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## I Quaderni di Scienze Politiche

I *Quaderni di Scienze Politiche*, la cui pubblicazione è iniziata nel 2011 sotto la denominazione di *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche*, si ispirano ad una tradizione scientifica orientata allo studio dei fenomeni politici nelle loro espressioni istituzionali e organizzative a livello internazionale e, in un'ottica comparatistica, anche all'interno agli Stati. Essi sono promossi dal Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, costituito nel 1983 e interprete fedele della tradizione dell'Ateneo.

Il fondatore dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Padre Agostino Gemelli, affermava nel 1942 che diritto, storia e politica costituiscono «un tripode» sul quale si fondano le Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, delle quali difendeva l'identità e la funzione. Circa vent'anni dopo, Francesco Vito, successore del fondatore nel Rettorato e già Preside della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, scriveva: «Noi rimaniamo fedeli alla tradizione scientifica secondo la quale l'indagine del fenomeno politico non può essere esaurita senza residui da una sola disciplina scientifica. Concorrono alla comprensione della politica gli studi storici, quelli filosofici, quelli giuridici, quelli socio-economici». Per Gianfranco Miglio, Preside per trent'anni della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche dell'Università Cattolica e per otto anche Docente di Storia dei trattati e politica internazionale, la storia è il laboratorio privilegiato della ricerca politologica.

Come immagine caratterizzante della vocazione internazionalista dei *Quaderni*, è stata scelta la mappa disegnata nel 1507 dal cartografo tedesco Martin Waldseemüller (1470-1521), di grande importanza storica essendo la prima nella quale il Nuovo Continente, scoperto da Cristoforo Colombo, è denominato "America". Nel 2005 tale mappa è stata dichiarata dall'UNESCO "Memoria del mondo".

La frase *Orbem prudenter investigare et veraciter agnoscere*, che esprime lo spirito di libera ricerca ispirata alla vocazione cattolica, utilizza alcune espressioni della seguente preghiera di San Tommaso d'Aquino: «Concede mihi, misericors Deus, quae tibi placita sunt, ardentem concupiscere, prudenter investigare, veraciter agnoscere,

et perfecte adimplere ad laudem et gloriam nominis tui. Amen». Tale preghiera, «dicenda ante studium vel lectionem», a sua volta forma la prima parte di una più lunga orazione: «Ad vitam sapienter instituendam».

Pubblicati sia a stampa sia *online* sul sito internet [www.qdsp.it](http://www.qdsp.it), i *Quaderni* ospitano articoli soggetti a *peer review* anonima.

The *Quaderni di Scienze Politiche* follow a scientific tradition of multidisciplinary study of politics based on history, political science and law. International history, international relations and international law are the fields covered. This internationalist approach is reflected by the cover image: the map of 1507 by Martin Waldseemüller, the first in which the New Continent discovered by Cristoforo Colombo is called “America”.

# A Strange Approach. Susan Strange's Contribution to International Political Economy and International Relations Theory

di ENRICO FASSI

**Abstract** – Esattamente 40 anni fa, con la pubblicazione dell'articolo "International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect", Susan Strange contribuiva, insieme a pochi altri pionieri, alla creazione di quella che sarebbe poi diventata nota come International Political Economy (IPE). L'articolo analizza il contributo di Strange sia in rapporto all'IPE, sia alle Relazioni Internazionali (IR), a partire dalla comprensione della "relazione genetica" tra questi due ambiti e dal ruolo svolto dalla sua produzione intellettuale nell'evoluzione di entrambi. Vengono quindi esaminati alcuni elementi fondamentali del suo "approccio eclettico", concentrandoci in particolare sulle idee di Strange in merito alla teoria, sulla sua ridefinizione di politica e sul concetto di potere strutturale. Prima di analizzare alcuni dei problemi che sembrano aver impedito alle sue elaborazioni teoriche una diffusa accoglienza, vengono illustrati alcuni dei suoi contributi espressamente pertinenti alle Relazioni Internazionali: in particolare la sua tesi della "Ritirata dello Stato" e il suo approccio alla teoria dei regimi. In conclusione, si suggerisce come l'opera di Susan Strange, e in particolare gli aspetti qui analizzati, possano essere ancora oggi utilmente applicati, rivisitati e migliorati per esprimere finalmente tutto il potenziale del suo contributo.

## Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, the discipline of International Relations found itself in front of two opposite perspectives; on the one side, even if the scope of the historical moment was recognised – to the extent that for some this represented "the End of History" –, for its "classical approaches" nothing was fundamentally changed, once recorded the shift from a bipolar system to one (then) undoubtedly unipolar. On the other side, in the midst of the theoretical dispersion caused by the speed and magnitude of these changes, and the total failure of the discipline to predict them, there were all those perspectives that had been challenging



the mainstream theories and advocated a fundamental review of their assumptions.

Several approaches, from constructivism to feminism, from critical theory to post-modernism, were united in questioning the theoretical lenses through which the international domain was analysed. Among these, and also due to the growing importance of the globalisation debate, the sub-branch of International Political Economy (IPE), seemed to emerge from its subaltern position; not only to reaffirm the relevance of its specific field of inquiry but, starting from there, to conduct a critique of the whole complex of the *international studies*<sup>1</sup>.

One of the scholars at the centre of this paradigm shift, so instrumental in the foundation of the IPE as to be defined as its “intellectual midwife”, has been a British academic called Susan Strange<sup>2</sup>. This paper intends to analyse Strange’s theoretical production in the light of this interaction between the two disciplines of International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy. In particular, the aim is to show how her work cannot and should not be confined within the academic boundaries of IPE but presents instead several themes, questions, insights and theoretical constructs that are directly significant for IR theory<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This process, according to some observers, produced a new way to perceive International Relations, such that mainstream scholars have started, even if in retard, to recognise what IPE scholars have taken for granted: politics and economics are not separable analytical categories. See R. Higgot, *Taming economics emboldening international relations. The theory and Practice of International Political Economy in an Era of Globalization*, in S. Lawson (ed), *The new agenda for International Relations*, Oxford, 2002. Indeed it can be argued that the evolution of the always uncertain relationship between IR and IPE, through the globalisation debate, has led at least to the recognition that «ontologically speaking, a shift can be observed towards leaving behind the narrow conception of IR as the security *problématique* of sovereign States in favour of International Political Economy». B. Verbeek, *Criticizing US method and Thought in International Relations: Why a Trans-Atlantic Divide narrows IR’s Research Subject*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *Strange Power: Shaping the Parameters of International Relations and International Political Economy. Shaping the Parameters of International Relations and International Political Economy*, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 146-147. The potential of Strange’s contribution, nonetheless, goes far beyond this limited achievement.

<sup>2</sup> T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *Strange Power: shaping the parameters of International Relation and International Political Economy*, Farnham, UK, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> The intent of the paper is not to “measure” the “impact” of Strange’s ideas on IR theory. Even if some example of her direct impact could be provided, we

The first goal will be to understand the “genetic relationship” between IR and IPE and the role played by Strange in the institution and early evolution of the latter. The appreciation of Strange’s contribution in this process, and particularly her view of this relationship, are critical to set the context for our analysis.

