligence, which becomes possible in this stage: 'The importance of what we term "communication" lies in the fact that it provides a form of behavior in which the organism or the individual may become an object to himself' (1976[1974b]: 162-163).

Obviously, the acquisition of 'semantic competence' matures here in asymmetrical relationships, such as those between parents and children or teachers and learners, so that the semantic potential contained in the 'gestural interactions' is already available in the form of identical symbolic meanings, at least for the adults of reference, and there is the possibility of a common experience of mutual learning. More problematic is, on the phylogenetic level, the explanation of how the construction of a rule takes place *ab origine*, as happened in the *statu nascendi* of the proto-social semantic conventions. However in these writings Habermas does not yet present the problem with regard to the elaboration of Mead. Moreover, Habermas criticises Mead again, using Durkheim, for the lack of difference between 'semantic conventions' and 'social conventions', between the plan of understanding and the plan of action, or rather, the plan for 'rule-driven behavior'. Learning to agree about meanings – in such a way that the addressees can judge, according to criteria of intersubjective validity, whether in a given context the term is correctly used or not – does not imply a transformation on a symbolic basis of the child's behavioral patterns and instinctual dispositions.

In the German version, extended and completely revised, with reference to Mead, Habermas states that the sociological paradigm of the 'roles of play' – underlying the theory of action, in particular in the Parsonian version – would have neglected the ontogenetic dimension of relational competences:

> Ironically, social role theory has determined the conception and approaches to socialization research much more than any other field of sociological research, without motivating, however, to undertake a serious study of the acquisition of competing roles. The proposal made by Mead to distinguish in logico-evolutionary terms between *play* and *game* has been repeated frequently, but it has never systematically become the starting point for a structural analysis of the evolutionary levels of action capacity and interaction systems (1974c: 188).

In the development of the logical-evolutive theory of cognitive, linguistic and motivational competences, Habermas employs Mead under the two usual aspects. In the analysis of the 'taking the attitude of the other', as a learning mechanism of the whole system of the roles of first, second and third person, and in the more specific examination of the passage from symbolically mediated interaction to normatively guided interaction.

In *Einleitung: Historischer Materialismus und die Entwicklung normativer Strukturen* (1975) we find another piece of the Habermasian reconstruction of Mead's thought directly employed in theory of ontogenetic development. Once we suppose that the semantic conventions that regulate the complementary relationships between adults and children have been formed, it is necessary to explain how it is possible that the behavioral dispositions and models become not only semantically accessible but also normatively binding. Habermas explains this by introducing the connection between the system of 'speakers' perspectives' and the 'observer's perspective' at the level of action, which extends to a 'social world' of norms and values that legitimately regulate relations. This happens with the gradual socio-cognitive and moral appropriation of the objectively given structure of the 'roles'. In the reconstruction of the normative attitude, once again, Habermas uses Mead's description of the process of 'decentralization' in the conception of the infantile world, with the acquisition of the 'concrete primary roles' – first of all, the sexual and generational ones – with the assumption of the attitude of the 'significant others' (stage 3) through the privileged channel of the 'role-plays' (play) and, then, the acquisition of the 'system of roles', with the assumption of the attitude of the 'generalized other' (stage 4), through which the child internalizes the 'general will' of the group of belonging in an 'organized game' (game). The concept of 'generalized behavioral model' refers to the assumption of the attitude of 'all the members' of the social group (N). In addition to the generalization of expectations that regulate the relationship between the significant other (B), the child (A) assumes the attitude that a member of the group could express about each and both of them. At this point, he is able to understand that the interactions between him and the other

significant ones have always been directed prescriptively by a 'system of roles', whose strength lies not in the authority of the parental figures but in the 'will of the social group' – an instance, largely 'independent', 'external' and 'constricting' with respect to the normative provisions of the specific persons of reference. A 'social world' of interpersonal interactions guided by norms and values detaches itself from the cultural background taken for granted in the world of children's life. The passage from symbolically mediated interaction to normatively regulated interaction produces, at the same time, the construction of a system of social roles and the restructuring of the reasons for action with the redefinition of personal identity. Habermas connotes the personal identity of the child as 'sociocentric':

> the unity of the person, which is constructed by way of intersubjectively recognized self-identification (analyzed by G. H. Mead), is based on belonging to, and demarcating oneself from, the symbolic reality of a group, and on the possibility of locating oneself in it. The unity of the person is formed through internalization of roles that are originally attached to concrete reference persons and later detached from them – primarily the generation and sex roles that determine the structure of the family. This role identity, centered on sex and age and integrated with the child's own body image, becomes more abstract and, at the same time, more individual to the degree that the young child appropriates extra-familial role systems up to and including the political order, which is interpreted and justified by a complex tradition (1979[1975a]: 109).

