

A Philosophical History of German Sociology

Frédéric Vandenberghe

Routledge Studies in Critical Realism

A Philosophical History of German Sociology

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A Philosophical History of German Sociology presents a systematic reconstruction of critical theory, from the founding fathers of sociology (Marx, Simmel, Weber) via Lukács to the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas). Through an in-depth analysis of the theories of alienation, rationalization and reification, it investigates the metatheoretical presuppositions of a critical theory of the present that not only highlights the reality of domination, but is also able to highlight the possibilities of emancipation.

Although not written as a textbook, its clear and cogent introduction to some of the main theories of sociology make this book a valuable resource for undergraduates and postgraduates alike. The following investigation of theories of alienation and reification offer essential material for any critique of the dehumanizing tendencies of today’s global world.

Recently translated into English from the original French for the first time, this text showcases Vandenberghe’s mastery of German, French and English traditions of sociological theory. The result is an important and challenging text that is essential reading for sociology students of all levels.

Frédéric Vandenberghe is a Sociology professor and researcher at IUPERJ (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His writings on a broad range of sociological and philosophical topics have been published as books and articles around the world.

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Introduction: the adventures of reification

A single concept was all it took to dissipate the whole of philosophy, showing how partial philosophies are founded on only one aspect and reveal just one side of the concept.

(Gaston Bachelard: *La Philosophie du non*)

Despite the quite understandable tendency of historians of ideas to trace the origins of sociology as far back as possible, returning to Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, there is now a general acknowledgement that sociology emerged as a relatively autonomous discipline, distinct from economics and political science, in the nineteenth century. Sociology cannot be separated from the discovery of the relative autonomy of society, which is linked to the advent of modernity: right from the start, the new discipline expressed the self-reflexive attitude of modern societies towards themselves, and to what eludes them. As a sub-system of science, which is a sub-system of society, sociology can be viewed as a kind of large-scale psychoanalysis that seeks to reveal the historicity and facticity of functionally differentiated modern societies.

The relative autonomy of society

Historicity: between contingency and necessity

Defined vaguely as the “science of society,” sociology emerged with modernity, following the collapse of the *Ancien Regime*, which gave way under the triple pressures of the French Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution (cf. Nisbet (1966), Touraine (1974), Bauman (1976), Elias (1984) and Wagner (1994)). If these revolutions taught their contemporaries any single lesson, it was the principle of historicity: the insight that society is not an immutable whole, meta-socially guaranteed by God or Prince. Instead, society is seen as an entirely human institution that is contingent, but also relatively autonomous – an institution that obeys its own laws, and even imposes its laws on agents against their will.¹ Indeed, from its inception, the discovery of the principle of historicity is inseparable from the simultaneous discovery of the

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dual principles of the contingency and necessity of society: sociology rapidly understood that humans have the ability to make history freely, even as their history escapes them, either because they do not control it or because it controls them by imposing its own external laws. The founding experience of early sociology can thus be summarized as the insight that society is the 'result of men's action, but not a human project' (A. Ferguson). Paradoxically, it is only when the individual is alienated from, and crushed by, his own product that individual and society can become the focus of an objective science. According to the categories identified by Jean-Pierre Dupuy (1992: 38), the task and challenge of sociology as an emerging science are the need to understand the link between two autonomies: the autonomy of the subject who makes up society, and the autonomy of the object, which follows its own laws, since subjects do not know what they are doing.

Modernity thus heralded the emergence of an artificial factor: humans became aware that society is not a natural fact, nor a gift from God; instead, it is their own creation, the product of their actions. This new awareness of the relation between social *poiesis* and human *praxis* stimulated utopian projects for conscious social transformation, as well as technocratic projects seeking to plan society from a comprehensive perspective (Saint-Simon, Marx). In counterpoint to the artificial approach, modern societies also discovered the torments of the autonomization of society. Human beings make society, but their actions and reactions produce unexpected results, multiplying, interconnecting, and developing their own dynamic, so that whatever they do, they contribute to the autonomization of the processes they initiate. In its inert facticity and structural opacity, society is in effect a "second nature" for humans, since it counters their plans and imposes external constraints on them. This is the classic view of alienation: human products are objectified, dehumanized, and eventually turn against their creators.

For and against the autonomization of society

The fundamental problematic that informed sociology as a newly emerging discipline was a concern with the relative autonomy of self-referential socio-cultural systems, functioning according to rigorous mechanisms that are able, if not to impose their necessity upon actors, then at least to considerably limit their room for maneuver (Elias, 1973: ch. 1; 1984: 37ff.). There are arguments both for and against the concept of the autonomization of society. In interpretations supporting autonomization, which are found mainly, but not exclusively, on the right of the political spectrum, a conservative emphasis focuses on the necessity for institutions; a supposedly realist approach concentrates on the inevitable differentiation of the social sphere into autonomous sub-systems; and an ultra-liberal approach highlights the advantages of spontaneous order and the detrimental effects of any form of social planning.

In his philosophical anthropology, Arnold Gehlen (1981) starts from the view that human beings are defective (*Mängelwesen*). Unlike animals, humans no longer have instincts to guide their actions. Since control no longer comes

naturally from within, Gehlen concludes that it must be imposed from without. If humans are not to be lost in the chaos of drives and affects, they must re-establish the lost link between instincts and stimuli by interposing institutions between themselves and the world. Institutions stabilize his understanding of the world and provide general rules that considerably restrict the field of action. Rationalists like Fichte and Marx, who criticize alienation in defense of the subject's autonomy, simply fail to understand that to avoid falling back into the state of nature, humans must alienate themselves in institutions and must allow themselves to be "consumed" by them (1983: 366–379).

Whereas Gehlen claims that alienation is good for humans, Niklas Luhmann (1987; 1997: II) simply drops the intellectual tradition of "old Europe" – and with it the humanist notion of alienation. For Luhmann, all social systems, including economic, political, scientific, and pedagogic systems, face the problem of complexity. To reduce the complexity of their environment, societies must control the relations of interchange with the environment, differentiate their functions, define themselves according to their own criteria, develop binary codes, and present themselves as self-referentially sealed worlds, unaffected by other sub-systems or overall inter-systemic integration. The autonomization of sub-systems is inevitable since it is a necessary pre-condition for the functional differentiation of hyper-complex societies. Of course, nothing precludes the expression of a sense of nostalgia, in a critique of the autonomization of the social sphere that appeals to the Enlightenment's cherished vision of the autonomous subject, but according to Luhmann, sociology has revealed the limitations of an approach based on obsolete principles. "Sociology is not an applied *Aufklärung*," he says, "rather it is a decanted *Aufklärung* [*nicht angewandte, sondern abgeklärte Aufklärung*], an attempt to determine the limits of Enlightenment philosophy" (Luhmann, 1971a: 67).

Friedrich Hayek (1973–1979), Nobel Prize winner in economics and neo-liberal mentor, is more openly ideological than Luhmann: his approach is founded on an affirmation of the inescapable limits of human reason. In a tirade against "constructivist rationalists," he claims that because it is impossible to know the physical and social worlds and their relations in their totality, we can only act in an acceptable manner through the tacit understanding of abstract rules over which we have no control. Just as an individual cannot attain a synoptic view of everything in the surrounding environment, so too in a complex system such as society, there is no central steering point from which to command everything related to the functioning of the whole. Society is a spontaneous order (*kosmos*), not an instituted order (*taxis*). According to Hayek, humans increase their ability to act if they recognize that spontaneous social orders exist, such as the market (the "catalaxy"), an order that emerges spontaneously from the mutual adjustment of many individuals whose actions respect property laws and contracts. In Hayek's view, this is the best of all possible orders, and this leads him to conclude that any state intervention is, by definition, an act of coercion that can only result in disorder since it impedes the mutual adjustment on which the spontaneous order is based.

In the critical tradition, the (relative) autonomization of society is seen as neither an advantage, nor a necessity, nor is it, for that matter, inevitable. Starting

from the hypothesis that socialization must be conscious to some degree (depending on the attraction of the Fichto-Hegelian model of the identity of subject and object) the autonomization of society is invariably criticized as a form of dehumanization, alienation, or reification. This book offers an in-depth analysis of the critical tradition of German sociology in relation to this specific theme. The intellectual antecedents of the tradition lie in Hegel's early writings and its (provisional) conclusion can be found in Jürgen Habermas's recent texts. By focusing the analysis on the problem of the alienating autonomization of society, I hope to show that the apparently esoteric notion of reification (*Verdinglichung*) goes right to the heart of sociology. Whether in Marx, Weber, Simmel and Lukács, or Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas, in every instance we encounter the dual question of the reification of the world and the alienation of the human being as the central theme that forms and informs their work.

The ideological pathos of the critique of reification

Autonomy, anomie, alienation

The thesis of the (relative) autonomy of society is not just an *idée fixe* that acts as an argument for the relative autonomy of sociology. Contrary to the views of constructivists, such as Tenbruck (1981) and Pels (1998: ch. 5), the object of sociology is not simply an artefact of the sociological project. In fact, the thesis about the *sui generis* existence of society is simultaneously an expression of the fundamental experience of modernity and a constitutive *a priori* of sociology. By definition, a sociologist accepts that "society" exists, distinct from the economy and the polity, and essentially irreducible to the psyche (or biology or chemistry). It does not mean, as Durkheim (1968) claimed, that social facts must always be explained by social facts, but rather that social facts – that is, social entities, relations and representations – exist, and that they cannot be reduced to psychological facts (or biological, chemical, neurological facts). The two fundamental claims that the sociologist should not question are that society is relatively autonomous in regard to individuals and that sociology makes a transcendental presupposition regarding the existence of this sphere. Anyone who rejects the thesis of the autonomy or relative irreducibility of the social sphere, from conviction or as provocation, denies the autonomy of sociology and thereby excludes himself from the community of sociologists. This categorical claim is both descriptive and performative. I understand the thesis of the relative autonomy of society transcendently: it is a necessary condition for sociology as a relatively autonomous discipline. Formulated in these terms, this thesis is no more the acceptance of the objectivist premises of the Durkheim School than it is a rejection of the subjectivist variations of sociology. It simply stipulates that the relative autonomy of sociology is analytically linked to the relative autonomy of its objective field. It is because there are social facts – social entities, relations and representations that are relatively irreducible – that sociology is a relatively autonomous discipline.

Thus, to use a typically Marxist expression, it is not by chance that sociology was established at the moment of the great transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* – a transition that can be characterized in Hegelian terms by a gradual “schism” between subject and object, between humans and their work, that was retrospectively, reflexively sanctioned by sociology – just as it is no mere chance that the notion of reification (*Verdinglichung* or *Versachlichung*) appeared at the dawn of modernity. Nevertheless, in so far as the notion of reification is inseparable from what I call, with a nod towards the founder of the history of ideas, Lovejoy (1936: 10–14), a specific “ideological pathos,” reification should not be confused with the relative autonomy of society. The relative irreducibility of society is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for reification. The proof of this, I suggest, lies in the fact that Durkheim, who insisted so strongly on the *sui generis* nature of society, did not develop a theory of reification or alienation. Indeed, although like Marx Durkheim was a radical critic of the institutions and dominant values of modern society, his normative conceptions of humans and society, which are in many ways opposed to those of the classic German sociologists whose work I discuss, prevented him from developing such a theory (cf. Horton 1964; Dawe, 1970, 1978; Lukes, 1977: 74–95). Significantly, in *Suicide* he allots only a very marginal role (one brief note) to “fatalist suicide,” that is, to a suicide which, unlike anomic suicide, is caused not by a lack but by an excess of social control (cf. Durkheim, 1960: 311, n.). To put it crudely, one could say that although moral anarchy is Durkheim’s central problem, he did not conceive the problem of reification – defined for now as the domination of the individual by external forms of constraint – as a problem, but rather, as a solution to anomie. The theory of reification and the theory of anomie presuppose different axiological systems. This explains not only why Durkheim did not develop a theory of reification, but it also shows that the relative autonomy of social structures cannot simply be confused with reification.

The enlightened Anti-Enlightenment

The notion of reification is imbued with ideological pathos. It expresses the typically romantic fear and disillusionment experienced by European intellectuals faced with the triumph of industrial-capitalist bourgeois society and the accompanying, inexorable rise of formal-instrumental reason, which undermined the foundations of community and imposed itself in all areas of life. Following Lovejoy, by “pathos” I refer to a metaphysical sensibility or sensitivity. I am not using the adjective “ideological” in the Marxist sense; by ideology, I am referring to all the non-empirical political, moral, and anthropological hypotheses that inform a social theory. Robert Nisbet (1966: 266) has argued that like alienation, which belongs to the same “conceptual family” and with which it is often associated, if not confused, the concept of reification represents “the antithesis or inversion of progress.” This claim may be true, but given that Nisbet retains and reinforces the myth of the conservative origins of sociology (Giddens, 1977: 212–218 and 1982: 47–51; Birnbaum, 1971: 81–93), I believe it is necessary to reject this thesis, on the grounds that it associates conservative, even reactionary, connotations with the

concepts of alienation and reification. Even if reification does imply a critique of the idea of progress and the Enlightenment, it should also be recognized that the Anti-Enlightenment tradition is not homogenous. Following Steven Seidman (1983: ch. 2), we can identify three different approaches within the nebulous Anti-Enlightenment, namely philosophical conservatism, anti-bourgeois romanticism and revolutionary radicalism. None of the authors considered can be included among the family of conservative Anti-Enlightenment thinkers such as Bonald, Burke, and de Maistre, which the Germans call the Counter-Enlightenment (*Gegenaufklärung*). This leaves the romantics and the radicals. Apart from Simmel, Weber, and the late Horkheimer, all of the authors whose work I consider tend towards revolutionary radicalism. Nevertheless, in my opinion the specificity of the critique of reification comes not from its link to revolutionary thinking, but from its connections to various forms of “romanticism” (Lovejoy 1948: 183–253). In my view, the origins of sociology, particularly classical German sociology on the question of reification, are found primarily in romanticism, in what Löwy (1979; Löwy and Sayre 2001), following Lukács, called “anti-capitalist romanticism.”

This thesis of the connections between romanticism and German sociology is indebted to Arthur Mitzman’s analysis (1966, 1973: Part 1). According to Mitzman, judgments and solutions vary depending on whether the critic judges modern society on the basis of a “Faustian” vision of humanity, characterized by an incessant battle to master the world, or on the basis of a “Apollinian” vision of civilized human beings who value harmony and seek to reconcile humans and nature. In the first instance, modernity is seen as intrinsically “reifying” and the solution is social; in the second instance, modernity is viewed as intrinsically alienating and the solution lies with the individual. However, this analysis is problematic. First, by characterizing romanticism as an anti-modernist movement, Mitzman seriously underestimates the progressive, modernist impact of romanticism. In looking for a non-reifying modernism, the romantic movement was not opposed so much to modernity as to reification. Furthermore, to give just two examples, it is not at all clear how Marx or Adorno would be classified on this basis. Marx clearly favored the social solution, yet it was he who formulated the classic theory of alienation; conversely, Adorno, who was fixated like no other thinker on the phenomenon of reification, rejected the theory of alienation and valued the Apollonian personality. Finally, Mitzman does not see that the distinction he establishes between the theories of reification and self-alienation follows a more fundamental distinction that can be drawn within romanticism between the individualist, modernist and progressive movement on the one hand and the holistic, anti-modernist and conservative movement on the other (cf. Mannheim (1982: 164–181) and Gouldner (1973: 323–366), as well as Ringer (1969: 128–199), Arato (1974) and Shalin (1986) who connect it to neo-Kantism).

Since this individualistic and modernist strand of Romanticism gradually becomes confused with the critical rationalism of the Enlightenment, it is somewhat problematic to associate it, as Seidman does, with the Anti-Enlightenment. Given that progressive romanticism had already incorporated, or, as Mannheim

(1964: 454) puts it in his famous essay on conservatism, “sublated” (*aufgehoben*) the modernist and rationalist moment of the Enlightenment, it is not a matter of abandoning the Enlightenment project, but rather of enlightening the *Aufklärung* in order to reflexively continue its emancipatory project. Moreover, this is why the progressive movement in romanticism, which, to use Louis Dumont’s expression (1985), fully accepts the ideology of the “individualist universalism” of modernity without reservation, can also be considered a sub-movement of the Enlightenment.

The critique of reification originates within a very specific ideological context, which I term the “Enlightened Anti-Enlightenment.” This context is characterized by individualism, modernism and above all, by an insistence on autonomy in the Kantian sense (Levine, 1995: ch. 9). If we now distinguish, within the progressive, individualist strand of romanticism, two different, but not disjunctive, structures of sensibility, namely a tendency towards ideological activism and a nostalgic-tragic attachment to the past, it is possible to classify the authors discussed in this study of theories of reification according to whether they are more inclined towards active optimism or defeatism: Marx, Lukács, Marcuse and Habermas fit in the first category; Simmel, Weber, Horkheimer and Adorno fit the second.² To explain the emergence and attraction of the concept of reification, one must refer to a modern understanding of autonomy, in the positive sense of self-determination, rather than the wholly negative sense of an absence of external constraints (Berlin, 1969: 118–172). Intellectuals, who are singularly predisposed to value autonomy due to their position and activities, criticize modern society in terms of reification because social formations, as autonomous human creations that exceed human mastery, come up against humans and threaten to crush them by undermining their autonomy. Without the humanist and individualist premises that humans are, and must be, autonomous subjects, masters of their own actions, rather than heteronymous objects, one thing among many, subject to external determinants imposed by pseudo-natural laws, reification, understood as the alienating autonomy of social forms and formations could not and would not be considered a problem.

Since modern society forms a relatively autonomous systemic fabric made up of functional interconnections that inevitably limit individual autonomy, we might well ask whether reification is not simply part and parcel of the modern human condition. After all, the disjunction between system and lifeworld, the functional differentiation of self-regulating sub-systems, and the implied heteronomy are distinctive characteristics of advanced modern societies. This is an important objection, since it demonstrates that if the concept of reification is to retain its critical edge, and if criticism is to avoid collapsing into a philosophical conservatism bemoaning the “lament of reification” (Adorno), criticism must establish and respect its own limits. This means that objective idealism must be abandoned and the relative irreducibility of the systemic structures of society must be accepted. The implication of giving up objective idealism in recognition of the relative irreducibility of the system in the lifeworld is that the unity between the system and lifeworld should not be conceived according to the Fichto-Hegelian model of a

split ethical totality (I return to this point in the chapters on Marx, Lukács, and Habermas). The critique of reification does not imply a longing to turn back the clock, nor an appeal to abolish the systemic properties of society as such; rather, it is a need to grapple with the systemic social structures that artificially limit individual autonomy. In other words, if autonomy is to retain its value and meaning as a criterion of judgment, reification should only be concerned with the “over-repressive” (Marcuse) systemic proprieties of society that impose superfluous alienation, which could be abolished under the actual circumstances without losing the functional differentiation of modern societies. The implicit challenge for reification is thus to achieve, as far as possible, the optimal conditions for autonomy.

Social reification and methodological thingification

Epistemological quarrels

The theoretical, scholarly and technical concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*) is closely connected to the development of Marxist thought. However, unlike the concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*), which is the core concept of the *Paris Manuscripts*, if not the entirety of Marx’s work, reification does not have an undisputed, canonical origin. Depending on the inclinations of the commentator (Meszaros, 1972a; Rose, 1978; Pitkin, 1987), the concept has been attributed to Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Simmel, Weber or Lukács. In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant (1964a, IX: 197) uses the word “*Verdingung*” as a synonym of “sale by contract.” In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche (1955, II: 585) uses the verb *verdinglichen* to ridicule the hypostasis of concepts in general, especially the concept of causality. In his philosophy of law, Hegel (1970, VII: 144) uses the word *Verdingung* with the sense, and in the context of, the alienation (*Entäußerung*) of property. The substantive term *Verdinglichung* only appears with Marx; however, to my knowledge, it appears only twice in Marx’s writings, and both times in the third book of *Capital* (in the section on the “Trinity Formula” (MEW, XXV: 838) and in the chapter on the relations of distribution and production (MEW, XXV: 887). Yet according to the “official”, orthodox and canonical account, found in several dictionaries and encyclopedias of Marxism, the concept supposedly first appeared in the first volume of *Capital*, in the famous chapter, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” even though it is not in fact used there. Later Georg Simmel used *Verdinglichung* in *Philosophy of Money* (1900) while Max Weber continuously used the term *Versachlichung* in *Economy and Society* (1914–1921), but their contribution to the use of the term is so poorly known that several commentators (Pitkin, 1987: 246; Feuerlicht, 1978: 12) have gone so far as to claim that Georg Lukács, who was directly influenced by Simmel and Weber, forged it in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). The classic version of the theory of reification was indeed formulated by the young Lukács in this collection of articles, in the central chapter entitled “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.”³

To my knowledge, the word *reificatio* does not appear in any Latin dictionary. Etymologically, the neologism, which appeared around 1860, derives from the

contraction of the Latin words *res* and *facere*. Reification can be defined literally as “effective or mental transformation” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) into a thing from something which was originally not a thing (*res*).⁴ Hannah Arendt (1958: 139–141) uses the term in the first sense, of effective transformation. For her, reification is related to “making,” to “the work of *homo faber*.” Thus, the cabinet maker who makes a table reifies his idea, his mental image of the table, not the raw materials, for they are already *res*, and only God creates *ex nihilo*. On the other hand, W.O. Quine (1981: 9–15 and 183) uses the term in the second sense, of mental transformation. For Quine, reification concerns the selection of entities we consider real and which we therefore accept in our ontology.

The highly critical, polemical, character of reification should not be overlooked, for its meaning and standard usage invariably carries negative connotations. As a subversive concept, reification designates the becoming-thing of that which *by right* is not a thing. This pseudo-thing can be a concept, person, animal, relation, process, social world or commodity – the list goes on. The reification of these pseudo-things involves illegitimately attributing them with, alternately, facticity, fixity, objectivity, externality, impersonality, naturalness, in short, the ontological thingness deemed inappropriate. In every case, the concept of reification presupposes an ontology which initially is only rarely, if ever, made explicit (Thomason, 1980: 163); usually it is introduced secretly. In this analysis, I seek systematically to render explicit the ontology adopted by each author so as to clarify his notion of reification.

Reification is the opposite of personalization and is therefore conceptually related. While reification transforms something which is not a thing into a thing, personification transforms that which is not a person into a person. The demythologization of world views can be seen as reification: magical objects lose their personal *anima* and become things. Reification, in Marx’s sense, can also be seen as personification: social or pseudo-natural forces are perceived and understood as quasi-human forces that rule the world. The notion of “thing” is highly metaphysical. What a thing is depends on which ontology one adopts. What some people consider a thing, for instance Pegasus or social facts, is viewed by others as a reification. Furthermore, the extension of the notion of thing is historically variable. To give just two examples, the Greeks considered slaves to be things and the colonial masters considered black people as animals. Since then, black people, women of all races, and some animals have crossed the line separating the domain of “things” from the domain of “persons” and are no longer perceived as “goods” whose trafficking is legitimate.

Finally, before proposing a typology of reification, it is important to emphasize the essentially metaphorical and metonymical character of this concept. Metaphor implies the transfer from one or more words to an object or concept that they do not literally denote in order to suggest a comparison with other phenomena. Metaphor connotes more than it denotes. It operates by analogy and, as Perelman reminds us (1988: 128), analogy relates to the theory of argument, not to ontology. Taken literally, it becomes absurd: concepts then become fetishes, and thought soon turns to myth (Turner and Edgley, 1980; Turner, 1987). As we will

see on several occasions, the danger of scientific thought falling helplessly into unreflective, tautological thought is all the more serious in the case of reification. The first methodological principle I therefore propose for the theory of reification is that reification must not itself be reified.

A typology of reification

Reification is a composite concept that conceals an amalgamation or confusion of two meanings. To untangle these different meanings, I distinguish “social reification” from “methodological thingification.” The meaning of the concept of social reification (the alienated and alienating autonomization of social structures), which can be traced back to Hegel, relates primarily to the sociological theory; while the meaning of the concept of methodological thingification (the hypostasis of the naturalist concepts and method), which originates with Nietzsche, is more closely connected to philosophy of the social sciences. Since the distinction between the concepts of social reification and methodological thingification corresponds roughly to the fundamental division between micro and macro sociology, and to the related epistemological views – a realist and objectivist view of the social field, on the one hand, and a nominalist and subjectivist view of it on the other – these concepts can be considered as truly “paired concepts” (Berger and Bendix, 1959). Indeed, like other paired concepts, such as society and community or statute and contract, which express the dual tendencies of society, the concepts of social reification and methodological thingification point to the limits of monistic epistemological perspectives and the need to reveal their dialectical complementariness (Gurvitch, 1962: 190–199). The objectivist perspective of social reification and the subjectivist perspective of methodological thingification are not mutually exclusive, like fire and water, but rather are complementary, like ham and eggs.

Methodological thingification

In philosophy of the social sciences, reification refers to both a critique of the hypostasis of concepts and to the naturalization of the subject and the lifeworld. I describe these two usages under the rubrics (a) “Critique of reism” and (b) “Critique of naturalism.”

(a) Critique of reism

The critique of the reification of concepts concerns the mental operation that transforms an abstraction (for instance, a notion, representation or concept) into material reality, a concrete object that exists “out there.” This is essentially a nominalist critique of naive realism (or “reism”). In this case reification is synonymous with what Alfred North Whitehead (1930: 65f.) called the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” The common criticism concerns the hypostasis of concepts or ideal-types, the slippage from substantive to substance, from signifier to signified,

that is typical of those who take a word for a thing (Bourdieu, 1984; Lacroix, 1985). This is the case, for example, with sociologists who transform their conceptual or lay phantoms (the “State,” the “Bourgeoisie,” the “Proletariat,” etc., always in capitals) into historical subjects capable of acting and determining their own ends (“the State decides,” “the French Church combats,” “the triumph of the glorious Proletariat” . . .). In this substantializing-emanating logic, which is closely related to magical-mythical worldviews, the Concept or Idea is similar to when, in the past, the hand of God conducted the earthly affairs as a lord commands his manor. Here, as elsewhere, W. I. Thomas’ famous dictum applies: “When men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (cf. Merton, 1968: ch. 13).

In sociology, as in philosophy, accusations regarding the hypostasis of concepts are chronic, not to say endemic. Hegel is accused of hypostasis by Marx, Marx by Weber and Simmel, Durkheim and Weber by Parsons, Parsons by Habermas, and Habermas by Honneth and Luhmann These serial defamations can no doubt be explained by the collision between the differing ontological discourses of philosophy and sociology, combined with a lack of consensus about the ontological status of their empirical referents.

So far as the conflict between ontological discourses is concerned, it is important to recognize that the theoretical ontology operating in the social sciences and the implicit ontology in the philosophical critique of the theoretical concepts of the social sciences are incommensurable (Spence, 1982). This is the case because the conditions of scientific production are different from those of critical thinking. As Ernst Cassirer (1994: 279) put it: “We cannot engage the functions intended to edify the reality of experience while simultaneously submitting them to critical investigation.” Working sociologists necessarily operate with a realist ontology – they speak of “stratification,” “revolutions” and the “political system,” assuming all the while that these abstractions refer to something real. But when philosophers discuss concepts and critique theories, they understand them in terms of a post-Kantian nominalism: “categories” of thought must not be confused with the “thing-in-itself” (the surreptitious transcendental paralogism, spearhead of the deconstructive critique of the metaphysics of presence). It therefore follows that the success of the critique of reism is effectively guaranteed in advance, but what is still more troubling is that the critique of reism has the potential to put into question the very possibility of sociology. To avoid this threat, the dual relative autonomy of sociology and its objects must be reasserted and deployed from a critical realist perspective.

Beyond the conflict of ontological discourses, we encounter further confusion at every level, due to the lack of consensus about empirical referents in sociology. While individualists claim that only individuals are real, relegating groups and other collective bodies to the status of conceptual entities (*entia rationis*), the holistic approach states that collectives are real and, indeed, that they are more real than the individuals they determine. Mid-way between the individualist and holistic approaches, the interactionist view claims that neither individuals nor groups are real; they emerge through their reciprocal implications. These ontological positions underpin epistemological positions. The opposition between

ontological individualism (nominalism) and ontological holism (realism) corresponds to an equally profound opposition between methodological individualism and methodological holism. I aim to supersede these oppositions by proposing a dialectical synthesis of critical realism and comprehensive-hermeneutic sociology. Further, I believe that critical sociology should aim for a synthesis of the realist moment that characterizes ontological holism, both in its materialist (Marxist) and its idealist (hermeneutics) versions, and the constructivist moment that characterizes the phenomenological approach of methodological individualism. Put negatively, I believe that, above all else, a critical theory must refute the false rationalism of the utilitarian variant of methodological individualism since, as Homans (1987) showed clearly, in the end this variant is no more than a version of vulgar behaviorism. Although the central postulate of methodological individualism – that social facts observed at the macro-sociological level must ultimately be explained by an analysis of the rational actions of individuals – has the advantage of leading to a refusal of sociologism, the advantage is only apparent. Since methodological individualism reduces human actions to the strategic action of *homo economicus*, paradoxically it too displays the hyper-determinism of the holistic position. One of the central theses of this book is that from a meta-theoretical view reification is nothing other than the conjunction of a strategic concept of action and a materialist concept of social structure.

