I

TERMS

1.
AESTHETICS

What is the place and the role of aesthetics in Habermas's concept of communicative reason? Should reason be open to aesthetics? What is the relationship between aesthetics and the public sphere? Between art and society? This entry answers these questions by, first, briefly examining the issue of Critical Theory and aesthetics, then reconstructing Habermas's intellectual development (with its aesthetical implications), and finally, developing some critical remarks on Habermas's rational-*discursive* view of language and its implications for aesthetics.

Whereas aesthetics plays an important role among the thinkers of the first generation of Critical Theory (Max Horkheimer, and especially Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Leo Löwenthal), this is not the case with Habermas. The first generation takes the interaction between the rational and sensuous aspects of humankind seriously and uses aesthetic-informed arguments quite centrally in their sociophilosophical thinking. Adorno, for example, argues in his aesthetic-informed philosophy for the possibility of a nonalienated relationship between humans and nature, subject and object, reason and the senses. Habermas, though, has a different approach to aesthetics. His position can be clarified with the help of a distinction made by Axel Honneth (1987, 348), between the inner and outer circles of the first generation.

The inner circle (consisting of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) became increasingly skeptical about the possibilities of a rational understanding of society. They described the infiltration of instrumental reason in the lifeworld with the concepts of societal degeneration and the culture industry. Horkheimer and Adorno thus described everyday conceptual and symbolical thinking as instrumental reason. As a critical alternative, only certain modern artworks represent, for Adorno, the last remnants of "reason" in a world of identity thinking, where "aesthetic synthesis," as opposed to conceptual thinking, does not violate the particular and nonidentical, but exposes the irrational character of reality by a proposal of social reconciliation of another world (Wellmer 1986, 48–49). The outer circle (consisting of figures such as Otto Kirchheimer, Franz Neumann, Eric Fromm, and Walter Benjamin) did not share such a pessimistic understanding of instrumental rationality. In Benjamin's aesthetics, for example, there is a less functionalist view of social communication and rationalization. Unlike Adorno, Benjamin does not limit the aesthetic healing of fragmented modern rationality to the modern autonomous artwork itself, but also gives art a positive role within the public sphere.

Habermas's differences with the inner circle of the first generation has made it possible for Shierry Weber to remark that his "interest in the subjective or interactional components of domination has led to a more systematic return to the original problems of the nature of reason and its role in history, without, as yet, a similar reconsideration of the nature of the aesthetic and its relation to reason" (Weber 1976, 80). In a rejoinder to Martin Jay, Habermas refers to his "scattered remarks" on aesthetic modernity, their "secondary character," and "that they arose only in the context of other themes and always in relation to the discussions among Adorno,

Benjamin and Marcuse" (QCQ, 199). But despite his reference to the "secondary character" of his work on aesthetics, it is still a worthwhile task to undertake a historical and systematic reconstruction. Before this is done, it must be said that Habermas has been honest about the "hidden" dimension of aesthetics in his social philosophical thinking (see, for example, STPS; PPP1, 129–64 and 165–70; QCQ; NC, 71–99; PDM, 45–50 and 185–201; and PMT, 205–28). In the vast secondary literature on Habermas, however, contributions on aesthetics are still small in number (see, for example, Bürger 1981, Duvenage 2003, Ingram 1991, Jay 1985, Keulartz 1986, Kliger 2015, Kompridis 2006, and Wellmer 1986 and 1991).