An equivalent examination of the genesis and development of conventional identity can be found in the re-elaboration of the speech that Habermas gave on 19 January 1974 on the occasion of the award of the *Hegel-Preis* assigned to him by the city of Stuttgart. There is no trace of such reference, however, in 'On Social Identity' (1974) based on the first version rather than on the final text included in the book *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*. As we have already seen in his previous writings, Habermas reinterprets the phenomenology of Hegel's spirit through Mead – a very pertinent parallel when one considers that the American pragmatist was also a disciple of Josiah Royce, whose idealistic philosophy emphasized the social nature of self (1971d).

In the essay *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*, the result of the reworking of the text presented at the Congress of the International Hegel-Vereinigung (Stuttgart, May 1975), Habermas expanded the interest in *Mind, Self and Society* also with respect to phylogenetic development. Considering the transition from gestural to symbolic language, he introduced the familiarisation of the male – and the genesis of parental role structures –

as the distinction between the animal and human worlds (1979[1975b]: 136). In the *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Habermas includes *Intention, Konvention und sprachliche Interaktion* (1976), an essay located within the philosophy of action, focuses on the validity of social norms and examines the conceptual interconnections between rules, conventions and intentionality. After having introduced the distinction between instrumental and communicative action, he deepened the link between intentionality and normative orientation, referring again to Mead for the analysis of the norms in terms of expectations others have about our behavior according to the situation-specific expectations to which the members of his social group are entitled. In fact, the concept of a behavioral expectation contains not only the sense of a prediction, but also the normative sense that members of a social group are mutually entitled to expect certain types of behavior from one another (2001[1976]). The last of the essays we are examining is *Rekonstruktive vs. verstehende Sozialwissenschaften*, published in *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (1983) but dating back to March 1980, when Habermas presented it at the Congress 'Morality and the Social Sciences' in Berkeley. The analytical construction of the general theory of society is now completed in all its fundamental aspects, and the outline of what interests Habermas of Mead's Symbolic Interactionism is also more precise. This is made explicit in the description of the three functions of language with respect to the symbolic reproduction of the three fundamental components of the lifeworld:

> (a) that of reproducing culture and keeping traditions alive (this is the perspective from which Gadamer developed his philosophical hermeneutics), (b) that of social integration or the coordination of the plans of different actors in social interaction (my theory of communicative action was developed from this perspective), and (c) that of socialization or the cultural interpretation of needs (this was the perspective from which Mead developed his social psychology). This is what the threefold nexus between utterance and world looks like when it is viewed […] *intentione obliqua*, from the perspective of the lifeworld, or against the background of the shared assumptions and practices in which every communication is inconspicuously embedded from the outset (1990[1980]: 25).

Considering Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, however, Habermas emphasized the influence of Mead's interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason on American pragmatism*, in support of a communication ethic that links the principle of universalisation of interests to the procedural ideal of rational discourse: 'When […] Kohlberg points to "ideal role-taking" as an "appropriate procedure" for moral-practical

decisions, he is being guided by genuine Kantian intuitions that have been reinterpreted from the pragmatist point of view by Peirce and Mead to mean participation in a "universal discourse'" (Habermas 1990[1980]: 36).

4. Conclusion

The comparison with Mead's work has accompanied the entire scientific path of Habermas, from the first period in which he reflected on the methodological dualism of social sciences, to the constitution of a genetic-reconstructive model. The *Theory of Communicative Action* represents a first point of arrival but does not exhaust the interest of the German scholar. As is well known, Habermas places Mead within the framework of the general theory of society and uses it to reconstruct the process of symbolic reproduction of a component of the lifeworld: the system of personality. This would be the main contribution of Meadian thought to Habermas' elaboration:

> in the tradition stemming from Mead, social theory is based on a concept of the lifeworld reduced to the aspect of the socialization of individuals. Representatives of Symbolic Interactionism, such as Herbert Blumer, A. M. Rose, Anselm Strauss, or R H. Turner, conceive of the lifeworld as the sociocultural milieu of communicative action represented as role playing, role taking, role defining, and the like. Culture and society enter into consideration only as media for the self-formative processes in which actors ace involved their whole lives long. It is only consistent when the theory of society shrinks down then to social psychology (1984[1981]: 140).

However, he does not modify either the interpretation or the selective use of his thought. On the level of the conceptions of action Mead's social psychology is understood as a 'theory of communicative action' that anticipates the paradigm shift from the 'philosophy of consciousness' to that of language (Habermas, 1984[1981]: 86, 390). Communication is examined by Mead as a form of reciprocal interaction oriented by the meanings that the actors attribute to their behaviors. On a methodological level, Mead's evolutionary theory of interaction structures is considered as a good example of 'reconstructive science' in the tradition of the great classics of social thought (Habermas, 1984[1981]: 95, 399). The fifth chapter 'The Paradigm Shift in Mead and Durkheim: From Purposive Activity to Communicative Action' is the main reference text. Compared to the past, however, Habermas examines in greater depth the passages of *Mind, Self and Society* about the phylogenesis of the human species and ontogenesis of the person. Both the criticism of Morris and the parallel with Wittgenstein's investigations of the