(b) *Critique of naturalism*

The methodological critique of positivist naturalism in terms of the reification of the subject and the lifeworld is linked to the famous quarrel of methods (Frisby, 1976; Apel, 1979) which, since the nineteenth century, has fundamentally divided sociologists between those who prefer the explanatory method of the natural sciences (*Erklären*) and those who favor the interpretative method of the human sciences (*Verstehen*).

From its inception, sociology was built on the model of the natural sciences. Auguste Comte considered sociology, which he initially named ‘social physics’, as the extension and final element of the natural sciences. In the 47th lesson of his *Cours de philosophie positive* [course on positivist philosophy], he introduced the neologism “sociology” “to distinguish with a single term the complementary area of natural philosophy relating to all the fundamental laws which relate to social phenomena” (Comte, 1974: 38, note 3). Wilhelm Dilthey quite rightly criticized this subordination of the human sciences to the natural sciences, explaining that he could not accept Comte’s naturalism, that is, his unwillingness to recognize the specificity of socio-historical reality. To establish the irreducible difference between the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the natural sciences, Dilthey appealed to Vico’s principle of *verum factum* (*verum et factum convertuntur*), according to which, unlike nature, which is the product of God, and can therefore only be understood by him, we can understand socio-historical reality because it is the work of humans. Dilthey concluded that the human sciences are concerned with reality in as much as it is the objectification of the mind, the

exteriorization of subjectivity or the realization of the values and goals of the sensible world. In short, for Dilthey (1957, 148), “everything that is an objectification of the mind relates to cultural sciences.”

The appropriate method for the human sciences is the comprehensive-interpretative method which seeks to reactivate, by reconstitution of intentional meanings, subjective activity as it is objectified in socio-historical reality. But the intended meaning incorporated in the object can only be grasped within the signifying whole (*Wirkungszusammenhang*) through which its meaning is formed. Just as understanding a sentence involves understanding the page, and in turn the page depends on the book, and *vice versa*, so too understanding a meaningful activity presupposes an understanding of the lived context in which it takes place, through which it derives its meaning and becomes comprehensible. Together these two principles of understanding, the re-interiorizing of exteriorized meaning (the micro-understanding of action – the phenomenological moment) and the re-creation of the lived whole (the macro-understanding of a meaningful whole – the hermeneutic moment) destroy the positivist ideal of external observation.

Despite what Durkheim believed, social facts have a meaning; they cannot be treated as things subject to processes of experimentation or observation in which, through the neutralization of the lifeworld, they would be defined in terms of invariable causal sequences. To eliminate all meaning through naturalistic observation is equivalent to transforming psychic events into physical facts or reducing meaningful culture to mechanical nature. As Weber says, following Rickert, “an item *becomes* a part of “nature” if we cannot raise the question: What is its “meaning?”” (CS, 110). To eliminate meaning, the correlative of understanding, is to distort the object of investigation, dehumanizing it through a thingifying transformation. In response to Durkheim, we must assert that social facts are not things (Monnerot, 1946), and deliberately reintroduce objective meanings and subjective sense into sociological analysis. However, although “astronomic” knowledge of social phenomena cannot be the ideal of sociology, if only because in an open system there are no invariable laws, interpretative sociology has its limits and we must be aware of these. In as much as actions inevitably produce unexpected effects and form social systems that function effectively and objectively in a relatively autonomous fashion in relation to individuals, an objectifying disposition and a thingifying apparatus such as Marxism, structuralism or systems theory are appropriate (Markovic, 1972; Habermas, 1984–1987, II: 163–167). Humanists may protest all they like: when social facts are transformed into things, they must be treated as things – without forgetting, however, that things are themselves social facts which, as it happens, can be decoded as “the continuous accomplishments of the concerted activities of daily life” (Garfinkel, 1968: VIII, cf. also Maynard and Wilson, 1980).

Social reification

“Western Marxism” combines Marx’s analyses with those of Hegel, Simmel, and Weber (Habermas, TPF II: 165–236; Anderson, 1976; Merquior, 1986 and Jay,

1984a). The “holy book” of this important intellectual tradition is Georg Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*, in which the concept of reification is used extensively to criticize the alienating autonomization of the social system, either as a social fact, or an ideological fact. The critique of social reification is dialectical and therefore somewhat paradoxical: by insisting on the autonomy of the object, it seeks to reactivate the subject’s autonomy. This dialectical maneuver is only possible if one presupposes that the object is a subject or, in other words, that the object is an exteriorized product of the subject. The Hegelian metaphor of the differentiation and inversion of subject and object is thus the “grammatical grounding” for the critique of reification (Gouldner, 1985: ch. 9). Once this is clear, the critique of reification offers a transformatory critique that seeks to invert the inversion of subject and object. To paraphrase Freud: where the object once was, the subject must arise.

When thought through to its logical conclusion, reification theory leads to a model of a fully administered society (*total verwaltete Gesellschaft*) without meaning or freedom. In a reconstruction of a “perfect” theory of reification, three distinct analytical levels are systematically integrated: the foundational level of social critique (a) and two further levels of ideological critique, the first related to pre-reflexive false consciousness (b), and the second to reflexive false consciousness (c) of the analyst who duplicated the *doxa* of everyday life.

(a) *The social critique*

Social reification is concerned with the relatively autonomous, alienated, and alienating functioning of systems of culture and modern society, as well as their transformation of means to ends in themselves. While the worlds of culture and society, institutions and organizations, are human objectifications, products of their *praxis*, these worlds inevitably become increasingly complex in the course of their development. They are rationalized formally and functionally to the point where they transmute into a veritable cosmos that functions independently from the will and intentions of individuals, confounding their plans and designs, threatening their autonomy, and even their very existence. Bureaucracy is the classic example of the inversion of means into ends; more dramatically, the vicious circles of “institutional counter-productivity” that Ivan Illich denounced throughout his career, illustrate the same problem. Beyond certain critical thresholds of development, production becomes an obstacle to the objectives it supposedly serves: medicine destroys health, school makes students stupid, transport immobilizes, and communication makes people deaf and dumb.

In this analysis I systematically review the development of the theory of reification, following the chronological thread from Lukács’ first major synthesis of German sociology to Habermas’ second major synthesis of Lukács and the Frankfurt School. To resume the argument that follows most succinctly, in the tradition of Western Marxism, which culminates in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Simmel’s theory of the tragedy of culture and Weber’s theory of formal rationalization will be reviewed and reconnected to the Marxist theory of alienation. From this perspective, capitalism and formal rationalization enter into

an alliance, mutually reinforcing each other to the point that they eventually form a systemic infra-structural complex that affects all spheres of culture. Culture then becomes nothing more than a passive epiphenomenon of the formally rationalized infrastructure of capitalist society. Since it is entirely determined, it no longer determines; it merely reflects the base, thereby reinforcing it. Faced with these monolithic systemic systems, the individual disappears. The powerless individual is reduced to the role of support (*Träger*) for the structure, and loses all his transformatory powers. Activated by external forces, he is a simple functioning function; deactivated, he is reduced to a passive spectator of the objective enormity that oppresses him. He maintains and reproduces the alienated/alienating functioning of reified social structures through continued passive activity.

(b) *The critique of false consciousness*

The alienated subject is powerless (“loss of freedom”), but furthermore, he does not understand the meaning of everything going on over and around him (“loss of meaning”). Within his conscience, the autonomous functioning of socio-cultural structures appear as a natural and eternal, inhuman and unchangeable, phenomenon. He is unable to go beyond immediate appearances to understand the dialectical relations under the surface of things; he is unable to mediatize social facts by placing and interpreting them in the framework of a socio-historical totality (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*), which means that they become fetishized, fixed, and frozen in their facticity and “pseudo-concrete” immutability (Kosic, 1976, ch. 3). Stuck in an illusion of immediacy, the alienated subject normalizes, legitimizes and reinforces the alienating/alienated functioning of reified/reifying social structures. In this situation, the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism is adopted, generalized and connected to the Hegelian theory of “positivity,” forming a theory of ideology and “false consciousness.” When they are brought together, the theory of reification as social fact and the theory of reified conscience logically lead to the observation (in Frankfurt) of total reification: inevitably, the reified world appears as the only possible world.

This is the point where critical theory intervenes. By illuminating the objective mechanisms of domination and revealing the social basis of reification, it tries to provoke an awareness of the pseudo-natural character of the alienated functioning of social structures. Since the goal of criticism is to stimulate voluntarism and emancipation, it is somewhat paradoxical that it believes it can achieve this by emphasizing determinism and domination. It can only adopt this approach, however, because it presupposes that domination is the result of social action and that action always underlies domination. To paraphrase Sartre, reification is other people.

(c) *The critique of science*

Moving from the critique of the natural attitude (the *doxa*) of the everyday world to a reflexive scientific attitude, and specifically to the “scientific scientist” (Marx) who applies the methods of the natural sciences directly to the social, it could be said that, given the lack of a critical conscience regarding the ideological effects of

the method, it runs the risk of doubling and legitimizing reification by forming, as Adorno explains so well, a “reified apperception of the reified” (1976: 63, cf. also Horton, 1971). Indeed, by apprehending social reality the same way as natural reality, through his very methods, the scientist naturalizes and sanctions reality as such *nolens volens*, without knowing, and no doubt without wishing to. By sticking to what is and refusing to take a position on the basis of an erroneous interpretation of Weber’s axiological theory of neutrality, by sticking to observed facts and refusing to mediate them by placing them in the field of tension between the real and the possible, between what is and what could or should be, the scientist attains a second degree reification and hypostasizes the present state of affairs. But when social theory and sociological research are guided by a de-fetishizing philosophy of the social, such as the philosophy of *praxis*, which does not duplicate the reified conscience, but which de-reifies social facts by dissolving them into actions and processes, the socio-historical and socio-cultural dimensions of reified social structures become visible and their transformation possible. Hence, once again social movement is conceivable (Heller, 1987).

The above description positions the ideological critique of the social sciences at the borderline between the theory of social reification and the theory of methodological thingification. Indeed, it might just as well be considered an integral part of the theory of social reification (in which the social sciences appear as an “ideological apparatus of the state” among others whose function is to reinforce domination by naturalizing the *status quo*) as an integral part of the theory of methodological thingification (in which case the extreme view of social reification softens and the natural organic nature of society is decoded as pseudo-natural). Social facts no longer appear as things, but instead as human products. The dialectical nature of the concept of reification enables this reversal in the perspectives of systems theory and action theory.

However, since the theory of social reification ultimately tends towards a hyper-objectivist vision of society and the theory of methodological thingification tends, inversely, towards a hyper-subjectivist vision of society, the two perspectives appear to be mutually exclusive. Just as the critique of methodological thingification can be turned back against sociological theories of social reification, the ideological criticism of social reification can be turned against the critique of methodological thingification, as if it were simply a matter of adopting a social reification perspective for it to be refuted by the opposite perspective, and *vice versa*. In the conclusion, I try to escape these circular perspectives by developing a neo-objectivist and post-structurationist theory of society, taking into account social reification without falling into the trap of methodological thingification.

Towards a metacriticism of the theories of reification

Social theory, metatheory and metacritique

Social theory encompasses more than sociological theory. Not only does it ignore the institutional boundaries of different social disciplines, but in reaction to

sociology's paradigmatic crisis, its main objective is to establish a general social theory offering an adequate response to fundamental questions such as the status of the social sciences vis-à-vis the natural sciences, the nature and forms of action, social institutions, and structures, the relationship between individual and society, action and structure, etc. This interest in the ontological and epistemological foundations of sociology connects it to what is referred to hereafter as "metatheory" (Fuhrman and Snizek, 1990; Ritzer, 1991, 1992). Metatheory differs from social theory in that it does not seek as much to answer fundamental questions by constructing a substantial theory of the social world, as to systematize possible answers by mapping the "basic presuppositions" of the social sciences. Borrowing a mathematical term that was popular during the heydays of the structuralist era, I will use the notion of the metatheoretical "space (or combinatorial) of possibilities" and propose a cartographic re-construction of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of social theory. The metatheoretical space of possibilities reflects all the various stances taken in the field of social theory. Taken as a systematic elucidation of the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of the different social theories circulating in academia, metatheory is a necessary precondition for the development of a general social theory. Like psychoanalytic dialogue, metatheory enables an illumination of the "tacit dimension" which informs, or deforms, social theory. This is important, since if metatheory is poorly constructed, the social theory built on its foundations will be equally deficient.

In this book, I subject social theories of reification to a metatheoretical critique – which I call a "metacritique" – by showing that their basic presuppositions are fundamentally flawed. My central thesis is that the diagnosis of social reification, which is the conclusion of almost all the theories of reification considered here, results from a false metatheoretical construction. More precisely, I show that reification results from a premature closure of the metatheoretical space of possibilities, a closure which implies that purposeful rational action (Weber) or strategic rational action (Habermas) are the only possible types of action. By analogy with Gehlen's "cultural crystallization" (1963: 311–328), I use "metatheoretical crystallization" to refer to the state of reification that arises when the metatheoretical space is restricted in every sense. This metacritique of the theory of reification, which judges the theory on the basis of the metamethodological criterion of a gradual and preemptive crystallization of the space of possibilities – a criterion which is none other than the negative version of the positive post-positivist criterion of multidimensionality presented by Jeffrey Alexander (1982–1983) – is only possible and plausible if it succeeds in suggesting a convincing map of the space of metatheoretical properties of sociology.

The space of possibilities in sociology

It is widely accepted that sociology is currently in crisis; in fact, in my view it has always been in crisis. Since the time when the "orthodox consensus" fell apart and the alliance of functionalism and positivism lost its hegemony over the field, the

crisis has reached a point of veritable “multiple paradigmatisis” (Luhmann, 1981: 50). Competing approaches are prospering, schools and sub-schools are blooming, and specialized sociologies are multiplying. There is an inflationary proliferation of micro- and macrosociologies: different variants of phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionisms, structuralisms, functionalisms, and marxisms coexist one next to the other, each more esoteric than the next, under the vast umbrella that is sociology. What do analysis of the last five seconds of a telephone conversation (Schegloff) and world systems theory (Wallerstein) have in common, other than the fact that they both claim to be sociology? Clearly the unity of the discipline is only superficial.

While a paradigm crisis is common enough in the social sciences, it is rare in the natural sciences. Kuhn (1970: 244–245) views the social sciences as “proto-scientific” and “pre-paradigmatic.” With the possible exception of Chomskyan linguistics, he suggests that none of the contemporary human sciences has a “disciplinary matrix” or commonly accepted “exemplar” available. This lack is clear, for instance, in the proliferation of conflicting approaches, the wealth of philosophical discussions and the constantly renewed debates over the foundations of the discipline. While such dissension is an aberration in the natural sciences, it is institutionalized in the social sciences. Since facts are always over-determined by theories, and theories are under-determined by facts, empirical research cannot arbitrate in disputes over the foundations of the discipline. In sociology, there are no facts – and hence no verification or falsification of facts– there are only, to cite Nietzsche (1955, III: 903), “interpretations” (and interpretations of interpretations). Given that an empirical argument cannot be put forward that does not simultaneously engage in meta-empirical presuppositions, sociology cannot divorce itself from philosophy. Just as there is “no real history” that is not also a “philosophy of history” (White, 1973: xi), there is no sociology without a philosophy of sociology, and hence without social philosophy, or even a social metaphysics. From this perspective, the pressure to make sociology more scientific is only the expression of a specific modality of the philosophical conceptualization. This recognition of an unavoidable philosophical dimension of sociology does not, however, imply that objectivity is impossible (Alexander and Colomy, 1992). We must engage in theoretical and metatheoretical discussions in order to systematically identify the most general presuppositions and to submit them discursively to the test of “reasoned persuasion” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1988, Part 1).

There is no guarantee that any particular metatheoretical constellation crystallized in any single social theory could enjoy consensual validation (for instance, Bourdieu’s genetic structuralism, Touraine’s sociology of action, or Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic theory). But we can nevertheless hope that the participants in the discussion will agree on the pluralist criterion of multidimensionality, the metacritical criterion that stipulates that a general social theory is only acceptable if it takes into account all the coexisting positions mapped out in the metatheoretical space of possibilities.

Now that I have explained why all social theory presupposes a metatheory, I can develop the metatheoretical space of possibilities (cf. also Habermas, 1984: 11–25;

Johnson *et al.*, 1984: 12–28 and Robertson, 1974). To this end, I start from the thesis that one way or another all social theories must ask certain fundamental questions and provide answers, since these answers are a transcendental condition of the theory itself.

I believe that there are two fundamental questions which sociologists cannot avoid, since avoidance is itself an answer. The first question is ontological: what is the nature of social reality? The second question is epistemological: how can this social reality be known? So far as the *ontological question* is concerned, ignoring the dialectic, there are only two possible complementary positions: either the substance (*Weltstoff*) of the social world is matter, that is, the social reality exists as an objective set of material phenomena (materialism); or it is spirit, implying that social reality exists as a meaningful set of symbolic phenomena and is constituted by the ideas humans have of the social world (idealism). The ontological determination of society has axiological implications: while idealists insist on the orientation of action, conceptualizing it in terms of the definition or constitution of the situation, materialists emphasize conditions of action, viewing them as adaptation to the environment of the situation.

On closer inspection, it appears that this ideal–typical distinction between materialism and idealism corresponds to the distinction often drawn between objectivism and subjectivism. In the first instance, meaning is excluded as a fundamental category of social theory, which explains why social action is understood in terms of the Newtonian model of observable behavior exodetermined by the constraining material social structures; while in the second instance meaning is included. Action is no longer understood then in behaviorist terms, but rather in terms of a phenomenological hermeneutics. The Newtonian model of behavior gives way to the Weberian model of intentional action, significantly oriented to rules, norms, and symbols. Social reality no longer appears as a set of pseudo-natural objective structures whose empirical regularities can be observed and explained by nomological hypotheses, but as a context of symbolic and meaningful structures whose meaning is understandable and orienting action internally.

If we now move from the ontological question to the *epistemological question*, it is also possible to distinguish two possible complementary answers, if again we temporarily ignore intermediary positions: whether social reality is understood as a set of material phenomena or as a set of ideal phenomena, it can either be explained in individualist terms (elementarism), or in holistic terms (emergentism).⁵ In the first instance, social reality is understood as an aggregate that is no more than the sum of its parts; while in the second, it is perceived as an emergent structure that is more and other than the sum of its parts. While holists see social structures as a legacy of the past and insist on the fact that social structures always already pre-exist individuals, individualists emphasize the fact that social structures are the result or product of interactions between individuals, intentional or otherwise (as if the world were remade from scratch in every instant).

For present purposes the analytic axes “materialism–idealism” and “individualism–holism” will suffice, although in the conclusion I introduce nominalism and realism as an additional analytic axis. By combining the ontological axis and the

epistemological axis, the (simplified) metatheoretical space of possibilities is produced (see Figure 0.1).

	Individualism-Holism	
Materialism	A	D
Idealism	B	C

Figure 0.1

Combining individualism and materialism, quadrant A represents the position of behaviorists and rational choice (since the latter is simply a sublimated return to the former). Crossing individualism and idealism, quadrant B designates the position of interpretative sociology and the micro-sociological theories of action that reintroduces subjective meaning into behavioral analysis. Quadrant C, representing the position of hermeneutics, integrates subjective meaning into over-arching symbolic structures, giving a holistic turn to the idealism of theories of action, while quadrant D, which articulates materialism and holism, represents the position of Marxists and critical theory, and seeks to expose the material conditions that influence action.

Since each of the quadrants represents and reflects only one permutation of the metatheoretical space, the combinatorial must be viewed as a field of tensions governed by the law of mutual blindness and lucidity: A and B see that which C and D do not see (and *vice versa*), B and C see that which A and D do not see (and *vice versa*), etc. This logic of “elective affinities” among the various permutations explains the instability of each of the theoretical positions outlined and their innate tendency to drift towards adjacent permutations (Johnson *et al.*, 1984: 1–17). I share Simmel’s dialectical “neither-nor” position (not monism, but non-ism), as formulated in the regulating principle of methodological pluralism: neither idealism, nor materialism, nor elementarism, nor emergentism. Taken individually, each of the metatheoretical permutations and theoretical positions based on them are insufficient, for each is biased; as a whole, however, they make it possible to construct a truly general, global and multidimensional theory of society.

This metacritical principle of methodological pluralism can be expressed in Parsons’ terms as the absolute requirement to treat metatheoretical dimensions as analytic dimensions of the real, as dimensions which we must not empiricize if we are to avoid falling under the influence of the paralogism of misplaced concreteness (Parsons, 1949: 727ff.; Adriaansens, 1980: 20ff.). Formulated in negative terms, the Simmel-Parsons’ principle formally prohibits the development of a social theory that views any single metatheoretical quadrant as an absolute. Any

theory that restrains the metatheoretical combinatorial of possibilities by taking into account just one or two of the quadrants will collapse when faced with the metacritique of metatheoretical crystallization. This is the reason why the theories of reification, which stake everything on quadrant D, fail the metacritical test.

Metatheoretical crystallization

To understand the mechanisms of metatheoretical crystallization that characterize the general theories of reification, I will now restate the dual onto-epistemological question in terms of the twofold question regarding the nature of action and the nature of social order (Alexander, 1982, I: 64–112; 1988: 84–87). Starting from the dual thesis that any social theory, whether elementarist or emergentist, transcendently presupposes a concept of action and a concept of social structure, and that the specification of the concept of action determines the concept of social structure, I hope to show that, metatheoretically speaking, reification approaches typically conjoin a strategic concept of action and a materialist concept of social structure.

In putting forward this argument, I follow Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937/1949). In this great charter of sociology, Parsons engages with every field (Camic, 1989): he deals with the scientific method ("analytic realism"); presents a systematic history of sociological thought (the "convergence thesis"); classifies the social sciences by specifying their interrelations (the "action systems"); develops the analytical foundations of social theory (the "action frame of reference"); defends the voluntaristic conception of human action against utilitarian and behaviorist reduction (the "utilitarian dilemma"); and analyses the causes of, and solutions to, social order ("Hobbes and the problem of order").

The main objective of Parsons' first, programmatic book, which is undoubtedly also his best work, was to develop a voluntaristic theory of action capable of synthetically exceeding the reductionism characteristic of objective materialism and idealism. Materialism quite rightly insists on the material elements that condition action. But, since it tends to eliminate the (normative) symbolic structures that direct action by reducing them to a reflection of the material base, it runs the risk of making the error of epiphenomenalism. On the other hand, idealism emphasizes, again quite rightly, the (normative) symbolic elements that direct action, but because it has a tendency to eliminate the material conditions that structure action by viewing them as spiritual, it makes the opposite error of "emanationism."

In an attempt to go beyond the materialist-idealist dualism, which is the "great dichotomy" of his analysis, Parsons introduces social action as an articulating pivot between causal-conditioning elements and meaning-directing elements in the action situation. In his words: "Action must always be thought of as involving a state of tension between two different orders of elements, the normative and the conditional" (Parsons, 1949: 732). To bring conditional elements in line with normative elements and overcome this tension between them, some "effort" is necessary. With the introduction of the concept of effort as an additional element,

independent of action – a motor element that makes it possible to distinguish the ideal meanings targeted by the actual action situation, as well as to connect them – we have all the elements of voluntaristic action.

Parsons was convinced that no social theory existed, or could exist, without a theory of action; he therefore developed the “action frame of reference,” defining the principles and elements necessary for the theory of action. Along with Weber and the utilitarians, he emphasized the teleological nature of social action and, starting from the basis that any description of action must also refer to ends and means, Parsons dissects the action or unit act, which is the elementary unit of the analytic structure, into different parts: 1) a hypothetical actor; 2) an end, understood as a state to come, which the actor tries to bring about; 3) an action situation including both elements that are beyond the control of the actor and which condition his action, and those elements over which he has control and which he can manipulate as means to his ends; and, last but not least, 4) a normative orientation that determines in part the ends and which imposes normative constraints on the choice of means.

Having developed the analytic structure of action, Parsons formulates a decisive critique of the strategic conception of action presented by utilitarianism (see Halévy, 1972 and Caillé, 1989, as well as the *Revue du MAUSS (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* [the anti-utilitarian movement in the social sciences]). He emphasizes the anti-voluntarist and determinist implications of this conception of action, which corresponds to the way Weber conceived of rational action with a view to an end (*zweckrational*), and which is today advocated and developed in the United States and elsewhere by the “rats” or, less polemically, by advocates of rational choice theory. Utilitarians – from Hobbes and Mill to Homans, Coleman and Boudon – essentially consider action as the isolated activity of a rational and calculating being faced with an objective world of states of existing facts and with a more or less precise knowledge of events and situations in the world. The actor is a would-be scientist who uses a scientific method and the calculation of probabilities to effectively coordinate the ends and means of action and to efficiently achieve his goal. Given that the “rational norm of efficiency” is the only norm taken into account, it might be said, returning to the analytic elements of the structure of action, that ends are reduced to means. Depending on the material conditions of action, the subjective determination of ends is eliminated and the choice of ends remains undetermined. Whether they are attributed to the actor’s innate or acquired dispositions (the behaviorist variant of utilitarianism) or to a function of his knowledge of the situation (the rationalist variant of utilitarianism), in either case the freedom of decision, which Parsons views as the kernel of freedom of action, is eliminated and human actions are reduced to exo-determined behavior that adapts to the surrounding environment: “Then action becomes determined entirely by its conditions, for without the independence of ends the distinction between conditions and means becomes meaningless. Action becomes a process of rational adaptation to these conditions” (Parsons, 1949: 64).

The conclusion of this analysis of the utilitarian conception of action is that the voluntaristic dimension of action can only be retained if the concept of action is

not reduced to its instrumental or strategic dimension. In other words, if one wants to avoid reducing action purely to behavior that is exo-determined by the material conditions of action, if one wants to maintain freedom as an inherent property of action and not reduce social life to a simple “puppet show,” a non-strategic concept of action is absolutely necessary.

In addition to a concept of action, all social theories also presuppose a concept of social structure. When one moves from an isolated actor to interactions among several actors to consider how their actions can be coordinated with each other, so that regular and stable connections ensue, the linkage between the concepts of action as structures is almost automatic. Based on the premises of the strategic conception of action, Parsons demonstrates through an immanent critique, that utilitarianism can only conceive of social order as a “biotic order” (Park, 1967: 82 and 91), that is, as an instrumental order based solely on the external constraint of individuals by material social structures. Believing erroneously that such an order could never be stable, Parsons concluded that social order can only be based on a normative consensus.

Parsons views Hobbes as a thinker who starts from utilitarian presuppositions to inquire in the most logical manner how social order is possible. Having abandoned the classic conception of how *zoôn politikon*, a concept that was in use from Aristotle to the Christian natural law of the Middle Ages, Hobbes conceives of human beings as isolated subjects who act rationally to protect themselves in the struggle for self-conservation (Habermas, 1973a: 48–88). Influenced by Newtonian mechanics, he viewed humans as a machine moved by the primary passions of the will to power and fear of death. Given penury and the fact that the primary passions that dictate the ends of individuals vary arbitrarily and are not naturally coordinated, the rational pursuit of individual interests necessarily degenerates into unbridled competition to ensure individual security and the possession of rare goods. Hence Hobbes’ famous state of nature, “war of each with another,” governed by “constant fear and danger of violent death,” in which “strength and fraud . . . are the two cardinal virtues” and where “the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, 1971: 185–188). To escape this state of nature, Hobbes proposes the solution of a contract of sovereignty in which each individual gives up his natural right to pursue his own selfish interests by submitting to the absolute and despotic power of the Leviathan. A consequence of this analysis of “possessive individualism” (MacPherson, 1962) is that the strategic conception of action annuls itself: it necessarily produces its own alienation in a reified system that coordinates or, as Halévy suggests (1972: 13ff.), “artificially” identifies passions, interests and ends by imposing a restrictive material external order on the actions from without.