Before the aesthetical implications of Habermas's theory of communicative reason are discussed, it is necessary to distinguish at least two phases in his career. In the first phase (which stretches from the 1950s to the early 1970s) there is an early interest in aesthetics as a student and a journalist. In an interview, Habermas recalled how he was part of a generation after the Second World War that absorbed the modern movement step by step:

> the Haubrich Collection opened our eyes to expressionist painting; we read expressionist poems from Trakl to Benn, and were introduced to functionalism and Bauhaus. Sartre's novels and O. F. Bollnow's account of existentialism led us back to Kafka and Rilke. The contemporary cultural scene was dominated by novels like Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus* and Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*. Films like *The Third Man* stamped the experience of an entire generation. (AS, 36)

In many ways Habermas's early work STPS is already a kind of communicative formulation of the role of art in society from a sociohistorical perspective. Habermas argues here that the Enlightenment opened a space for a rational public debate on political as well as *literary-aesthetic* issues (in the literary public sphere). In this process, institutions such as coffeehouses, theaters, and newspapers served as new forums of debate contributing to the reception of literature and artworks by various audiences. This positive sociocommunicative description of the literary-aesthetic sphere deviated from Horkheimer and Adorno's ideas of aesthetics and their critique of mass culture. Despite using some of their insights, Habermas did not relinquish the conceptual and normative potential of the enlightened public sphere. The very motive of the rational public sphere also guides his work in the 1960s and early 1970s. In one of his studies, the decline of the public sphere is sketched as a legitimation crisis being created by a winnowing away of the cultural and aesthetic lifeworld (LC). Habermas's essay on Benjamin's "redemptive aesthetics" is an interesting juncture at the end of the first phase of his aesthetics. At this point (PPP1, 129–31) he favors a Benjaminian "materialistic aesthetics of redemption" against Marcuse and Adorno's "idealistic aesthetics of consciousness" – thereby providing the first outlines of a model of communicative reason through a critique of a philosophy of consciousness (PPP1, 163–64).

The second phase of Habermas's aesthetics starts in the early 1970s and culminates in TCA, PDM, and subsequent work (such as PMT, 205–28, one of his most developed engagements with aesthetics). Habermas's favorable reading of the communicative aspect of art in Benjamin's thinking has certain parallels with his linguistic turn that formed the core of his philosophical work during the 1970s and culminates in TCA and PDM – the second phase of his aesthetics. Here Habermas's aesthetics can be discerned in terms of a theory of argumentation, a theory of social rationalization, a theory of modernity, and certain case studies.

With regard to a theory of argumentation, Habermas emphasizes the interaction between the validity claims of speaking and acting subjects and their relations with an objective, intersubjective, and subjective world. Here he allows for the differentiation of the modern cultural spheres of cognitive-scientific, moral-judicial, and *expressive-aesthetic* reason. It is interesting, though, that the latter plays a much more subdued role than the other two forms of rationality – an aspect of Habermas's thinking (the *fate of aesthetics*) that will be critically revisited below.

In a second step, Habermas links the differentiated rational and cultural spheres of science, law, and art with a theory of societal rationalization (TCA2, 398). At this point he connects the different forms of rationality in the communicative lifeworld, on the one hand, with systems such as the market and bureaucracy, on the other hand. This move allows him to refer to the infiltration of system imperatives (money and power) in the fragile sphere of the communicative everyday praxis as a particular modern pathology (the *colonization of the lifeworld*) (TCA2, 196).

In a third step, Habermas positions his concept of communicative aesthetics within the "philosophical discourse of modernity" (PDM). He argues that whereas Hegel's counter-discourse of modern differentiation (*Entzweiung*) never abandons the broad project of modernity, Nietzsche's antidiscourse radically challenges the certainties of modernity from an aesthetic perspective. Habermas maintains that two groups of thinkers continue Nietzsche's (totalizing) aesthetic critique of rationality in the twentieth century: on the one hand Heidegger, with his critique of Western metaphysics, and Derrida's leveling of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature, pursue an ontological or quasi-ontological reversal of modernity with aesthetic means; on the other, Bataille and Foucault offer a more scientific-skeptical aesthetic approach. The location of these groups of post-Nietzschean philosophers in the philosophical discourse of modernity allows Habermas to propose his alternative of communicative reason and aesthetics.