We thus move to an examination of the fundamentals of her “eclectic approach” highlighting the aspects of her work that are particularly relevant for an appreciation of her contribution to IR theory; in particular, we focus on her approach to theory, her re-definition of politics and the concept of structural power.

Before analysing some of the problems that seem to have prevented her theoretical work a widespread reception, we scrutinise some of her contributions expressly pertaining to the IR: namely her “retreat of the State” thesis and her contribution on regimes theory.

In the conclusive remarks we will attempt to suggest how Susan Strange’s work, and in particular the aspects here analysed, can be usefully applied, revisited, and enhanced to finally express the full potential of her contribution.

### **International Political Economy: a Strange (’s) discipline?**

In 1970, with the publication of her famous article “*International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect*” on the journal “*International Affairs*”<sup>4</sup> Strange contributed, with few others, to the establishment of what would eventually become the IPE<sup>5</sup>. As the title makes clear, this article contains at its core one of

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will focus on the analysis of her production from an IR theory point of view, underlining which aspects of her work are – have been, or could be – of some relevance for the theoretical evolution of the discipline.

<sup>4</sup> S. Strange, *International economics and international relations: a case of mutual neglect*, “*International Affairs*”, vol. 46 (1970), n. 2, pp. 304-315.

<sup>5</sup> Strange often quotes Charles Kindleberger, *Power and Money: the Economics of International Politics and the Politics of International Economics*, 1970, as the first example of an International Political Economy approach. Among the pioneers of the discipline should be quoted at least also Robert Gilpin, David Baldwin, Edward Morse, Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, Joan Spero. See S. Strange, *International Political Economy: Beyond Economics and International Relations*, “*Economies et Sociétés*”, vol. 34 (1998), n. 4, p. 3.

the major themes of her work: the critique of the separation between politics and economics in the study of the international domain.

In what is considered “her manifesto”, Strange invited scholars from different disciplines to join their effort for the exploration of what then was seen as «*terra incognita*»<sup>6</sup>. The article called for a radical dismantling of the artificial barriers that kept international politics, international law and international economics separated, arguing instead in favour for a flexible and multidisciplinary approach<sup>7</sup>.

Her critique was directed, on one side, towards the limits of international economics, based on naïve assumptions and abstract theorising, detached from the realities of power and dangerously muddled with the neo-liberal doctrine<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, she criticised the discipline of International Relations for being too focused on issues of war and security, thus allowing the realist perspective – and its ontology and epistemology – to gain a solid hegemony that had the effect of limiting the potential of alternative approaches.

What was needed instead was an integrated approach of international politics and international economics, sustained by an innovative framework of analysis capable to overcome the limitations that were intrinsic in the two distinct disciplines. Strange’s appeal was not vane and the «following establishment of IPE as an accepted academic field has been a success»<sup>9</sup>.

However, even in the newly established discipline contents and methods are far from uncontested; IR’s limits and contradictions

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<sup>6</sup> «...there are areas of *terra incognita* in which it would be helpful to us all if someone were to do some explanatory digging and to apply some careful thoughts». *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the most characteristic and recognised features of her approach: «there is no escaping the imperative of multidisciplinary in the understanding of change and outcomes in the international political economy. Geography, demography, sociology, law, anthropology all have valuable insights to contribute». S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State. The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> S. Strange, *International economics and international relations: a case of mutual neglect*, cit., p. 314. For a critique of this dangerous liaison between economic theory and ideology see S. Strange, *The Bondage of Liberal Economics*, “SAIS Review”, Winter-Spring 1986, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> S. Strange, *International Political Economy: Beyond Economics and International Relations*, cit., pp. 4-5.

seem to be reproduced in IPE. Indeed, in her view, what emerges in, and spread from, American universities is a conception of IPE based on the Politics of International Economics Relations (PIER)<sup>10</sup>, which considers politics and economics as two areas interrelated but empirically distinct, and reduces the creation of wealth as instrumental to power gains. This has the consequence to maintain unaffected the State-centric perspective, imposed to RI by the prolonged hegemony of (neo)realism; Unaffected is also the separation between domestic and international domain that, reducing IPE to the study of the economic aspects of State's foreign policy, enormously limits its heuristic potential.

To her, instead of a *critical* discipline based on a *problem-posing* approach, concerned with raising questions about the nature of the international reality and of its study, IPE was embracing a *problem-solving* perspective, with a «blinkered view» on the practical State agenda and ignoring dynamics transcending inter-States relations<sup>11</sup>. What seems to emerge was thus a «new orthodoxy» which, by matching an ontological perspective of realist derivation with a rationalist epistemology<sup>12</sup> – based on the imitation of economics (!) – fundamentally limited that pluralism of approaches and perspectives that was supposed to lead the renewal of IR<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Strange quotes among the first contributions Gilpin (1975), Spero (1977), Blake e Walters (1976). Robert Gilpin's influential *The Political Economy of International Relations*, published in 1987, reflects for Strange the tendency, particularly in the United States, to consider IPE in a narrow sense as «*The Politics of International Economic Relations*» (PIER) – little more than a specialization of foreign policy studies.

<sup>11</sup> On the concepts of critical and problem-solving theories see R. Cox, *Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory*, «Millennium. Journal of International Studies», vol. 10 (1981), n. 2, pp. 126-155.

<sup>12</sup> As stated by Verbeek: «the popular identification of a rationalist epistemology with an ontology that puts emphasis on monolithic states in an anarchic international system has additional unfortunate consequences [...] because the debate between rationalists and constructivist has focused on epistemology, it has rendered invisible the ontological debate». B. Verbeek, *Criticizing US method and Thought in International Relations...*, cit., pp. 145-146.

<sup>13</sup> See Strange's opposition to «the separation of social science in always smaller *chasses gardées*» each closed to the outsiders. S. Strange, *An Eclectic Approach*, in C.N. Murphy-R. Tooze (eds), *The New International Political Economy*, International Political Economy Yearbook n. 6, Boulder, CO, 1991, p. 33.

All the work of Susan Strange can be considered, we argue, in the light of her endless effort to challenge these orthodoxies and to demolish the disciplinary boundaries that prevent a deep understanding of international dynamics. For this reason, and for the peculiar goal she attributed to this discipline, we consider misleading an interpretation of her contribution that focuses exclusively on IPE<sup>14</sup>. On the contrary, her theoretical production shows several themes, intuitions, and intellectual provocations that are particularly relevant to International Relations theory<sup>15</sup>.

### An Eclectic Approach

Strange's critique to what she identified as the *mainstream* of IPE and her endless effort to blur disciplinary and cultural boundaries represent the basis for a wider reflection on the theoretical foundations of *international studies*<sup>16</sup>. As she put it: «there is great confusion about the nature of theory concerning the working of the international system, political and economic»<sup>17</sup>.