Still within the utilitarian tradition, Locke tries to circumvent Hobbes’ authoritarian solution by postulating that human beings are by nature sufficiently reasonable to recognize the (property) rights of each individual and thus, to voluntarily give up their immediate self-interest in the name of the general interest. But Parsons objects that the rational recognition of moral obligations cannot be derived only from rational considerations with a view to an end. Recognition is

therefore a truly residual category. Furthermore, as Halévy (1972: 13ff.) clearly demonstrated, Locke's solution is based entirely on the thesis of the "natural" identification of interests. According to this originally economic thesis, which finds its philosophic counterpart in Leibniz's monadology (Renaut, 1989: 115–151), the social order is the unintentional result of the spontaneous harmonization of the selfish actions of individuals. Individuals produce social order without knowing they are doing so, and it is only afterwards – *post festum*, as Marx said – that they discover that in pursuing their own interests, they also serve the general interest. Here we recognize the theses of Mandeville (*private vices, public benefits*) and Smith (the "invisible hand").

In his classic analysis of commodity fetishism, Marx shows that the natural identification of interests by the market does not resolve Hobbes' problem; on the contrary, it is only an economic variant: political constraint is replaced by the economic constraint of the pseudo-natural laws of the market. As Jameson said so well (1991: 273): the market is a "Leviathan in sheep's clothing." Like "artificial" identification, the "natural" identification of interests and ends implies that the social order is externally imposed by material constraints. In both instances, social order is conceived on the model of biotic order, and hence as an instrumental and strictly anti-voluntarist order. Having rejected both Hobbes' solution of authoritarian coercion and Lockes' more benign natural integration of selfish interests, Parsons examines Rousseau's normative consensus described in *The Social Contract*, and concludes, using Durkheim's tactic of "argument by elimination," that the normative solution is the only one compatible with the voluntaristic model of action.

I conclude that the rationalist premises of utilitarianism are incompatible with a voluntaristic social order. The sacrifice of action to benefit the system is the price of maintaining social order. Given a strategic conception of action, reification, whether imposed by power or interests, is the only solution to the problem of social order. From a metatheoretical view point, reification can only be avoided if the concept of strategic action is abandoned in favor of a concept of non-strategic action. Indeed, given the internal connection between the concept of strategic action and the materialist concept of social structure, it is only possible to exceed reification, which in metatheoretical terms, is none other than the systematic conjunction of the two concepts, by avoiding reducing the concept of action to a solely strategic dimension.

Parsons reaches a different conclusion, however. Believing that the biotic order is not, and can never be, a stable social order, he eliminates the metatheoretical possibility of reification and immediately identifies the normative order regulated by the social order implying somehow that the factual order of a prison must be interpreted as if it were the normative order of a monastery. By rejecting objective materialism in this way, Parsons finds himself drifting towards the opposite position of objective idealism (Alexander, 1983, IV: 212ff.). Instead of defending the thesis that the voluntaristic dimension of action can only be retained if objective materialism is complemented by objective idealism, he claims, without real justification and without considering the possibility of a conflict of norms and values,

that these are essentially integrative and that only a system of ultimate ends, based on shared values and giving rise to internalized obligations in the form of norms, can preserve the stability of the social order. In other words, for Parsons, a normative consensus is the only solution to the problem of order (cf. Parsons, 1951, chapter 3). In my view this amounts to a *non sequitur*. The hasty elimination of the political (Hobbes) and economic solution (Smith) does not prove that the normative solution is the only possibility. Indeed, contrary to what Parsons suggests, there is no single solution; rather, there are at least five complementary solutions to the problem of order:

- 1 the artificial identification of personal interests and the general interest through political constraint (Hobbes, Bentham, Carl Schmitt);
- 2 the natural identification of interests through economic constraint (Locke, Mandeville, Adam Smith);
- 3 the natural identification of interests through moral constraint (Durkheim, Freud, Parsons);
- 4 the natural identification of interests through the constraint of reason (Kant, Mead, Habermas);
- 5 the “sympathetic fusion” of interests through the motivation of moral sentiments (Adam Smith, Scheler, M. Mauss).

Together, these five solutions offer a response to the question of social order. Constraint, exchange, normative consensus, communication and sympathy are so many necessary, but not sufficient, conditions that explain the persistence of social order. The theories of political and economic constraint, on the one hand, and the theories of consensus and communication, on the other, are perfectly complementary: some provide an explanation of the material conditions of society, others for normative conditions. Furthermore, the theories of sympathy elucidate the motivational conditions of the social order. Together with communication theory, they are able to explain its emergence. I do not wish to develop this point here, but only to insist that a one-dimensional theory of the social is unacceptable.

Social order is always based on a combination of different metatheoretical possibilities. This does not mean, however, that material, symbolic and motivational influences are always constant. Parsons’ analysis must be historicized, moving from an analysis of metatheoretical conditions of “formal voluntarism” to an analysis of the empirical conditions of “real voluntarism” (Alexander, 1978). In other words, instead of ignoring time and space and analyzing freedom as a universal property of action, we need to analyze the particular socio-historical conditions that enable or impede the realization of free action and individual autonomy. While from the perspective of metacritique, reification appears as a metatheoretical error, from the perspective of critical theory, it appears as a socio-historical error that must be theoretically denounced and practically combated.

Yet both perspectives are complementary. Social theory can only offer a critique if it does not totalize social reification. Reification is a methodological *a priori* of

critical theory, but it only maintains its critical force if it consciously and reflexively controls its own presuppositions. The theory of reification is simply a heuristic device of de-reification. An emancipatory policy must begin by understanding that a one-dimensional society is not really one-dimensional. Social reification is a limit case that must be thought through and anticipated in order to forewarn. A critical theory that does not see that the *a priori* of reification must be counterbalanced by the *a priori* of individual autonomy is not a critical theory, but rather offers only a one-dimensional theory of the social world.

The structure of the book

There are essentially four ways to approach the history of sociological thought. The first is to present the thinkers whose texts form the history of sociological thought (e.g. Aron, 1967); the second focuses on systems, schools and doctrines (e.g. Martindale, 1961); the third analyses the “unit-ideas” (Lovejoy) that constitute the elements of theoretical systems (e.g. Nisbet, 1966); the last studies the ideological and philosophical assumptions that inform sociological theories (e.g. Alexander, 1982–1983). In this book, I combine these four approaches through a critical reconstruction of the history of the foundational idea of reification in German sociology, from Marx to Habermas.

This research seeks to systematically, logically and meta-critically reconstruct the history of the concept of reification as it appears in the important German tradition of sociology and social philosophy. In this context, the systematic reconstruction attempts to give maximal coherence to the entire work of a series of thinkers, starting from the analysis and critical interpretation of their texts, read in the light of the dual problematic of social reification and methodological thingification. The systematic reconstruction of a body of thought can be seen as a synchronic synthesis of the combined textual fragments. It precedes a logical reconstruction of the history of sociology, which is in some respects its diachronic counterpart. The logical reconstruction helps to order the subordinating movement of systematic thought reconstructed in a hierarchical, linear fashion, by offering a gradual view of the cumulative development of a complex theory of reification. Since this logical reconstruction is guided by a critical meta-theory, it is also a meta-critical reconstruction.

This book is divided into three parts, linked by intermediary considerations. Part 1 explores the classics and is composed of four chapters. In the first chapter, I reconstruct the work of Karl Marx by combining an analysis of the themes of alienation, exploitation and commodity fetishism; in the second chapter, I present Georg Simmel’s philosophical-sociological thought, centering the analysis on the double theme of the tragedy of culture and society; the third chapter studies the work of Max Weber by looking closely at his analysis of formal rationalization; and the fourth chapter shows how Georg Lukács synthesizes the theories of Marx, Simmel and Weber in his classic study of reification.

Part 2 is dedicated to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and is made up of two chapters. In chapter five, I present a critical analysis of the thought of Max

Horkheimer, following the way he evolves from a Marxist critique of capitalism towards a Weberian critique of reification. In chapter six, I reconstruct, or rather deconstruct, the work of Theodor W. Adorno, showing how his systematic analysis of society is founded on the metaphysical *a priori* of total reification.

Part 3 is composed of three chapters, and is entirely devoted to the work of Jürgen Habermas. Following the development of his thought, I show how he gradually breaks with the premises of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and revises the theory of reification in terms of the communication paradigm. Having completed the logical reconstruction of the evolution of the theory of reification, the work closes with an attempt to redeploy the theory of reification within a critical realist theory of society.

Part 1

Classic German sociology

First intermediate reflections

The German nineteenth century starts with Hegel's death in 1831 and ends in 1918 with the Treaty of Verdun or, alternatively, in 1933 with the end of the Weimar republic (Schnädelbach, 1983: 15–16). In retrospect, it appears as such an exceptionally rich period in terms of intellectual productivity that I am tempted to compare it with the Italian Renaissance. Paraphrasing Whitehead, one might say that all contemporary philosophy and sociology are but notes to nineteenth-century German philosophy and sociology. Even if this claim is somewhat excessive, one has only to think about the “effective-history” (Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte*) of Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Lukács' texts, or, in sociology, of Marx, Dilthey, Tönnies, Weber and Simmel, to see that twentieth-century philosophical and sociological thought is the direct heir to nineteenth-century German thought. Indeed, the intellectual investigations of nineteenth-century Germany, which were somewhat behind those of France and England from an economic and political perspective, were nonetheless of such import that the questions they posed, if not the answers they provided, are still ours today.

The exceptional situation in Germany can largely be explained by the special importance the cultured German bourgeoisie attach to *Kultur und Bildung* (Dumont, 1991: ch. 2). Although the German bourgeoisie had neither a Robespierre (the 1844 Revolution was a failed revolution) nor a James Watt (the industrial revolution only began in Germany after 1871), thanks to Kant's genius, they did experience an early “philosophical revolution.” For the Germans, and particularly for the intellectuals of the dominant class, which the Germans call the *Bildungsbürgertum*, culture (*Kultur*) is a dominant value – which explains why, even today, university education takes far longer in Germany compared to other countries. In Germany, culture is always associated with ideas, values and ends that raise the mind and allow for the cultivation of one's interior and the development of one's autonomy. Culture is contrasted to civilization (*Zivilisation*), which is generally associated with the vulgar and functional, the useful and commercial, means and interests, in short, to technology, politics and economics.

The distinction between “culture” and “civilization” was formulated classically by Alfred Weber in the sociology of culture and later developed by Norbert Elias (1969, Vol. I; cf. also Bourdieu, 1979: 74ff.) expressing an anti-modern sentiment and opposition to the colonization of the lifeworld by formally rationalized

sub-systems. Their distinction corresponds to the equally classic distinction employed since Schelling, and particularly Tönnies, between “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “society” (*Gesellschaft*): community refers to the solid, natural and “organic” character of the family, in a non-Durkheimian sense of the word; while society refers to the anonymous, artificial and “mechanical” character of market society. I believe that together these two fundamental dichotomies, which both reject utilitarian individualism and the predominance of instrumental-strategic action form the typically German transcendental topology of critical sociology, of the dialectic of reason and modernity, as found not only in Tönnies, Weber and Simmel, who are now recognized as the founding fathers of classic German sociology, but also in the later attempt by Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas to synthesize bourgeois sociology and Marxism. The rejection of utilitarian individualism should not be confused with the rejection of ethical individualism: “Far from being opposed to individualism, the entire tradition of classical sociology presented a well-founded critique of utilitarian and hedonistic individualism, even as it established an ethical or social concept of individualism” (Holton and Turner, 1989: 14). One could go even further, I believe, by claiming that it is precisely in the name of ethical individualism, and thus on behalf of the autonomy of the person, that the sociological tradition was opposed to utilitarian individualism. Early sociology clearly understood that far from stimulating freedom, utilitarian individualism actually threatens it.

The classic German sociology of rationalism, examined in the first part of this book, is simultaneously a special science (sociology) and a general science (social theory). Its philosophical sophistication and the acuity of its methodological reflections prove once and for all that sociology can be more than, and other than, a verbal reframing of statistical models. This post-Hegelian sociology, which is similar to social philosophy in that it seeks to define social pathologies (Honneth, 1994: 9–69), is characterized above all by the fact that it tries to develop a general critical theory of the genesis and development of bourgeois culture and modern society. Defining itself from the start as a relatively autonomous science that continues the project of moral and political philosophy by its own means, it simultaneously offers a general social theory and a critical illumination of the ambivalence of modernity, fusing from the start the construction of a general social theory with a diagnosis of the present (Habermas, 1991: 184–204). Furthermore, this combination of theory and criticism explains why the explanatory category of rationalization and the critical category of reification play a major role and are constantly connected to each other.

To put it succinctly, I discern “three sources” or major quasi-normative intuitions, which gave rise to and continue to nourish the critique of reification, as defined by the German tradition that starts with the young Hegel and ends provisionally with Habermas.¹

The first source is Hegel. In his theory of “positivity” and alienation, the young Hegel protests the split between subject and object in the wake of the first German idealists (Lukács, 1975). His protest expresses the sense that the socio-cultural formations of the objective mind, which he views as an exteriorization or

objectification (*Entäußerung*) of the subject, should not be alienated (*entfremdet*) from him, since this might compromise the subject's interiorization (*Erinnerung*) or re-appropriation (*Aneignung*) of socio-cultural forms. As we shall see, in his triple critique of alienation, exploitation and commodity fetishism, Marx offers a more sociological reading of the Hegelian critique of the blockage in the exteriorization and re-appropriation processes. From that point on, the critical theme of positivity returns in all later versions of reification theory.

The second source is Nietzsche or, to put it in more general terms, originates in *Lebensphilosophie* (Schnädelbach, 1983: 172 sq and 1992: 177–179 and 315–321). Life is affirmed not only in the critique of the mummification of concepts and the rejection of mechanistic thought, but also in the unpleasant observation – formulated in Simmel's exemplary theory of the tragedy of culture and society – that modern society and culture are dead, mechanical forms and that in this frozen state they interrupt the flux and ferment that is vital to life. Later a second normative insight that things and concepts should be in movement and dissolve in process is combined imperceptibly with the first. This Vitalist theme can be found in the texts of Simmel and Weber, as well as in the work of Lukács and the members of the Frankfurt School, especially Adorno, for whom the notion of reification seems to owe more to Nietzsche and Weber than to Marx and Lukács.

The third source is Freud, who presents the repressive conflict for self-conservation and the resulting stiffening of the ego, as well as its social aspects, in the symbolic violence exercised by reified socio-cultural powers that prevent the peaceful reconciliation of the conflict opposing men to things and to each other by blocking reflexivity and systematically distorting communication. Although Freud's influence is not present in classical sociology, it is included in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, where it is combined with the other two primary sources. In Part 2 we will see how the Freudian theme takes form as a negative theory of inter-subjectivity or, in more positive terms, as an implicit call to peaceful communication between humans. In Part 3, I show how this insight into non-violent communication, which is the main thread of Habermas's thought, results in a masterly reformulation of the theory of reification in the paradigm of inter-subjective language and communication.

Part 1 presents an analysis of social reification in classic German sociology from Marx to Lukács. In the following chapters, I propose a systematic and meta-critical reconstruction of the theories of reification proposed by Marx (Chapter 1), Simmel (Chapter 2), Weber (Chapter 3) and Lukács (Chapter 4). A large part of my presentation is involved with the methodological and meta-theoretical discussions of these classic sociologists because I am trying to integrate a realist theory of society and a multi-dimensional theory of action within a critical theory of reification in the era of globalization. In the next chapter, I explore the foundations of a realist theory of society. This chapter on Marx is quite literally fundamental, for the realist conception of society is the foundation of all later analyses. Adopting a realist perspective, I criticize the nominalist tendencies of Weber and Simmel, but retain their interpretative approach, basing my argument on them in the attempt

to develop a multi-dimensional theory of action. My thesis is that, from a meta-theoretical perspective, reification results from reducing action to a single instrumental-strategic dimension. Believing that objectivity is best served when we reveal subjective penchants and ideological presuppositions, I do not hide my sympathy for Marx and Simmel, or my dislike for Lukács' over-Hegelianism. Attempting to remain faithful to the liberating impulse of Marxism, I appeal to it to critique bourgeois sociology; but I also lean on bourgeois sociology to critique Marxist dogmatism. While the old school may find my critique of some aspects of Marxism too harsh, in so far as this difference expresses a generation gap, it is unavoidable. Whether it is a matter of bourgeois thought or Marxism, I contest and critique the focus on reification and the ensuing gradual crystallization of the meta-theoretical space of possibilities for sociology. In Part 2, which is dedicated to critical theory, I show how the members of the Frankfurt School radicalize the analyses of classic German sociology. At that point the gradual crystallization of the possibilities is no longer the conclusion, but instead becomes the point of departure for the analysis of reification. In Part 3, which is dedicated in its entirety to the work of Habermas, I follow and reconstruct the reformulation of the theory of reification after the linguistic turn, which is in fact a pragmatic turn to a communicative theory of communicative action that refuses to reduce rationalization to reification.

1 Karl Marx: critique of the triple inversion of subject and object

Alienation, exploitation, and commodity fetishism¹

It is difficult to imagine Marxist theory without the concept of alienation. The concept of alienation, which Marx (1818–1883) took from Hegel and Feuerbach, is perhaps the key concept in his work. By following Marx's series of reformulations of the concept during his career – from alienation to exploitation and from exploitation to commodity fetishism – Marx's entire opus can be reconstructed in a unitary, coherent, and systematic manner. I am not claiming that Marx's thought did not evolve significantly, but instead of contrasting the young Marx to the mature Marx, as was common in the 1970s, I wish to integrate the early humanist insistence on action with the later realist view of society. From this perspective, shared by Roy Bhaskar (1989), society is an invisible, but real, system of internal relations between institutions and social positions that conditions and structures the actions of individuals and groups, who act within given conditions, thereby reproducing or transforming society. When society is imposed on actors as an external, alien, and constraining force, action is reduced to its instrumental-strategic dimension. Labor becomes toil and life becomes a matter of survival. Marx posits that workers are alienated from labor, from the product of labor, from other workers, and from themselves. Furthermore, because they are alienated from society, action, and themselves, they can no longer express their being through action, nor can they transform society with consciousness and will. When workers are subjected to society, transformatory praxis becomes the practice of reproducing society as a context of domination that imposes external constraints on actors. In this way, alienation halts the dialectic between agency and society. As a realist theory of the causes of reification, Marxism seeks to reactivate the dialectic, to move beyond alienation by revealing the structural constraints that weigh on action and that transform actors into mere agents of the structure, thus impeding a conscious transformation of alienated society into a just and free society, without exploitation.

From alienation to reification: two Marxisms?

All Marx's work can be systematically reconstructed through the single, central concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*).² The theory of alienation, as Marx first developed it in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1848*, is the core of his

thought. Exaggerating only slightly, and braving the interpretative prohibitions of Althusser & Co., one might say that most, if not all, of Marx's thought, as well as the critical categories of *Capital*, are already discernable in their early form, in this brilliant foundational text, written in 1844, but published only in 1932. The *Manuscripts*' "anatomy" in effect provides the key to the "anatomy" of *Capital*, which suggests that we should abandon the structuralist claim that the concept of alienation is a "pre-Marxist concept" (Althusser, 1968: 246) that Marx soon relegated to the museum of philosophy. In fact, the "symptomatic" reading proposed by Althusser and his consorts is a misleading interpretation that feigns ignorance of the fact that the much maligned concept of alienation is omnipresent in the "scientific texts" written after the "epistemological break" (1845), particularly the *Grundrisse* of 1857–1858 and the *Economic Works* of 1861–1865.

Although the concept of alienation cannot serve as a criterion for establishing an *epistemological* break between the young and the mature Marx, between Marx the philosopher and Marx the scientist, it does however aid in identifying an *ideological* break between the two interpretative schools of Marx, that is, between those who defend a critical, humanist, voluntaristic Marxism of Hegelian inspiration, and those who favor a scientific, structuralist, and determinist Marxism inspired by Spinoza (Gouldner, 1973: ch. 16 and 1980). Some of those who are, or who were, among the scientific Marxists include Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, Rancière, Establet, Poulantzas, Godelier, Glucksmann, Naville, Bettelheim, Therborn, and the *New Left Review*. In the 1980s and 1990s, scientific Marxism (now post-Marxism) dissolved into post-structuralism. The critical Marxists include Lukács, Goldmann, Sartre, Lefebvre, Garaudy, Axelos, Avineri, Ollman, Meszaros, Gouldner, Rubel, Schaff, Koscic, Kamenka, the Frankfurt School, the Budapest School, the *Telos* circle (before it shifted towards the new right), and the Yugoslav group *Praxis* (prior to its dissolution). Lukács and the members of the Frankfurt School, whose thought I present in this book by focusing on the concept of reification, are undoubtedly Hegelian Marxists.

The concept of alienation cannot be used to establish a rupture between the young and mature Marx, but this does not imply that there are no breaks at all in Marx's thought. From 1845, Marx took his distance from Feuerbach's essentialist anthropology and abandoned "philosophical phraseology – 'human essence', 'species', etc." (V, 236). In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), he established historical materialism and from then on he never viewed human nature as a supra-historical, unchanging "abstract thing," but instead conceived of it as a "social product," a historical condensation of "the ensemble of the social relations" (V, 4) of a given era. The break with Feuerbach initiated the move from an anthropological theory of "intrinsic alienation," that is, alienation from the self, from human essence, to a more sociological theory of "extrinsic alienation" related to exploitation or the appropriation of labor power and the products of labor (Torrance, 1977).

In Marx's intellectual development it is certainly possible to identify a gradual transition from a philosophical-anthropological approach to a structural-historical analysis of alienation and, within this, a shift in the view point

(*Ausgangspunkt*) from which Marx analyses all social relations, namely, from an analysis that has the concept of labor (alienation-exploitation) as its starting point to an analysis oriented around the concept of commodity (commodity fetishism-reification) (Israel, 1976, 1979).

However, this double slippage, from “intrinsic” to “extrinsic” alienation, and from exploitation to reification, does not mean that Marx renounced his humanist faith and became a structuralist *avant la lettre*. Alienation, exploitation, and commodity fetishism are all social phenomena that can be analyzed from both the perspective of the participant (action theory) and the observer (systems theory), but not from a neutral point of view.

From this point of view, the double slippage does not endorse a break between a young, humanist Marx and a mature, supposedly anti-humanist Marx: Marx did stay forever young. The break is more a question of phraseology than epistemology. From start to finish, from analysis of the worker’s alienation to analysis of the reification of social relations, his motto – which I have adopted as my own – remained unchanged: “To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself” (III, 182).

Although from an ideological perspective, that stresses the non-empirical, political, moral, and anthropological hypotheses, there is no break in Marx’s thought, from a meta-theoretical perspective that analyses the most general and fundamental assumptions surrounding the theory about the nature of individual action and social order, which account for the degree of voluntarism or determinism that characterize a systematic theory of society, a gradual progression towards a deterministic theory of society can be discerned. The change from the young to the mature Marx does not lie in his ideological humanism; the change lies in the metatheoretical assumptions of his scientific theory (Alexander, 1982–1983, II: 11–74). The shift from the early to the later Marx involves a gradual move from a voluntarist theory to a more socially determinist theory. While the young Marx has a multidimensional concept of action that cannot be reduced to instrumental or strategic action, the mature Marx’s systematic theory of society clearly accords primacy to instrumental or strategic action. Consequently, the later Marx tends to conceive of individual and collective action as mere epiphenomena of the material conditions of existence (see Habermas, 1971, 59–87; Wellmer, 1974: ch. 2; Castoriadis, 1975: 40 sq; and Cohen, 1982a, ch. 3 and 6). The external determination of human activity through the constraints of material social structures, a pressure that explains the reduction of human, expressive, and communicative action to meaningless activity, is precisely what the concept of alienation seeks to explain. The dialectical concept of alienation presupposes, however, that the reduction of intentional action to mechanical action, and the reduction of humans to a corresponding thing, can be reversed.

The critical concept of alienation assumes that ideas may have a causal effect on the conscience of alienated men and that this consciousness is a necessary, but not sufficient, prelude to the revolutionary reversal of the inverted relation of humans and things. To this extent, the concept of alienation expresses the tension between determinism and voluntarism, a tension that cannot be eliminated and which

means that Marxism cannot be reduced to a determinist and reductionist theory of society.

I begin by presenting the thought of the young Marx as a proto-Hegelian approach, and then correct this philosophical reduction to reveal the socio-economic foundations of alienation. Thus, my account progresses from the theory of alienation to the theory of exploitation, and then on to the theory of reification.

The theory of alienation

Philosophical alienation: critique of Hegel and Feuerbach

Until 1843, the young Marx was a “critical critic,” defending a form of critical idealism whose aim was to transform consciousness. As early as 1837, in a letter to his father, Marx explained that he was tormented by “the same opposition between what is and what ought to be, which is characteristic of idealism” (I, 12). Like other young Hegelians (Feuerbach, Ruge, Bauer – cf. McLellan, 1980), Marx believed that reality should be confronted with the “idea”, summoning it as it were to realize the rational ideal immanent within it. In his doctoral thesis on post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy he claimed: “The practice of philosophy is itself theoretical. It is the critique that measures the individual existence of the essence, the particular reality by the idea” (I, 85). “Immanent criticism” (Benhabib, 1986: ch. 1), which takes the ideal seriously and confronts it with existing reality, must serve as a catalyst for social change, since ideas have real power and are capable of modifying reality.

All this changed between 1843 and 1844. Marx broke with the critical idealism of the young Hegelians and adopted a rigorously materialist position. He discovered the Proletariat, turned towards practical activism, and became revolutionary, claiming now that “Ideas cannot carry out anything at all” (IV, 119). It takes critical activity to change the world, but he now understood that “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons” (III, 182).

The opposition between real and ideal is the essence of philosophical alienation, which can, and must, be overcome, not theoretically, by philosophically crossing one’s arms, but practically, through the critical revolutionary praxis of men who transform reality and bring out its truth. For the young Marx, the Hegelian resolution of oppositions, entirely isolated from practice, is “purely scholastic” (V, 3) and the “critical” criticism of the young Hegelians, which is equally isolated from practice, is at best “a practice *in abstracto*” (IV, 40). Hence Marx’s famous statement: “you cannot supersede philosophy without making it a reality” or “make philosophy a reality without superseding it” (III, 181).

Marx attacks Hegelian idealism and its conservative implications directly. Instead of seeing that “philosophy must come down from the heaven of speculation to the depth of human misery” (IV, 39), Hegel spiritualized alienation and poverty. In *The Phenomenology of the Mind*, Hegel identified human beings or “man” with self-consciousness.³ It follows that alienation can never be anything but the exteriorization (*Entäußerung*) of self-consciousness, and that it can only be superseded

by overcoming the alienation of self-consciousness through the speculative incorporation (*Erinnerung*) of objective being alienated in consciousness. But for Marx alienation is not spiritual: it is real, material, sensorial, almost corporal. Ideas cannot chase away alienation. Because idealism lacks a materialist conception of human beings and reality, it inevitably reverts to positivism: “The supersession of the alienation [in Hegel] is therefore likewise nothing but an abstract, empty supersession of that empty abstraction – the negation of the negation. . . . Because the exposition is formal and abstract, the supersession of the alienation becomes a confirmation of the alienation” (III, 342–343).

Marx believed that the weaknesses of Hegel’s analysis result from the “logical, pantheistic mysticism” (III, 7) of his speculative dialectic. Hegel turned the world upside down; now it was a question of righting it. Human consciousness and self-consciousness do not determine existence; quite the opposite. For Hegel, the movement of thought, personified by the Idea, is the demiurge of history; while for Marx, the movement of thought is nothing but the reflection of real movement transposed to the human brain. Marx accuses Hegel of transforming the idea into a subject and the real subject into a predicate, substituting the determinant with the determined, inverting causes and effects, confusing the abstract and the concrete; in a word, Marx accuses Hegel of hypostasizing the concept. The reification of thought leads to the “speculative theory of creation” (IV, 141). As Marx says in an attack on Hegel’s conceptual fetishism, “The figments of his brain assume corporeal form. A world of tangible, palpable ghosts is begotten within his mind” (IV, 184).

The mystery of the Hegelian dialectic lies precisely in the concept’s hypostasis. In *The Holy Family* (1845), Marx and Engels delight in ridiculing the hypostasis of the subject into a substance:

If from real apples, pears, strawberries and almonds I form the general idea “Fruit”, if I go further and imagine that my abstract idea “Fruit”, derived from real fruit, is an entity existing outside me, is indeed the true essence of the pear, the apple, etc., then – in the language of speculative philosophy – I am declaring that “Fruit” is the “Substance” of the pear, the apple, the almond, etc. . . . I therefore declare apples, pears, almonds, etc., to be mere forms of existence, modi of “Fruit.” . . . “the Fruit” presents itself as a pear, “the Fruit” presents itself as an apple, “the Fruit” presents itself as an almond . . . We see that if the Christian religion knows only one Incarnation of God, speculative philosophy has as many incarnations as there are things, just as it has here in every fruit an incarnation of the Substance, of the absolute Fruit. . . . In the speculative way of speaking, this operation is called comprehending Substance as Subject . . . and this comprehension constitutes the essential character of Hegel’s method.