'concept of a rule' and the connection between identical meanings and intersubjective validity are identical. But the analysis of the genesis of the symbolically mediated interactions, starting from the subhuman interaction guided by instinct and mediated by conversation of gestures, is systematized and expanded both on the level of the categorical reconstruction of the logic of development (general interpretations) and in the descriptions and causal explanations of the dynamics of development (initial empirical conditions). Moreover, Habermas introduces, for the first time, on a phylogenetic level, the criticism of Mead inspired by the Durkheimian' sociology of religion, regarding the passage from symbolically mediated interaction to that regulated by norms, that is, the analysis of the prelinguistic foundations of social bonds. The analysis of the passage from symbolically mediated interaction to normative action is also deepened, through the internalization of particular primary roles (play) and of the system of general roles (game). Finally, Habermas uses Mead for the analysis of the process of complementary construction of the social and subjective world, with the development of the 'identity of roles' and 'ego identity' (cfr. Corchia, 2012).

On a philological level, Habermas extended his interest to other writings by Mead included in *On Social Psychology* (1956), edited by Anselm L. Strauss, *Selected Writings* (1964), edited by Andrew J. Reck, and *Philosophie der Sozialität* (1969), edited by Hansfried Kellner, in which extracts of *Philosophy of the Act* and *Philosophy of the Present* were translated. Finally, the German scholar began to deal with studies produced within the Max Planck Institut, with American developmental psychology, whose exponents (Kohlberg, Flavell, Sellman, Youniss, Turiel et al.) were regular guests in Starnberg, and with other monographic works of critical literature on the thought of Mead, in particular by Hans Joas (*Praktische Intersubjektivität*, 1980; *Mead: A Contemporary Reexamination of His Thought*, 1985), David Miller (*G. H. Mead: Self, Language, and the World*, 1980) and some progress in Norman K. Denzin's research (*Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology*, 1971).

Habermas' interest in Mead is expressed on the level of the foundation of the ethics of discourse, starting from the idea of an ideal communication community. As we have seen, this is a comparison already present in the writings of the seventies and which finds its first elaboration in the *Theory of communicative action* (1985[1981]). Habermas incorporates Mead's reflections on morality from two points of view. On the one hand, at the philosophical level of the theory of argumentation, with the 'program of foundation' of moral norms and principles – abstract and universal (discourse ethics). On the other hand, at the reconstructive level in which he interweaves the hypothetical ex post reconstructions of the logic of development (general interpretations) and the causal description and explanations of the dynamics of development

(initial conditions). This line of research on morality and ethics will be widely developed in numerous essays of the eighties (cfr. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 1990; *Justification and Application*, 1993) and taken up sporadically in other works in the following two decades. Habermas also follows Mead in the evolutionary analysis of the normative systems of modern States, in which the principles of the formation of democratic sovereignty and universal legal principles are institutionalized, although he does present some criticism of the idealism of the Meadian theory of society, only focused on the communicative rationalization of the lifeworld (1985[1981], 1986, 1989). In this period Habermas publishes *Individuierung durch Vergesellschaftung. Zu G.H. Meads Theorie der Subjektivität*, the text of his lecture at the 18th World Congress for Philosophy, held in Brighton, from 21 to 27 August 1988. This is the essay in which the analysis of Mead's work by Habermas is most complete at the level of the history of ideas, both from the historiographical point of view of the intellectual path, from the very beginning of the works of his youth, and from the systematic point of view of the placement of Meadian thought in the context of the European philosophical reflection on the logical, social and psychic theme of the complementary genesis and development of identity and intersubjectivity, with individualisation on the one hand, and socialization on the other hand (1992[1988]). Moreover, already from the reading *Die Einheit der Vernunft in der Vielheit ihrer Stimmen*, given at the 14th German Congress for Philosophy "Unity and Multiplicity" held in Giessen (September 21-26, 1987), Habermas begins a wider reception of American pragmatism, from Peirce, Dewey, James Mead and Royce to Rorty, Putnam and Brandom, in an investigation into the procedural conditions of a post-metaphysical conception of reason, whose applications have opened the way to intersubjective and universal approaches not only in terms of moral and political philosophy but also of epistemology (cfr. *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 1992; *On the pragmatics of communication*, 1998; *Truth and Justification*, 2003).

These are the aspects examined by the critical literature on Mead's Habermasian interpretation. We note that there are not many monographic studies (Corchia, 2016), but excellent papers: Aboulafia (1986, 1995); Joas (1986); Antonio (1989); Shalin (1992); Rosati (1994); Dews P. von, (1995); Strydom (2001); Carreira Da Silva (2006, 2007); Bunchafft (2014); Rehberg (2016). From a larger perspective, on the link between Habermas and American pragmatism, the monographic issue of 'Symbolic Interaction' (Vol. 15, no. 3, 1992) is very interesting, with essays by Dmitri Shalin, Hans Joas, Robert Antonio and Douglas Kellner, David Sciulli, Gisela J. Hinkle and Eugene Halton. Their analysis would require another long essay. However, through the philological reconstruction conducted in our research, we have

now shown that the results of those critical analyses can also be extended to the Habermas' work until 1980.

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