Habermas's "scattered remarks" on aesthetics can be criticized on several grounds. The first issue is the status given to the aesthetic sphere in Habermas's theory of argumentation (Jay 1985). In Habermas's theory of argumentation there are culture-invariable validity claims – such as truth, normative correctness, and sincerity. Each of these claims represents an aspect of rationality and a part of reality – the objective, the intersubjective, and the subjective world. It is puzzling, though, that Habermas restricts the validity of art to the subjective judgment of the author or creator. Similar to his argument on the progressive "linguistification of the sacred" (RR, 76) it seems that aesthetics remains relevant in modern life (only) to the extent that it can be translated or assimilated into (intersubjective) rational-discursive language.

In the second place, the restriction of the validity of art to the subjectivity of the author or the creator (a kind of subjective production aesthetics) can be contrasted in a social-rational context with reception aesthetics – where a more communicative understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience is proposed. To this latter idea the concept of post-avant-garde art is also added – a move that opens a more appropriate mediation between art and life (Bürger 1984, Keulartz 1986). This perspective suggests a reopening of the debate between Habermas and Adorno. On this point, Jay Bernstein (1989a) aligns himself more strongly with Adorno, while Wellmer (1991) follows a more cautious critique of Habermas by placing the issues of instrumental rationality, aesthetical reconciliation, and truth in a communicative framework.

The critique of the abstract nature of Habermas's formal-pragmatic analysis of language action (normal vs. abnormal language use) can, thirdly, be connected with the issue of nature. Foucault's notion of an *aesthetics of existence* and Whitebook's rehabilitation of inner and outer

nature in psychoanalysis both emphasize that the restriction of the poetical dimensions of language could contribute to the disappearance of the creative and natural dimension of human beings in a formalist theory of reason, language, and action (Foucault 1983 and Whitebook 1985).

Finally, the formalist nature of Habermas's understanding of language and reason can be further explored in the distinction between world-disclosing and discursive-rational uses of language (Kompridis 1994 and Seel 1994). Although Heidegger (1993) provides too strong an opposition between the processes of world disclosure and the practices of discursive reason-giving in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," Habermas, for his part, restricts the transformative and subversive qualities of novel disclosures to the aesthetic edges of our self-understanding and social practices in his theory of communicative reason. The argument is that both Heidegger and Habermas (although on the opposite sides) retain too strong an opposition between world disclosure and reason giving. Given this impasse between Heidegger and Habermas, Kompridis (2006) proposes that both the decentering and centering effects of world disclosures could be emphasized – that is, the complementarity and interdependence of world disclosure and rationality.

In conclusion it could be said that while Habermas's entire corpus has been in a quiet but intense dialogue with key thinkers and artists of twentieth-century aesthetics, he has not developed an explicit aesthetic theory. Yet, it is clear that his communicative theory of rationality both presupposes the role of the aesthetic in disclosing the world and has powerful potential to be developed into a communicative theory of the aesthetic. This potential, though, remains to be developed.

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SEE ALSO:

Communicative Rationality
Psychoanalysis
World Disclosure
Theodor W. Adorno
Martin Heidegger

SUGGESTED READING

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2.
ALL-AFFECTED PRINCIPLE

According to the all-affected principle, a proposed norm, policy, or course of action attains normative validity only if all those affected by it could rationally consent to it. As such, the reference to "all concerned" or "all affected" (*alle Betroffenen*) appears both in Habermas's Universalization Principle (U) and in his principle of discourse ethics (see e.g., MCCA, 65–6; IO, 42). These central principles thus connect rational acceptability (however it may be elaborated) with an affective dimension that has generated a lot of debate in recent years. In the early formulations in the context of discourse ethics, Habermas stressed that the principles are supposed to render "monological" norm justification impossible: against Kant's categorical imperative and, for instance, Rawls's veil of ignorance (Rawls 1999a), those affected (however that is understood) are supposed to actually participate in real discourses (MCCA, 66). Affectivity is to be construed so as to demand actual participation (RUPR, 17). However, it seems that Habermas gradually removes the "all affected" criterion from (U) and related principles, passing from "all actually affected" via "all possibly affected" to "everyone" or "humanity" (see e.g., BFN, 108). In the bioethical context of prenatal interventions, for example, and so in the case of defending the interests of the unborn, Habermas has taken the path of fictionalizing discourse and rendering hypothetical the idea of consent, in favor of a consent that is counterfactually attributed to those possibly affected by them (FHN, 91). This move is resisted by defenders of Habermas's earlier, less hypothetical account of what discourse ethics requires in terms of consent and discursive participation, complaining that discourse ethics has become indistinguishable from other forms of (allegedly "monological") contractualism, especially Rawls's and Scanlon's standard of "reasonable rejectability" (Heath 2014; cf. Kettner 2002).