(IV, 57–60)

This critique of hypostasizing concepts is important and will return in the succession of critiques of alienation, exploitation, and commodity fetishism. As we shall

see, Marx invariably attacks the inversion of subject and predicate, or the substitution of the subject and object, or the personification of things and the thingification of persons.

Before Marx, Feuerbach had already demonstrated that Hegel's philosophy transposes and develops religion through the Idea, and on these grounds he had rejected it as the mode and expression of human alienation.⁴ Marx seeks to synthesize the critical elements of Feuerbach's objective materialism and the dynamic and historical elements of Hegel's objective idealism by developing the concept of *praxis*. Although Feuerbach put Hegelian philosophy back on its feet and removed its mystical veil (for Marx this is his greatest accomplishment) at the same time, he also made the mistake of eliminating the dialectic, following a form of thought that is contemplative, determinist, and mechanical, even if it is materialist. As Marx famously put it, Hegel cannot be treated like a "dead dog" (XXXV, 19). A Hegelian correction to Feuerbach's contemplative materialism is therefore necessary. While Hegel defines labor as mental labor, he understood the active and voluntaristic aspect of labor and viewed history as a process of self-creation in which man exteriorizes himself, alienates himself, and ultimately overcomes alienation through labor. This is what Marx believed should be retained from Hegel: "Hegel conceives the self-creation of man [and history] as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour, and comprehends objective man . . . as the outcome of man's own labour" (III 332–333).

By contrast, Feuerbach never understood the world as the result of man's labor. He did not take history into account and did not understand that religious alienation is a socio-historical product. Conceiving of alienation as a universal metaphysical accident, neither Feuerbach nor Hegel understood that suppressing it in thought is not sufficient for suppressing it in reality. Marx firmly believed that ideas cannot change anything. To transform the world, thought must become practical. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (V, 5).

Normative philosophical anthropology

The young Marx's theory of alienation presupposes a normative philosophical anthropology, in other words, a view of man as a species being (*Gattungswesen*), as the accomplished being that he ought to be, and that he will be, once he fully realizes his essential powers in communist society.

Marx says that man is spontaneously a "natural being" (III 336). As a natural being, who lives in and from nature, man cannot be distinguished from animals by his needs and specifically human abilities. "But man is not merely a natural being: he is a human natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself (*für sich*). Therefore he is a species-being" (III, 337). By following Feuerbach in designating man as a "being for himself," Marx means that man is a reflexive, self-conscious being, an intentional being who pursues his goals consciously. By then describing him, still following Feuerbach, as a "species being," he suggests that it behooves

this self-consciousness being to be a universal consciousness, a consciousness that can detach itself from a particular perspective to rise to a universal one.

Labor is central to Marx's moral ontology. His humanist anthropology is a hymn to the *homo laborans*. Three determinants characterize "species man," – if even one of these counter-factual determinants is not satisfied, man becomes "alienated man": i) species man is a being endowed with the power to produce and to produce himself, to labor and to realize himself in and through his labor; ii) he is a social and sociable being who only realizes himself as a member of the human community; iii) he is a sensitive and aesthetic being, who fully cultivates his sense organs.

i) Labor, as a vital, productive, and creative, goal-oriented activity, is an instrumental and expressive activity (cf. Taylor, 1975: 3–51). Through labor, man distinguishes himself from animals, creating his own world and, thereby creating himself. As Marx says,

Men . . . begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence. . . . By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing material life. . . . As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with what they produce and with how they produce.

(V, 31–32)

First and foremost, labor is a process of reciprocal formation and transformation of man and nature, as well as of man and society. Labor consists essentially in the expression or externalization of human powers. It is an intentional process that involves the production of ideas and the creative transformation of ideas into material products that reflect the essence of man as so many "mirrors where our beings shine." Marx writes further, "It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a species-being. This production is his active species life. Through this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man's species-life; for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created" (III, 277). If man does not recognize the world as his creation, if he does not recognize himself in his products, and if his products stand before him like an estranged power, then man is alienated from the products of his labor, and thus also from himself.

ii) Labor is not only an expressive instrumental activity; it is also, by nature, an implicitly communicative social activity (cf. Habermas, 1973a: 142–169). Marx views the utilitarian fiction of an isolated individual such as Robinson, living and laboring outside of society, as absurd. Man, *homo faber*, is essentially and necessarily a social being, or as Marx says, citing Aristotle, a *zōn politikon*. By producing, men are connected to nature (subject-object relation), as well as being engaged in relations with other men (subject-subject relations). For the individual, society is not an abstraction; as the "product of man's interaction upon man" (XXXVIII, 96), it is the very being of each and every individual. Labor, and the pleasures of labor,

are naturally social activities, in both content and form. Even the most isolated scientist, spending his life behind a desk, labors socially since the material of his activity, his consciousness, and the language in which he expresses himself, are social products. As such, they presuppose the “co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end” (V, 43).

In his outline of communist society, Marx emphasizes the communal (or communicative) basis of inter-human cooperation, the conscious and willing coordination of activities and the rational distribution of the products of individual activities. Labor is not reduced to its purely instrumental aspect: the Marxist concept of labor or praxis is a multi-dimensional concept. It represents a synthesis of instrumental actions, expression (Taylor), and communication (Habermas). Although, unlike Habermas, Marx emphasized the teleological aspect of social activity and did not discuss its communicative aspects explicitly, I believe that they are equally important.⁵ For if the dimension of cooperative sociability is removed, leaving only the teleological dimension, then man becomes alienated from those around him, as well as from himself.

iii) Man is not only distinguished from animals by his labor and cooperative sociability, but also through the cultivation of his “species organs” (I, 83) and his human relations with the world. Unlike animals, man knows how to create objects and to appreciate them “in accordance with the laws of beauty” (III, 277). The cultivation of sensitivity is connected to the five senses (“a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of forms,” etc.), as well as to spiritual and practical senses. Refined sensibility and the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment, in the large sense of the word, can only be effectively realized in a truly human community, when labor is understood by man as an end in itself, as a goal with no end other than the expression of his being, and in which the objectified object is humanized; in short, when the product of labor is not understood “merely in the sense of immediate, one-sided enjoyment, merely in the sense of possessing, of having” (III, 299). When labor is no longer leisure, and becomes toil instead, when it is debased to a mere means of subsistence, then man is alienated from his labor and, hence, from himself.

Religious alienation

The negation of religion began when Hegel transformed theology into logic. It continued when Feuerbach converted logic into anthropology, and concluded when Marx went from anthropology to political economy. Hegel *genuit* Feuerbach, Feuerbach *genuit* Marx.

Religious alienation is the paradigm of alienation in all its different forms (alienation, exploitation, fetishism): man creates a force outside himself that he does not recognize as his own, to which he is submitted. The premise of the critique of religion that Marx presented in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* (1844) is similar to Feuerbach's approach: “Man makes religion, religion does not make man” (III, 175). But unlike Feuerbach, Marx believed that religion is not the cause of alienation; it is simply one of its manifestations. The causes of

alienation are strictly secular. Religion is not false; the world is false; religion expresses, sublimates, suppresses, and thereby perpetuates worldly alienation:

[Religion] is the fantastic realization of the human essence because the human essence has not true reality. . . . Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. . . . The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion. . . . The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms.

(III, 175–176)

Political alienation

The premise of the critique of political alienation, as Marx first presented it in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of State* (1843), is analogous to his critique of religious alienation: the state does not make men, nor does the constitution make the people; men make the state, and the people make the constitution (III, 901). Marx sees profound similarities between religion and the bourgeois state. The state is a secular version of Thomas Aquinas' *communitas Dei* (community of God). While inequality and the clash of private interests reign in civil society, in the state citizens are viewed as inter-dependent equals. By guaranteeing the formal equality of individuals and treating each one as a strategic actor with property rights, the state guarantees the conditions of existence of civil society – “the battlefield of the individual private interests of all against all” (III, 41). But by guaranteeing formal equality, the state also ensures the conditions of economic competition, thereby perpetuating the conditions of material inequality between individuals.

By positing the state as the artificial resolution of the opposition between general interests and private interests, Hegel added his idealism to the real contradiction of bourgeois society. For Marx, the schism between the private sphere (civil society) and the public sphere (the state) that characterizes bourgeois society continues to grow even within individuals, in the schism between the citizen and the bourgeois. To overcome the separation between public and private spheres, which manifests itself concretely in the “separation of the deputies from their mandators” (III, 123), Marx proposes the establishment of real democracy, involving the simultaneous abolition and realization of the state. As he says: “Civil society has really raised itself to abstraction from itself, to political being as its true, general, essential mode of being only in elections unlimited both in respect of the franchise and the right to be elected. But the completion of this abstraction is at the same time the transcendence of the abstraction” (III, 121). The abolition of the state through its realization means that the general interest is identical to the interests of each and every individual who constitute the whole.

The ideal political regime is direct, radical democracy, as Marx witnessed in the Paris Commune, which allowed citizens to self-govern without the intermediary of

a bureaucratic administration. The abolition of the state abolishes bureaucracy itself. In this sense, the realization of politics is synonymous with the abolition of the political system as an autonomous organization that raises itself above the community. Marx calls for a total democratization of society, not limited to political organizations, but extending to social and economic organizations. In other words, when the principle of popular sovereignty becomes the leading principle of society, society is reduced to community and becomes one with it. Below, I criticize the naivety of this type of radical and revolutionary policy which, failing to take the hyper-complexity of modern societies into account, aims simply to abolish the differentiation of self-regulated sub-systems and lifeworld.

Marx returns to the theme of political alienation in the first part of *On the Jewish Question* (1844). Arguing against the young Hegelian Bruno Bauer, who believed that Jews should give up their religion, and that their demand for political emancipation was impossible so long as the state had not freed itself from all religion, Marx advanced the thesis that since the modern, post-revolutionary state presupposes not the abolition, but rather the privatization of religion, that is, since it makes a distinction between public citizenship and private religion, the Jews' demand for political emancipation is perfectly compatible with the existing state. Since religious alienation is only the expression of political and economic alienation, the immediate concern is not the abolition of religious alienation; it is the abolition of political and economic alienation.

For Marx, the distinction between the public and private spheres, manifested by individuals as an internal schism between "man" and "bourgeois," is the essence of the modern state. This distinction is granted programmatic status in Marx's distinction between "political emancipation" and "human emancipation." *Political emancipation*—which Marx relates to the French Revolution—is the emancipation of civil society from an absolutist state. However, this emancipation is only partial, since it does not supersede the separation between citizen and bourgeois, nor does it abolish the political system as an alienated mediator of community and state. The French Revolution frees the bourgeois, but does not free man. The community it institutes is a community of isolated, selfish individuals, strategic actors free to pursue their own individual interests, with no concern for the general interest. The freedom it guarantees is the negative freedom to exploit others. The equality it establishes is purely formal; it is the equality of abstract man, of the legal person entitled to make market exchanges. And as for fraternity, it is a fraternity between men who are only functionally connected through the medium of commodities they exchange on the market. The rights of man, which summarize it all, are no more than "the rights of egoistic man separated from his fellow men and from the community" (III, 164).

This should not just be construed as a direct attack on the rights of man as such, but as an attack on selfish individuals, against positing the strategic actor as the foundation of civil society. In contrast, *human emancipation* revolutionizes society by freeing man, not the bourgeois. It does not dissolve the constitutive elements of society (selfish individuals), but is involved in "revolutionizing these components themselves" (III, 167). Overcoming the reduction of action to an

instrumental-strategic dimension, human emancipation abolishes, in a conscious and non-constraining manner, the separation between private and public spheres, hence achieving a match between private and general interests. By going beyond the instrumental-strategic dimension of action and thereby reactivating the species dimension, Marx points towards a communal resolution of the problem of social order as described by Hobbes. Human emancipation overcomes the contradiction between the interest of all and the general interest and thus abolishes once and for all the political alienation manifested in the internal divide between citizen and bourgeois, as well as in the external divide between community and state:

Political emancipation is the reduction of man, on the one hand, to a member of civil society, to an egoistic, independent individual, and, on the other hand, to a citizen, a juridical person. Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his "*forces propres*" [own powers] as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.

(III, 168)

From a meta-theoretical perspective, the internal link between an instrumental-strategic conception of action and a materialist concept of social structure emerges clearly and distinctly here. Social forces lose their external and constraining character only if men coordinate their actions in a conscious, communal fashion and abandon the strategic pursuit of their own selfish interests. Alienation is precisely the alienated exteriorization of the species powers of men in a social force that stands before them like a natural force. As the alienated mediator between men, the state links men with each other by artificially imposing the general interest from without. In this sense, the reification of social relations and the abstraction of the isolated, individual subject can be seen as effectively two sides of a single process.

In the second part of *On the Jewish Question*, Marx considers human emancipation from the perspective of the emancipation of the Jews, or rather, from the perspective of the emancipation of humanity in relation to the "Judaism" of bourgeois society. Since Judaism is only a metaphor for bourgeois greed – in poor taste, misplaced, and unfortunate, to say the least – *On the Jewish Question* should be read as an anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist tract, rather than as an anti-Semitic text. Defined as a secular cult of money, Judaism is the bourgeois religion. I have already suggested that the critique of religious alienation is a paradigm for the critique of all forms of alienation; indeed, the critique of Judaism rapidly becomes a critique of the cult of money:

Money is the jealous God of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man – and turns them into commodities.

Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world – both the world of men and nature – of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man’s work and man’s existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it.

(III, 172)

Economic alienation

The alienation of labor

Marx claims that economic alienation, i.e. alienation in the sphere of economic production and reproduction under the regime of private property, is the fundamental form and real basis of all alienation. If economic alienation is abolished, then all other forms of alienation disappear with it. In the famous section on alienated labor in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx describes the devastating effects of capitalist production on man and his physical, mental, and social condition with great perspicacity and a profound scorn for capitalism. The alienation of man from the object of labor, from labor itself, and from the worker’s fellow men, are viewed as the negation of the being of man and of man as a species being.

Alienation can be understood generally in analytic terms as the last part of a three phase process: externalization – objectification – alienation (cf. Berger and Pullberg, 1965; Berger and Luckmann, 1966: Part 2; Berger, 1969: ch. 4). In the initial phase of externalization, man exteriorizes or objectifies his subjectivity in the external world by working. During the objectification phase, the product man creates becomes autonomous and takes on a life of its own. Objectification is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of alienation. Unlike Hegel, who confuses objectification and alienation, Marx carefully distinguishes between them. Objectification is anthropologically necessary and is not at all pathological. As he says, following Feuerbach and against Hegel:

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural being. . . . a non-objective being is a non-being. . . . a non-objective being is an unreal, non-sensuous thing . . . To be sensuous, that is, to be really existing, means to be an object of sense, to be a sensuous object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself – objects of one’s sensuousness.

(III, 3371)

Alienation, in the full meaning of the term, only arises in the final phase, when the autonomized product turns back against its creator to subjugate him, in other words, when the object subjugates and dominates the subject:

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own

confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

(III, 272)

In his analysis of alienated labor, Marx starts from the fundamental premise of “possessive individualism” (MacPherson, 1962: ch. 2) that is presupposed by political economy: the worker, or rather his labor power, is a commodity like any other, a thing that can be bought and sold. The premises of political economy already express the alienation of the worker and his degradation to the rank of a thing. As a commodity that produces commodities, and which is the foundation of wealth, the worker is less important than the commodities he produces. The product is the goal, and the producer is lowered to the rank of a means to that end. The more the worker produces, the more the product, seized up by the capitalist, debases him. The product of labor is no longer his realization, the expression of his creative forces; instead it expresses and explains his destruction. Since the product of labor belongs to the capitalist instead of the worker, it appears to be an independent being, confronting the worker as an external, hostile force. The more the worker produces wealth, the more impoverished he becomes:

The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things. . . . the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. . . . Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself.

(III, 272)

Alienation is not only manifested in the results of labor, in the fact that man no longer recognizes himself in his product, which turns against him; it also shows in labor itself. The alienation of labor reflects the alienation of the activity of labor. Cut off from its expressive aspect, labor becomes purely instrumental action. Labor is no longer free, it is forced, imposed externally. Because it is no longer an end in itself, it changes from leisure to labor. The primary goal of labor, which is to assert oneself as a species being, becomes merely a means of surviving. “What is animal becomes human, and what is human becomes animal” (III, 275). Cultured man, endowed with all his different senses, becomes an idiot. Alienated man can no longer be distinguished from animals. Alienated by his labor, man ceases to be a species being:

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. . . . He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is not therefore

voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is only a means to satisfy needs external to it. . . . so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is a loss of his self.

(III, 274)

A stranger to the product of his labor and to his labor itself, man also becomes a stranger to man, for "the alien being, to whom labour and the product of labour belongs, in whose service labour is done and for whose benefit the product of labour is provided, can only be man himself" (III, 278). The worker is alienated from the capitalist, as well as from other workers. Consequently, labor activity loses both its expressive and communicative dimensions. Social activity is reduced to strategic activity. When subjects become objects they treat each other in terms of objectivity. Human society becomes increasingly close to Hobbes' state of nature. Cooperation gives way to competition, the battle of all against all. Social connections are established via things. All that matters to men, and connects them to each other, is the circulation of commodities and money. Exchange is the main synthesizing force in society. Analyzing this state of nature, where the external coercion of things is the only force that maintains society as such, Marx concludes that capitalist society "estranges the species from man" (III, 276). Alienated from the product of his labor, from his labor itself, and from other men, man's very essence is alienated. In short, capitalism is an anthropological catastrophe.

The causes of alienation

Alienation is a social pathology specific to, and inseparable from, capitalist societies. From a sociological perspective, it is based on private property, the division of labor, and market production. We have seen how it is possible to connect each of the forms of "species man" (man as a productive and expressive being; man as a sensitive and cultured being; man as a social and sociable being) with the forms of "man alienated from himself" (man alienated from the products of his labor; from the activity of labor; and from other men). I now wish to connect the alienation of the products of labor to private property; the alienation of the activity of labor to the division of labor; and the alienation from other men to the market. These connections can be represented schematically as follows:

<i>Species man</i>	<i>Man alienated from</i>	<i>Alienated society</i>
Productive being	Products of labor	Private property
Cultured being	Labor	Division of labor
Social being	Man	Market
Species being	Self	Social totality

Following the analysis proposed by Istvan Mészáros (1972a: 78–84 and 108–114), I suggest that private property, the division of labor, and the market are "second level mediations." These mediations are on a second level, since in taking the place of labor – which is the first level mediation – they stand between man and

nature, in the widest sense of the word (humanized nature, human nature, and society), thereby intervening in and interfering with the expressive and creative externalization of the essential powers of man, as well as in the properly human appropriation of the products of labor and communal, conscious, and voluntary cooperation between men. Since the Marxist conception of society is dialectical, each of these second level mediations expresses all the social relations in capitalist society and is determined by them. Related to the totality, causality is therefore holistic (Bhaskar, 1993: 127 and 399) not individualist, contrary to the claim of Elster (1986: ch. 2). It follows that the alienation of the self, as a summary and conclusion of alienation, can only be abolished if the social totality is transformed.

Marxist social philosophy is a realist philosophy of internal relations (Ollman, 1971: Part 1; 1993: Part 2). For critical realism, capitalist society, as a set or totality of social relations structured by the private property of the means of production, is viewed as an intransitive generative structure, in other words as a real, relational, but not empirical, structure that determines, structures, and generates states and events in the social world (Benton, 1977: ch. 8; Mepham and Ruben, 1979; Sayer, 1979; Keat and Urry, 1982: ch. 5; Isaac, 1987: Part 2; Collier, 1989). Capitalist society is not a system in the analytic sense, but a dialectical totality in which each moment is conditioned and determined by it (Adorno *et al.*, 1976: 131–163). Private property (A), the division of labor (B), and the market (C) are linked to each other by internal or conceptual relations. A presupposes B and C; B presupposes A and C (etc.); and none of the terms exists without the others. “There is no exchange without division of labor ... private exchange presupposes private production” (XXVII, 36). A, B, and C merely represent “differences within a unity” and, as such, they are in their “one-sided form ... determined by the other moments” (XXVII, 36). Unlike elements in a system, which are empirically connected to each other by inter- and retro-action effects, the moments of a totality are conceptually linked to each other by “intro-action effects.” A is essentially the same thing as B or C seen from another angle.

This internal relation, which is hard to grasp for analytic minds that skipped the Hegelian school, is the origin of Pareto’s quip (cited in Ollman, 1971: 3) that “Marx’s words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice.” The implication of these conceptual interrelations is that various concepts cannot be separated from each other, since they are all members of an “organic entity” (XXVII, 37). In effect, this means that they must be thought at once as one, to ensure that the mobility and totality of the entire system of internal relations is understood.

Since in principle the entire conceptual system can be developed on the basis of each of the mediations, the point of departure is arbitrary. I start with the division of labor and then analyze its internal relation with private property (i), alienation (ii), and the market (iii).

(i) Marx understands the division of labor to mean different things at different levels. Historically, it marks the end of primitive communism; sociologically, it causes society’s split into antagonistic classes; economically, it is the origin of private property; and psychologically, the division of labor impresses distinctive characteristics on members of the different classes. In *The German Ideology*

(1845–1846), Marx and Engels discuss the socio-genesis of the division of labor to explain the socio-genesis of private property. Originally, the division of labor occurs naturally between the different sexes. The division of labor only becomes constraining when the division between manual and intellectual labor arises. “For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood” (V, 47). The division of labor is not only an external force imposing unilateral and limited activity on man, alienating him from his labor, but is also, from the start, the constitutive basis of private property and social inequalities. The division between material and spiritual activity means that “enjoyment and labour, production and consumption devolve on different individuals” (V, 45). Those who labor and those who appropriate the fruit of labor by alienating workers from the products of their labor, are distinct. The division of labor (*Arbeitsteilung*) and property (*Arbeitsverteilung*) evolve together. To emphasize this internal relation, Marx specifies that “division of labour and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of this activity” (V, 46).

(ii) On the other hand, in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx does not derive private property from the division of labor; here he derives it from alienated labor itself, concluding that “private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labour” (III, 279). But isn’t Marx contradicting himself by claiming that private property is the result of alienated labor? Haven’t we seen that alienated labor derives from private property? If so, can private property be both cause and effect of alienation? It can, in fact, if we take the alienation of labor and private property to be identical expressions seen from different angles, considering the products of labor from the perspectives of the worker and the capitalist.

(iii) Marx believes that capitalist society starts as a vast accumulation of commodities. The concept of commodity implies market mediation, and the market presupposes the division of labor. The division of labor and market mediation are also identical expressions of the same thing, the first in relation to the sphere of production, the second in relation to the sphere of circulation. In capitalist society, by definition, production is production for the market. Workers do not labor to consume the labor product, but to sell it. In market society, workers no longer produce to fulfill their own needs or those of their neighbors directly; they labor for an anonymous market. The social nature of labor appears only subsequently, when the products are exchanged and an “invisible hand” naturally coordinates production (supply) and consumption (demand). Just as exchange stands between production and consumption, money, “the universal pimp,” to cite Shakespeare, stands between men, alienating them from each other:

The essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the mediating activity or movement, the human, social act by which

man's products mutually complement one another, is estranged from man and becomes the attribute of money, a material thing outside man. Since man alienates this mediating activity itself, he is active here only as a man who has lost himself and is dehumanized; the relation itself between things, man's operation with them, becomes the operation of an entity outside man and above man. Owing to this alien mediator—instead of man himself being the mediator for man—man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them. His slavery, therefore, reaches its peak. It is clear that this mediator becomes a real God, for the mediator is the real power over what it mediates to me. Its cult becomes an end in itself. Objects separated from this mediator have lost their value.

(III, 212)

Communism: the abolition of alienation through the active abolition of private property

The Marxist philosophy of history is “onto-theo-teleological” (Derrida). It reflects a secularized version of the Christian story of salvation and is similarly organized around an elementary trinity: first there was paradise (primitive communism – the Father), an original state of unity and harmony; then came the fall (capitalism – the Son), a period of divides and alienation; and, eventually, the hour of redemption will come (communism – the Holy Spirit), the restoration of the first state of unity to a higher level through the incorporation of intermediary developments. For both Marx and Hegel redemption is the *telos* of alienation. Between alienation and redemption, there is the proletariat, not, as Marx says, because communist authors take proletarians for gods, but for exactly the opposite reason (IV, 36): the proletariat is the class “which has a universal character by its universal suffering . . . which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete rewinning of man” (III, 186). By abolishing private property through a radical and voluntary act, the proletariat abolishes itself and, thereby also abolishes religion, the state, and the economy. Closing the door of the “prehistory of humanity” (I, 274) firmly behind it, the proletariat achieves the absolute utopia of communism. For the young Marx, communism is neither “electricity plus the Soviets” (Lenin), nor “only a community of labour, and equality of wages paid out by communal capital – by the community as the universal capitalist” (III, 295). Marx sees communism as far more than this; it is in fact a secular Second Coming:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development (III, 296). . . . The positive transcendence of private property, as the appropriation of human life, is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement [!] – that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his human, i.e. social

existence (III, 287). . . . [This communism] is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self -confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.

(III, 296–297)

Marx has clearly lost his way when he expresses this chiliastic enthusiasm. From an analytic point of view, the revolutionary change from “total alienation” to “full flourishing” is problematic. First, it is not easy to go from total alienation to redemption. The dehumanization of the proletariat is hardly merry. Marx presents such a devastating image of the living conditions of the laboring proletarian (the worker is “crippled”; labor produces “imbecility and cretinism”; the worker “mortifies his body and ruins his mind”; labor is a “mortification,” etc.) that it is hard to imagine proletarians as the “gravediggers” of capitalism. Furthermore, in presenting capitalism as a system of internal relations, Marx forgets to analyze the external, constraining connections that exist between the elements (Sayer, 1995: ch. 2). The result is an amalgamation of second level mediations that confuse the abolition of private property with the abolition of the division of labor and the market. The Soviet experience proved that even when private property is abolished, the market and division of labor may persist; and the fascist economy showed that it is possible to abolish the market (planning) while maintaining the division of labor and private property (see Pollock and Horkheimer’s analysis of fascism discussed in Chapter 5). Finally, by reducing species alienation to economic alienation, and economic alienation to private property, Marx eliminated moral-practical and political questions from the analysis. The result is Marxism’s lack of a democratic theory of politics – a lack that has disastrous practical effects. If the fight against political alienation is not considered from a liberal and democratic perspective that guarantees the rights of the individual against those of society, the battle against economic alienation runs the risk of leading to and reinforcing political alienation (Ricoeur, 1955: 260–285 and 1986: 433–448).

The theory of exploitation

Correcting reductions dialectically

In the previous section, I presented the syndrome of intrinsic alienation in Marx’s early texts. My analysis focused exclusively on German philosophy, just one of the “three sources” (Lenin, 1978, I: 77–82) of Marxism, omitting British political economy and French socialism. I presented the young Marx as a romantic esthete of production in the wake of Hegel and Feuerbach, but in fact he was not just a romantic philosopher. He was also already the rigorous and systematic thinker of *Capital*. This conjunction of the romantic and the scientist is admirably expressed in *Economy and Philosophy* (the so-called *Paris Manuscripts*), a text whose title

alone suggests an entire program. Up to now, I have knowingly neglected the economic and theoretical underpinnings of the theory of alienation present in Marx's early writing, even if they are not yet developed systematically. I now wish to correct this anthropological-philosophical reduction through a reading of Marx's later texts. These texts offer a systematic analysis of the socio-economic foundations of the workers' alienation from his products, labor, and fellow men, in bourgeois society. These socio-economic analyses of the mechanisms and systemic structures of capitalism found, extend, complement, and confirm the prior socio-philosophical analyses of the lived experience of alienation. By formulating the theory of value, they enable a shift from lived alienation to structural alienation – from lifeworld to system, and from system to lifeworld (Brunkhorst, 1983: 51–56). This puts me in a position to claim, along with Avineri (1970: 123), that *Capital* demonstrates that alienation is empirically verifiable. While *Capital* demonstrates that alienation is empirically verifiable, *The Worker's Questionnaire* (cf. XXIV, 328–334) seeks to measure it. The question of whether the sociological theory of alienation can be verified by socio-psychological research gave rise to a controversy between Marxist sociologists and empirical-positivist sociologists. While Marxists doubted whether the application of quantitative methods of social psychology could verify the theory, empirical-positivists, who are infatuated with testing and quantifying, readily distributed millions of questionnaires to measure the state of alienation of workers – unless they were measuring something else (cf. Seeman, 1975; for a critique, see Harvey *et al.*, 1980 and 1983–1984).