Examining the dominant literature in IPE the Author concludes that: «All we have, so far, are competing *doctrines* – set of normative ideas about the goals to which state policy *should* be directed and how politics and economics *ought* to be related to one another»<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The book T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *Strange Power...*, cit., for example, seems particularly careful in avoiding this position. Roger Tooze and Christopher May, in editing Susan Strange's writings in the book *Authority and Markets. Susan Strange's Writings on International Political Economy*, London, 2000, concentrated more on the IPE perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, questioning the general understanding that IPE was a sub-field of IR, she provocatively claimed that «IR is a sub-discipline of IPE». S. Strange, *States and Markets*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), London, 1994, p. 18. As we will see, although expressly provocative, this is somehow consistent with her definition of IPE.

<sup>16</sup> This is a term the Author preferred to International Relations, since this latter suggests a too-narrow focus on inter-States relations. See S. Strange, *Looking Back – But Mostly Forward*, "Millennium. Journal of International Studies", vol. 11 (1982), n. 1, pp. 38-49.

<sup>17</sup> [...] This has resulted in a lot of theoretical work which is not really theory at all, in the sense in which the word should be used». S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibi*, p. 16.

Each doctrine starts from particular assumptions that determine the kind of questions we investigate, and each is based on its own method of analysis devised in such a way that would inevitably lead to the expected conclusions, so that too often the contribution of the Realist, Liberal or Marxist perspective to the study of the international domain is restricted to the simple choice between three 'menu à la carte'<sup>19</sup>.

A theory should instead have the following features: first of all, it should try to explain aspects of the international system that are not easily understood by common sense<sup>20</sup>; secondly, a theory shouldn't necessarily aspire to predict or prescribe<sup>21</sup>; finally, a theory should be 'scientific' only in sense that the scholar respects the scientific virtues of rationality and impartiality and aspires to the systematic formulation of explicative propositions<sup>22</sup>.

Starting from such a wide and informal idea of theory, it logically follows Strange's refusal to limit the analysis to what the «orthodoxy»<sup>23</sup> of IR/IPE considers a «legitimate theoretical production»<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> This applies entirely also to IR theory. See, for example, O. Waever, *The Rise and Fall of the inter-paradigm debate*, in S. Smith-K. Both-M. Zelewski (eds), *International Theory: positivism and beyond*, Cambridge, 1996. Strange's goal, instead, was to offer to anyone «the opportunity to pick-up their own plates and receipts». See R. Cox, *Take six eggs: theory, finance, and the real economy in the work of Susan Strange*, in R. Cox-T.J. Sinclair (eds), *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed «social sciences can never confidently predict, given the irrational factors inherent to human relations». *Ibi*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> On the difference between social and natural science, and the operating of a «reflexive principle» that influences the object of study in the latter, see S. Strange, *What Theory? The Theory in Mad Money*, «CSGR Working Paper», n. 18/98, Coventry, 1998, pp. 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> On the establishment of an academic orthodoxy see the interesting R. Cox, *Take six eggs: theory, finance, and the real economy in the work of Susan Strange*, in R. Cox-T.J. Sinclair (eds), *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge, 1992. From the point of view of Cox's sociology of academic production Strange could be identified as a *loner*. For a critique of the conception of theory that dominates the mainstream American Academy see Strange's discussion of Popper's and Feyerabend's contrasting approaches. Her eclectic conclusion is: «forget theory. Ibn Khaldun in North Africa in the fourteen century would have agreed. His question was simply "why things are as they are?"». S. Strange, *What Theory?...*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Tooze, *Susan Strange, academic international relations and the study of international political economy*, «New Political Economy», vol. 5 (2000), n. 2, pp. 280-289. To fully understand what kind of vision Strange is opposed to, see

To acquire a better understanding of the reality of international relations we need to overcome these restrictions in favour of an *eclectic approach*, open to insights coming from different disciplines<sup>25</sup>, based on a wider definition of the object of analysis, lead by the effort to overcome the «dialogue of the deaf» that has been characterising the classic paradigms of IR.

What Strange tried to devise is thus not a 'grand theory' that could encapsulate and predict every aspect of the international political economy or changes in the international system. In her view, such a theory simply doesn't exist. What she fixes as her primary goal is instead the search for a *framework of analysis* that would leave the possibility of choice and the communication between different approaches: «what we need is different. Is a method of diagnosis of the human condition as affected by political, economic and social circumstances»<sup>26</sup>.

To attain this goal it is necessary to (re)start from a reflection on the fundamental values men try to attain through social organisation<sup>27</sup>. Wealth, security, justice and freedom are considered the essential values: if every society tries to pursue in some measure these values, each one distinguishes itself exactly for the relative balance between them<sup>28</sup>.

Thus the aim of the social scientist should be first that of identifying the hierarchy of values beneath his object of analysis. The *political* scientist, in particular, would proceed to ask: *cui bono*? Who gets what? Who wins and who loses? Who has to bear the risks and who enjoy the benefits and opportunities that the present mix of values involves for the society?

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S. Krasner, *The accomplishments of International Political Economy*, in S. Smith-K. Both-M. Zelewski (eds), *International Theory: positivism and beyond*, Cambridge, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> «International Relations stands as the one social science with barriers to enter so low that anyone can jump them. It has been and will remain the richer keeping those barriers low». Strange, quoted in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> See S. Strange, *International Political Economy: Beyond Economics and International Relations*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> See how this is exemplified by Strange in her prologue to *States and Markets: 'Some desert island tales'*. S. Strange, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

The 'unnatural' division between politics and economics lead to the fact that these values, when considered, were analysed starting from an unrealistic separation: political science – IR – has dealt with freedom, security and justice whilst economics has focused almost exclusively on the search for efficiency in the production of wealth. Only the integration of these two areas allows to consider these values jointly and to understand, behind each political decision, in which direction the trade-off between these values is resolved<sup>29</sup>.

The analysis of the combination of values that characterises every political choice represents thus a useful instrument to lead our understanding of the changes marking the constant evolution of the international system<sup>30</sup>.

This focus on values should not be misunderstood as an «idealist» position: to understand change is necessary to «be realist», that is «to maintain a close contact with the real situation and the feasibility of remedies»<sup>31</sup>. To be realist, for Strange, means staying anchored to power considerations<sup>32</sup>.

