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The Potential of “Frankfurtianess” of Habermas in Organizational Studies

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Abstract

This essay reflects on the convergence between Jürgen Habermas’ work and the theoretical framework put forward by the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, arguing in favor of the characteristics of the Frankfurt school in Habermas and pointing out research possibilities in the field of Organizational Studies (OS). We discuss the essential theoretical aspects of the work by Horkheimer (1975) “Traditional and Critical Theory,” and produce a critique on the use of generational chronology as the main criterion for understanding the intellectual movement of the Frankfurt School. The methodology is based on the critique of the interpretation using the philosophical hermeneutics (RICOEUR, 1990) and observes the propositional nature of an interpretation offered in theoretical essays (MENEGUETTI, 2011). To support the provocative proposition of this work, we establish a dialogue with authors such as Bottomore (2001), Freitag (2004), Nobre (2004), and Melo (2013) discussing a non-generational characterization of the Frankfurt School’s members and the proximity of Habermas in relation to the pioneer works on the Critical Theory. We believe that (i) the re-reading of the emancipatory purpose (HABERMAS, 2002); (ii) the deconstruction of the impartiality of the scientific knowledge (HABERMAS, 1987); (iii) and the incorporation of the philosophy of language into the Frankfurtian social criticism (HABERMAS, 2012) are important contributions of Habermas to the Frankfurt’s critical theory. As for a proposal for the field of organizational studies, this essay concludes that recognizing Habermas as a Critical Theory scholar of the Frankfurt School may constitute a new research agenda for the field. The contribution of this essay lies in helping researchers in the field of Organizational Studies to understand Habermas’ work differently and not as a non-critical or utopian production. In this perspective, it is clear that Habermas’ intellectual production is politically engaged in contemporary social problems, which is a dimension neglected by the researchers of the field of Organizational Studies in Brazil.

Keywords: Organizational Studies. Habermas. Critical Theory. Frankfurt School.

O potencial da frankfurtianidade de Habermas em estudos organizacionais

Resumo

O objetivo deste ensaio é argumentar em favor da *frankfurtianidade* de Jürgen Habermas, isto é, estudar os pontos de convergência de sua obra em relação ao projeto teórico do Instituto de Pesquisa Social de Frankfurt e, a partir dessa ênfase, apontar novas possibilidades de pesquisa no campo de Estudos Organizacionais (EO). Para isso, refletimos sobre aspectos teóricos essenciais do ensaio “Teoria tradicional e teoria crítica” (HORKHEIMER, 1975) e elaboramos uma crítica aos intérpretes que utilizam a cronologia geracional como principal critério para a compreensão de diferenças no movimento intelectual da Escola de Frankfurt. Metodologicamente, inspiramo-nos na proposta de crítica à interpretação por meio da hermenêutica filosófica (RICOEUR, 1990) e na natureza propositiva de interpretação de um ensaio teórico (MENEGUETTI, 2011). Para sustentar a proposição expressa de forma provocativa no título deste artigo, dialogamos com comentadores (BOTTOMORE, 2001; FREITAG, 2004; NOBRE, 2004; MELO, 2013), a fim de propor uma caracterização não geracional de seus membros e a proximidade de Habermas em relação ao marco fundador da Teoria Crítica. Nesse sentido, acreditamos que (a) a releitura da intenção emancipadora (HABERMAS, 2002), (b) a desconstrução da isenção do conhecimento científico (HABERMAS, 1987) e (c) a incorporação da filosofia da linguagem à crítica social frankfurtiana (HABERMAS, 2012) são contribuições importantes de sua obra à Teoria Crítica de Frankfurt. Como proposição para a área de EO, em nossas considerações finais argumentamos que a recolocação do autor no posto de genuíno teórico crítico da Escola de Frankfurt pode constituir uma nova agenda de pesquisa para o campo. Acreditamos que nosso esforço pode auxiliar pesquisadores da área de EO a compreender a obra de Habermas a partir de uma via que os afasta da armadilha de considerá-lo um teórico não crítico e/ou utópico. Sob esse enfoque, torna-se evidente sua produção intelectual politicamente engajada nos problemas sociais contemporâneos – dimensão que vem sendo negligenciada pelos pesquisadores do campo de EO no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Estudos organizacionais. Habermas. Teoria crítica. Escola de Frankfurt.