However, even as I present the mature texts as a scientific correction of an anthropological-philosophical reduction, it is important to recognize that in many ways this correction can be viewed as a scientifically-oriented correction which, by reducing the philosophical category of alienation to the economic category of exploitation, serves to eliminate the voluntaristic and humanist aspects that characterize Marx's early writings. Indeed, in his self-portrait, Marx sees himself as such a "scientific scientist" that in the *Afterword to the Second German Edition of Capital*, he proudly cites at length a Russian commentator who presents his method in a manner that is hardly distinguishable from the flattest, most determinist naturalism. From this scientific perspective, the task of research is to understand "the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but rather, on the contrary, determining that will, consciousness and intelligence" (XXXV, 18).

This type of crude, determinist, and inhuman sociology, which emphasizes the causal determination of external social forces to such an extent that any form of action that is not instrumental or strategic simply disappears from sight, inevitably leads to a meta-theoretical contradiction. Since positivist naturalism can only imagine society as an objective material force determining all human action, and since it can only grasp ideas and actions as effective and determining forces, it is in fact no longer clear on what grounds Marx calls proletarians to reverse the existing social order. Furthermore, given that in this case the move from capitalism to socialism occurs only through mechanical, causal necessity, it is not clear why Marx calls on proletarians to bring about the reversal. If the march

of history is predetermined by natural historical laws, and if everything depends on infrastructure and nothing on superstructure, then all the proletarians have to do is put their faith in science and wait for the capitalist system to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions.

This paradoxical, quietist conclusion can be avoided only if the scientific reduction is corrected by the philosophy of praxis found in the young Marx. Marx makes this philosophical correction to scientific alienation when he submits classical political economy to a “de-fetishizing critique” (Benhabib, 1986: ch. 2). If one does not understand this second moment in the critique of political economy – a moment inseparable from the first and that gives social theory its dialectical character – Marxism is reduced to mechanical determinism (“automatic Marxism”) and the voluntaristic, humanist, and historicist aspects are inevitably lost. But the Marxist critique is two-fold: on the one hand, it is a critique of the “objective” conditions of capitalism in which Marx analyses the causal mechanisms of socio-economic production and reproduction in a quasi-naturalist manner; on the other hand, it is a critique of the science of political economy in which Marx reveals that the bourgeois economy is in fact an ideology. Unlike the Marxist categories, the categories of the bourgeois economy do not refer to internal relations and their transformation, nor do they refer to human processes of which they are the product; instead they refer to things and their phenomenal properties, thus obscuring the social relations they express.

Classical economics treats the capitalist system as if it were entirely natural. It does not view capitalist social relations as a transitory historical product; instead, because it does not understand history dialectically, it freezes them as an eternal given. The *a priori* of classical economics is in fact alienation – the determinate negation of action. Instead of dialectically reflecting alienation as a moment that can be superseded by men’s voluntary and conscious action, it reproduces alienation, and thereby legitimates it. This economic approach does not see that the objective conditions of action are only the non-intentional sedimentation of men’s prior actions, and that through subsequent actions they can intentionally and consciously transform the system of internal relations of the institutions that constitute capitalism as a system of exploitation.

For men to make this kind of historical intervention effectively they must have an adequate understanding of the real structures of capitalism. The Marxist critique of political economy emphasizes the determination of action by external material forces, precisely because it presupposes the effectiveness of ideas and moral understanding in configuring capitalist social relations. The implicit object of Marxism is the dialectic of consciousness and action. There is no gap between Marx the philosopher and Marx the scientist, only a dialectical tension. In other words, the mature Marx does not conflict with the young Marx; he presupposes him.

To explicate the dual critique of political economy, I begin by presenting the theory of exploitation as the theoretical and economic ground of the theory of alienation, and then discuss the theory of commodity and money fetishism. The shift between these two areas of discussion involves not only a move from the

sphere of production to the sphere of circulation and distribution, but also assumes that the starting point of the analysis shifts from labor to the commodity.

From exploitation to alienation

If I may be so bold as to summarize thousands of pages in a single sentence, it might be said that *Capital*, and the many drafts that preceded it, offers a vast critical study of “the capitalist mode of production, and the conditions of production and exchange corresponding to that mode” (XXXV, 8). For any Marxist, the basic axiom of analysis is the following: in capitalist society, production relations are fundamentally antagonistic; capital and its personification (the capitalist) are opposed to labor and its personification (the paid worker). Not only are they opposed to one another, they also presuppose each other: “Capital presupposes wage labour; wage labour presupposes capital. They reciprocally condition the existence of each other; they reciprocally bring forth each other” (IX, 214). I take these sentences, which are both the starting point and conclusion of Marxist analyses, as the reference point for analyzing how capital produces, is produced, and reproduces itself.

Let’s start with a budding capitalist who has in his possession a sum of money, to explore how this sum of money is transformed into capital, in other words, into a value that valorizes or money that capitalizes. The increase in value, which defines capital, cannot come from the sum of money itself, or from its exchange for commodities of an equal value, since “circulation or the exchange of commodities, begets no value” (XXXV, 174). To increase the value,

our friend, Moneybags, must be so lucky as to find . . . in the market, a commodity, whose use value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value . . . The possessor of money does find on the market such a special commodity in capacity for labor or labor power.

(XXXV, 177)

Marx adopts Adam Smith and Ricardo’s theory of value here. In this theory, the force of living labor is the only source of value (neither technology nor the market are taken into account). Living labor, the force of active labor, creates value, or, if it does not create it, conserves and transmits value that is already contained and accumulated in dead labor, that is, in the instruments of production. In every instance, the value of any given object derives only from its status as the product of the force of labor in action, because it is “objectified labor” and, as such, “coagulated time of labor.” According to the theory of value, an object’s value is always determined by the amount of labor it incorporates, and can be measured by the time of labor to produce the object that is socially necessary, in other words, that corresponds to the current social norm in any given society at any given moment.

But let’s return to our emerging capitalist who has found a “free worker” who sells his labor power as a commodity and who enables the capitalist to transform his invested money (constant capital + variable capital) into capital (constant

capital + variable capital + excess). The “free worker” is free in the formal sense: freed from his feudal bonds to a lord, he is now legally entitled to sell his labor power contractually in return for payment. He is also free in a material sense, for he “is short of everything necessary for the realization of his labor power” (XXXV, 179). But although he is “free,” the “whip of hunger” (Weber) forces the worker to sell his labor power on the employment market. Marx claims that the worker’s presence on the market is a sufficient historical condition for the change from a feudal to a capitalist production system (XXXV, 180).

Like all commodities, the value of labor power is determined by the costs required for its production, in this case, the maintenance costs of the worker and his descendants (*proles*). However, the capitalist, who has hired the living force of labor for a determined period of time, forces the worker to extend the duration of labor as long as possible and to produce more value than the wages costs him. The critical point is that the value of the wages is calculated on the basis of the labor necessary to produce the worker, rather than on the basis of the worker’s labor. Marx calls the difference between the two “surplus value” (*Mehrwert*). Surplus value represents the value of “excess work” freely given by the worker and collected by the capitalist. The surplus value extorted from the worker, which costs the capitalist nothing and provides him with a large return, is the hidden source of capital. For the capitalist, it has all the charms of spontaneous creation:

By the purchase of labour power, the capitalist incorporates labour, as a living ferment, with the lifeless constituents of the product [the means of production]. From his point of view, the labour process is nothing more than the consumption of the commodity purchased, i.e., of labour power; but this consumption cannot be effected except by supplying the labour power with the means of production. The product of this process belongs, therefore, to him, just as much as does the wine which is the product of a process of fermentation completed in his cellar.

(XXXV, 195)

Like a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly, our budding capitalist has now become a true capitalist. Through worker exploitation, money reproduces, and metamorphoses into capital. At least, the necessary conditions of this metamorphosis are in place, for in order for it to occur effectively, the entire mass of commodities, the total product (both the part that represents the constant capital and the variable capital, and that which represents the surplus value) must be sold. Whether or not this sale takes place, it is clear that the exploitation of labor is the actual basis of capital, realized through selling.

Although it is unfair, this theft is in no way illegitimate. The exploitation or extortion of surplus value is perfectly legal. Our capitalist and free worker – who meanwhile has become an exploited, paid worker – formed their relation on the market as exchange partners and, apparently, as equals: one bought what the other sold and both are considered as legally equal persons. But, the juridical fiction of a contract veils the fact that no exchange took place, just “the appearance of an

exchange” (II, 354), or, to be more explicit, what we have here is exploitation: “the exchange of a small quantity of objectified labour for a large quantity of living labour” (XXXIV, 417).

There is no capitalization without exploitation, and no exploitation without alienation. This is perhaps the most succinct summary of the connection between the theory of exploitation and the theory alienation. We have seen that money capitalization takes place through, and at the expense of, labor exploitation. Like a vampire, capital only comes alive by sucking the life out of labor. From this parasitic perspective, the raw material, the object of labor, serves only to absorb the labor of others, just as the instrument of labor serves only as a conductor or transmitter in the absorption process. Living labor has no value in itself; as a medium of capitalization, it is only a means of activating dead labor. In capitalism, the worker is literally a mere “employee.” The more he works, the more he is dominated by his own product. By working, the worker produces his counterpart: capital, “the wealth of others that rules over it, the power that is hostile to it” (IX, 215). In the capitalist production system, the subject becomes the object and the object the subject; death seizes life, and the inversion spreads throughout society:

The functions performed by the capitalist are only the functions of capital itself performed with consciousness and will—the functions of value valorising itself through the absorption of living labour. The capitalist functions only as capital personified, capital as a person, just as the worker only functions as the personification of labour, which belongs to him as torment, as exertion, while it belongs to the capitalist as the substance that creates and increases wealth; and in fact it appears as such an element incorporated into capital in the production process, as its living, variable, factor. The rule of the capitalist over the worker is therefore the rule of the object over the human, of dead labour over living, of the product over the producer . . . This is exactly the same relation in the sphere of material production, in the real social life process . . . as is represented by religion in the ideological sphere: the inversion of the subject into object and vice versa.

(XXXIV, 398)

The capitalist system cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production and, hence, production relations. In capitalism, social change is constant. Urged on by the thirst for profit, the capitalist system propagates itself all over the world like the devil in the flesh. No sooner is a means of increasing the surplus value imagined than it is implemented. Marx explains that surplus value can increase in two ways: either directly, by increasing the rate of excess-work, or indirectly, by increasing the productivity of labor. We have already seen that the capitalist forces the worker to work for longer than necessary for the reproduction of himself and his offspring. Marx calls this direct increase of surplus value through the extension of the working day the “formal subsumption of labour under capital” (XXXIV, 93); he calls the surplus value produced by this “forced labor,” “absolute surplus value” (XXXV, 320). The capitalist can also increase surplus value

indirectly through an increase in productivity, an increase that brings about a decrease in the value of labor power and thus also the time needed to reproduce it. In this case, Marx speaks of the “real subsumption of labour under capital” (XXXIV, 104); he calls the resulting surplus value “relative surplus value” (XXXV, 320).

The indirect increase in surplus value is inseparable from Weber’s rationalization of production and of the supervision of the production process. Rationalization of production implies the introduction of new production techniques, the mechanization of labor, and the deskilling of workers. Rationalization of supervision involves panoptical control, submission to discipline, machine mediation of domination, and organizing workers “like soldiers” (VI, 491). For the worker, the consequences of this two-fold rationalization are disastrous. First, he is submitted to despotic discipline and transformed into a mere appendix to the machine; second, he is constantly threatened by unemployment and impoverishment. The rationalization of production is inseparable from the production of a relative over-population that “forms a disposable industrial reserve army that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost” (XXXV, 626). An abundant workforce along with hiring shortages increases competition between workers, leading inevitably to wage reductions and thus to an increase in surplus value. The accumulation of wealth goes hand in hand with the rise in poverty and suffering:

all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers: they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange him from the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his lifetime into working time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital.

(XXXV, 639)

In these ways, capital does not produce and reproduce just capital, it also produces and reproduces poverty for the worker and his family. Capital produces the conditions of its own reproduction. The circle of “simple reproduction” (continuous capitalization from surplus value) extends and spirals outwards. Marx claims that in the long term the continuous increase in relative surplus value leads to an underlying decrease in the general rate of profit. This is because the advantage of technological innovation, which enables individual firms to produce beyond the time of socially necessary labor, is only ever temporary. Competitors must survive or perish. In each case, the time of socially necessary labor for the production of individual commodities tends to decrease. The tendency of value to decrease leads to a rise in relative surplus value, but also restores the previous status quo among

capitalists and the need to begin the whole cycle again. Since profit is a function of the relation between surplus value and total capital invested, the secular tendency of industrial capitalism to constantly revolutionize the means of production and, thus to increase constant capital in relation to variable capital establishes the basis for the tendency of the general rate of profit to fall (while the rate of exploitation remains the same). This tendency to decrease exacerbates the general propensity for internal crisis that lies dormant in the heart of the capitalist production system and, as such, the purely economic basis of its potential collapse.

The theory of fetishism

From exploitation to commodification

Capitalism is not just a system of production based on exploitation; it is also a system of circulation of commodities. Moving from the theory of exploitation to the theory of commodity fetishism, we shift from the sphere of production to the sphere of commodity circulation. This shift from one sphere to another corresponds to a change in the starting point in the analysis of capitalism. In one instance, Marx starts from the concept of labor and analyses capitalism as a system of exploitation; in the other, he starts from the concept of commodity and analyses capitalism as a generalized commodity production system. Generalized exploitation and exchange are key elements in the Marxist analysis of the concept of capital. Internally connected, together they form the capitalist system. Capitalism can thus be defined most succinctly as a generalized system of commodity exchange based on the exploitation of wage labor.

To analyze the internal connection between exploitation and commodity production, it is important to recall that exploitation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of capitalization. To transform money into capital, it is not enough to exploit the laboring masses; surplus value must also be realized, and the mass of commodities produced by the worker must be transformed into capital by being converted into cash on the market. If exploitation in the sphere of production is connected to its realization in the circulation sphere, the formula of capital: $A-M-A'$ or $A-M + \Delta A$ (transformation of money into commodity and retransformation of the commodity into money plus surplus) can be reformulated as: $A-M$ (the capitalist buys labor power on the market as a commodity) and $M-A'$ (the capitalist sells the mass of commodities produced by the worker, part of which represents the materialization of the time of wage labor, and the other part, the materialization of stolen labor time, and cashing in surplus value, transforms money into capital). Marx unveiled the mystery of capital by revealing the internal connection between capitalization, which occurs in the sphere of circulation, and exploitation, which takes place in the sphere of production. Instead of limiting his analysis to appearances (the exchange of equivalents), he identified the hidden mechanism that defines capitalist market production.

Marx identifies the starting point of his research from the very first line of *Capital*: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production

prevails, presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities”, its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity” (XXXV, 45). To analyze the concept of capital, Marx starts from the concept of commodity, not the concept of labor. Starting from the sphere of circulation, he goes back to the sphere of production to reveal the essential connection between capitalization and exploitation. This link is essential although it may not appear so on the surface of the circulation sphere. If one fails to grasp the reality of exploitation that underlies capitalization, and if, following standard economics, one limits oneself to an analysis of phenomenal forms of exchange, which express social relations of exploitation just as much as they mask them, then one necessarily misses the core fact, namely the social relation of the appropriation of surplus value that generates and defines phenomenal forms of exchange. In the same way that “the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are not intelligible to any but him, who is acquainted with their real motions” (XXXV, 321), the phenomenal movement of commodities is only understandable if one knows the real, but non-empirical, structure of internal relations that underlie and explain the empirically observable movement of commodities.

In speaking of a reality or essence underlying phenomenal forms, an essence that is revealed and viewed as real by the theory, Marx rejects empiricism and adopts a realist position: “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided” (XXXVII, 804). The task of science is not, and cannot therefore be, the methodical observation of the empirical world, for phenomenal appearances hide the real relations that produce appearance. The task of science is to construct a theory that can conceptualize essential relations and the generative causal mechanisms that explain the facts, events, and processes of the empirical world. To understand the theory of commodity fetishism and the Marxist critique of classical political economy, it is important to understand that Marxist philosophy is a realist social philosophy. In other words, Marxist philosophy is a social theory that defines its object of knowledge (the social world) as a real, objective, and material structure of social relations, which explains the phenomenal forms of the social world even though the structure is not empirically observable.

However, if the structure is not empirically observable, how can one avoid the sort of Althusserian rationalism, which simply claims that the real world is reproduced in its theory of the social world, and thus tends to understand social reality as an objective and constraining structure of ideas?⁶ In other words, if Marxism is not an empiricist or rationalist philosophy, what are its criteria of validity? It is difficult to answer this question directly, but it is fully in keeping with the spirit of Marxism to suggest that the test of Marxist theory is political practice, or better yet, the ability to generate such a practice. This view is based in the young Marx’s philosophy of praxis. Social reality is the non-intentional result of man’s actions. It is not a natural given; it is a historically specific, human construction that can be transformed through the conscious and voluntary action of men who act knowingly on the basis of Marxist theory. Since knowledge is an integral part of action, its validity is demonstrated at the level of political intervention. As Merleau-Ponty so rightly said, the truth of Marxism is a “truth that lies in the making.”

Commodities are the basic form of bourgeois wealth. In capitalist society, commodities initially appear under the two-fold aspects of use value and exchange value. The use value of a good is primary, and is defined by the value the good has in relation to the satisfaction of immediate needs. The entelechy of use value is this consumption. However, in capitalism, use value becomes secondary since use value becomes a mere “depository” of exchange value (XXXV, 196). To have exchange value, the good must be related to other goods and transformed into a commodity. As a commodity, the good is an exchange object, whose value appears immediately as a “quantitative relation, the proportion in which use values are exchanged for one another” (XXIX, 270). Because it represents the relation between use values, exchange value is not phenomenal. It manifests itself and becomes visible in the commodity. In this sense, the commodity can be seen as the reification of exchange value (and following Castoriadis (1978), we might add that it is an imaginary institution). For example, the exchange value of a palace can be expressed by a certain number of tins of shoe polish, or, in more convenient terms, by a particular sum of money. The exchange value of a good thus involves the abstraction of its sensory qualities. Considered as exchange value, a natural silk shirt, for instance, is not soft; it is expensive: it is worth as much as a pound of Scottish smoked wild salmon.

Commodities thus appear in two different forms: sensory and supra-sensory, although in Marx’s view, this is only the case in capitalism. The fact that exchange value is a thing, or rather, a specifically bourgeois social relation, is explained by the fact that “the product [only] finally develops its character as a commodity, and hence its character as exchange value ... under capitalist production” (XXXIV, 362). Capitalist production is essentially the production of commodities for a market; production with a view to exchange. In capitalism, the immediate character of the product as use value for the satisfaction of needs is secondary and unimportant. What matters is that the product obtains the status of exchange value; that it sells on the market and metamorphosizes into money and capital. This change of form is the principle, motive, and goal of capitalist production, in which the production and sale of commodities become ends in themselves. Use value is now so secondary that commodities can only obtain it through exchange value. The product therefore only attains its natural destination in consumption through the mediation of the market: “To become use values commodities must be altogether alienated; they must enter into the exchange process; exchange however is concerned merely with their aspect as exchange values. Hence, only by being realized as exchange values can they be realized as use values” (XXXIX, 283–284).

“This duality of the commodity there presents itself the dual character of the labour whose product it is” (XXIV, 546). In analytic terms, use value derives from “concrete labor,” while exchange value derives from “abstract labor.” Concrete or useful labor is the intentional and creative expenditure of the human labor force, in any particular productive form, to fulfill concrete needs. Concrete labor is natural and universal: “it is an eternal nature-imposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and Nature, and therefore no life” (XXXV, 53). In contrast, abstract labor is neither natural, nor universal, for it is

not the labor of the weaver, nor that of the builder or carpenter; abstract labor is all these different types of work abstracted from their qualitative differences and retaining only their common element – the fact they represent an expenditure of human labor force that can be measured in terms of time. Abstract labor is supra-sensory, homogenous, and qualitatively undifferentiated. Just like the exchange values it produces, abstract labor is only distinguished quantitatively since all qualities and individualities are erased by being sublimated as if they were identical. Furthermore, just as exchange value supplants use value, abstract labor dominates concrete labor: “the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives . . . Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day” (VI, 127).

Marx reformulates his theory of the alienation of labor in the language of political economy through the distinction between concrete and abstract labor. The distinction between these two types of labor clearly coincides with an earlier distinction between species labor and alienated labor. Abstract labor is not just an analytic category: the indifference to specific types of labor and the erasure of individuality in labor are real. “The abstract category labour, labour as such, labour *sans phrase*, the point of departure of modern [political] economy, is first seen to be true in practice” (XXVIII, 41). By emphasizing the abstraction of the concrete and the qualitative in this way, not only in the economic sphere, but also in society at large, Marx captures an essential aspect of modernity. As we shall see in the following chapters, Simmel, Weber, Lukács, and the members of the Frankfurt School all adopt and systematize the critique of abstraction and rationalization, quantification, and formalization within the framework of a theory of reification.

Critique of reification

With the advent of capitalism, we move from a market economy to a market society. In bourgeois society, Marx says the commodity becomes “the universal form of all products” (XXXIV, 359). What Marx calls “commodity fetishism” is inseparable from the generalization of market exchange and this in turn is conceptually and empirically linked to the social division of labor. We have seen that in capitalism, production does not occur for consumption; instead it is motivated by circulation. Production is not for oneself or one’s fellowmen, but for an anonymous, self-regulating market. The market, as the natural principle for matching private interests with the general interest, naturally coordinates the production of these interests, with the result that the social connection is mediated by things (cash nexus). Individuals are independent from each other. Each individual acts in a strategic manner by pursuing and calculating his own self-interest. Since society is embedded in the economy, and not vice-versa, as was the case in pre-capitalist societies, individuals do not enter into contact with one another socially except by exchanging their products (cf. Polanyi, 1957: ch. 5 and 6).

Since there is no principle matching private interests and the general interest artificially, or any central institution overseeing the production and distribution of

products, the coordination of actions and individual labor does not take place in any conscious or intentional manner; instead it occurs spontaneously, following the laws of the market. The market's "invisible hand" coordinates production and consumption naturally. Consequently, it is only afterwards, when products are exchanged on the market that the social character of products and the individual labor invested in them emerges. The coordination of individual actions thus takes place unbeknown to individuals. This unintentional result of individual action is both functional and systemic. Since utilitarianism is the dominant form of action in market society, social integration is imposed from outside by the systemic interconnection of things. Relations of personal dependence are replaced by relations of material dependence, and men are held together by "real abstractions" (Sohn-Rethel, 1972; Sayer, 1987).

In market societies, socialization takes place, therefore, through the medium of reification. Embedded in the economic system, social relations between men are mediated through the functional interconnections of things. This means that men are dominated by products made by their own hand. Obviously, the situation is very different in communist society. By replacing the principle of a natural matching of interests by the principle of their artificial correspondence, in communism relations between men and with nature are "perfectly intelligible and reasonable" (XXXV, 90). The inversion of exchange value and use value is also corrected: individuals produce for each other, not for an anonymous market. They coordinate their individual actions rationally and consciously through common accord. Even if they do not necessarily act in a communicative manner, they act in a communal manner. By submitting production coordination to their own convivial control, they abolish the law of the market and free objectified interpersonal relations from their structural opacity. Social production is subsumed by individuals who manage it as their shared power. These then are the "recipes ... for the cook-shops of the future" (XXXV, 17): instead of being subjected to social power they have created, men direct it with conscience and will. They abolish private property and the market, and rationally organize the process of production and distribution of the products of labor in a conscious and structured manner. The primacy of the economy is abolished and the primacy of politics reestablished, so that economy loses its object. Relations between men and things are once again subordinated to relations between men.

The critique of fetishism refuses mediations and rests on a myth of a transparent collectivity in which actions are mediated neither by exchange relations nor by the market. This type of collectivity can only be envisaged as a small, utopian, entirely autarkical community (Lange, 1978). Since this underlying normative model, which fails to take into account the relative autonomy of social structures, has been historically superseded by the facts, we might ask to what extent the critique of fetishism and the philosophy of identical subject-object on which it is based, are still pertinent to hyper-complex modern society.

In the end, is the Marxist critique of mediations nothing more than a romantic critique? If so, can we still critique the alienated autonomization of the economic sub-system in terms of commodity fetishism? Or should we start looking for a new

normative model that does not have the same deficiencies as this anachronistic utopia of a world without mediations? I believe we must, and in the chapter on Lukács, I explicitly critique the philosophy of the identity of subject and object, with reference to Luhmann and Habermas.

In the first volume of *Capital*, in the well-known section on “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” Marx presents his famous theory of fetishism (Geras, 1971; Rovatti, 1982; Burris, 1987; Goldmann, 1959: 64–106; Rubin, 1973: 1–60; Larrain, 1983: 1–45; Feenberg, 1986: 59–86. For the history of the concept, see Iacono, 1992 and especially Pietz, 1985, 1987, 1988). Semantic analysis reveals at least five different meanings of the concept of fetishism. Fetishism means: i) that exchange value supplants use value, to the point that exchange value appears inherent to objects themselves, although in reality, it comes from the labor incorporated in them, expressed as a relation of magnitude between things that are exchanged; ii) that social relations between people are mediated by the economic relations between things, and become confused with them; iii) that commodities exist independently as pseudo-persons; iv) that things, commodities, and their movement lead, dominate, and direct men, not vice versa; and finally, v) that the forms of fetishism distinguished here, which are specifically bourgeois and, hence, temporary, are treated by the bourgeois economy as if they were natural and eternal trans-historical necessities.

The starting point of the classical analysis of commodity fetishism is that the commodity is not just a thing that can be understood by itself, but that it is “a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (XXXV, 81). As a synthesis of use value and exchange value, the commodity is simultaneously a sensory and supra-sensory object. Yet, the “mystical character of the commodity” does not come from its use value because, as a use value, the object considered (for example, the book in your hand) simply satisfies a specific need. The enigmatic character of the commodity thus derives only from its exchange value, for as Marx says, “value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (XXXV, 85).

Let us try to make sense of this riddle: the transformation of useful objects into commodities with exchange value is a social act, since it assumes that exchange partners consider their different products as equal, abstracting real inequalities, and reducing them to their common denominator, which is the expenditure of human labor power. Exchange partners do this without realizing it. “When, therefore, Galiani says: ‘Value is a relation between persons’ ... he ought to have added: a relation between persons expressed as a relation between things” (XXXV, 85), for none of this is visible. The social nature of the product disappears in the act of equalizing products, which is also coordinates individual labor. The useful labor of the different producers incorporated in the commodity is obliterated. Lucien Goldmann (1958: 78) gives a nice illustration of this idea:

A pair of shoes costs 5,000 francs. This expresses a social, and implicitly human, relation between the cattle breeder, the tanner, his workers, his

employees, the retailer, the shoe salesman, and lastly, the end consumer. Yet none of this is visible; most of these people do not even know each other, and are not even aware of each other's existence. They would all be amazed to learn of the link that binds them to each other.

The result is that the product's exchange value appears to be an inherent part of the product's "nature." The non-phenomenal exchange value manifests itself concretely in the commodity; the commodity is the reification of the exchange value. From this, Marx concludes that the social relation between men takes on the phantasmagorical form of a relation between things:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses ... it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

(XXXV, 82–83)

For the realist philosophy of internal relations, fetishist reification can be defined as the erroneous attribution of social power, which things possess, through the emergent properties of a larger social system of social relations in which they are embedded, to things themselves, as if it were an inherent quality. To put it briefly: fetishism is a well-founded categorical mistake whereby "vehicles of holistic causality are taken to be sources of its effects," as Torrance (1995: 165) explains. Although the social attributes of labor are still vaguely perceptible through the veil of the materiality of commodities, they disappear with money. In money, the value of things is separated from their substance; it attains an autonomous status. As Simmel later said following Marx, money expresses "the value of things without the things themselves" (*Philosophy of Money*, 121, cf. chapter on Simmel).

Since it is clear that money is only the "transubstantiation" of the commodity, and that the commodity is only the reification of exchange value, its secret is readily revealed: "Hence the riddle presented by money is but the riddle presented by commodities; only it now strikes us in its most glaring form" (XXXV, 103). Although commodity and money appear to be simple things, in fact they are social relations of production and exchange. The appearance of things hides their essence. If people cannot see through to the reality behind appearance in daily life, it is not because they have not read *Capital*, but rather because, as Marx says, for the producers "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things" (XXXV, 84).