With and beyond Habermas, the all-affected principle has come to play a significant role in democratic theory and in ethics for future generations. Defenders of deliberative democracy in particular have suggested that "all affected" is central to the vexed problem of constituting the demos and the democratic boundary problem; that is, the question of who is entitled to inclusion (Goodin 2007, Owen 2012). The principle is meant to help us avoid the paradox of a self-constituting people. Whereas traditional theories of democracy (as well as interpreting "all affected" to mean "all-subjected to an existing political unit") assume a given people (e.g., an ethnicity or a nation), only then to ask over what it should have decision-making power, an understanding of the all-affected principle that is wider than "all-subjected" turns this around by determining the scope of the demos by the range of its decision-making (Näsström 2011). It has been suggested, however, that these arguments underspecify the supposed wrong of affectedness (Miklosi 2012). Others have argued that the problems of the principle – above all, that it seems to require a theory of interests that would itself be politically contestable – in the end favor the more limited "all subjected" principle according to which everyone who is subject to the laws should be granted the right to participate in making them (Owen 2012).

A prominent way of extending deliberative democracy and discourse ethics to future people is to view the latter as covered by the "all affected" principle. Several "green" deliberative democrats and discourse ethicists have argued for this temporal extension (Dobson 1996, Eckersley 2000, Shrader-Frechette 2002, Johnson 2007). The principle can be extended to the unborn if "all affected" is interpreted to mean "all possibly affected" and if the consent requirement is not taken to call for actual, empirically verifiable consent, of which not yet existing people are at present incapable. Some of the debate centers on whether the principle is subject to the nonidentity problem and related conundrums specific to extending justice to future people (Heyward 2008).

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SEE ALSO:

Deliberative Democracy
Discourse Ethics
Universalization Principle and Discourse Principle
John Rawls

SUGGESTED READING

Eckersley, R. 2000. "Deliberative Democracy, Ecological Representation and Risk. Towards a Democracy of All Affected," in *Democratic Innovation. Deliberation, Representation and Association*, ed. M. Saward. London: Routledge.
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3·
APPLICATION AND JUSTIFICATION

The terms "justification" and "application" refer to two distinct but linked dimensions within discourse ethics: while the former refers to the formal dimension of the justification of moral norms, the latter refers to the contextual application of those norms. Habermas has sought to show how we could rationally justify moral norms by reaching agreement through argumentation on practical questions. Following Kant's categorical imperative, discourse ethics also asserts that certain norms are morally valid because their validity is linked to their acceptability as a "universal law": in other words, only those norms that express a universal will that would meet the assent of those affected by its implementation could be considered morally valid. The universalist formulation followed by Habermas presupposes first that "valid norms must *deserve* recognition by *all* affected" (MCCA, 65). But, moreover, it demands that the universal acceptability of the norm stems from a recognition that has been intersubjectively produced. Thus, a norm can be qualified as "moral" for Habermas if it can obtain the recognition of all the people affected by its application. This means that only the universal acceptability of a norm produces a justified moral point of view. And we can only accept (or reject) the moral claim of a norm if we can assume the role of participants in a moral discourse and intersubjectively test the universality of the norm in question. This implies both procedural conditions of discursive acceptability and the intersubjective test of its universalization. Therefore, every valid norm must be tested by a procedure of moral justification that Habermas calls a "universalization principle": "*All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation)" (MCCA, 65).