El potencial de la frankfurtianidad de Habermas en estudios organizacionales

Resumen

El objetivo de este ensayo teórico es argumentar a favor de la *frankfurtianidad* de Habermas, es decir, ensayar sobre los puntos de convergencia de su obra en relación al proyecto teórico del Instituto de Investigación Social de Frankfurt y, a partir de este énfasis, apunte nuevas posibilidades de investigación en el campo de Estudios Organizacionales (EOs). Para ello, reflexionamos sobre aspectos teóricos esenciales de la obra Teoría Tradicional y Teoría Crítica (HORKHEIMER, 1975) y ensayamos una crítica a los intérpretes que se utilizan de la cronología generacional como el principal criterio para la comprensión del movimiento intelectual de la Escuela de Frankfurt. Metodológicamente, nos inspira en la propuesta de crítica a la interpretación a través de la Hermenéutica Filosófica (RICOEUR, 1990) y en la naturaleza propositiva de interpretación de un ensayo teórico (MENEGUETTI, 2011). Para sustentar la proposición expresa de forma provocativa en el título de este trabajo, dialogamos con comentaristas (BOTTOMORE, 2001; FREITAG, 2004; NOBRE, 2004; MELO, 2013) a fin de proponer una. La caracterización no-generacional de sus miembros y la proximidad de Habermas en relación al marco fundador de la Teoría Crítica de 1937. En este sentido, creemos que (i) la lectura de la intención emancipadora (HABERMAS, 2002); (ii) la desconstrucción de la exención del conocimiento científico (HABERMAS, 1987); y (iii) la incorporación de la filosofía del lenguaje a la crítica frankfurtiana (HABERMAS, 2012) son contribuciones importantes de su obra a la Teoría Crítica de Frankfurt. Como proposición para el área de EOs, en nuestras consideraciones finales argumentamos que la re-colocación del autor en el puesto de genuíno teórico crítico de la Escuela de Frankfurt puede constituir una nueva agenda de investigación para el campo. Creemos que nuestro esfuerzo puede ayudar a investigadores del área de EOs a comprender la obra de Habermas a partir de una vía que los aleja de la trampa de considerarlo un teórico no crítico y/o utópico. Bajo este enfoque se hace evidente su producción intelectual políticamente comprometida en los problemas sociales contemporáneos – dimensión que viene siendo escudada por los investigadores del campo de EOs en Brasil.

Palabras clave: Estudios organizacionales. Teoría crítica. Habermas. Escuela de Frankfurt.

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INTRODUCTION

The Critical Theory of Frankfurt School has influenced several generations of thinkers of the 20th century to promote an emancipatory social science. This school of thought was developed from the essay “Traditional theory and critical theory” (HORKHEIMER, 1975). Its genesis is linked to the critical analysis based on Marx, which sought to warn about contradictions that, considered its *modus operandi*, capitalism has established particularly in the 20th century.

In the field of Organisational Studies (OS), many authors have seized critical aspects of the reflections of philosophical and sociological order of the Frankfurt School (FARIA, 2009; PAULA, 2008; MOTTA, 2014). This approximation is given especially in the sense of seeking an analytical and conceptual basis for the understanding of the contradictions of social and historical order contextualized in the scope of organisations. Among the inspirations of this perspective and its use in OS is the concern with the emancipation of a human being conceived as a mere productive resource for organisations (FORESTER, 1994; VIZEU, 2005; PAULA, 2008; FARIA, 2009), which enables the subjects to reflect on their own lives in the context of capitalism (PAULA, 2013).

In a certain sense, the assessment of the Critical Theory in OS has been (and continues to be) a work of resistance to the hegemony of the positivist conception of science in this field of studies. In Brazil, where the OS is bound mainly to the large area of Management, the academic knowledge is outlined from basic functionalist assumptions, which impinge a conception of society tending towards balance and harmony, and where the notion of the process is ahistorical (VIZEU, 2010). In the same way, such a functionalist conception is responsible for the disciplinarianisation of the life in organisations from an economic rationality (PAULA, 2008), that is, based primarily on capitalist interests and on the belief that organisations are omnipotent and sacred entities (VIZEU and MATITZ, 2013). It is against this hegemonic vision in the area of OS that the critical perspective is being contested.

In relation to the advancement of the Critical Theory in OS, one of the challenges is precisely to understand all the possibilities of this intellectual movement offers to researchers of organisations (FARIA, 2009). This means, first of all, knowing exactly the work of the authors of the Frankfurt School, understanding their place and their contribution to the intellectual project inaugurated by this movement. In the same way, it is important to check how the broad proposal of the Critical Theory can help rebuild the field of OS, in view of its functionalist inheritance and the difficulty still present to untangle the bonds of the positivist doctrine.

Faced with this challenge, we found a particular issue that should be reflected by the academic environment. It corresponds to the differentiation in terms of the purpose of the authors of the Frankfurt School from the framework in different generations. According to some interpreters, this criterion is significant to distance authors from different generations in relation to the emancipatory project initiated by the movement of Frankfurt from the work of Horkheimer (1975). This is the case of the understanding of authors such as Faria (2009), Nobre (2004), Aragão (1997), among others. These authors argue that there is a significant gap in terms of purpose among the first, second and third generation of authors of the Frankfurt School. It means, the generational distancing is perceived especially regarding the main identification of their proposals in relation to the pillars mentioned in the text that represent the scholars of the movement as its milestone, the essay “Traditional theory and critical theory” (HORKHEIMER, 1975), originally published in 1937. It should be noted that behind the generational distinction of Frankfurt lies the idea that the first generation, is more Frankfurtian than the others.

On this positioning on the Brazilian OSs, stands the vision of Faria (2009), who suggests that only the works in OS grounded on the writings of authors of the first generation can be legitimately considered Frankfurtian. In this sense, Faria (2009) understood that authors like Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth would be less Frankfurtian, for being distant, in his view, from the Marxist thesis, despite the controversy surrounding the association of the Frankfurt movement to Marxism (or to any type of Marxism).