This is the place to introduce a theory of ideology that is phenomenologically inspired, understood as a sub-set of culture, composed of symbolic representations of society that duplicate and reproduce the domination of capital by masking it, in this instance, by presenting the actual relations between men and things as natural and eternal relations, rather than social relations that can be transformed and inverted by historical praxis. If ideology is understood as a way of thinking about a society that is implicated in its social structure and that has implications for action, it is possible to exceed the opposition between structuralism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology (Bourdieu, 1977; Ricoeur, 1986). From this perspective, ideology appears as *doxa*, a form of symbolic representation of society that finds its foundation in reality (*fundamentum in rebus*), meaning that for consciousness social relations naturally appear as natural relations. This is doubtless what Marx had in mind when he claimed that the inversion of men and things, which characterizes fetishism, is “prosaically real, and by no means imaginary” (XXIX, 289). Since reality, rather than the subject, is misleading, it is possible to conclude that fetishism is not just an illusion. It is an “allusion” – an allusion to material existence that is recognized, and that at the same time consciousness necessarily “misrecognizes.” False consciousness is a falsified consciousness, but is nevertheless constitutive and reproductive of the inversion of men and things in capitalism. Fetishism only becomes an illusion when the reified form of social relations is presented and justified as an entirely natural state of affairs by those who Marx describes as “crude” economists. When theoretical representation doubles the dogmatic apprehension of the world and reinforces it, “this brings to completion the fetishism peculiar to bourgeois political economy, the fetishism which metamorphoses the social, economic character impressed on things . . . into a natural character stemming from the material nature of those things” (XXXVI, 227).

In the final chapters of the third volume of *Capital*, Marx returns to the theme of fetishism. This time he approaches it not only in the sphere of circulation, but in relation to the economic process as a whole. Critiquing the classical formula of wealth, he attacks the fetishism of categories in bourgeois economy. Unlike Marxist categories, the bourgeois economy’s categories remain on the surface rather than breaching the real relations that define capitalism: they express things and their properties, instead of internal relations and their transformations; in other words, they designate relations between things, rather than relations between relations.

The problem with the bourgeois economy is not that it denies or shifts attention from internal relations; the problem is that it excludes them from thought structurally (Mephram, 1979). Thus, in the “trinity formula” of wealth – capital-interest, land-ground rent, and labor-wages – bourgeois economists relate economic wealth to what they see as its three “sources” and corresponding income (cf. Sayer, 1979: ch. 3).

For Marx, the inter-relation of capital, land, and labor is only arbitrary. Between these supposed sources of wealth, he says there is “about the same relation to each other as lawyer’s fees, red beets and music” (XXXVII, 801). The classical formula

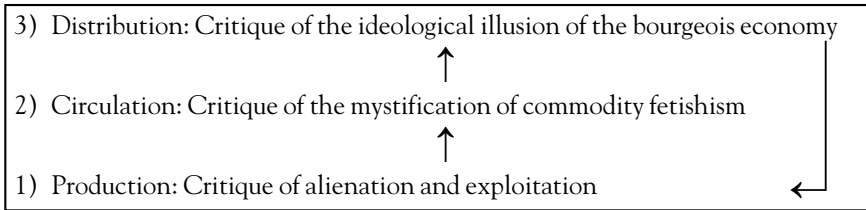
of wealth does not grasp the specificity of capitalism. It confuses categories that refer to specifically capitalist relations. Capital and landed property, for instance, are confused with the category of labor, which in fact refers to an ontological relation between man and nature in general. Furthermore, by placing the same value on land, capital, and labor, it obscures what Marx views as the only source of wealth, namely wage labor. Finally, the formula reveals the annual incomes of the three classes – the capitalists, land owners, and workers – as the annual fruits of three different trees, while really they all come from the same source, namely, wage labor: “Rent, Interest, and Industrial Profit are only different names for different parts of the surplus value of the commodity, or the unpaid labour enclosed in it, and they are equally derived from this source, and from this source alone” (XX, 134). These parts of surplus value do not come from land or capital as such; land and capital only put their proprietors in a position where they can take their respective share of the surplus value extracted from the worker in the process of exploitation by the capitalist. But none of this is visible in the trinity formula, which is why the categories of bourgeois economy are well and truly ideological according to Marx. It obscures the social and internal relations that characterize capitalism by transforming them into natural things, that is, by reifying them:

In capital-profit, or still better capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations into things [*Verdinglichung*], the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical and social determination. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things.

(XXXVII, 817)

Synoptic table

The dialectical figures of righting and inversion provide a unifying thread for Marx’s thought. One way or another Marx critiques the reification, or inversion of subject and object, that characterizes the capitalist system in every instance: in the theory of alienation, the theory of exploitation, and the theory of commodity fetishism. In this sense, the critique of political economy, which inverts the inversions, can be seen as a vast project of “transformative criticism” (Gouldner, 1985: 233) that integrates alienation, exploitation, and the fetishism of commodities into an ascending system of inversions of the first, second, and third order. If the sphere of income distribution is superimposed onto the sphere of commodity circulation and this sphere is then superimposed onto the sphere of production then the trajectory of the reversals of subject and object inherent to capitalism can be schematized in the following synoptic table:



- 1) The primary reversal of subject and object (“social reification”) occurs in the sphere of production: the worker’s alienation and exploitation mean that the object of his labor is opposed to him as an external, objective, autonomous force that turns against him and transforms him into an object. The subject is alienated from the object of his labor, the object of labor is transformed into capital, capital becomes the subject, and the worker the object, of capital, which is personified by the capitalist. In capitalism, the process of production, which is itself a process of exploitation and alienation, concludes with the personification of things and the reification of individuals.
- 2) In the sphere of circulation, fetishism, which is connected to commodities, inverts the primary inversion of subject and object (“the reification of consciousness”). The reification of interpersonal relations and the personification of relations between things seem to be a natural process. Social relations between men, particularly relations of production and exchange characteristic of capitalism, appear as objective relations between things. Commodity fetishism, defined as a well-founded distortion of perception induced by the structure of market economy, makes practical processes and social relations disappear behind a veil of naturalness and materiality. Although this “mystification” of consciousness is “prosaically real, and by no means imaginary” (XXIX, 289) (it is a mirage, not a hallucination) the consequence is still that the origin of the exchange value, mechanisms, and social nature of its production are obscured. The internal connection between the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation is ruptured.
- 3) In the ideological sphere of the bourgeois economy, the mystification is mystified, and the appearances of the sphere of distribution become mere illusions, thus inverting the inverted relations (“theoretical reification”). Bourgeois economists represent exchange as the actualization of freedom and equality, and thingified social relations as a perfectly natural and therefore eternal state of affairs. “Their definite social character in the process of capitalist production bearing the stamp of a definite historical epoch is a natural, and intrinsic substantive character belonging to the, as it were, from time immemorial” (XXXVII, 812). In the trinity formula of wealth, ideology attains the “most external and most fetish-like form” (XXXVII, 388). In “land” and “capital,” which Marx describes as the “perversion and materialization of production relations in their highest degree” (XXXVII, 390), the “automatic fetish” finds its ideal expression: value engenders itself. In the same way that it appears to be the nature of the apple tree to produce apples, it

appears that the nature of money is to bring in interest or profit. In this ideological form, there is no longer any trace betraying the origin of surplus value. Its source in exploitation is totally obliterated, the interests of the dominant classes are safeguarded, and the capitalist system self-perpetuated.

This is where Marxism intervenes. By addressing itself directly to exploited and alienated workers; by unmasking political economy; and by unveiling the objective mechanisms of capitalist production and reproduction, Marxism aims to stimulate an awareness of inversion, which is the prelude to the reversal of all the inverted relations. In this sense, one could say that the defetishizing critique of political economy aims to abolish the object of its critique. Marxism thus offers a maieutics for the de-reification of social relations.

Conclusion

This is not the place to sort through “what is alive and dead” in Marx’s work. History has decided that, and since the fall of the Berlin wall, Marxism is no longer fashionable, while capitalism has become universal, as Marx predicted, and as the passionate debates about globalization proves. Nevertheless, although Marx is cited less and less, his work remains an essential reference. Since his critique of reification of social structures and the alienation of man offers a defetishizing critique motivated by an emancipatory interest, it provides an exemplary model for any social theory that aspires to provide a critique, Marxist or other.

The essence of a critical theory of society is that it analyses the structural forms of domination from an emancipatory perspective. Critical theory reveals the alienating existence of reified social forces that escape men’s control and weigh on them by systematically limiting their margins of action. This theory also shows that reified social forces are not natural forces, that they are the unintentional product of men’s actions, and that they can be transformed by men. Marx articulated this conjunction of a systemic approach of reified social structures and a praxeological approach of emancipatory action in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not just make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (XI, 103).

It is true that in his mature texts Marx somewhat neglected the voluntaristic dimension of his theory by presenting action as an epiphenomenon of material structures. From this determinist perspective, material social structures, seen in a realist light as a hidden, non-phenomenal set of internal relations, determine the observable behavior of men to such a degree that in a fully Althusserian fashion they appear as mere “supports.” However, this crudely determinist and deeply anti-humanist sociological vision is only a humanist ruse. It does not seek to reinforce fatalism, but to reveal the fetishistic character of the social whole, and thus to increase awareness and incite emancipatory action that will reverse the reified social relations underlying domination.

Although Marx emphasizes the determination of action by external material forces – an alienating determination that reduces action to its mere instrumental or strategic dimension – he does so precisely because he assumes that this degrading condition can be transformed in a decisive manner through human intervention. Alienation is an anthropological catastrophe, but it is not total. Man's essential powers can be reclaimed. Reification, defined as the imposition of social order through the external constraint of material forces, that results from and leads to the reduction of action to its solely strategic dimension, is not history's last word. Contrary to what Hegel, and as we shall see, Simmel believed, the alienating reification of social structures is neither a metaphysical accident nor a cosmic fatality: it is a historically determined condition.

No doubt Marx was mistaken when he presented the abolition of private property as a sufficient condition for the abolition of all forms of alienation, but he was right that the reactivation of the communicative and expressive dimensions of action, repressed in a systematic manner by the structural conditions of capitalism, is an entirely practical task. Even if it is no longer the "unsurpassable horizon" of our time, Marx's thought is still essential because he outlined the contours of a critical social theory that goes right to the root of things – and that root is man himself.

2 Georg Simmel: between Marx and Weber

The dialectics of modernity¹

Of all the great sociologists, Georg Simmel (1858–1918) is without doubt the most original, most subtle and most brilliant. Reflecting his thought process of association and analogy, Simmel is often described as a “brilliant essayist.” Torn “between science and literature” (Lepenies, 1988), Simmel sought to establish sociology as an independent discipline, distinct from other sciences which also analyze the social sphere, for instance social psychology, political sciences, and linguistics. Yet, despite his fertile imagination, which borders on the anti-academic, and despite the new paths that he cut through sociology and its neighboring disciplines, as well as the mass of ingenious and productive hypotheses he left behind, the many theses that others subsequently developed successfully, Simmel was almost forgotten. Even though during his lifetime his fame was comparable to Bergson at the *Collège de France*, he has only been rediscovered since the 1980s. Simmel predicted his fate with striking lucidity:

I know that I shall die without spiritual heirs (and that’s good and well). The inheritance that I leave behind is like money distributed among many different heirs, each of which will use his share to advance some occupation compatible with his own nature, but which will no longer be recognizable as coming from the inheritance.

(FA, 1)

In contemporary sociology Simmel’s concepts are common currency (for example, social distance, role, reference groups, and interaction). Yet in spite of his influence on American sociology (Levine *et al.*, 1976) and the current renaissance of research into Simmel’s work, which is particularly visible in Italy, France, and Germany, by and large Simmel’s work remains unrecognized. All too often the philosophic aspects of his thought are neglected. There is an over concentration on his micro-sociology, while the philosophy that drives his thought and provides its unity remains in the background. In my opinion, neither his contributions to social epistemology, nor his critique of modernity have received the attention they deserve. This chapter seeks to reintegrate Simmel’s formal sociology, philosophy of knowledge, and social metaphysics; to contribute to a renewed appreciation of the heuristic principle of methodological

pluralism; and to reveal Simmel's place within the grand sociological tradition, between Karl Marx and Max Weber.

A social metaphysician

Simmel is an anti-systematic thinker, just like Adorno, who wrote a short essay on him (Adorno, 1958, XI: 556–566). Whether he did not wish to, or was unable to crystallize his thought in a unitary system remains a moot point. He was indeed, as he said himself, “very little inclined to enclose the fullness of life in a systematic symmetry” (1958: 189). Like the pre-scientific mind, described so marvelously by Bachelard (1993: 30–31), Simmel never limits himself to studying a carefully defined phenomenon. Moving from one object to the next, he seeks variety, not variation. Accused of being a “*flâneur*” [a stroller] (Frisby, 1981: 68–101) and a “*bricoleur*” [D.I.Y. or *do-it-yourselfer*] (Weinstein, 1993: 53–70) for precisely this reason, Simmel is above all an essayist. He is a supplier of hypotheses, rather than a system maker, a polymorphous and curious thinker who scatters his thought across a mass of disparate objects, to the point that Ortega y Gasset compared him to a “philosophical squirrel, who leaps from one nut to the next, hardly nibbling on them” (cited by Coser, 1977: 3). Simmel's elaborate essays treat subjects as anodyne and apparently trivial as bridge and door, adornment, laziness, numbers, lies, epistolary exchange, meals, ruins, adventure, flirting, and much more.

For Simmel, however, nothing is trivial since everything is connected and bound to the essential, or as he says, since it is a matter of “finding in each of life's details the totality of its meaning” (PM, 55). If all the details indicate the total meaning of life and if the depths of life can be found in appearance, then the world is one and each appearance can be interpreted as a symbol connected to the unity of the world. The monumental *Philosophy of Money* is the perfect example of his integrative approach. Treating money as a symbol of modernity, Simmel emphasizes and develops relations between the most superficial, accidental phenomena and the deepest currents of individual, social, and historical life. While he apparently treats money *sub specie momenti*, it is in fact interpreted *sub specie aeternitatis*. Frisby (1985: 39 ff.) claims that this is what makes Simmel the sociologist of modernity *par excellence*, in the sense Baudelaire described: “Modernity is the transient, fleeting, contingent half of art; the other half is eternal and immutable” (Baudelaire, 1976: 623).

Simmel does not only hop from one theme to another, he also continually changes his interpretative perspective. The real is inexhaustible and can only be understood from several different perspectives, each of which captures an aspect of life without ever exhausting its meaning. Simmel is a master of interdisciplinary juxtaposition. By adopting many different perspectives and progressing from one analogy to the next, he moves smoothly from philosophy to sociology, from sociology to aesthetics, from aesthetics to ethics, from ethics to psychology, and from psychology to history. His claims are informed by empirical examples, but he is the first to admit that he could just as well have employed fictive examples (GSG 11, 65, n.). In this respect, his “simulations” are closely related to art, for like art they do not reproduce reality, they reconstruct it.

Simmel's research is always rigorously inter-or trans-disciplinary. His approach and thought conflict with the sectioning of disciplines that existed prior to Simmel, and which has been exacerbated since for reasons that are more related to the political economy of academic institutions than to their objects of investigation. There is no point asking therefore whether Simmel's research should be ascribed to the field of sociology or philosophy, as he explains in a passage that I could have used as an epigraph to this book:

It is superfluous to ask whether this research belongs to philosophy or whether, strictly speaking, they are a part of sociology . . . In any event, the nature of sociology and its definition in relation to philosophy are no more concerned with this question than the concepts of day and night are worried about the fact that there is a dusk, or that the concepts of man and animal suffer from the fact that one day we might find intermediary stages which would join the characteristics of both into a single species, so that they might no longer be conceptually separated.

(GSG 11, 61)

In the *Fundamental Problems of Sociology*, however, Simmel distinguishes between "Pure, or Formal, Sociology" and "Philosophical Sociology" (SS, 21 sq). As a specialized science of the forms of association, formal sociology plays an essential role in the field of social sciences. At the junction between specialized social sciences (e.g. psychology, economics, linguistics) and philosophy, formal sociology implies both a theory of knowledge and a metaphysics. As an autonomous science, pure sociology presupposes an epistemology and projects a metaphysics, although neither can be addressed within the science itself. Social epistemology, which is concerned with basic concepts and *a priori* assumptions, studies the metatheoretical foundations of sociological research; its complement is social metaphysics, which synthesizes fragmentary results in a totality or interprets the totality of several relations through a particular phenomenon.

In this chapter, I start by presenting the dualist meta-principle of the dialectic without synthesis as a means of systematically unifying Simmel's non-systematic thought (2). I then discuss Simmel's formal sociology and its ontological and epistemological foundations (3). We see that formal sociology is not at all formalist; in fact, it is interactionist and vitalist. Finally, I analyze Simmel's social metaphysics in *The Philosophy of Money* and in various essays as a classic theory of modernity (4). This theory of modernity, which can be interpreted through the dialectical terms of reification and freedom, positions Simmel between Marx, who he was influenced by, and Weber, who he influenced, thereby reclaiming his place in the ranks of the great sociological tradition.

The "unity in all duality or the duality in all unity"

Among the founding fathers of sociology, Simmel is the only one who was a professional philosopher. Although he rarely cites his sources, Simmel was always

sensitive to the spiritual movements of his time. He was friends with Max and Marianne Weber, Husserl, Rickert, Rodin, Rilke, and Stefan George and was influenced by Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Spencer, Comte, Dilthey, Tönnies, and Bergson. In spite of his status as an outsider, he was a significant influence on Lukács, Benjamin, Buber, Cassirer, Ortega y Gasset, Mannheim, Groethuysen, Vierkandt, von Wiese, Park, Small, Homans, and Goffman.

Simmel's work is usually analyzed according to three phases: during the first phase (1879–1900), he was a positivist, influenced by Spencer's neo-Darwinism; in the second phase (1901–1908), he moved closer to neo-Kantianism; in the final phase (1909–1918), the last ten years of his life led him towards Bergson and *Lebensphilosophie*. Of course, this periodization is not entirely false, for Simmel's thought did evolve considerably; however, it is misleading since it should be seen as the main direction of his thought, rather than rigid periods. At every stage of his work the principles of social differentiation, the construction of reality, and the vitalist process are present and intersect with each other.

The core of Simmel's thought is best summarized in the meta-concept of dualism, duality in interaction, or the dialectic without synthesis (Landmann, 1968; Freund, 1981). The constitutive *a priori* that underlies Simmel's thought is that the coexistence of polarities, which logically presuppose each other in their mutual opposition, is constitutive of all life. He argued that, "the essence of human life is that the vital conditioning of these particular moments is the existence of its opposite" (GSG 11, 685). Being the union of complementary oppositions, life itself is divided: "We are obliged always to speak of unity where to a certain degree the opposing forces become mutually visible" (GSG 3, 164). The formula behind Simmel's thought, "the formal structure of our existence" (L, 1), is that elements seek out and complement each other, but their opposition is never superseded.

Simmel articulates the principle of dualist structuring in terms of an original synthesis of neo-Kantism (the opposition between form and content) and vitalism (the principle of interaction). This synthesis structures all his thought. It is simultaneously the basis of his formal sociology, his relationist epistemology, and his vitalist metaphysics (Bevers, 1985). In his writings, dualism manifests itself in at least three ways: synthetically, heuristically, and tragically.

Synthetic dualism

In Simmel's formal sociology the dualist principle functions as a synthetic principle in the Kantian sense. The following passage demonstrates clearly that Simmel sees the forms of socialization, or better yet, "association" (*Vergesellschaftung*) to use Durkheim's literal translation, as a fragile synthesis of opposing tendencies: "Sociological relations are conditioned in an absolutely dualist fashion: union, harmony, cooperation, which act as socializing forces, are necessarily cut through by distance, competition and repulsion to give rise to the real configurations of society; the vast forms of organization, which construct or which appear to construct society, must always be unsettled, unbalanced, gnawed at by irregular,

individualist forces, to obtain, by alternately giving way and resisting, the liveliness of its reaction and development. Intimate relations, which are borne through bodily and mental rapprochement lose their force of attraction, and even their content, as soon as they too cease to include, in a simultaneous and alternating fashion, distance and intermittence” (GSG 11, 391).

A systematic reconstruction of Simmel’s sociology of social forms (for instance, conflict, subordination, the division of labor . . .), would require an inventory of polarities and a mapping of his mental space. The following profile of polarities, which is in no way complete, suggests the possibility of this type of reconstruction:

Distinction	←————→	Imitation
Opposition	←————→	Integration
Resistance	←————→	Submission
Differentiation	←————→	Expansion
Distancing	←————→	Intimacy.

Just as in Saussure’s linguistics the structure of differences forms the deep structure of language, in Simmel’s formal sociology the structure of polarities forms the generative grammar of social forms. Since Simmel views social forms as an alliance of opposing tendencies, the polarities listed above suggest an understanding of the formal sociology essays he wrote on fashion (SC, 187–217), conflict (GSG 11, 284–382), subordination (GSG 11, 160–283), social groups (SD, 45–69, 100–116; GSG 11 791–863), and money (PM), as a synthetic application of the dualist principle.

Indeed, on closer inspection, it turns out that for Simmel fashion is a form of association that links the tendency to imitate the group and the tendency to distinguish oneself from the group; conflict brings together the tendency for intergroup opposition and intra-group integration; subordination is a dialectical synthesis of submission and resistance; the growth of social groups combines the quantitative expansion of groups and the qualitative differentiation of individuals; and as in Marx and Durkheim, exchange is shown to be a form that both unites and separates individuals. In each instance, and there are many more examples, social forms are synthetically determined in a dualist manner.

Heuristic dualism

In Simmel’s epistemology the dualist principle functions as a heuristic principle in the construction of theory. His epistemology is relationist, with neo-Kantian origins (Mamelet, 1914: ch. 3; Dahme, 1981, I: 313–319). Simmel believes that the world is far too complex to be understood from any single point of view or deduced from any single principle. The world is not simply the sum of its parts; it is more than the various different theories can grasp. Like Adorno, and later Derrida, Simmel is a bitter adversary of *prima philosophia*, that is, any form of absolute idealism that deduces the ontic totality from an ontological principle (for example, the subject or object (GP, ch. 3), being or becoming (ch. 2)). Simmel refuses to accept any first principle as the foundation of thought. As he states explicitly, “relativism

denies the notion that the relativity [of being] can be borne by an absolute" (SN, 70).

Simmel believes this is the case because no philosophical system is capable of incorporating the totality of being. Each first principle finds its complement and foundation in its opposite principle. Given that "the last thing that we can explain is next to last" (GSG 3, 27), it follows that each first principle must effectively be treated as the penultimate principle and that "ultimate comprehension is transferred to infinity" (PM, 112). The conflict of opposing terms cannot be exceeded by dialectical synthesis. "The unitary moment *A* decomposes into *a* and *b*. . . *a* can only be founded on *b* and, in turn, *b* can only be founded on *a*" (IF, 108). Each term enters into a relation of reciprocal substitution and the opposition is dissolved in interaction, which is solely heuristic.

Moving from ontology to epistemology, first principles are transformed into regulative principles (cf. K, 14 sq, 184 sq). Thus, starting from the "permanent possibility of putting up an opposing observation or probability in front of each observation or probability" (SD, 5), Simmel invites thinkers to conceive of the world alternately from the premises of idealism and materialism; rationalism and empiricism; holism and individualism. Likewise, he believes it is useful to represent the world, in turn and always heuristically, from the perspectives of unity and plurality; continuity and discontinuity; fixity and fluidity. In each case, the world can be understood from many unilateral points of view, each of which projects unity onto the infinity of an imagined point of convergence (Kant's *focus imaginarius*) and none of which is ever adequate to its object. Consequently, none may claim cognitive hegemony.

Perhaps Simmel's most important idea is his concept of methodological pluralism. Admittedly this concept can lead to integral relativism, but it is far more productive to approach it from a different angle, as a guiding notion that enables the development of a truly multi-dimensional sociological metatheory. From this perspective, it is not a question of contrasting Marx's realism with Weber's nominalism, or Weber's individualism with Durkheim's holism, nor is it a matter of contrasting Marx's materialism to Durkheim's idealism; this approach suggests instead that these metatheoretical positions are mutually complementary. They become falsified only when they assert a monopoly over knowledge and try to force reality into their conceptual frameworks.

In principle, if not in fact, reality is multidimensional. To reduce it methodically to a single dimension inevitably leads to the hypostasis of its own one-dimensional point of view and the reification of other dimensions of the real which alternative perspectives try to capture. Thus, for example, when the conceptual system of historical materialism posits material forces as the sole determining force, it excludes the efficacy of ideas. This leads *eo ipso* to the reification of men, since they are relegated to the rank of mere puppets. When materialism is considered a constitutive principle, rather than a regulative principle, paradoxically it collapses into idealism. Marx's critique that Hegel's ideas take the form of tangible ghosts, can be turned back on Marx, just as it can be turned against Durkheim.

Against Marx and Durkheim, and with Simmel and Weber, I believe it is necessary to maintain the possibility and need to "understand the march of history as an

alternating game (*Wechselspiel*) between ideal factors and material factors, in which neither factor is either first or last" (GSG 6, 719). Once the principles of methodological pluralism are repressed, one way or another there is a hypostasis of method and a thingification of the real.

One point I wish to make is that reification results from a deviation from methodological pluralism: from this perspective, reification occurs when the space of metatheoretical possibilities is systematically reduced so that strategic action appears to be the only possible type of action and consequently the social structure appears as a real and material structure imposing external constraints on individuals. As we shall see below, in his critique of modernity, even Simmel did not entirely manage to avoid the dangers of monolithic methodologies. Like Marx and Tönnies, he tends to see modern society as a mechanical order, or, to use Robert Park's expression once again, as a "biotic order."

Tragic dualism

In the vitalist metaphysic that Simmel developed systematically on his death bed, relationism takes a dramatic turn. The dualist principle now manifests itself tragically as a cosmic principle that rules the dialectic of civilization. What Simmel calls the tragedy of culture and society – the fact that socio-cultural creations of the human spirit become autonomous and turn back against their creators – is just one aspect of the universal tragedy of life, of the mobility of life that must fix itself in forms in order to express itself. As a vital force, life is the continuous and creative becoming we experience in ourselves; to use Simmel's expression, it is "more-life" (L, 20, 94). In this sense, life is the antithesis of form, but to realize itself, it must produce forms or pass through forms that are other than life. Simmel then says life is "more than life" (L, 20, 94). The tragedy of life lies precisely in the fact that the negation of life is inherent to life itself and that to achieve itself, the vital must pass through forms . . . which kill it.

Simmel immediately transposes the tragedy of life onto the processes of cultural and material life of modern society as a whole. When he turns his attention to the individual, the drama of life becomes the tragedy of culture and society. As with Hegel and Marx, with whom Simmel shares "the expressive ideal," the individual must not only produce to provide for his existence, but also to realize his essence. Culture is both the process of objectification or exteriorization (*Entäußerung*, to use Hegel's term) of the soul in its objective forms (objective culture) and the inverse process of subjectivization or introjection (*Erinnerung*) of objective forms in the soul (subjective culture).

Like other later neo-Kantians such as Dilthey, Rickert, and Weber, Simmel emphasizes the autonomy of spheres of cultural values. Objective culture does not obey the same laws as subjective culture. Simmel believes that the risk of autonomization of cultural content and, hence, the risk of alienation, is inherent to the process of objectification, for as soon as cultural objects take on existence and form, they join the objective realm of cultural content (Popper's "world 3") a realm made up of several autonomous "provinces of life," each of which follows its own

logic and is therefore irreducible to the others. As soon as cultural content is objectified, it “follow an immanent logic . . . and thereby become alienated from both their origin and purpose” (SC, 70). He says further,

Spiritual life can only manifest in one form or another: in words or actions, works or contents in which the energy of the soul realizes itself. But at the moment of their birth, these formations already have an objective meaning that belongs to them alone, a fixity and an internal logic, with which they oppose themselves to the life that formed them.

(L, 22)

The same deadly process, which inevitably leads to a “loss of meaning” (*Sinnsverlust*) in the cultural sphere, is also at work in the material sphere of society, where it leads to a loss of freedom (*Freiheitsverlust*). Just as the axiological spheres become autonomous, the spheres of the economy and state crystallize in self-referential and self-regulated sub-systems. Together they form “society,” which confronts the individual as a part of objective culture: “in the individuals themselves, social elements fuse into the particular phenomenon called ‘society.’ ‘Society’ develops its own vehicles and organs by whose claims and commands the individual is confronted as by an alien party” (SS, 58).

This conflict between society and individuals continues within the individual (R, 64) and, as soon as the individual experiences it as a conflict between the social part (Mead’s “Me”) and the non-social part (Mead’s “I”) of his person, or rather (for this conflict is no doubt part of the human condition) as soon as the creative development of his personality is blocked and social forms force the individual to be inauthentic, alienation ensues. In other words, Simmel believes that when objective social forms prevent the development of the non-social part of the self and when the objectification of social relations touches the root of individuality in the human soul, alienation can be diagnosed.