Even if Strange always refused to label her approach, her position can be usefully compared, to some extent, to the “New Realism” advanced by Robert Cox: «the *new realism*... differs both from early or classical realism and from neorealism. It differs from

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<sup>29</sup> «the results involve both distribution – who gets what – and the mix of values in the whole system». S. Strange, *Structures, Values and Risk in the Study of the International Political Economy*, in R.J.B. Jones (ed), *Perspectives on Political Economy*, London, 1983, p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> It is precisely the incapacity “to catch” these changes, due to that limitation of scope and instruments that has made “myopic” the sight of International Relations on the long-term evolution of its object of analysis, that represents for Strange the clear evidence of traditional approaches’ limitations, and thus the necessity of their overcoming. See for example how Cox describes Strange’s sensibility for developments “in the real world”: R. Cox, *Take six eggs...*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>31</sup> Strange, quoted in S. Guzzini *et al.* (eds), *New Diplomacy in The Post Cold War World*, London, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> On Strange’s realism see S. Guzzini, *Strange’s Oscillating realism: Opposing the Ideal and the Apparent*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.* In particular, Guzzini identifies two possible conceptions of realism: on the one hand realism can be understood as *anti-idealism*, devoted to keeping the analysis anchored to materialist power considerations and mainly status-quo oriented. On the other hand, realism is intended as *anti-appearance*, aimed to uncover the real structures of power and ready to challenge the status quo.



classical realism in its concern with structural change and in understanding this change in historical terms»<sup>33</sup>.

To keep power at the centre of the analysis, and try to overcome an approach to IR and IPE that narrows the field of enquiry to the inter-States interactions, involves a general redefinition of the conventional concepts of politics and power; this means to go directly at the core of IR's understanding of the world.

### A Structural Approach

Strange considers useful to initially define power simply as «the ability of a person or group so to affect outcomes that their preferences take precedence over the preferences of others»<sup>34</sup>. Beyond the semantic aspect, the main problem consists in the method to adopt to identify which actor detains power and where it comes from. The classical approach that identifies power based on resources encounters major difficulties in situations in which also *capacity* and *will* to utilise such resources – factors that are not quantifiable and often unforeseeable – have to be taken into account<sup>35</sup>.

For Strange, instead of «power from» (*resources*) power should be intended as «power over» (*results*) and this should not be limited to the analysis of results whose pursuit is conscious or deliberate<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> R. Cox, *Introduction*, in R. Cox (ed.), *The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order*, Basingstoke, 1997, p. xvi. See also an analysis of Strange's version of "New Realism" in L. Seabrook, *US power in international finance: the victory of dividends*, Sydney, 2000, pp. 36-40.

<sup>34</sup> S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, cit., p. 40. In Political Science, the debate concerns especially the possibility and opportunity to distinguish power from authority and influence, or whether this should be intended as a generic term that embraces every meaning from the violent coercion to the art of persuasion. Strange's definition, large and comprehensive, has the advantage to avoid the logical trap of fixing power to the pursuit of interests – national, class, of an enterprise etc. – whose exact determination poses further problems.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibi*, p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> As clearly stated by Jonathan Story, analysing structural power in Strange's perspective: «is not enough to know that X is well-endowed with resources relative to Y to anticipate the outcome. The way resources are distributed does not tell us what X or Y's policy choices will be: Strange is not determinist, Marxist or 'econocrat'». J. Story, *Setting the Parameters: A Strange World System*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

From insights of the Marxist and Neo-Gramscian approaches on the role of production's relations as factor that determines power in the international political economy<sup>37</sup>, Strange derives the idea that in the world economy – and thus in the international system –, is possible to detect *structures* through which choices are determined, beyond the conscious choices of each single actor<sup>38</sup>. Two types of power are thus identified: *relational power* and *structural power*; of these two, structural power, even if widely ignored by the academia both in IR and IPE, is according to Strange the most decisive.

Relational power, as defined in classical terms by Political Science «is the power of A to force B to do something he wouldn't otherwise do», with A and B, in IR, implicitly considered to be States.

Structural power is instead defined by Strange as «the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other States, their political institutions, their economic enterprises and (not least) their scientists and other professional people, have to operate»<sup>39</sup>. Structural power is power over structures, the power to set «the rule of the game». For struc-

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<sup>37</sup> Starting from the assumption that the 'production system' implies power relations – particularly between classes – Robert Cox, for example, shows how the *power on the structure* of production, now global, is more relevant than the results of any *relational bargaining* that takes places within this structure. Strange herself underlines the influence of Robert Cox on her work, often quoting him as the main proponent of the neo-gramscian approach. S. Strange, *An Eclectic Approach...*, cit., p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Stefano Guzzini shows how the origins of the concept of structural power can be traced back to the area of dependency theory. The quotation of Caporaso (1978) shows indeed how striking are the similarities between the two definitions of structural power. Indeed, we can argue that the whole thesis of the dependency school could be understood as a particular case of Strange's framework, limiting the analysis to inter-States relations and to the structure of trade and production. S. Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy*, London, 1998, pp. 167-168.

<sup>39</sup> «structural power, in short, confers the power to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises». S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 25. The first advantage of structural power thus defined is that it allows overcoming the separation between economic and political power; A much-limiting separation for an approach, such the IPE, which puts the integration of these two areas as a primary goal.

ture Strange means «a supporting framework... something within which things happens and changes take place»<sup>40</sup>. In Strange is clear the idea that structures, more than deliberate decisions or actions of any actor in the system, determine the agendas and the options within which others States, groups or individuals contend all the major decisions about who-gets-what in politics, both within the State and in the international system<sup>41</sup>.

The concept of structure allows to establish that link between the analysis in terms of values combination and the attention to power dynamics evoked by Strange: what we need to do is to «start thinking about event's results in terms of *values* gained or lost», not by singular States but also by others groups «and in the system as a whole in each of its principal *structures*»<sup>42</sup>.

Whoever enjoys structural power, whoever can affect the prevalent mix of values – the rules of the game – within a given structure, has the power to change the range of choices open to others actors without employing directly on them a pressure to make a decision or make one choice instead another<sup>43</sup>. This kind of power is thus less «visible»<sup>44</sup>.

The main effect of the structural approach is to free the analysis from the State-centric perspective; power does not belong

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<sup>40</sup> The notion of structure also suggests that there could be a rough predictability about the kind of decisions that could be made, the actors involved, the causes and effects of these decisions, without however implying a rigorous determinism.

<sup>41</sup> S. Strange, *An Eclectic Approach...*, cit., p. 34. Indeed, more than one scholar denounces how the concept of structure is not completely defined. See, for example, J. Story, *Setting the Parameters...*, cit., pp. 31-32; indeed Bertjan Veerberg, to clarify, prefers to speak of «dimensions» of structural power. Cfr. B. Verbeek, *Criticizing US method...*, cit., pp. 140-141.

<sup>42</sup> S. Strange, *Structures, Values and Risk in the Study of the International Political Economy*, in R.J.B. Jones (ed), *Perspectives on Political Economy*, London, 1983, p. 212.

<sup>43</sup> The range of options left to others is widened by giving them opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have and can be restricted imposing to them costs or risks higher than would have faced, thus making some choice less easy to be made and easier others. For the relationship between values, opportunities and risks; see S. Strange, *ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> In this aspect is in somehow similar to the notion of *soft power* elaborated by Joseph Nye. Cfr. J. Nye, *Soft Power*, «Foreign Policy», (1990), n. 80, pp. 153-171. See Strange, *ibi*, p. 19.

necessarily to some actors but it is intrinsic in the structures: actors that have the capacity to influence the combination of the values of security, justice, wealth and freedom in a given structure exercise structural power and deserve thus to be taken into account in the analysis.