Even without the intention of disassociating the work of Habermas from the movement of the Frankfurt School, we problematise the discourse of Faria (2009) and other researchers of OS – demonstrated by Motta’s research (2014) - which alienate the work of Habermas from the theoretical project presented by Horkheimer (1975). On account of this, we propose this theoretical essay, a reflection on the *Frankfurtianess* of Habermas from another path of interpretation than that of the generational concept. From the suspension of the criterion of generational distancing, we aspire to reflect on certain aspects of the work of Habermas not always exploited in OS. At this point, like Bottomore (2001), we consider that the division of members through generations, although didactic, induces to the mistake of neglecting that the interdisciplinary thinking around the

project of Horkheimer (1975) does not always mean full concordance among the Frankfurtians in relation to the diagnosis of society, even among the founding members or of the first generation. Disregarding this ends up contributing to overvaluing generational borders at the expense of their proximity to each one of those theoreticians in relation to the foundations of the theoretical project of the Critical Theory enunciated in 1937.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to argue in favour of the Frankfurtianess of Habermas, i.e., his proximity to the theoretical project of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and appoint possibilities of advances in the articulation of their ideas in the field of OS from this emphasis. For this reason, we have pieced our essay redeeming the historical context that led to the foundation of the institute, and we reflect on the essential aspects of the Critical Theory contained in its founding milestone (ASSOUN, 1991) and how these are evidenced in the works of Habermas.

Methodologically, this study is characterized as a theoretical essay in the philosophical sense of the term, by which the essayist approaches the object by suspending its identity, in search of freeing the dimensions suppressed by the reification of its identity determined by socio-historical conditions (MENEGHETTI, 2011). In this sense, epistemologically, we assume the posture of critical hermeneutics (RICOEUR, 1990), where the argument is built taking into account the relativisation of multiple conceptions on the object in conjunction with the full awareness of the contradictions of the material world. Thus, this conception of essay “requires subjects, essayist and reader, able to assess that the understanding of reality also occurs in other ways” (MENEGHETTI, 2011, p. 321). As reminded by Vizeu, Macadar and Graeml (2016), the theoretical essay thus conceived is still perceived as limited by researchers from the field of management. It is due to the heritage of the founding scientific positivism of this field in Brazil, which seeks the scientific truth supported by formal protocols in the production of hypothetical-deductive knowledge.

Precisely in opposition to this academic stance is that this essay is presented as an attempt to overcome a vision that seems to us to be crystallized or, at least, slightly unclear about what it means to be a genuine Frankfurtian. Thus, our gaze is on the possibility of developing a reading which opens the horizon of a new understanding in the area of OS, allowing for the recovery of the Frankfurtianess of Habermas, sometimes considered as detached from the Critical Theory movement.

HISTORICAL MILESTONE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CRITICAL THEORY

In accordance with the revisionists, the emergence of the Critical Theory is marked by the collapse of the enlightenment project in modernity and by the tension of the social crisis of late capitalism. In this context, the illuminist thought has been useful for the construction of modern society, characterized by a totalitarian project of mass domination (HORKHEIMER, 1975). This process is marked especially by two factors: on the one hand, by the emergence of a strong communist State and willing to promote its expansion based on a totalitarian State and founded on orthodox Marxism (BOTTOMORE, 2001); on the other hand, nationalist discourses spread throughout capitalist Europe, creating an unstable scenario and preventing the peaceful arrangement among the powers that controlled the forces of production and where the primitive accumulation of the oligopolistic capital was concentrated. The historical developments of this instability culminated in the Third Reich in Germany, in the Italian Fascism and in the Soviet communist dictatorship headed by Lenin. The construction of these totalitarian regimes reveals that the enlightenment promise of human prosperity by reason had failed (ADORNO and HORKHEIMER, 1975) and that the social thinking needed a new reference to continue the project of modernity.

In the context of the early 20th century, Sociology was impregnated of positivist bias. There was a predomination of theoretical perspectives derived from the functionalist approach and inappropriate admissions of methods that represented the extension of the cartesian science outlined under the inspiration of the biological and exact sciences (HORKHEIMER, 1975). In contrast, there were orthodox Marxist intellectuals who supported the Soviet regime, and also neomarxist theorists who sought interdisciplinary dialogs, whose analyses went beyond the structuralist Marxism (NOBRE, 2004).

Dialoguing with cultural and sociological theories and psychoanalysis (BOTTOMORE, 2001), some social researchers tried to rethink some of the ideas of the Marxist criticism (MELO, 2013). This is due to the fact that, in spite of the bourgeois ideology having been unravelled through the contradictions of the *modus operandi* of the system of capitalist production, the awareness of the relationship of domination of the class had not culminated in the proletarian revolution. These researchers saw that

the Manichaeism of certain Marxists kept them tied to economic analyses, making them obsessed by the exclusivity of the paradigm of labour as a means for the structural change of society (MELO, 2013).