As a discourse of justification, the Universalization Principle states that a norm is morally valid only if it can deserve the intersubjective recognition of all affected, and only this kind of recognition would be responsible for the universal (and therefore valid) character of the moral norm. But, besides the universal constriction inherent in the justification discourse, the universalization principle also states that only those norms that can be mutually recognizable by all affected, insofar as *all* have to rationally accept the norm in view of its *consequences for each*, are morally justifiable. This means that, in order to be normatively valid, the justification process of norms must consider the reciprocal acceptability of all foreseeable consequences. Habermas is concerned not only with the procedure of moral justification and its universalist validity claim. We need a principle of universalization in a Kantian sense, but we must also take into account practical situations and more concrete moments of application as well. However, the issue of application is something to which moral theories of the Kantian type do not usually pay attention. "They focus," says Habermas, "on questions of *justification*, leaving questions of *application* unanswered" (MCCA, 206). Habermas, on the contrary, intends to open up space for a discourse-ethical notion of application that considers each situation, for "no norm contains within itself the rules for its application" (MCCA, 206).

Nonetheless, the risk of an inapplicability of the Universalization Principle was made explicit by Albrecht Wellmer, an important friend, interpreter, and critic of Habermas's works. According to Wellmer, universalization alone cannot cover, anticipate, or consider each possible situation for its application, as presented in the formulation of the moral principle by Habermas. After all, "this increases enormously the difficulty of the task of determining the consequences and side effects of a *universal* observance of norms for *each* individual and, beyond that, of finding out whether *all* would be able to accept without coercion these consequences and side effects, as they would arise for each individual" (Wellmer 1991, 155). This difficulty has to do with both the universality as criterion of the general validity of practical norms (Wellmer shows that law and politics, for example, cannot be subsumed by the universal justification of morality because both have different validity claims, linked to processes of legitimacy, ethical questions, and negotiations) as well as the anticipation of material, cultural, and institutional conditions that the principle should take into account.

The Universalization Principle belongs to a discourse of justification if it represents the role of justifying generalized behavioral expectations or modes of action, that is, the norms that underlie general practice. Habermas, however, is aware that the justification of norms is not possible if we just abstract from expectations how they could be applied in different situations. To understand what could be a right or moral action in all given circumstances is something that cannot be decided by a single discourse of justification. Habermas considers, then, what could be called a "two-stage process of argument," consisting of an analytical distinction between the procedure of justification and the discourse of application of norms (JA, 36–38 [here Habermas follows Klaus Günther, *The Sense of Appropriateness: Application Discourses in Morality and Law* (1993)]). In this process, each participant of a moral discourse could consider a norm as valid if its observance in all situations in which the norm is applicable is appropriate. Then, justificatory discourses demand that "we take into account a norm's rational acceptance among all those possibly affected with reference to all situations of application *appropriate* to it" (JA, 36). Only further discourses of application can consider the validity of a norm regarding anticipated typical situations that would be appropriate for similar future situations in which the norm will be applied.

It is important to note, however, that the distinction between justification and application is analytical, not substantive. The abstract distinction between justifying norms and determining their appropriateness leaves out the historical and social dynamics of practical conflicts around values and interests. The normative and critical aspect of Habermas's discourse theory is oriented toward a historical and social world, with aspirations and needs that could never be totally determined. There is a desirable practical indeterminacy or "incompleteness" in the social world that discourses of moral justification cannot overcome (JA, 39). However, it is precisely this complex and open constitution of the social world that makes it necessary to think about the relation between application and justification in dealing with practical conflicts.

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SEE ALSO:

Autonomy
Discourse Ethics
Ethics and Morality

Justice
Practical Reason
Universalization Principle and Discourse Principle
Albrecht Wellmer

SUGGESTED READING

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