This involves, in turn, a redefinition of the concept of politics and particularly an enlargement of the sphere of actors that can exercise a «political action»; this redefinition is much needed to avoid that «The conceptual wall that was built to define the study of international relations... [would] become a prison wall putting key questions out»<sup>45</sup>.

Politics is thus defined as the sum of «processes and structures through which the mix of values in the system as a whole, and their distribution among groups and individuals are determined»<sup>46</sup>. Matching this definition with the conception of Bertrand de Jouvenel who argued that «an action becomes political whenever the help of other people is a necessary condition of an individual achieving his aim», Strange obtains an enlargement of the concept and of the nature of actors involved that drastically resizes the role usually accorded to the State<sup>47</sup>. A political action can be undertaken not only by governments but also by MNCs' managers, labour unions, professional associations, market cartels, social movements, international organisations, NGOs, mafie, terrorist and criminal groups and by a whole kind of actors towards which the academic study of International Relations has shown – for a long time – to be myopic.

The relevance of the State – of one State or of a group of States – in a given structure becomes a variable, resulting from the analysis, and it is no more an *a priori* assumption<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> S. Strange, *What Theory?...*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State...*, cit., p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> This re-definition of politics is based on the recognition that the allocation of values between generations, social classes, genders and occupations is often more important than their allocation between States or nations. «This is the point where I detach from my colleagues and I prefer *not* to be known as an International Relations scholar but as an IPE's one». S. Strange, *The Limits of Politics*, «Government and Opposition», vol. 30 (1995), n. 3, pp. 308-311.

<sup>48</sup> As perfectly synthesised by Robert Cox: «instead of defining the world exclusively in terms of states, [Strange] sees power as the principal concern of realism and asks: where is the power? In states obviously, to a certain extent, but

## A neglected approach? Strange and IR Theory

One part of Strange's work that is relevant for scholars in IPE and also in IR is certainly the one encapsulated in her «Retreat of the State» thesis. This formula, even if often reduced to the idea of a transfer of power from States to Markets, it is composed of three interrelated propositions, equally relevant in defining the meaning of the whole analysis. Indeed, power is at the same time shifting «horizontally» – from States to Markets –, «vertically» – from weak States to the powerful ones – and is «evaporating», leading to a situation of «ungovernance».

Through this theory Strange enters directly in a debate that has been at the core of the discipline of IR in the 1990s: namely how developments in the international system are inducing a change – that could be quantitative, but to an extent that becomes qualitative – in the functions and ultimately in the very nature of the State.

The goal, as she stated, is to understand how far the irreversible integration of national societies and economies in the basic structures of the global economy «is changing the nature of State's goals, that constitutes the world of States»<sup>49</sup>. It is «the nature of state's objectives» – i.e. of the peculiar mix of values whose promotion defines its role – to give sense to «the system of States». The change of these objectives is thus inevitably destined to infuse the whole system.

Her analysis cannot be confined to the domain of IPE nor reduced to the extreme position of those who claim that «the State has become an unnatural, even dysfunctional unit to organise human activity and manage the economy in a borderless world»<sup>50</sup>. It represents instead a wide theoretical construction that brings together changes in the «State ideal-type», the analysis of the asymmetries of power that characterise the international system and

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also in markets. In firms also, and in other entities. The answer is not given with the question, and the answer is subject to change». R. Cox, *Take six eggs...*, cit., p. 183.

<sup>49</sup> S. Strange, *Economic Linkages 1967-87*, in R. O' Neill-R.J. Vincent (eds), *The West and the Third World. Essays in Honour of J.D.B. Miller*, Basingstoke, 1990, p. 240.

<sup>50</sup> K. Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-State*, New York, 1995, p. 26.

an enquiry into the concrete evidence of the concept of «global governance» in the globalization era<sup>51</sup>.

A second major theme in her work that is highly relevant for IR theory concerns the role of international organisations and particularly the study of «regimes». Here her critique is directed especially towards neo-liberalism, with its naïve expectations about the relevance of international organisations within the international system: «the international organisation is above all a tool of national government, an instrument for the pursuit of national interest by other means»<sup>52</sup>.

Even towards the European Union, considered by some «the most successful example of institutionalised international policy coordination in the modern world»<sup>53</sup> Strange is quite sceptical, dismissing the Union as simply «a different kind of commercial agreement»<sup>54</sup>.

Her critique extends to the theoretical approach of IR/IPE to the issue of cooperation. In particular, the criticism is directed towards the focus on «regimes», defined by Stephen Krasner in a classical article as «set of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor's expectations converge in a given area of international relations»<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Higgott signals how it is possible to identify three phases in the globalisation debate: in the first the «End of the State» is declared», and the State «reduced to the status of a residual category in front of global imperatives»; in the second, conversely, globalisation is rejected and considered «largely a myth and an exaggeration»; in the third phase, finally, State transformations and those of the international political economy can be considered with the due balance. After a careful analysis, it should be clear that Strange position shows all the nuances, careful thoughts and fine distinctions that characterise the 'third phase' of this debate. R. Higgott, *Taming economics emboldening international relations...*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> «the truth... is that the limits and the nature of any intergovernmental bureaucracy's decision-making power are set by the most powerful of its member governments». S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State...*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Moravcsik quoted in S. Strange, *Ibi*, p. 239.

<sup>54</sup> Fundamentally euro-sceptical, Strange considers the future of the Union simply determined by the political relations among 'big – States': particularly relevant are the delicate Franco-German condominium and the difficult relationship with the United Kingdom. Cfr. S. Strange, *The Power Gap: Member States and the World Economy*, in F. Brouwer-V. Lintner-M. Newman (eds), *Economic Policy Making and the European Union*, London, 1994, pp. 19-26.

<sup>55</sup> S. Krasner, *International Regimes*, Ithaca, NY, 1983, p. 2.

Focusing on international organisations and inter-governmental relations, regime theory tends, in Strange's view, to downplay trans-national relations and the role of all the actors different from the State – or State's officials<sup>56</sup>.

Her critique is not limited to the accusation of State-centrism, which is nonetheless evidence of the «common lower denominator» to which neo-liberalism has confined itself in accepting the «pacific coexistence of theories» summarised by the «neo-neo consensus»; the critique is directed towards the concept of regime itself, questioning its utility and explanatory power<sup>57</sup>. Indeed Strange considers this concept highly imprecise<sup>58</sup>, and dismisses the success of «regime studies» as nothing more than «an American academic fad», mainly derived from personal perceptions of American scholars<sup>59</sup>. At the same time, this concept is even dangerous, in that it represents «a highly distorting mirror of reality by implying an exaggerated measure of predictability and order in the system as it is», and it also value-loaded<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, this theory assumes order as the primary value, downplaying in such a way analysis concerned with the maximising of other fundamental values such as justice,

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<sup>56</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> «[this article] queries whether the concept of regime is really useful to students of international political economy or world politics; and whether it may not even be actually negative in its influence, obfuscating and confusing instead of clarifying and illuminating, and distorting by concealing bias instead of revealing and remove it». S. Strange, *Cave! Hic Dragones: A Critique of Regime Analysis*, «International Organisation», vol. 36 (1982), n. 2, p. 479.