Based on this social and political context, during 1923, the “Week of Marxist Studies” was organized in Frankfurt (ASSOUN, 1991; FREITAG, 2004). This event sought to discuss the paths of orthodox Marxism contrasting interpretations that gave support to the Soviet Marxism. Months later, in that same year, beside Felix Weil and Friedrich Pollock, Max Horkheimer founded The Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt (BOTTOMORE, 2001). That institute would be considered later one of the largest granaries of intellectuals of Europe – from where the proposal of a critical theory of society emerged.

The first members of the institute developed interdisciplinary and to large extent heterogeneous studies, whereby it is not correct to affirm that this initial group maintained uniqueness in their visions (BOTTOMORE, 2001; FREITAG, 2004; NOBRE, 2004; MELO, 2013). The fact is that the first generation of intellectuals of Frankfurt goes far beyond Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse – the 3 most famous authors of this movement (FREITAG, 2004). This initial group counted on other intellectuals, such as Eric Fromm, Felix Weil, Friedrich Pollock, Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Henryk Grossman, Arkadij Gurland and Walter Benjamin – this latter participating as a member of the outer circle of the institute (BOTTOMORE, 2001).

From this, many commentators believe that the Frankfurt School cannot be reduced to an apparent hegemony of thought among members belonging to the same generation (FREITAG, 2004; WIGGERSHAUS, 2002); instead, it should be considered as a set of efforts of heterogeneous theoretical nature of authors who maintained an interdisciplinary posture around a common academic project (BOTTOMORE, 2001). In this sense, it is important to consider that, for the majority of the commentators of this movement, the foundations of the Critical Theory are arranged in the seminal essay “Traditional theory and critical theory” (HORKHEIMER, 1975), originally published in 1937. Its manuscript is considered the starting point of the Frankfurt School (FREITAG, 2004; ARAGÃO, 1997; ASSOUN, 1991). It was around this project that some intellectuals have dedicated their work and to these we may refer to as representatives of the critical Frankfurtian thinking.

Thus, without wishing to constitute an absolute exposure on grounds or even an exhaustive revisional incursion, the following is a systematisation of essential points about the proposal of the Critical Theory of Frankfurt School, given from our own interpretation of the original and the reading of some commentators articulated in this essay. In fact, when it comes to revisions on the Frankfurt movement, there is no consensual view or even someone who holds a definitive interpretation of what represents the essence of this school of thought. Therefore, accepting that there are different views – and interpretations – on this intellectual movement means accepting the proposal for the construction of critical thinking as something not centred on the ties of essentialism common to the single and auto erected thought of a traditional theory in Social Sciences. About this perspective, Horkheimer (1975) himself, assumes a false pretence to seek the absolute truth of the social facts. Our effort in pointing out the foundations of the Frankfurt School is merely an attempt to recover – i.e., an essay on the conception assumed herein (MENEGHETTI, 2011) –, from the point of view of the commentators selected, a perspective on the proposal of the Critical Theory as a theoretical project that equips for the social change.

Although grounded on the critical stance and on the search for emancipation inspired by Karl Marx¹, the Critical Theory of Frankfurt offers its own essence, marked by the interdisciplinarity of those involved in its project (FREITAG, 2004). THEN, we indicated these points from principles that we consider represent a synthesis of the theoretical project proposed by Horkheimer.

The Critical Theory is Emancipatory

In accordance with the commentators, the genesis of the Critical Theory of Frankfurt is found in the inspiration for the critical posture coined by Marx in view of the contradictions of the bourgeois society and in the intention to promote the awareness of society regarding this situation (MELO, 2013). However, unlike other emancipatory conceptions, the Critical Theory refuses to prescribe an ideal societal structure, using only a reflection that aims to reduce the contradictions of society by the critical *praxis*. Certainly, there is a strong relationship between such a non-prescriptive attitude and the scepticism of those thinkers in relation to totalitarian States that emerged at the time, based on governments built on the promises of idealized societies.

¹ The conception of Marx about emancipation can make distinctions in relation to that of the authors of Frankfurt. Due to the limited space in this article, we restricted ourselves to pointing out this difference, without indicating the differences in epistemological nature. For an in-depth discussion, we suggest the reading of Melo (2013).

Thus, the aim of the institute was to develop a method of thinking that equips the social action nourished by the desire for emancipation (ARAGÃO, 1997), in order to allow a new social conscience, able to overcome the obstacles that hinder the achievement of what, in potential, there is best in society (NOBRE, 2004). In other words, for Horkheimer (1975), the exposure of the mechanisms of domination by means of critical reflection has no other purpose than to stimulate social transformation to reduce the contradictions of modern society.

The Critical Theory is Eclectic and Interdisciplinary

This is perhaps the most striking feature of the Frankfurt School, which allowed them to theorise on issues little or hardly addressed by orthodox Marxism (MELO, 2013). Having as its horizon the intent of emancipation, the intellectual plurality of the Frankfurtians was sought as a response to the criticisms of a Marxist orthodoxy, which was established after the Russian Revolution (ASSOUN, 1991; FREITAG, 2004). Among the influences that formed the eclecticism in the foundation of the Critical Theory are the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and the phenomenology of Friedrich Nietzsche (BOTTOMORE, 2001), 2 approaches that allowed certain intellectual cohesion between the more famous authors of the Frankfurt School. In accordance with Nobre (2004), it was precisely this interdisciplinary debate around the Marxist thesis, undertaken by intellectuals with different backgrounds, which allowed Horkheimer to formulate the diagnosis of his time and allowed the construction of the critical theoretical tradition in Frankfurt. According to the commentators of the movement, the analytical wealth derived from this interdisciplinarity is integrated with the theoretical legacy of Marx, even though this has entailed pointing to directions contrary to some of the Marxist thesis (MELO, 2013; FREITAG, 2004; BOTTOMORE, 2001).