On first glance, Simmel appears to pick up the Marxist critique of the alienating inversion of subject and object. But he generalizes and reinterprets the process of reification as a metaphysical process, while Marx sees it as an economic process (Aron, 1969: 202–205; Habermas, 1991: 157–169). Influenced by *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Romanticism, Simmel’s sociology falls under the charm of Nietzschean *amor fati*. For if it is cosmic forces, rather than the inversion of the relation between living and dead work or socio-economic forces, that animates the opposition between subject and object, then the conflict between soul and forms, and between individuals and society, is fundamentally insoluble.

The philosophical foundations of formal sociology

Forms of abstraction, association and interaction

Ultimately, the ontological presuppositions of formal sociology are vitalist. Simmel believes that the surrounding reality we seek to understand is infinite. There are no limits to the ways things are extended in space and phenomena evolve in time. The real, or the world before knowledge, is in perpetual movement,

and life is lived experience of this infinite world. As the expression of our original relation to the world, lived experience is primary; although it is legitimate, the reflection of rational understanding that objectifies the lifeworld is secondary and derivative (Christian, 1978: 58–67). The objectifying abstraction of rational understanding is inevitable and necessary, but does not grasp the essence of life. Simmel writes, “We know all too well that [rational understanding] does not grasp the essence, and further, that from the moment we objectify it, it eludes us” (L, 182).

Rational understanding substitutes the discontinuous for the continuous and stability for mobility by adopting a distancing view of reality’s heterogeneous totality and by cutting up life’s continuous infinity. Simmel explains that “our sensible impressions become ‘objects’ as soon as they are grasped by the forms of our intellect” (GSG 11, 42). Since the logic of understanding fixes movement and processes in solid bodies, it is necessarily a thingifying logic. As Nietzsche said (1955, II: 567): “That which is does not become; that which becomes is not.” Likewise science systematically superimposes its mummified analytic concepts onto lived reality just as rational understanding imposes a reflexive systematization of the objectification on the lived experience.

This is “the tragedy of human concept formation” (PM, 221): the more general a concept, the emptier it is. To subsume the contents of the real, the generic concept must disdainfully set aside particularities, so that the increasing extension of the concept occurs at the expense of the gradual reduction of its content. Nevertheless, Simmel detects an evolution away from the thingifying fixation of relations and processes in modern science. Increasingly modern science abandons the metaphysical presuppositions of thing-based logic (an ontology of substances and stable essences) in favor of notions of relation and structure whose validity is based on the consistency and rigor of concepts. Simmel believes that this scientific trend towards the relativist dissolution of things and substances in relations and processes is a particular manifestation of the more general evolution of European culture towards vitalism. The vitalist shift was indicated at the beginning of the century by the “creative evolution” of spiritual movements (pragmatism, expressionism, mysticism) opposing the objectivist spirit of the time.

The sociology of forms of association is saturated in *Lebensphilosophie*. Simmel outlined the method of formal sociology twice. First in the opening chapter of his “big sociology” (*Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*) and later in the first chapter of his “little sociology” (*Grundfragen der Soziologie*). As a systematic study of the forms that structure processes of interaction, formal sociology (*formale Soziologie*) is primarily interactionist. To avoid misunderstanding and emphasize the interactive elements of association, it would perhaps be better to call it “formist sociology” (Maffesoli, 1985: 97–118).

Whatever label is used, formal sociology is not formalist sociology. Contrary to Raymond Aron (1981: 6), who adopted Hans Freyer’s critique (1931: 99), it cannot simply be defined as a “geometry of the social world.” Simmel is not the Euclid of sociology; he is its Heraclitus. Although Simmel often compared sociology to geometry, the analogy is misleading. In fact, it only serves to put into

relief the abstracting approach that founds formal sociology as an autonomous discipline that reworks (or re-synthesizes) the materials (or syntheses) of other sciences such as psychology, anthropology, and statistics. If sociology wants to be more than a “general name for the totality of human sciences” (SE, 164), and really wants to constitute itself as a specific, autonomous science, it must try to inductively abstract and systematically extract “forms of association” from their “content,” that is from the living material that fills the forms and the psychic motives that propel them and that, strictly speaking, are not themselves social, at least for Simmel. Simmel views sociology primarily as a method. In this respect, a comparison between the methods of sociology and linguistics is more fruitful than the analogy with geometry:

The study of this second area may be called ‘pure sociology,’ which abstracts the mere element of association. It isolates it inductively and psychologically from the heterogeneity of its contents and purposes, which, in themselves, are not societal. It thus proceeds like grammar, which isolates the pure forms of language from their contents through which these forms, nevertheless, come to life.

(SS, 22)

As in Chomsky’s generative grammar, where the deep structure of rules structures utterances, in Simmel’s formal sociology, the synthetic forms of association structure interaction. Simmel discusses subordination and domination, competition, the division of labor, and imitation as examples of these types of generative forms, which are equally present in a religious community and a mafia gang. Simmel’s examples of content, which can be seen as vitalized “things-in-themselves,” include interests, drives, inclinations, desires, ends, and psychic states. The distinction between “form” and “content” is not only the linchpin of formal sociology; according to Simmel, it is the pillar of all of his thought. However, the reason why I have chosen to present the dualist principle, rather than the “form-content” distinction, as the unifying theme in his thinking is that it seems to me that it obscures more than it illuminates. In my opinion the form-content distinction is problematic not only because Simmel uses it inconsistently, but also for at least three other reasons. First, because the notion of form is ambiguous: on the one hand it designates a synthetic principle (Kant’s *a priori* forms) which is simultaneously analytic and empirical (a problem of circularity); on the other hand, it also refers to an *a posteriori* crystallization of energies or interactions in cultural objects and social institutions (the forms of the objective mind). Furthermore, the distinction between form and content is intuitive and arbitrary, as Simmel admits “the isolation of form from the complex totality can not be imposed by logical means” (GSG 11, 29).

The autonomous science of pure sociology is distinguished from other specialized social sciences not only through the specific abstraction of forms it implements, but also through the fundamental concept of “association.” By “association” (*Vergesellschaftung*), Simmel refers to the processes of micro-sociological interaction

that are the crucible of society. Interaction is not enough to constitute association, which also requires that individuals in interaction “act for, with and against them” (SS, 40; GSG 11, 18) and in some manner consciously form a “unit” or “society.” The individual must understand that by acting with others he determines their actions as much as he is determined by them, and he must be conscious of forming a social unit with them. Simmel writes, “The awareness of forming a unit with others is the only unity concerned here” (GSG 11, 43).

Unlike the synthesis of nature, which is, as Kant says, a synthesis of transcendental consciousness in which the synthesis is imposed from without by the epistemic subject, the social synthesis is the work of the elements themselves who act together: “The following principle in Kant: the connection can never reside in ‘things’ since it is only realized by the subject, does not act for the social connection which in fact occurs far more immediately in things – which in this instance are individual souls” (GSG 11, 43).

While Hobbes sees society as the war of all against all, Simmel sees it rather as the synthesis of all with all. By pursuing their interests, whether they are “sensuous or ideal, momentary or lasting, conscious or unconscious, causal or teleological” (SS, 41), individuals enter into direct contact with each other, thus creating “the objective unity” of subjective consciences that is society.

Association is society in *statu nascendi*, as it gradually realizes itself. For Simmel, society is sewn together from the threads of people watching each other, writing to each other, eating together, dressing or making themselves up for each other, attracting or repelling each other. Each day, every hour, these threads are woven, lost, caught up, replaced by others, and sewn to yet more: “Association continuously emerges and ceases and emerges again. Even where its eternal flux and pulsation are not sufficiently strong to form organizations proper, they link individuals together” (SS, 10; GSG 11, 33).

Simmel is interested in the play of interaction as the living substance of the social, the crucible of society. He claims somewhat prematurely that “society as such does not exist” (GSG 11, 24); there are only individuals in interaction. Interaction is the necessary and sufficient condition of society. It is necessary, since “if we get rid of all of them through thought, there is no more society” (GSG 11, 24), and it is sufficient because once several individuals enter into reciprocal action, society exists. Of course, there is a difference between ephemeral and lasting encounters, but since the concept of society is a “gradual concept” (SD, 14), as far as Simmel is concerned, “society exists when a number of individuals interact” (GSG 11, 17).

Sociology cannot ignore these micro-sociological processes of interaction because they are the foundation of macro-sociological structures. A sociology limited to an exclusive study of meso or macro-sociological forms would be like “the old anatomy which only took into account the heart and lungs, stomach and kidneys, brain and motor organs” without understanding that in these important organs “the essential factors of life and their reciprocal action are joined in distinct forms and macroscopic functions” (GSG 11, 32). Simmel believed that to restrict the term society to “enduring reciprocal actions,” particularly to those that are objectified in uniform figures, such as the state, the church, corporations, classes,

is to conform superficially to common language and to succumb already to the thingifying temptation of conceptual fetishism. Under these larger forms, described as “social facts” since Durkheim, there are an infinite number of reciprocal actions between individuals. These actions are of no great importance, and are sometimes even futile, but they are constitutive: “For those who wish to penetrate the depths of things, any phenomenon which appears to constitute any kind of new and independent unity above individuals would be resolved into the reciprocal actions exchanged amongst the individuals” (SE, 174).

In this context Simmel appears to adopt a nominalist, reductionist position that misrecognizes the relative autonomy of the social. However, elsewhere, in a long discussion of the problem of nominalism and realism and the ontological status of general concepts, he not only recognizes the “full reality” of the social (GSG 4, 119) – society is “not a simple representation” (GSG 4, 122) – but also insists on the emergent character of the social, claiming that: “although the whole only exists thanks to individual parts, it nevertheless obtains an autonomous, substantial, and independent position in relation to them” (GSG 4, 189). Furthermore, he links the relative autonomy of sociology to the relative irreducibility of society in an extremely interesting manner that accords with the relative autonomy of sociology thesis I defended in the introduction:

If society is to be the autonomous object of an independent discipline, then this is only possible in virtue of the fact that a new entity emerges from the total sum of the individual elements of which [society] is composed; otherwise, all the problems of the social sciences would be reduced to the question of individual psychology.

(GSG 1, 370–371)

Although Simmel argues primarily for the development of a micro or meso sociology, he is clearly not opposed to using macro-sociological concepts. He is simply opposed to their hypostasis. From a methodological perspective, he believes that the holistic approach is just as valid as the individualist approach. Indeed, for Simmel, the sociological synthesis of data can always be achieved either through individuals or through society: “The individual and society are method concepts – either they share the data between them, or else they consider their unity – which we are unable to grasp immediately, from two different points of view” (GSG 11, 860).

Methodological interactionism, ontological relationism

Although Simmel attacks the reifying hypostasis of social facts, he does so from a position that on first glance might be confused with methodological individualism. On closer inspection, however, it seems that Simmel is defending a far more original position that goes beyond “holistic individualism” and “totalitarian realism” (Piaget, 1967: 45). I suggest that we refer to this third position as “methodological interactionism.” Simmel’s enduring strategy is to dissolve “social facts” into “interactions” rather than “individual actions.” The fundamental unity of Simmel’s sociology is accounted for by reciprocal action between individuals, not individual

action. It is not a matter of interpreting a “social fact” as an effect of aggregation or composition produced by the combination of individual actions, but of interpreting it as a result of daily interactions that connect individuals to each other.

Furthermore, unlike methodological individualists and natural choice theorists, Simmel does not reduce action to strategic action, or man to *homo economicus*. Following Aristotle, he views man as a *zōōn politikon*. Anticipating the complexities of Habermas’ theory of communicative action, he asserts that “the category of you is almost as decisive for the construction of the practical and historical world as the category of substance or causality for the world of natural sciences” (IF, 68). But unlike Habermas, Simmel believes that action is primarily affective, not reflexive. Only in modern society, dominated by money, is action detached from values and affects, becoming formally rational and reflexive, calculating and technical, in a word, strategic action.

The principle of methodological pluralism excludes all reduction of Simmel’s philosophy to nominalist philosophy. Simmel does claim that “society as such does not exist” (GSG 11, 24), but this is not because, like Mrs. Thatcher, he believes that only individuals are real. Simmel defends neither the premises of individualism, nor those of ontological holism. Instead, he argues for what I suggest we call “ontological relationism”: neither society, nor the individual as such are real, except through their reciprocal implication. Just as society (the general) as the *terminus ad quem* presupposes the individual (the particular) as *terminus a quo*, the individual (the particular) as *terminus ad quem* presupposes society (the general) as *terminus a quo*. “It would be difficult to determine which of the two moments is cause and effect” (GSG 4, 125).

Paraphrasing Anthony Giddens’ (1984: 25) theorem of the duality of structure and action, society can be seen as both the “medium” and “result” of action. The connection between the two occurs in and through interaction. Interaction is thus both the vehicle of association and socialization. It is the vehicle of association because the function of social synthesis is ascribed to individuals who are aware of forming a unit through interaction, and the vehicle of socialization, because by acting together the individuals who produce society become its products:

On the one hand we know that we are products of society. . . . On the other hand, we know that we are members of society. . . . The fact that we are able to make the social synthesis and to construct on the basis of beings, each of which experiences himself as the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of its developments . . . is an *priori* of empirical society which makes its form possible as we know it.

(GSG 11, 54–57)

In his famous ‘Digression on the Problem: How is Society Possible?’ (GSG 11, 42 sq), Simmel distinguishes three sociological *a priori*s of association, which I refer to as *a priori*s of structure, role, and individuality.

The *a priori* of structure (or system) posits society as a *sui generis* structure of functionally interconnected social positions that are relatively independent of the

supports filling them. Society appears here as a material objective system or as Simmel says as “an inextricable web of functions” (GSG 11, 58).

The *a priori* of role (Mead’s concept of “Me”) is the corollary of the structure *a priori*. It dictates that each social position has a corresponding role and that the role in effect appropriates the personality. Acting as a support for a role, the individual appears as a living network of functions, a functioning function. The individual is then none other than the role he assumes and is perceived as such by others. Paul is no longer Paul, he is “the mailman” or “the policeman.”

The *a priori* of individuality (Mead’s ‘I’) is the necessary complement to the role *a priori*, whose sociology it corrects. It states that the individual is always more and other than a member of society, that he never totally disappears behind a role, but that he appropriates it in such a way that his individuality is expressed in it. In this regard, Simmel says that the way an individual is socialized is determined or co-determined by the way he is not socialized. In an interesting manner, reminiscent of Bourdieu’s dialectic of positions and dispositions, field and habitus, Simmel puts forward profession and vocation (*Beruf*) as categories that explain the harmonious production and reproduction of society:

On the one hand, society produces and offers in itself a ‘place’ which, although it is different from other places in content and delimitations, can nevertheless be occupied in principle by many individuals, and for this reason becomes something anonymous; and on the other hand, despite the general character of this place, it is grasped by the individual on the basis of an internal ‘call’ (*Ruf*) or qualification that is experienced as fully personal.

(GSG 11, 60)

Simmel believes that the “pre-established harmony” between the structure of society and individual drives can be ruptured in two ways: either the individual refuses the generality of the function, which leads to anomie; or the function refuses the particularity of the individual, which signals alienation. Since it allows us to define the concept of reification, the second instance is of most interest in the present context. To express one’s singularity, the desire not to be determined by society, but to determine it in an authentic, almost aristocratic manner by cultivating the “natural distance between men” (SN, 279), this is the ideal of “qualitative individualism” (ISF, 224; L, 228; GSG 11, 811) that Simmel shares with Nietzsche.

Simmel wrote monographs on Goethe and Rembrandt who he sees as models of the type of qualitative individual who develops his personality in a consistent and methodical manner by following his own “individual law” (L, 150 sq, cf. Vandenberghe, 2000a). It is easy to recognize Nietzsche and Weber’s aristocratic ideal in the model of qualitative individualism (Lichtblau, 1984), and this is precisely my point, since this model functions as a means of measuring reification. Reification arises when society, as a structure of functional interconnections, hypertrophies and autonomizes itself to such an extent that it interrupts the full realization of the person and appropriates the personality with its particular

coloring, irrationality, and inner life, so that the expressive and emotional aspect of action are absorbed by function and the individual disappears behind his role.

The philosophy of money: a critique of modernity

The Philosophy of Money (1900) is Simmel's principal (socio-) philosophical work. In contrast to *Soziologie*, which is a collection of essays connected by a quest to prove the validity of the method of sociological abstraction, *The Philosophy of Money* is a continuous analysis of more than 600 tightly written pages. In this work money is treated as a "total social fact" (Mauss, 1950: 274 ff.) that implicates the whole society and all its institutions, or, to put it in terms closer to Simmel's, as a "symbol" that expresses and condenses all social relations in a more or less unitary fashion. In so far as Simmel interprets money as a metaphor for life, *The Philosophy of Money* is an exercise in social metaphysics as defined by Simmel: it is a totalizing reflection that starts from a concrete phenomenon, not a totalizing system, as in Hegel or Marx.

In this true masterpiece of speculative historical sociology the explicit object of analysis, monetary economy, is merely a pretext for the development of a vitalist theory of modernity, formulated in terms of a vaguely Hegelian theory of objectification of value and reification of social relations (Miller, 1987). Simmel corrects, generalizes, and develops the Marxist critique of alienation while also anticipating Weber's analysis of the rationalization of culture and society. While *The Philosophy of Money* could not have been written before *Capital*, Weber's *Economy and Society* could not have been readily written without *The Philosophy of Money*. Simmel's philosophy of modernity should therefore be viewed as an extension of Marx and an anticipation of Weber, set between Marx and Weber.

The Philosophy of Money is divided into two parts: the "analytical" part treats money as a dependent variable, while the "synthetic" part treats it as an independent variable. While the analytical part describes the theoretical genesis of currency in terms of objectification and the autonomization of value; the synthetic part studies the consequences of universal monetarization according to the dialectic of the emancipation of the individual and the reification of social relations. The key terms of Simmel's diagnosis of modernity are emancipation and the de-personalization of the individual, intellectualization and the rationalization of life. Although Simmel was clearly inspired by the Hegelian ambition to grasp his time in thought, he did not really manage to conceptualize the present in a system. Nevertheless, since the analysis is centered on reification and the limits of individuality in modern society, Simmel's main problem is essentially the same as Weber's: how to save the individual in the era of functional de-personalization?

Analytical part: the theoretical genesis of currency

Value, or the objectification of desire

The dualism of subject and object is the starting point of the psychogenetic reflections on value, exchange, and money underlying the analysis of the socio-genesis

of the modern economic system. Originally, mental life exists in a state of indifference: “the Ego and its objects are not yet distinguished; consciousness is filled with impressions and perceptions while the bearer of these contents has still not detached himself from them” (PM, 63). Following the “decentering” (Piaget) process of the interpretative system of the world, this primordial unity splits: man calls himself “I,” thus distinguishing himself from the external world. In a passage that could have been written by G.H. Mead (1962: 103 sq), Simmel explains that

Subject and object are born in the same act, logically, by presenting the conceptual ideal content first as a content of representation, and then as a content of objective reality; psychologically, when the still ego-less representation, in which person and object are undifferentiated, becomes divided and gives rise to a distance between the self and its object, through which each of them becomes a separate entity.

(PM, 65)

Moving from the cognitive to the volitional level, the split between self and object appears as a distance the subject tries to overcome. This distance is the basis of what we subjectively call our desire for the object, and objectively refer to as its value. Just as the subject is the corollary of the object, value is the objective complement of desire, its objectification. Simmel derives the value of the object from the fact that the attainment of the desired object requires the subject’s effort to overcome the distances and obstacles separating desire from satisfaction. “Objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them” (PM, 67).

The objectification of desire, which establishes a distance between the desiring subject and the desired object, is thus the motive behind valorization. Value is born of desire, but by forgetting its subjective genesis, it appears to individuals as if it were inherent to the object. This objectification of desire is what enables exchange to emerge as a *sui generis* form of association. For Simmel, the objectification of desire is a condition *sine qua non* of exchange, for it is only when desire is objectified that the object I desire can also be desired by another person and thus acquire a fixed value through the comparison of desires and the relating of desired objects.

Exchange, or the objectification of value

In exchange everything happens as if the subject’s fundamental relation to the object, which is a condition of value, in effect goes through objects to allow them to measure each other. This inter-relation of subjective values transposes value to an objective level, making value a supra-subjective relation. “The subjective process, in which differentiation and the growing tension between function and content create the object as a ‘value,’ changes to an objective, supra-personal relationship between objects” (PM, 79). Related to the subject, yet autonomous from it, value is supra-subjective without being an objective or intrinsic quality of

things. Indeed, since Marx we know that “the relations between the objects are really relations between people” (PM, 176). But while Marx considers value fetishism as a consequence of generalized market exchange, Simmel views it as its condition.

Value becomes objective through comparison and economic through exchange. This is because in exchange, to obtain one object of desire, it is necessary to give up another object of desire. Exchange therefore also implies a sacrifice and, according to Simmel, this sacrifice is “the condition of value as such” (PM, 85). By relating value to exchange, Simmel takes a different view to Marx once again. We have seen that for Marx value is a function of production; Simmel views it as a function of exchange. He argues that: “exchange is just as productive and value-creating as is production itself” (PM, 84). Since it is simply an exchange between man and nature, an exchange of energy for products, production may also be interpreted in terms of sacrifice.

Money, or the objectification of the exchange relation

If the economic value of objects resides in the reciprocity they share as exchangeable goods, then money is the expression of this relation when it becomes autonomous. As the “value of things without the things themselves” (PM, 121), money is value fixed as a substance: “The activity of exchange among individuals is represented by money in a concrete, independent, and, as it were, congealed form . . . it is value turned into a substance” (PM, 176, 121). Thus, although initially, the value of money derives from its substance, which represents the value of commodities, ultimately, the value of money derives from its support, becoming purely conventional. As Marx said, “its functional existence absorbs, so to say, its material existence” (XXXV, 139).

To explain the change of money-substance into money-sign, that is, to money as “a token” with no intrinsic value representing the value of things, Simmel presents a quasi-historical analysis of the increasing processes of abstraction and spiritualization that characterize the functioning of money as a yardstick of value and mediator of exchange. Originally, money is a concrete substance (livestock, salt, tobacco or skins) and exchange takes place in kind (one good for another, salt for wood, wood for tobacco, etc.). Gradually, the intellectual ability for abstraction develops (Simmel saw this as one of the greatest steps forward for the human mind) and money frees itself from its concrete quality, after which it succeeds in equalizing the most unequal things. By abstracting all the qualities of things, money eventually represents the value of things as a pure quantity, in numerical form. Indifferent to its own value, it becomes “merely a symbol” (PM, 151).

The money-sign has therefore lost all quality and individuality. It is the impersonal medium term that allows the settlement of object exchange. Objects are unique and irreplaceable in themselves, but can be substituted for each other through money. This advantage of universal substitutability facilitates exchange and allows the acceleration of the circulation of commodities. Simmel explains that “this ability of money to replace every specific economic value – because it is

not connected with any of these values but only with the relation into which they may enter – assures the continuity of the series of economic events” (PM, 124). As ideality with no intrinsic value, measuring the relations of value between things, money subtracts itself from the flux of things, even as it is introduced as the medium term in their exchange. However, as a sign, money can only function as a mediator and accelerator of exchange if the exchanging parties are willing to cede substantial values (of livestock or furniture, for example) for a nominal value (a slip of paper). This presumes that they trust the stability of money and thus the state and social order that is its guarantor.

The autonomization of money or the objectification of social relations

Now that we have seen how value achieves autonomy in money, we must consider the autonomization of money and its inversion from means to end. The question is no longer about value, but about the place occupied by money in its “teleological series.” Teleological action, action oriented towards an end, can be described in general terms as the conscious implication of subjective energies in an objective existence. Referring to a figure reminiscent of Hegel, Simmel writes, “Our relationship to the world may be represented as an arc that passes from the subject to the object, incorporates the object and returns to the subject” (PM, 205). Teleological action, which intervenes instrumentally in the world, is characterized by the rational coordination of means to end, and hence, the intelligent combination of causality and teleology.

Thus, if goal D must be attained and in order to do so means A, B, and C, must be implemented, the realization of D assumes a knowledge of the causal relations that exist between means A, B, and C, so that the mechanical insertion of the causal series in the teleological series can lead to the effective realization of D. Tools are absolutely fundamental in the means series. As a mediator between subject and object, tools are a “potentialized” mechanical means as Simmel put it following Aristotle, determined in their nature and form by their destination. The tool is “an absolute means” (PM, 209) that concretizes the teleological chain by prolonging it through its insertion between subject and object. The tool principle is at work in all domains of life.

Like the social institutions (the state, the church, the law), which are tools that enable individuals to achieve goals they could never attain on their own, money is an institution into which individuals pour their actions to attain objectives that would be unobtainable if they attempted to achieve them directly. However, unlike social institutions, money is characterized by the fact that there is no relation between the content and the end whose attainment it enables. Money is the absolute tool. Since it has no relation to any particular goal, it finds one with “the totality of purposes” (PM, 212). As the medium term of exchange, it is entirely indifferent to being put into relation, up or down stream, with beetroots, beams, or bullets. “The whole vast range of commodities can only be exchanged for one value, namely money; but money can be exchanged for any one of the range of commodities” (PM, 213).

If we place money in the teleological series and take into account both the principle of the economy of effort, which requires a focus on means rather than ends, and the psychological principle of the expansion of qualities, which means that the value of the end resurfaces and is connected to means, we can understand that money becomes the absolute end precisely because it is the absolute means. This is only apparently paradoxical. The economic necessity to inverse means and ends leads to the psychological inversion of means as an absolute end. The loss of meaning that characterizes modernity is explained by (and explains) the fact that today “far beyond the inner state of the individual, the whole aspect of life, the relationships of human beings with one another and with objective culture are coloured by monetary interests” (PM, 236).

Gradually, as religious values that give concrete meaning to existence lose their credibility, they are replaced by monetary value. Simmel cites Hans Sachs on this topic: “*Geld ist auf erden der irdisch Got*” (“Here-below, money is the terrestrial God”), but he could just have well cited Marx in *On the Jewish Question*. Like God, money is the *coincidentia oppositorum* (PM, 236), the centre where things that are most opposed, most distant, and most foreign to each other find their common point and enter into contact. The fact that money becomes the absolute value, is shown both in the behavior of the miser, who revels in the money he has without using it, and the spendthrift, who enjoys money by squandering it. While for the miser and spender the translation of all values into monetary terms leads to the absolute valorization of money, in contrast, for the cynic who, to cite Oscar Wilde, knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing, and the blasé, for whom all values are indifferent, money de-valorizes absolutely all values.

In all cases, the interest of individuals in money is limited to the question: “How much?” The cognitive tendency to reduce quality to quantity (the most perfect manifestation of which is the “fifty cents bazaar” (PM, 394) where the main interest is not the commodity, but its price) concludes in the late nineteenth century with the universal monetarization of social relations. Simmel indicates that he views the evolution of money as a paradigmatic example of the general evolution of social relations towards modernity and concludes “money is the pinnacle of a cultural historical series of developments which unambiguously determines its direction” (PM, 280).

Synthetic part: dialectics of modernity

In the synthetic part of *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel studies the effects of the general tendency to objectification, abstraction, and the universal monetarization of social relations on freedom, culture, and human styles of life. His analysis, which combines the apparently contradictory conclusions of Spencer’s liberal progressivism and Nietzsche’s cultural pessimism, is reflective of his ambivalent attitude towards modernity. To systematize somewhat Simmel’s essay-styled presentation, I seek to reconstruct his analysis of the consequences of the general progression of objectification, abstraction, and the monetarization of social relations in the modern era, by presenting the analysis in terms of three dialectical theses: 1) the

thesis of the dialectic of the reification of social relations and the formal emancipation of the individual (the monetarization, depersonalization, and functionalization of social relations result in a emancipation from relations of personal dependence); 2) the thesis of the dialectic of rationalization and the loss of meaning (the monetarization and intellectualization of life open the way to the predominance of means over ends and to modern feelings of rootlessness and absurdity); 3) the thesis of the dialectic of the reification of life and the alienation of the individual (the autonomization of socio-cultural forms leads to the alienation of the individual).

The dialectic of reification and emancipation

In contrast to Marx, who insists above all on the historical and logical link between free labor and exploitation, Simmel emphasizes the liberating role of the monetarization of labor power. He argues that the suppression of feudal political relations in favor of capitalist economic relations thoroughly undermined the personal connections that characterized human commerce in the past, but that this objectification of social relations is precisely the grounds for the emergence of individual freedom. One has only to consider the historical evolution of the forms of subordination and its associated obligatory service – from slavery (the obligation concerns the whole person) to serfdom (the obligation relates to specific services) and from serfdom to the salaried class (the obligation is limited to a specific period of labor) – to realize that the gradual depersonalization of interpersonal relations benefits individual freedom – within dependence, for according to Simmel by definition there is no freedom without dependence (GSG 4, ch. 6).