<sup>58</sup> Another critique to the concept of regime is that it is imprecise: confronting Keohane and Nye formulation – «*networks* of rules, norms and procedures that regularise behaviour and control its effects» – with Krasner's – «decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge» – and how these are used, Strange concludes that the concept is so vague and indefinite to be useless, since «it can be broadened as to mean almost any fairly stable distribution of the power to influence outcomes». *Ibi*, p. 485.

<sup>59</sup> The first of these perceptions concerns the perceived American decline: regimes are viewed as the possible multilateral answer to the failure of hegemonic power to fulfil its tasks at the international level, particularly concerning the management of the international economy. The success of this approach, considered a typical «American fad», would also depend on the role by influential scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. *Ibi*, p. 479.

<sup>60</sup> It is value-loaded in that «it takes for granted that what everyone wants is more and better regimes, that greater order and managed interdependence should be the collective goal». *Ibid.*, p. 487.

wealth and freedom. Regime theory is also rejected as a fundamentally static analysis<sup>61</sup> and one that «forgets all these areas in which there are no regimes»<sup>62</sup>.

Strange thinks that even «non-decisions» should be taken into account exactly as positive decisions are; focusing on international regimes, as defined by the mainstream of the discipline, leads instead to underestimate power asymmetries and dynamics, losing important areas of conflict and offering a vision of the world as more cooperative than it is. To fully appreciate the relevance of structural power and the consequences of its uneven distribution, Strange proposes instead to «substitute regimes with structure, issues with values, capacity with outcomes»<sup>63</sup>.

### The Potential of an Eclectic Approach

Notwithstanding her vast theoretical production, Strange's major contributions to IR theory probably are to be found more at the methodological and epistemological level than in single theories or analysis. It is at this level, as one could expect, that we find also the major critiques of her work. Indeed, if in her process of critique and deconstruction of traditional theories Strange has been very successful, highlighting limits and ambiguities of the standard approaches, she seems less effective in devising the analytical foundations that sustain her theoretical building.

Concerning the definition of structural power, which represents a fundamental concept in her thinking and potentially a major contribution to IR, different critiques arise. Walzenbach and Verbeek, for example, claim that this notion is «defective»<sup>64</sup>,

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<sup>61</sup> Finally, is possible to detect a certain tendency to a static analysis of organisations, «which continue to exist long after the *bargain* that sustained them ceased to exist»; This has the effect to detach the analysis from actual power dynamics.

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Story, commenting Strange's attack to regime theory. J. Story, *Setting the Parameters: A Strange World System*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>63</sup> Cfr. S. Strange, *The Future of the American Empire*, "Journal of International Affairs", vol. 42 (1988), n. 1, pp. 1-17.

<sup>64</sup> «...little is said about the dynamics of power relations and how relational power is ultimately translated in structural power». G.P.E. Welzenbach, *The Doubtful Handshake: from international to comparative political economy?*, in T.



whilst Robert Keohane, in a similar way, critiques the fact that Strange «conflates the key distinction between power as a set of capabilities – not necessarily exclusively material – and power as the ability to affect outcomes»<sup>65</sup>. Going further, Amy Verdun illustrates the ambiguities concerning the agent/structure debate<sup>66</sup> – a debate in which Strange expressly refused to engage<sup>67</sup>.

In general, as we can see, critiques are directed to the scarce attention Strange devoted to the definition of her theoretical tools<sup>68</sup>; a fact, Roger Tooze claims, which certainly detracted from the reception of her work<sup>69</sup>.

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Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 371. The same critique is made by Verbeek: «...Strange has not always been clear in her empirical analyses of relational power on how relational power relations were nested exactly in structural power conditions». B. Verbeek, *Criticizing US method and Thought in International Relations...*, cit., p. 152.

<sup>65</sup> R. Keohane, Foreword, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *Strange Power*, cit., p. xi. Particularly interesting is Ronen Palan's view: «Seen in one way, her rather off-hand treatment of the concept of structural power represents a wasted opportunity to challenge international relations theory at its very core. Seen in another way, Strange could not bring herself to believe in something as abstract as a theory of power. The concept of structural power is introduced, therefore, as a supportive grid within her framework approach». R. Palan, *Susan Strange 1923-1998: a great international relations theorist*, "Review of International Political Economy", vol. 6 (1999), n. 2, p. 128.

<sup>66</sup> Concerning the agent/structure debate, Strange simply found it «long, boring and inconclusively sterile», also because narrowed by an exclusive focus on States. Cfr. S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State...*, cit., pp. 69-70. Packer notes that «structures represent agents' preferences: not necessarily states, but also non-state and sub-state agents»; This recognition represents the first step to overcome the State-centrism of this debate. R. Packer, *Financial Liberalization and the reconstruction of state-market relations*, New York and London, 1998, p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> «Strange sees actors as pawns on a chessboard being able to make some moves but having to follow the rules of the game. Those who can determine the rules have the most power. However, none of them is ever in the position to fully set the rules. Yet, for a researcher wanting to use her theoretical approaches, is a guessing game when an actor has the capacity to act independently, and when his actions are predetermined by the structure». A. Verdun, *Money Power: Shaping the Global Financial System*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> As stated by Palan «Her reluctance to engage in theoretical debates left admittedly gaping holes in her arguments, which were often inconsistent and at times contradictory». R. Palan, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> «Her thought was sometimes internally contradictory and not fully thought out, and often it omitted what many others thought necessary theoretical considerations» R. Tooze, *Ideology, knowledge and Power in International*

Epistemologically, one of the main critiques to her work is that she did not develop a clear basis from which to draw hypothesis that could be «rigorously tested»<sup>70</sup>; but the point is that, as noted by Amy Verdun, Strange «personally believed that one was missing the point by framing research questions in such a way that they could be rigorously tested»<sup>71</sup>. The refusal to frame the research in this specific way is not to be considered a limit, but it represents instead a constitutive element of her approach. As we saw, she was not interested in building a theory of IR or IPE in the usual meaning of the word; she wanted to build a «framework of analysis», «a method of diagnosis of the human condition as affected by political, economical and social circumstances»<sup>72</sup>.

Indeed, even if Strange's rejection for a «too abstract theorising»<sup>73</sup> is clear, the theoretical relevance of her work should not be underestimated; however, this could be appreciated only if considered jointly with her general approach to the discipline and her peculiar conception of theory<sup>74</sup>.