The Critical Theory does Not Provide a Finished Diagnosis

For Melo (2013), the biggest challenge of the Critical Theory rests upon the need for constant renewal of their diagnoses, according to the new (re)configurations of capitalism, also analyzing their own formulations critically regarding the new obstacles to emancipation or for their disencumbrance. Therefore, an important aspect of the Critical Theory is its unfinished character (NOBRE, 2004), which is a theoretical perspective continually renewed and put to the test of history, assuming, therefore, the same posture adopted by Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) in relation to Marxism. In this sense, the Critical Theory consists in a dual exercise to take the critical social thinking as a reference in the search for emancipation, updating it every moment in history (NOBRE, 2004). Such an exercise is not only characteristic of the critical posture of Frankfurtian theorists, but mainly of their self-criticism; in this sense, self-reflection is a philosophical orientation that “is determined by an emancipatory interest of knowledge” (HABERMAS, 1987, p. 140). According to some commentators, this unfinished condition and self-criticism has been responsible for conducting the Critical Theory to new interpretations about the relationship between capital and labour, without losing sight of the intentions of the critical social thinking (MELO, 2013).

In this way, the Critical Theory aims to add new data and new ideas to the theoretical body already elaborated, “relating it always to the knowledge that has been acquired on man and nature in that historic moment” (FREITAG, 2004, p. 39). Thus, it is a project with clear foundations, but of unfinished diagnosis, always challenged by the complexities of social sciences and humanities revealed by the historical movement and seeking to identify the obstacles to emancipation and their transposition by means of the critical praxis. Based on these elements we question the interpretation of many commentators of the Frankfurt School about the significant distinction between generations of Frankfurtians. We present our criticism below.

PROBLEMATIZING THE CLASSIFICATION FOR GENERATIONS

Some commentators are more emphatic than others on interpreting the legacy of the Frankfurt School from the generational differentiation. In these analyses, walls seem to have been erected between the generations, inducing the idea that the first generation made a truly Critical Theory while the theorists that followed at the institute after the departure of the founding members were unable to give continuity to the project initiated by Horkheimer and his closest collaborators. However, we follow an interpretation which considers that, even though didactic for the historical understanding of the movement, this generational distinction is not always able to indicate the nuances of the works of researchers in relation to the guiding foundations launched by Horkheimer in his seminal text (HORKHEIMER, 1975).

It is clear that, initially, the criterion of distinction for generations was not a very arbitrary way of establishing a divisional milestone among the authors from 1969, the year of Adorno's death, the last director of the institute who was part of Horkheimer's group during the 1930s, the period of demarcation of the Critical Theory (WIGGERSHAUS, 2002). Note, then, that originally the commentators had no pretence of establishing the *generations* as the definitive criterion for the construction of the narrative of the Frankfurt School; this only seemed to be a possible anchor to structure the narrative of the trajectory of the institute. It is also worth noting that the generational distinction is a concern of the commentators of the movement, not of its members. Beyond orthodoxies about the Frankfurtian thought we also acknowledge that the classification by generations helps the first time reader, by providing a didactic form of understanding the development of this dense theoretical body. However, the problem of adopting this perspective consists in not seeing nuances of intellectual production associated with this movement, which go beyond the purely chronological dimension. As it is presented by certain commentators, we believe that the classification per generation assumes a purely temporal demarcation, which suppresses important aspects of convergence between the intellectuals who constructed a theoretical framework around the project that has not been broken by time.

In Brazil, the demarcation between generations of Frankfurtian authors is adopted by many social researchers and in the area of OS, like Faria (2009), Paula (2008), Aragão (1997), Freitag (2004) and Nobre (2004). However, some of them are too emphatic to emphasize the differences between the generations, disregarding the common assumptions that bind them to the project of the Critical Theory. This is the case of Faria (2009), who, referring to the Frankfurtian critical theory, suggests that it is necessary to clarify to what generation it refers. He seems to consider only the first generation as genuinely the Critical Theory of Frankfurt, but not the second one, led by Habermas, or even the third generation, led by Axel Honneth. Faria (2009) sustains that after the first group have, the others have distanced of essential from the Critical Theory, among other reasons, because they deviate considerably from Marxism.

On the other hand, even if availing of the term *generations* to refer to the authors of Frankfurt, other commentators remind us that the differences between the intellectuals of this movement are not restricted to an intergenerational sphere. For example, Freitag (2004) and Nobre (2004) alert that the term *school* refers to the group of authors of Frankfurt can refer to a oneness that rarely existed between their representatives, independent of the generations to which they commonly refer. For Nobre (2004), different models of Critical Theory are observed among the Frankfurtian intellectuals, but all of these linked to the foundations that Horkheimer proposed and around which the theorists involved in this theoretical project orbited since it was presented to society in 1937. Nobre (2004, p. 21) argues that “resuming the original expression ‘Critical Theory’ means, among other things, to demarcate a theoretical field that values and encourages the plurality of critical models in its interior.” In fact, even recognizing the significant differences between the thought of critical theorists – regardless of the generation–, some commentators emphasize its convergence with the foundations established by Horkheimer (1975). On this point, Freitag (2004, p. 34) has the following understanding:

What characterizes the action [of the Frankfurtians] is their intellectual and critical capacity, their dialectic reflection, their dialogical competence or what Habermas would call “speech”, i.e., the radical questioning of the assumptions of each position and theorisation adopted.

Thus, when referring to the first generation as one that is closest to the project of the Critical Theory in relation to its successors, it incurs in an error similar to the one pointed out by Nobre (2004), when referring to Frankfurt as a school that brings full unity of thought. On using the criterion of generations exclusively to understand the trajectory of the institute, it must be admitted that it also presupposes a reference to other members who founded it and that these were not always fully engaged in Horkheimer's project (FREITAG, 2004; BOTTOMORE, 2001). Some of them took part in the foundation of the institute, i.e., they are members of the first generation, but never had strong ties with the Critical Theory project. In this situation, we can state Franz Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer in the field of Law, the sociologist Leo Lowenthal, the economist Henryk Grossman and the political scientist Arkadij Gurland, who, although they were founding members, they did not share with the same intensity the interest in the construction of an emancipatory critical social theory.

The differences among those intellectuals considered of first generation were notable until the end of their careers. In his letter to Adorno, Marcuse (ADORNO and MARCUSE, 1999) highlights discrepancies in theory and practice in relation to the political use of the “old purpose of the Institute”, with reference to the disagreements about the relationship between the production of knowledge for emancipatory social action and the revolutionary student movements of the 1960s. Thus, it is important to

consider that the intellectual Frankfurtian production is not characterized as such by the chronological proximity, but to set up an intellectual project that has as its horizon the criticism of the positivist manner of doing science in the field of Sociology.

Therefore, we argue that the narrative of the Critical Theory – not the chronology of the institute – may be a better reference to evaluate the closeness of the intellectuals, belonging to the institute, to the project of the School of Frankfurt. In other words, what makes the theorists genuinely Frankfurtian is not the fact of belonging to this or that generation, but their commitment with the essence of the project for the construction of a theory capable of explaining the contradictions of modern society, providing elements for social action in the promotion of emancipation and the end of social domination. In this intent, you must take into account the intellectual freedom without pretences of drawing up a final thesis, having as a guideline only the search for the potential of society for the scrutiny of its social contradictions.

It is in this sense that we understand that the work of Habermas constitutes a genuine critical theoretical effort, because it comprises precisely these elements. It is a debtor of the critical tradition and its emancipatory intention; it also reveals itself as an eclectic theoretical body, consisting of an original form and without failing to consider the whole path pursued by its Frankfurtian predecessors; finally, the theory of Habermas does not aim to be a definitive explanation of Modernity, but to be a theoretical reference for a possible way of overcoming their problems. Here are some points that underpin our understanding.

HABERMAS AND HIS PROJECT OF CRITICAL THEORY

As already announced, we uphold in this essay the thesis that, among the intellectuals studying at the Frankfurt School, those who propose to adopt the premises advertised by Horkheimer (1975) in his seminal essay on this approach made and make the Critical Theory, among them that of prescribing the need for social thinking to be based on the contrast to the relations of social domination historically imposed by capitalism in light of the criteria of interdisciplinarity and emancipation. And it is precisely in this sense that we argue in favour of Habermas’ contribution in the critical tradition of Frankfurt. We explore in this section some points of his work that reveal their convergence with the original theoretical project of the institute of Frankfurt.

First of all, as noted, the Critical Theory believes the emancipation from the production of a diagnosis of the present time, based on structural trends of the current model of social organisation (NOBRE, 2004). In this direction, Habermas continues the emancipatory project from the diagnosis of the structural problems of the society of his time. For this author, the meaning of emancipation for the construction of a society can continue to be built from the confluence between theory and social praxis for the elimination of the processes of domination from the diagnosis of society in late capitalism (HABERMAS, 2002).

In this sense, Habermas accompanies the premise that the production of material goods for the maintenance of human needs has not yet found ways, fair and rational, of distributing these goods and wealth among the society (FREITAG, 2004). It is important to remember – without going into the merits of the link or not between Habermas and Marxism – that the author proposes a reconstruction of historical materialism from its own constituent elements. Habermas (1987) argues that this approach is still alive and promising, as long as it is articulated with the advances of Social Sciences and with the updated diagnosis of the different readings on the late capitalism of the 20th century. However, as suggested by Ricoeur (1990), Habermas believes that this can only be achieved through the mediation of a category that contemplates the ideological dimension, given, in his theory, by an awareness of the mediation of an intersubjective reason and conceptually focused on the pragmatic philosophy of the language (ARAGÃO, 1997). However, for those who have him as an idealist, Habermas (2004) clarifies that the onto-epistemological influences of the Philosophy of Language and an interpretative Sociology in his work is conditional to the premise of the material conditions of social life. In other words, for the author, the material conditions of reproduction of social life, the reality of the world of life and the language interpenetrate indissolubly. It is worth mentioning that the world of life, for Habermas (2000), is symbolic and material.