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*Relations and International Political Economy*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>70</sup> That social sciences research should aim to product theories that could be empirically tested is one of the main features of the mainstream approach in IR. See Robert Keohane's view of the rationalist-reflectivist debate as reported in Steve Smith, *Reflectivist and Constructivist approaches to international theory*, in J. Baylis-S. Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford and New York, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> A. Verdun, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, *cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> As declared by Strange, in her typical style: «I am not generally regarded – nor wish I would to be – as a theorist in international relations». Strange, quoted in G. Underhill (ed), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, Oxford, 2000, p. 126. A critique of this position is expressed, for example, by Verbeek: «Strange was wrong to be critical of theorists. Her perspective on international relations badly needs them, if sound links are to be established between her grand vision and her empirical observations». B. Verbeek, *Criticizing US method and Thought in International Relations...*, *cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>74</sup> Critics to the theoretical consistency of her work are so forceful that she felt compelled to answer – partially – with a dedicated article: «*What Theory? The theory in Mad Money*», *cit.* This would have been also her last publication. For Strange, as we have seen, the approach to theory should be different. Robert Cox, in particular, finds useful to describe Strange's approach to theory using the metaphor, borrowed from Braudel, of a ship; a hypothesis represents this ship. «The trick is to find out in which set of circumstances the ship would sail well. You do not scuttle a ship because it will not sail in every circumstance. You take care not

We can thus agree with Palan that Strange's interest is devoted more to «develop *the challenge* than the theoretical construction in itself»; in this sense even «the concept of structural power is not truly a theory as much as a heuristic tool»<sup>75</sup>. Her goal was to build a framework to overcome the double separation politics/economics and domestic/international: «in terms of method, this implied the recourse to a number of analytical tools – structural power, network of bargains, non-state authority – rather than pushing any one of them to the highest sophistication»<sup>76</sup>.

At the same time, her position cannot simply be defined empiricist: «she was interested in theoretically informed empirical research»<sup>77</sup>. On the theoretical contents of her work, we believe, there is no better comment than her own:

They are rather more than analytical surveys of change in the world's system. Perhaps they are a bit like those children's comic-book puzzles in which the reader had to try to find the cat, the rabbit, the fox and the dog hidden in the foliage of a forest scene. A quick glance may not reveal them. But they are still there for the careful observer<sup>78</sup>.

Behind the apparent simplicity of her expositions, which is also due to clarity of style that only the best journalists possess – and often academics lack –, it is thus always necessary to search for the theoretical goals and assumptions of her work.

One point that has been made and deserves some attention concerns the normative character of Strange's works<sup>79</sup>. As seen,

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to use it where it will not work, but you do use it where it will. Susan Strange's sense of theory is similar to that of Braudel». R. Cox, *Take six eggs...*, cit., p. 177.

<sup>75</sup> R. Palan, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>76</sup> G.P.E. Welzenbach, *The Doubtful Handshake*, cit., p. 386.

<sup>77</sup> R. Palan, *op. cit.*, p. 123. As explained by Palan, «Susan simply cannot be subsumed within a conventional dichotomy of theory and practice. She was neither a theorist nor was she an empiricist. She was not interested in theory for its own sake, but equally she found empirical research utterly boring... A theory for her was not something one subscribes or adheres to, certainly not a totemic myth to be waved around like a patriotic flag. A theory is the name we give to the individual act of interpretation and reflection, it is a sensibility, a mode of expression in which one brings one's own life experience to bear upon the question at hand. A theory, therefore, is not a code but a voice». *Ibi*, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> S. Strange, *What Theory?*..., cit., p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> As underlined by Jens Odlander, in Strange's works there is a normative component that needs to be appreciated. J. Odlander, *The Quest for Leadership*

Strange considers fundamental to make explicit the values preferences on which every analysis is based. Her approach appears in this respect similar to that of Cox, for whom every theory, explicitly or not, embraces values and promotes goal and interests<sup>80</sup>. At the same time, as highlighted by Clair Cutler, Strange's approach cannot be genuinely considered 'critical' in that it misses a clear emancipative perspective<sup>81</sup>. In her approach, the perspective of the values also represents a heuristic tool. Apart from the practical difficulties this involves<sup>82</sup>, this is also linked to what Roger Tooze stigmatises with the «accusation of un-reflexivity»: while recognising the relevance of the value bias that exists in every research perspective «[Strange] seemed reluctant, to apply the analysis of the political economy of knowledge that she had first developed in *States and Markets* to the knowledge actually produced by the academia, including her own»<sup>83</sup>.

Strange seems indeed to recognise that «the processes we construct and use for producing legitimate knowledge is politics, and is thus a necessary part of any discussion of power»<sup>84</sup>; nonetheless, she fails to apply entirely the implications of this perspective to her

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in a *Strange World*, in L. Babic-B. Huldt (eds), *Mapping the Unknown: Towards a New World Order*, London, 1993, p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> R. Cox, *Social Forces, States and World Orders...*, cit., p. 87. The goal of critical theory is thus that of discovering them «to allow for a normative choice in favour of a social and political order different from the prevailing order».

<sup>81</sup> «how far going beyond the analysis towards prescription is a subjective choice»: S. Strange, *International Political Economy: Beyond Economics and International Relations*, cit., p. 22. As noted by Cutler, neither *Mad Money* nor *The Retreat of The State* can be considered «emancipative manifestos». Cfr. C. Cutler, *Theorizing the No-Man's-Land between Politics and Economics*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> First, it is not always evident which is the value – or the mix of values – that different actors try to maximize. Then is always difficult to draw a general balance; the same arrangement may increase the security of some actors and at the same time reducing it for others: is this value prioritised in the case? Finally, it seems difficult to reduce always any bargain to a combination of the four values indicated by Strange.

<sup>83</sup> R. Tooze, *Susan Strange, academic international relations*, cit., p. 285.

<sup>84</sup> Indeed this dimension is crucial in her critique to the methodological and theoretical orthodoxy established by the mainstream of the American academy in IR/IPE.

theoretical work<sup>85</sup>. As with many other aspects of her work, the full potential of her contribution remains somehow unexpressed.

### Conclusion: a Strange approach!

I believe profoundly that the function of higher education is to open minds, not to close them. The best teachers are not those who create in their own image a crowd of uncritical acolytes and followers, obediently parroting whatever they say or write. The best are those who stimulate and help people... to develop their own ideas and to work them out<sup>86</sup>.

To evaluate one author's contribution is always a difficult enterprise. In Susan Strange's case, this seems to be further complicated, for some reasons. First of all, the issue of time. On the one hand, her absence – Strange died in 1998 – could limit the possibility to formulate a conclusive interpretation and give a definitive sense to her thought. On the other hand, 20 years after, and 40 years from the establishment of IPE as an academic discipline, might be the right time to reflect on her legacy, since as underlined by Roger Tooze, «it is even more of a risky proposition to attempt an overview without the passage of a substantial time period to sharpen the focus of any benefits of hindsight, and to let both intertextual exchange and concrete world events pass some judgement on her work»<sup>87</sup>.