Another important aspect refers to Habermas’ interlocution with the authors also close to Horkheimer’s project. For Freitag (2004), in several of his essays, Habermas seeks to discuss and comment on the writings of Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer and Marcuse. However, Habermas seeks to transcend the impasse in which some Frankfurtian found themselves by incorporating into their thinking new philosophical and theoretical references. Due to their reinterpretation of the great themes of the Frankfurt School in light of new historical facts – and their longevity has contributed to this –, the theoretician proved to be one of the most meaningful and stated members associated with the Frankfurt School. In other words, Habermas remains

faithful to the purpose of building a criticism on the historical mechanisms of domination of capitalism, which are focused on social emancipation, struggling in the elaboration of a diagnosis about the legitimacy of the modern State. We also emphasize that Habermas (1987) resumes the project for the deconstruction of the alleged neutrality of the positive science presented by Horkheimer (1975), arguing that the production of knowledge is guided by vested interests by means of labour, of language and of domination (HABERMAS, 1987). In this essay, the author argues about the ideological character of the language to which science cannot escape, therefore, giving support to the propositions of non-neutrality of the traditional theory (FREITAG, 2004).

The reflections on language and communication, which until then had not exploited by the Frankfurtians, were particularly articulated by Habermas as an opening to new academic horizons, able to open the eyes to new possibilities and understandings of the reality until then not exploited. In other words, in our understanding and in that of other commentators (ARAGÃO, 1997; FREITAG, 2004; VIZEU, 2005), the author seeks in the linguistic turn theoretical elements for the continuity of the Critical Theory, finding in the concepts of the act of speech of the philosophy of language an interesting analytical assumption that, over time, becomes a fundamental category in its approach (FREITAG, 2004). At this point, Habermas believes that the obstacles to emancipation are manifested in the processes of communication and their structural manifestation in the social interaction of modernity, especially under the aegis of the discursive and ideological structures (HABERMAS, 2012). For the author, an emancipated society is made possible by the freedom, “in dialog, free from the domination, of all to all, to which we will always have to seek both the standard of an identity of a mutually constituted I like the idea of the true consensus” (HABERMAS, 1987, p. 144).

The vision that the adoption by the linguistic turn undertaken by Habermas did not compromise his project of developing the Critical Theory is shared by other commentators. For example, Aragão (1997) asserts that, even having incorporated new elements to the Critical Theory, Habermas remains faithful to the project of the Institute for Social Research, promoting an interdisciplinary research that seeks to reveal the contradictions and, thus, facilitate the emancipation, in his reading through the concept of communicative reason. However, on joining the paradigm of language, he departs from the pessimism of some radical members; on the other hand, Aragão (1997) believes that this effort enables Habermas to recover the project and the original program of criticism to the reason, the project that was abandoned by the concept of impingement to the instrumental rationality defended by Adorno and Horkheimer. In his production, mainly between the years of 1960 and 1980, Aragão (1997) believes that Habermas tries to demonstrate that, with the change of paradigm from the instrumental reason to the communicative reason, it is still possible to regain the lost paths of Horkheimer’s theoretical project.

In accordance with Habermas himself, the Theory of Communicative Action is presented by him in the 1980s as the synthesis of his production in previous decades (HABERMAS, 2012; RICOEUR, 1990). His theoretical proposal has as one of its brands the distancing from the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) regarding the possibility of a way out for the social problems of Modernity that took into account the rationality. In the same way, he reveals the conviction in linguistic and cognitive competence of the social actors where, in the debate and in contention for the best argument mediated by radical questioning, he establishes the theoretical conditions for the production of an intersubjective reason based on communicative interaction free from the structural mechanisms of the ideological domination of modernity (FREITAG, 2004; VIZEU and CICMANEC, 2013). Thus, the communicative reason is the point of intersection of 3 ontologies: a) world of objective things; b) social world of standards; and c) subjective world of affections (VIZEU, 2005).

Thus, we believe there is an important difference between the propositions of Habermas (2012), and Adorno and Horkheimer (1985): while these authors declare that the chances of emancipation of society were blocked in the current historical moment, Habermas has continued to seek a way out, finding it, in his understanding, in the concept of communicative reason. And this is the concept that Habermas puts his hope in to reach a social condition emancipated in Modernity. At this point, the author believes that enabling the public sphere without discursive and structural constraints, where decisions for social action can potentially be taken without any coercive and ideologically subordinate imposition makes it possible to envision a democratic disposition based on dialog and on the search for consensus intersubjectively constituted.