A second difficulty derives from the very structure Strange gave to her work. As seen, her method prevented her to formulate hypotheses that could be *rigorously tested*; what we have is a lot of intuitions, supported by empirical cases and thoughtful observations, and brought together in alternative theoretical construction by her interpretative capacity. So, there is nothing «to test». What is needed is an *interpretative* work capable of uncovering links and theoretical constructions that sustain her analysis.

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<sup>85</sup> In particular, Tooze maintains that Strange's main error consists in not assigning to the knowledge structure a prevalent position. Cfr. R. Tooze, *Susan Strange, academic international relations*, cit. and R. Tooze, *Ideology, knowledge and Power in International Relations and International Political Economy*, in T. Lawton-J. Rosenau-A. Verdun (eds), *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> R. Tooze, *Susan Strange, academic international relations...*, cit., p. 280.

Finally, we should perhaps consider with more attention a dimension often neglected by the theoretical analysis: because “it is the combination of what she wrote and said, how she wrote it and when it was written, that makes Susan Strange’s work of fundamental importance”<sup>88</sup>.

Concerning Susan Strange’s contribution this dimension seems to have a major relevance: her role of innovator of the discipline, as well as her critical and irreverent stance toward academic hierarchy and «dogmas» of mainstream approaches, are to be certainly considered also a reflection of her personality – and of the atypical path that lead her from being a journalist, to be «for a quarter of a century, ...the most influent figure in the British international studies»<sup>89</sup>.

This qualified premise notwithstanding, it is possible and certainly useful to reflect on Strange’s contribution. Particularly, as we have tried to show, a deeper analysis of the relevance of her work for International Relations theory is something that is crucially needed. What emerged from our tentative scrutiny is an eclectic and influential approach to the themes of International Relations and International Political Economy. Starting from the concept of structural power and the redefinition of the content of politics, we dealt with some of the main questions debated within *international studies*: from regime theory to the role of international organisations, from State transformations to asymmetries of power.

At the core of her approach seems to be one of the most contested questions of IR and the social sciences more in general: the issue of method<sup>90</sup>. In her work this latter seems to represent both a starting point and a goal; a starting point, since it is towards the methodological perspective that her critique of the traditional approaches are directed<sup>91</sup>. This appears also as the main theoretical

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<sup>88</sup> «In other words, the coming together of the intertextual, social and individual contexts reveal both the intellectual and political substance of her work». *Ibi*, p. 281.

<sup>89</sup> C. Brown, *Susan Strange: a critical appreciation*, “Review of International Studies”, vol. 25 (1999), n. 3, p. 531.

<sup>90</sup> Here, in line with Strange’s approach, we intend “method” in a comprehensive way, meaning the complex interaction of ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives.

<sup>91</sup> Starting from the denunciation of the *mutual neglect* between IR and international economics, to the critique of the epistemological and methodological

goal of the Author: Strange doesn't point to the construction of a detailed and self-contained theory in the conventional sense, but she is more interested in developing the «challenge» of an innovative «framework of analysis» able to grasp the changing reality of our times.

Her ontological construction is the result of this approach: through the analytical tool of structural power the classical, central role granted to the State is dramatically reconsidered, and we see the stage crowded with «entities» scarcely considered by International Relations theory. The 'Retreat of the State' thesis thus also assumes the nuances of a theoretical provocation directed towards the traditional approaches, particularly neo-realist and neo-liberal<sup>92</sup>.

Her epistemological stance, finally, cannot but reflect her eclectic approach: between those who consider her an empiricist and those who see in her work the features of a constructivist standpoint, clearly emerges that Strange thought refuses to adapt to these categories, thus forcing us to reflect on the meaning and the utility of such juxtapositions.

All the critiques we outlined should not lead us to reject her approach; what is needed is instead a critical analysis of her work, using the very same instruments she devised to uncover the weakness of her theories, the limits of her concepts and the values preferences at the base of her thought. Only through this «reflexive effort» we can fully understand her analysis, using her conceptual tools and her insights to face the contradictions and the unresolved questions emerging from her writings. Only in this way it is possible to revitalise and appreciate her contribution to IR theory<sup>93</sup>.

The relevance of this contribution consists particularly in its capacity to stimulate critiques and reflections in IR and IPE, to

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*orthodoxy* established by the mainstream of the American academy.

<sup>92</sup> The construction of such an approach cannot be confused with the results of the analysis: from the goal to overcome the State-centric bias we cannot directly derive the complete cancellation of the State from the scene.

<sup>93</sup> This can mean sometimes to indulge in what Tooze calls the «temptation» «to impose retrospective fits, patterns, orders and hierarchies, imagining connections and path dependency lines that were, at the time, more intuition than logic, more gut-feelings than carefully worked out conclusions». R. Tooze, *Susan Strange, academic international relations...*, p. 287. Instead, we argue, this is exactly what Strange's approach demands us to do.

challenge the orthodoxies and the established disciplinary boundaries, to make people think on methods and perspective that influences this field of studies<sup>94</sup>. The whole academic course of Susan Strange reflects an endless effort to overcome the restrictions that limit our understanding of the international domains: to force her colleagues, and everyone concerned with «the human condition as affected by political, economical and social circumstances» to reflect and critically discuss not only about means, but also about goals of international politics, and of the disciplines that have it as object of studies, represent an integral and fundamental part of her work<sup>95</sup>.

However, Strange's legacy could not be limited in a series of theoretical and methodological provocations: from her analysis, several intuitions, concepts, theoretical tools and empirical examples emerge to produce and stimulate innovative approaches to the study of international dynamics. As perfectly expressed by her own words:

They are by way of being a signpost, pointing not along an open well-trodden track but rather into a mysterious forest of the unknown. Just where the path will lead, I am not at all sure. That is the nature of exploration – and its appeal to the mentally adventurous<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> The fact that many of her analysis, even if produced and expressed through unorthodox methods, eventually resulted true, should make us reflect. In describing the persistence of American hegemony, the limits of the Japanese challenge, the growing role of the financial structure and its inherent fragility, Strange has been able to see, before and better than others, the transformations of the world we are living in.

<sup>95</sup> S. Strange, *States and Markets...*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>96</sup> S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State...*, cit., pp. 16-17.





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I *Quaderni di Scienze Politiche*, la cui pubblicazione è iniziata nel 2011 sotto la denominazione di *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche*, si ispirano ad una tradizione scientifica interdisciplinare orientata allo studio dei fenomeni politici nelle loro espressioni istituzionali e organizzative a livello internazionale e, in un'ottica comparatistica, anche all'interno agli Stati. Essi sono promossi dal Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, costituito nel 1983 e interprete fedele della tradizione dell'Ateneo.

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La mappa disegnata nel 1507 dal cartografo tedesco Martin Waldseemüller, la prima nella quale il Nuovo Continente scoperto da Cristoforo Colombo è denominato "America" e dichiarata nel 2005 dall'UNESCO "Memoria del mondo", è stata scelta come immagine caratterizzante dell'identità del Dipartimento, le cui aree scientifiche hanno tutte una forte dimensione internazionalistica.



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