This is, in our interpretation and according to other commentators (e.g., ARAGÃO, 1997; VIZEU, 2005), a viable possibility sought by Habermas (2012) for the construction of a society free from the domination of economic and political power, guaranteed, from this new concept of rationality, by the criterion of social action rationally oriented. Here is an important characteristic of the original argument of Horkheimer (1975), in which the Critical Theory – without falling into idealism – seeks what is concrete in potential in reality, but which is not carried out by forces of domination that must be overcome.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Potential of Habermas’ Critical Theory in Organisational Studies

As observed previously, Habermas has been considered by some Brazilian authors of OS as relatively dissociated from the theoretical project demarcated by Horkheimer (1975) for the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Rehearsing the argument in defence of the Frankfurtianess of Habermas, we faced this understanding to think of a *new Habermas* for OS.

The focus on the emancipatory intent in OS enhances the understanding of how the behaviour in organisations is dominated by the structures historically constituted in Modernity. That said how to think of an agenda of organisational researches of habersmanian base, endeavoured on a Frankfurtian reading of the work of this author? Even admitting that this attitude is rare among the Brazilian researchers of OS, it is worth noting that it is not non-existent. So, we remember here, particularly, the efforts of Vizeu (2005) and Paula (2008, 2013).

In more recent studies, Paula (2008, 2013) has sought to recover the potential of the Habermasian theoretical body from a conceptual approach, which was called by the author the *Freud-Frankfurtian* approach. In this sense, her reading on the Theory of Communicative Action is based, on the one hand, on an interpretation of the Freudian bases of the theoretical framework of Habermas, his points of contact with other Frankfurtian authors (with emphasis on Adorno and Marcuse) and, on the other hand, on the complementarity of concepts coined by Habermas with others from psychoanalysis not exploited by this Frankfurtian. This effort, constituted inside what is presented here as the essence of a genuine Critical Theory, has been thought by Paula as having as background the context of organisations, either those of capitalist interest or those in the public sector.

Another author who is prominent in the Brazilian context as a good example of interpreter of Habermas in light of his Frankfurtianess has been Vizeu (2005, 2010). This researcher has dedicated himself to the study of the Habermasian theory and its potential in OS for more than 13 years, since the publication of an essay on the approximation between the Habermasian communicative action and the OS (VIZEU, 2005). Already on that occasion, the author indicates a research agenda, in which he highlights some propositions derived from his reading of Habermas’ theory that he considers has a more direct implication for research in organisations. Two of them relate to the hierarchy established bureaucratically as a pre-linguistic structural constraint – a condition of the organisational space that induces the systematically distorted communication – and the analysis of discourse centred on the Habermasian theory. His researches focus on this aspect in particular analyzing the communicative distortion in labour relations, revealed by the scrutiny of discursive organisational structures that limit/control the lives of workers (VIZEU and CICMANEC, 2013).

The Habersmanian theory can also contribute to the criticism on ethics in organisations. Rasche and Scherer (2014) point out possibilities for criticism about the business ethics by means of the concepts of communicative action, since the ethics, as a fundamental criterion for the agreement of organisational coexistence, presupposes the need for communication between social actors that is free from structures of discursive domination and ideologically supported. The distinction made by Habermas between pragmatic, ethical and moral reasoning opens, thus, the possibility for a more comprehensive analysis on business ethics, if compared to the functionalist traditions of management research (RASCHE and SCHERER, 2014). This thought can also be useful for the criticism of Corporate Social Responsibility, deepening the analysis on the political role of the companies in society and the mechanisms of communicative distortion associated with these practices (RASCHE and SCHERER, 2014).

These examples of use of the theory of Habermas in OS showed us that it is possible to escape the romanticized interpretation of Habermas, which incurs in the bias of an interpretation of his work that minimizes its critical and dialectic character; it is important to remember that this attitude has not been adopted in Brazilian academic spaces outside the area of OS, or even by important authors for the Social Sciences and Humanities – for example, the famous hermeneutist Ricoeur (1990).

One point that deserves mention in these final considerations is that we do not intend to limit the space for the contradictory. In this sense, we believe that the Critical Theory brought by Habermas is not free from criticism and contradictions. In addition, we are aware that the work of Habermas must not be linked in its entirety to an effort by the author to produce the Critical Theory. Especially in his later writings, we recognize that Habermas sometimes is distant and even contradicts himself in relation to the Frankfurtian purpose. However, this does not disqualify the understanding that his main theoretical construction

(The Theory of Communicative Action) agrees with the principles proposed by Horkheimer (1975), particularly regarding the possibility of emancipation via communicative reason.

Going in defence of the Frankfurtianess of Habermas in OS means highlighting that organisations have a vital role in social transformation and the field of OS should produce knowledge that enables the construction of an emancipated consciousness, capable of articulating new paths for society and moving away from the problems of the mechanisms of domination. So, what we are proposing with this essay is an unusual interpretation of such an important author for the area, in order to open up the debate to think about different paths to knowledge production and reflection on the organisational context. We have no intention of our interpretation of Frankfurt and Habermas being considered as the ultimate truth about these objects of analysis; our argument is, rather, a possibility of thinking differently, open to dialog and to academic debate. We hope, therefore, to instigate in those who disagree with our positioning and understanding the development of new essays, promoting in the academic sphere what should be its biggest horizon: the renewed and unfinished quest for knowledge.

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