While the monetary economy allows the individual to free himself from the constraints of connections of personal dependence typical of mechanical societies in Durkheim's sense, the division of labor – the corollary of the market economy – makes individuals more dependent on a mass of anonymous and interchangeable people, but without lessening individual freedom:

Since freedom means independence from the will of others, it commences with independence from the will of specific individuals. . . . the inhabitants of a modern metropolis are independent in the positive sense of the word, and even though they require innumerable suppliers, workers and co-operators and would be lost without them, their relationship to them is completely objective and is only embodied in money.

(PM, 300)

Since freedom is not the opposite of dependence as such, but of dependence in relation to specific people, Simmel sees the modern individual as free, for although he is totally dependent on others, he is not dependent on anyone in particular. He does not depend on the person who fulfills the function, but rather on the function he fulfills. In modern societies, social relations are impersonal and instrumental. The social connection is no longer spontaneous, emotional, and personal; instead,

it is artificial, cold, and functional. Communal life increasingly takes on the form of *Zweckverband*. Each individual perceives others as bearers of specific roles, as the support for particular, well-determined functions, in short, as one means among others to be intercalated into his own teleological series. One person offers his services, the other pays, and, since each individual is nothing but a means for the other, they are all substitutable. The money that unifies men by separating them from each other is a “disincentive” for social relations. In monetary relations, affective bonds are neutralized and sterilized.

Because of the objectification of social relations, the social connection no longer goes directly through men; it is mediated by functions and things. With the shift from community to monetary society, we move from social to functional integration, to use Parsons’ terminology. Citing Marx literally, Simmel writes that “the relation between men has become a relation between things” (GSG 11, 662). This is simply another way of saying that human relations are reified:

The reification of the human relation . . . becomes so complete that in the fully developed economy all personal interaction is completely eclipsed, while commodities acquire a life of their own. . . . Men are no longer any more than the underlings of the tendencies of goods. . . . Even when he engages in the process for his own interest, man is essentially negligible.

(GSG 11, 662)

Objectivity, functionality, instrumentality, impersonality, and affective neutrality are the characteristics of inter-human relations in a society that is governed and integrated by money. The phrase, “without regard for people,” which, as we shall see in the following chapter, summarizes the essence of Weber’s analysis of formal rationality, is equally key to Simmel’s analysis of modernity. Like both Weber and Marx, Simmel assumes that in modern society action is reduced to instrumental or strategic action. There is no doubt that this is a one-dimensional view that results less from in-depth analysis than from the anti-modern opposition of *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, which Simmel shares with the neo-Romantics of his time. Like Marx and Weber, Simmel neglects the communal dimension of market society.

Yet, unlike Marx and Weber who believe that the reification of social relations depletes individual freedom, Simmel believes that it actually favors it. This difference of opinion probably derives from the fact that unlike Marx and Weber Simmel identifies freedom with a sense of freedom. This position emerges in his analysis of the condition of the modern worker.

In the organization of modern companies, objective and technical factors override personal factors. The production chief and subaltern worker are both subject to the objective purposes of production. Consequently, subordination as such is only a function of production techniques. Since subordination relations become purely functional, Simmel concludes that the worker, because and since he is “aware that he must bow down to an objective technique, not as an individual personality, but only as the impersonal link in the chain that objectively requires that discipline” (GSG 11, 263), experiences blind subordination as an objective necessity,

rather than as a humiliation. Simmel concludes from this that “subordination to a law that functions as an emanation of impersonal, non-influencable forces is the most worthy situation for the subordinate” (GSG 11, 229).

The dialectic of rationalization and loss of meaning

The formal freedom Simmel refers to is only one aspect of freedom. To be truly free, it is not enough to be “free from something” (negative freedom – “*Freiheit von etwas*”), one must also be “free for something” (freedom positive – “*Freiheit zu etwas*”). In other words, it is necessary to become concretely engaged to give meaning to life. Since modern man, freed from relations of personal dependence, is not capable of giving meaning or content to this freedom, it remains purely negative. Sensing the loss of meaning as the reverse of formal freedom, Simmel sees modern man as a “man without qualities” (Musil). Uprooted and lonely, or involved in a mass of superficial relations, modern man falls into the void of meaninglessness. More than ever he is a “nihilist” (cf. Nietzsche, 1955, III: 557), for he experiences “the vehement need for an absolute final purpose but has lost its compelling content. . . . modern man is deprived of an ultimate purpose” (PM, 361). Nostalgic for meaning and authenticity – a nostalgia that is a legacy of Christianity (SN, 44) – modern man is frantically in search of some form of substantial content to fill the empty form of his existence. If he is not attached to material objects, he eventually becomes a yogi, naturist, or theosophist: “Such freedom may be compared with the fate of the insecure person who has forsworn his Gods and whose newly acquired ‘freedom’ only provides the opportunity for making an idol out of any fleeting value” (PM, 402). Modern man is irresolute and volatile, always in search of sensations and desperately lacking meaning; by replacing “gods” (*Götter*) with “idols” (*Götzen*) (GSG 4, 167) he eventually becomes attached to objects. He looks for a meaning in the means and goods that market society makes available to him, but by slipping in before the final goals, ultimately these only mask ends by suppressing them.

Simmel argues that this absence of goals giving meaning to life, and the typical accompanying *ennui* or longing, are closely connected to the dominance of rational understanding and the intellect over the will and affectivity typical in modern society. As civilization gradually develops, intermediary instances increase and teleological series are extended. To attain any given end, civilized man must confront and coordinate a mass of means, which presupposes an increased ability to organize and rationally calculate data.

In modern societies, reason – a faculty that can only integrate causal connections in a teleological series and is unable to establish goals – develops to the detriment of the will, which establishes goals. As rational understanding and the intellect predominate and means proliferate, the will and affectivity weaken. Thus, modernity, which is dominated by money, enthrones the social logic of interest in the place of the community logic of passions (Hirschman, 1977). Without worrying about other people, each individual strategically pursues his own self-interest. “Cold reason” and “logical rigor” are put in the service of selfish drives. Utilitarianism triumphs.

The influence of money is manifested not only in the dominance of the intellect and interests over the will and passions, but also in the domination of quantity over quality. Like Weber, Simmel considers the calculating intellect a distinctive characteristic of formally rationalized modernity. And like the later Husserl, he notes that Leibniz's ideal of *mathesis universalis* is the ideal of modern knowledge – an ideal that tries to “conceive of the world as a huge arithmetical problem, to conceive events and the qualitative distinction of things as a system of numbers” (PM, 444). The monetary economy has caused unprecedented precision to enter into social relations. In principle, everything can be calculated.

The dialectic of the reification of life and the alienation of the individual

Simmel suggests that the modern “style of life” is characterized by the hypertelic growth of objective socio-cultural forms. The dominance of objective culture over subjective culture is such that the individual is now entirely unable to master even part of it. To give just one example, even in the restricted, specialized field of social sciences, the pace of international publication is so overwhelming that even the most conscientious reader can assimilate only a tiny fraction. Overwhelmed, yet constantly tempted by this quantitative and qualitative mass of cultural content that potentially enter the sphere of personal development, modern individuals are, so to speak, inverted Franciscans: “*Omnia habentes, nihil possedentes*” (SC, 73). The divorce between objective and subjective culture today is clear. The hypertrophy of objective culture is inseparable from the relative atrophy of subjective culture, and, according to Simmel, the tragedy of culture is in fact inscribed in cultural development.

In his philosophy of culture, Simmel develops a dynamic concept of culture (*Bildung*). Culture is not only the objectification of the soul in a form, it is also, inversely, the formation of the soul through assimilation of objectified forms. Once again employing a very Hegelian image, Simmel claims that culture is “the soul en route to itself.” He argues that “culture is the path from the closed unity through the developed diversity to the developed unity” (SC, 56). Whether it is a matter of culture, in the strict or a wider meaning of the term (science, morality, law, technology – Simmel even includes the material infrastructure of society), the interaction between the soul and the forms of the objective spirit are specific to cultural processes and embody a teleological interaction.

If culture can be defined as the movement of “a distinctive synthesis of the subjective and objective spirit” (WSL, 65), for Simmel the ultimate meaning of this movement can only be found in the perfecting of individuals. The goal is not to cultivate objects, which are only means, but to cultivate and perfect subjects. However, since objective culture becomes autonomous and hypertrophies, it “turns the subject-object synthesis . . . into a paradox, indeed, into a tragedy” (SC, 66). Objective culture abandons its mediating meaning; by absorbing all present and past spiritual content, it expands and becomes so hypertelic that the individual is so overwhelmed by the extent of accumulated wealth that there is no way he can assimilate it. The triumph of objective culture is proportional to the defeat of subjective culture:

The things that determine and surround our lives, such as tools, means of transport, the products of science, technology and art, are extremely refined. Yet individual culture, at least in the higher strata, has not progressed at all to the same extent; indeed, it has even frequently declined.

(PM, 448)

Not only does cultural content amass and crystallize in a hypertrophied, autonomous kingdom, but this opaque, unified kingdom then decomposes into a series of incommensurable “worlds,” each of which follows its own objective and immanent logic. In the second chapter of his philosophical testament, a chapter entitled “The Turn to the Idea” (L, 27–95), Simmel develops a vitalist version of the neo-Kantian theory of the autonomization of spheres of values (Weingartner, 1959, 1960: 15–84). His theory of culture is Kantian because it is based on the distinction between form and content, and vitalist because it contrasts the fluidity of life with the alienating fixity of forms.

The fundamental idea in Simmel’s theory is that the substrate of the world is constituted of an infinite multiplicity of content which, like Kant’s “things-in-themselves,” exist outside of time and space. Simmel calls the totality of this content *Weltstoff* or “matter of the world” (L, 29, 30, 31). As a multiplicity of content, the matter of the world can be synthesized into a unity by *a priori* forms that are historically variable. The form, which systematically connects content to a network of relations, is thus the principle of unification of the amorphous mass. Simmel distinguishes various sorts of cultural forms (for instance, knowledge, art, philosophy, religion, and ethics) and, since each form organizes matter differently, he denies the existence of a single criterion of unification. When all content is grasped and systematically synthesized by a single, specific form, for instance, religion, philosophy, or art, it constitutes what Simmel calls a “world”: “A world, in the full sense of the word, is thus a set of content in which, from the perspective of the mind, each part is freed of its isolation and gathered into a unified system, in a form that in principle is able to contain both the known and the unknown” (L, 27–28).

Simmel’s worlds can be viewed as languages, each apt to encompass all content. Like Goffman (1974), Simmel believes that content that is already formed may engage in consecutive “(trans)formations” and “re(trans)formations” (*keyings*). Thus, for example, the content of a work of art may be re(trans)formed in turn by a religious form. And like Schutz (1962: 207–286), Simmel believes that the real world, the practical world of daily life, which most people view as “*the world as such*,” is not the only world; it is “only one of many possible ones” (SR, 3–4; L, 50).

Simmel’s main thesis is that the emergence of self-referential worlds occurs when forms free themselves of their practical ends. Originally, the forms structuring the worlds are the means of satisfying vital needs. Rooted in the necessities of practical life, they are put to the service of human self-preservation. Then, when men feel the need to cultivate forms and apply themselves to structuring them in a systematic manner, forms split away from their initial purposes and become ends in themselves: “Initially, men know to live; but later there are men who live to know” (L, 55). “In general, we see to live; but the artist lives to see” (L, 63). As in Plato’s

Phaedrus, Simmel qualifies the passage from proto-forms to forms as “a great turn that led to the emergence of the realm of the idea.” He describes it as follows:

The forms or functions which life brings into emergence, for its own good, its own dynamic, become autonomous and definitive, after which life is put in their service, it arranges its content there and the success of this arrangement acts as the ultimate accomplishment of meaning and value, as before the insertion of its forms into the economy of life.

(L, 37)

From religion to art, from law to technology, and from economics to politics, in all “spheres of life,” the same inversion of ends and means is apparent, the same “depragmatization of knowledge” (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, I: 303), the same “radical logicity” (Broch, 1978) of socio-cultural spheres. This radical autonomy of fragments of culture is expressed in maxims such as ‘art for artsake,’ ‘business is business,’ ‘at war as in war,’ or *fiat iustitia pereat mundus*. Unlike Weber (1922, I: 563–573), who insists on the horizontal conflict between different spheres of autonomous values in his famous “Intermediary Consideration,” Simmel emphasizes the vertical conflict that opposes life and forms.

Simmel believes that different worlds can very well coexist peacefully side by side precisely because religion, science, and art, are *sui generis* totalities that can, in principle, encompass all content. Furthermore, there is no possibility of a dialectical movement of oppositional incorporation between the worlds since no intersection or crossing of worlds is possible (L, 29). For example, Simmel allows no dialectic between science and religion: both coexist gently without excluding the other or contrasting with each another any more sounds and colors (R, 2).

Although Simmel underestimates conflict between forms, he tends to overestimate and dramatize the conflict opposing life to forms. Unlike Marx, Simmel does not believe that commodity fetishism is a historically determined problem. For Simmel, it is just a particular instance of the universal tragedy of culture:

The ‘fetishistic character’ which Marx attributed to economic objects in the epoch of commodity production is only a particular modified instance of this general fate of the contents of our culture. These contents are subject to the paradox – and increasingly so as ‘culture’ develops – that they are indeed created by human subjects and are meant for human subjects, but follow an immanent developmental logic in the intermediate form of objectivity which they take on at either side of these instances and thereby become alienated from both their origin and their purpose.

(SC, 70)

By reducing commodity fetishism to a particular instance and by deducing the universal law of the autonomization of cultural content, Simmel not only de-historicizes the theory of fetishism, he also transforms it into a metaphysical theory. If the tragedy of culture is only a reproduction of the tragic character of life on the historical level, and if culture is threatened from inside, not outside, since reification is “universally inevitable” (SC, 208), the conflict between the soul and forms becomes entirely

insoluble. By generalizing the theory of fetishism, Simmel destroys the foundations of all cultural critique (*Kulturkritik*). When he reduces the “tragedy of society” – which is actually the tragedy of the individual in a society that seeks to reduce him to a functioning function without any individuality – to a particular instance of the “tragedy of culture,” he is not only spiritualizing the concept of society, but also reinforcing fatalism: “This conflict between the whole, which imposes the one-sidedness of partial function upon its elements, and the part, which itself strives to be a whole, is insoluble” (SS, 59).

In the end Simmel can only claim that this double distortion – between soul and forms, on one hand, and between individual and society, on the other – derives from cosmic fate. If he wants to explain this phenomenon, he is forced to introduce sociological causes, either as contraband, as in his essay on *The Concept and Tragedy of Culture*, or explicitly, as in *The Philosophy of Money*. In the last chapter of *The Philosophy of Money*, entitled “The Styles of Life,” Simmel derives the domination of objective culture over subjective culture, which characterizes exactly the modern styles of life, from the division of labor, and the incessant increase in consumption. In the final instance, these are both conditioned and stimulated by the monetary economy. Although as Weber quite rightly noted Simmel tends to confuse the monetary economy and capitalism, the similarity between his analysis and Marx’s analysis is remarkable. Long before Lukács, and without any knowledge of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which were not published until 1932, Simmel discovered the young Marx’s theory of alienated labor.

Simmel argues that the division of labor, the mechanization of production, the salarization of workers, and the separation of the worker from the means of production are the basis of the alienation of the worker from his work and from the product of his work. Under modern production conditions, the worker no longer objectifies his personality in organic and unitary work. His work is partial and fragmented; he produces parts of a whole, not the whole. The manufactured product no longer has a producer, properly speaking. It is the result of the mechanical and rational assembly of a mass of partial pieces of work whose destination remains unknown to workers. Along with the “mechanical-technical fragmentation of work,” the proverb “No weaver knows what he weaves” is truer than ever. Like the products he manufactures, the worker is but one piece among others in the production apparatus. Because the reciprocal relation between man and his object of labor is altered, the worker feels alienated from his work. “The person can no longer find himself expressed in his work; its form becomes dissimilar to the subjective mind . . . because it no longer touches the roots of his whole life-system” (PM, 455). Furthermore, since work becomes a commodity, it appears to the worker as a thing he no longer owns, for which he possesses only the monetary equivalent.

In this regard, Simmel says that “work has become something objectively separate from the worker, something that he not only no longer *is*, but also no longer *has*” (PM, 456). Simmel believes that ultimately the separation of the worker from his means of work, a process which also results from the division of labor, “fundamentally separates the subjective and objective conditions of work, a separation for which there was no psychological reason as long as both were united in the

same hands” (PM, 455). Simmel concludes his analysis of the alienation of work by considering technology and the domination of means over ends. The long citation that follows is surprising: it condenses and anticipates the core thesis that Horkheimer and Adorno advanced many years later in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, although it never once refers explicitly to Simmel:

This preponderance of means over ends finds its apotheosis in the fact that the peripheral of life, the things that lie outside its basic essence, have become masters of the center and even of ourselves. Although it is true to say that we control nature to the extent that we serve it, this is correct in the traditional sense only for the outer forms of life. If we consider the totality of life, then the control of nature by technology is possible only at the price of being enslaved in it and by dispensing with spirituality as the central point of life . . . the statement that we control nature by serving it implies the shocking obverse meaning that we serve it in so far as we dominate it. It is quite erroneous to believe that the significance and intellectual potential of modern life has been transferred from the form of the individual to that of the masses. Rather, it has been transferred to the form of the objects . . . the ‘revolt of the slaves’ that threatens to dethrone the autocracy and the normative independence of strong individuals is not the revolt of the masses, but the revolt of objects. Just as, on the one hand, we have become slaves of the production process, so, on the other, we have become the slaves of its products.

(PM, 482–483)

The alienated relation of man to things is evident not only in the sphere of production; it also manifests itself in the sphere of consumption. With mass production, the “subjective coloring of the product” disappears. Products of consumption are standardized, neutral, and impersonal. They no longer touch the soul of man. Likewise, the personal relation that in the past linked the producer and consumer is by necessity broken when the increase in the division of labor leads to the intercalation of “so very many intermediaries” between them. In a society driven by money, “the always greater abyss between the culture of things and the culture of men” (IF, 92), which characterizes modernity, reaches right into the intimacy of everyday life.

Simmel identifies three reasons for this: first, the simple quantity and variety of objects dumped on the market makes a quasi-personal relation to objects difficult. This fact is expressed in the housewife’s complaint: housework requires “fetishistic service.” Next, the succession of fashion wave after fashion wave lead to the same result as differentiation in the order of contiguity. Finally, the multiplication of styles, with individual syntaxes, accentuates still more the disassociation between being and things, and the feeling of alienation before things.

To conclude, Simmel imagines that the division of labor and the monetary system it incites develop into a situation in which “the material contents of life become increasingly objective and impersonal, so that the remainder that cannot be reified becomes all the more personal” (PM, 469).

Conclusion

Above all else, Simmel was a social metaphysician. Recognized as one of the founding fathers of the discipline, but still ousted from the pantheon of the “sociological trinity,” his work provides us with important metatheoretical principles for the construction of a sociological theory, provided we do not consider him as a salon sociologist, rambling on in a brilliant, vaguely “postist” fashion about the trivialities of daily life. To fully grasp the import of his work, it is essential to understand that this is a vitalist, essentially Nietzschean-Bergsonian, sociological version of neo-Kantism. Unlike Hegelianized Marxism, which is always inclined to hypostasize its own view point and fall into the trap of methodological thingification, Simmel’s work takes the critiques of reason very seriously in an investigation of the conditions of possibility of knowledge of the object and the object of knowledge.

Of all Simmel’s ideas, his concept of methodological pluralism, which, following Kant, transforms first principles (such as, materialism and idealism, individualism and holism) into regulative principles, appears the most fruitful to me, since it enables the founding of a truly multidimensional approach to the social. This approach does not begin with a reduction of action to its solely instrumental and strategic dimension; it also takes into account its expressivist, affective, and communicative dimensions. In the wake of Marx, and anticipating Weber, Simmel showed that reification can be conceived of in a meta-theoretical fashion as an instrumentalist reduction of the concept of action, and that this reduction is inseparable from a materialist concept of social structure. Furthermore, and this is a decisive advance on Marx, he offers us the rudiments of an interpretative sociology of action. Even if this was only fully developed later by Weber, Simmel already enables a distancing from utilitarian versions of an interpretative sociology that reduces history to “a mere puppet show” (PHe, 39). In defense against nominalist interpretations, it should also be emphasized that Simmel is not a follower of methodological individualism; rather, he defends and develops a position of methodological interactionism. From this perspective, in which interaction takes the place that Marx accorded to praxis, social synthesis can just as well be achieved starting from society as starting from the individual, since both are constituted reciprocally in and through interaction.

But even if Simmel’s Kantian criticism offers important breakthroughs in terms of methodology, his dialectical vision of modernity, however full of intuitions and original it might be, appears less promising to me than Marx’s. However critical Simmel is in a Kantian sense, he is not at all critical from a Marxist perspective. Not only does he fail to develop a rigorous conception of social structure, which as we have seen Marx conceived of as a material structure of internal relations, but following Hegel, he presents the reification of social structures and the alienation of man as if they were a matter of universal fate. Indeed, on closer inspection, it is clear that for Simmel the tragedy of culture is only one particular instance of the properly metaphysical conflict that opposes forms to life. But if the opposition between subject and object is not historically determined, as is the case in Marx, if

it is the result of cosmic forces and is effectively a matter of fate, then the conflict between the soul and forms and between the individual and society becomes utterly insoluble. Even if Simmel saw correctly that in modernity all socio-cultural forms become autonomous and follow their own logic, which seriously puts into question Marxist (over-) determinations of “last instances,” this does not subtract from the fact that in rooting reification in the irrational depths of life, Simmel’s diagnosis of modernity loses a good deal of its critical weight. Ultimately, despite all his contributions to a critical sociology of modernity, I fear that Simmel succumbed to the charms of the irrational sirens. It remains to be seen whether Weber will manage to disenchant us . . .

3 Max Weber: formal rationality and capitalism in the west

An analysis of the genesis and structure of reification¹

Max Weber (1864–1920) is undoubtedly the greatest contemporary sociologist, even if he is not “the greatest philosopher” of the twentieth century as Jaspers (1958) claims. Weber’s almost monstrous erudition, the depth and extent of his socio-historical and comparative study of civilizations, his rigorous methods, and philosophical acuity offer an exemplary model of a sociology that is at once historical, systematic, and critical. Weber is more than a sociology classic: every sociologist today is Weberian one way or another. In any case, I say “one way or another” because Weber’s work has been subject to such diverse interpretations that every sociologist, whatever his ideological commitments, invariably finds something to build on in his work. For instance, Parsons referred to Weber, first to develop a voluntarist theory of action and then a functionalist synthesis; Merton presented an idealist Weber by developing his thesis about the connection between Puritanism and science; Schluchter and Habermas transformed Weber into a neo-evolutionist thinker of universal rationalization; Collins, Rex, Gerth, and Mills adopted Weber as a founder of conflict theory; Schütz turned Weber into the precursor of phenomenological sociology by focusing on the interpretive method; Boudon and Popper view Weber as the father of methodological individualism. Weber’s studies of religion and the birth of capitalism, his theory of social stratification and axiological neutrality, his analysis of bureaucracy and charisma, his typology of action and domination, his distinction between the ethics of conviction and responsibility, the concept of ideal type, and the interpretive method are now all part and parcel of every sociologist’s foundational tool kit.

Introduction: from the typology of rationalism to the iron cage

Given Weber’s predominance in the field, it is not necessary to present his biography (Mitzman, 1969; Marianne Weber, 1989) or offer an introduction to his work (Freund, 1966; Brubaker, 1984; Gerth and Mills, 1985; Giddens, 1987; Vincent, 1973; and the articles in Hamilton, 1991); this leaves me free to focus directly on the heart of his thought. The *opinio communis doctorum*, from Abramowski to Zingerle, is that the key concept of Weber’s monumental work is rationality. This concept provides unity, thematically if not systematically,

to the vast corpus of apparently disparate empirical studies Weber dedicated to religion, law, domination, and economics, as well as his methodological investigations, political texts, and ethical and moral reflections. The concept of rationality is far from univocal however, as Weber frequently reminds his readers:

In fact one may – this simple proposition, which is often forgotten, should be placed at the beginning of every study which essays to deal with rationalism – rationalize life from fundamentally different basic points of view and in very different directions. Rationalism is an historical concept which covers a whole world of different things.

(PE, 78)

A formal typology of rationality

Analysis of Weber's scattered reflections on rationality suggests that it is important to distinguish "subjective rationality" from "objective rationality" (see Schluchter, 1979: 11–64; Habermas, 1981: 205–366; Kalberg, 1980; Levine, 1985: 142–178; 199–215). Subjective rationality is a quality of subjective mental processes, while objective rationality is a quality of supra-subjective institutions and organizations that characterizes "objective culture." Since Weber accepts Vico's *verum factum* principle (Raynaud, 1987: 79–91; 119–121) – the principle of the *Geisteswissenschaften* according to which society and culture are the product or work of man and must be understood as such, as a "quasi-text" (Ricoeur, 1986) – the shift from subjective to objective reason can be seen in terms of the objectification of subjective reason. From this perspective, objective reason appears as a supra-subjective rationalization or, more technically, as an emergent effect of the aggregation of subjective reasoning processes. To highlight the objectification of subjective reason in objective reason, from this point on I shall refer to "objectified rationality" rather than "objective rationality."

Starting with the distinction between subjective rationality (I) and objectified rationality (II), a formal typology can be drawn up that reflects systematic correspondences between the different forms of rationality (see Table 3.1).

<i>Subjective rationality (I)</i>	<i>Objectified rationality (II)</i>
Instrumentally rational action (<i>zweckrational</i> in the strict sense)	Instrumental and technical rationality
Rational understanding	Theoretical rationality
Value-rational action (<i>wertrational</i>)	Substantive rationality
Instrumentally rational action (in both the wide and restricted sense)	Formal rationality

Let us consider this typology systematically:

- 1 *Subjective rationality.* Weber examines subjective rationality in two different analytical contexts: first, in relation to understanding (a); then, in relation to types of social action (b).
 - a In an analysis of understanding (*Verstehen*), Weber contrasts “rational understanding” with “empathetic understanding.” Rational understanding implies an intellectual, rather than emotional, grasp of the coherence of the elements of action in the action situation. It is most complete and precise when actors reason mathematically or according to the rules of formal or economic logic, as Weber explains:

We have a perfectly clear understanding of what it means when somebody employs the proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$ or the Pythagorean theorem in reasoning or argument, or when someone correctly carries out a logical train of reasoning according to our accepted modes of thinking. In the same way we also understand what a person is doing when he tries to achieve certain ends by choosing appropriate means on the basis of the facts of the situation, as experience has accustomed us to interpret them. The interpretation of such rationally purposeful action possesses, for the understanding of the choice of means, the highest degree of verifiable certainty.

(E&S, 5)

- b Weber also distinguishes four types of social action, that is, actions significantly oriented “to the past, present, or expected future behavior of others” (E&S, 22). Two of these four types of social action are rational: instrumentally rational action (*zweckrational*) and value-rational action (*wertrational*). The other two are not rational: affectual and traditional behavior.

The concept of instrumentally rational action can be defined in a more or less restricted manner, depending on whether or not it includes a reference to values (Alexander, 1982–1983, III: 26–29, 124–125). If it does, then values inform the choice of desirable goals (instrumental rational action in the wide sense); if not, ends are determined by material interests, with the actor’s entire effort focused on the necessary means for achieving these interests (instrumental rational action in the restricted sense). The distinction between the wide and restricted concept of instrumentally rational action is essential, since if reference to the values determining goals disappears, rational action in relation to an end becomes identical to instrumental or strategic action. The difference between a capitalist’s crudely utilitarian self-interested action and a Puritan entrepreneur’s utilitarian and normative action is based entirely on the Puritan’s reference to values. Forcing the contrast somewhat, one might say that the Puritan who acts rationally in relation to an end follows the maxims of “the ethic

of responsibility,” while the capitalist does not follow any ethical maxim. In the strict sense, someone who acts rationally with a view to an end is not concerned with acting in accordance with moral imperatives. In fact, he is really acting without any concern for other people. In Kantian terms, his imperative is “hypothetical” rather than “categorical”: “For if reason has a decisive influence on his action, he who desires an end desires also the indispensables and necessary means which are in his power.” (See Kant, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 84 sq)

Determination of action either in affectual or traditional terms is incompatible with instrumental rational action (*zweckrational*), whether in the wide or restricted sense (E&S, 26). The individual acts in a rational manner, in the wide sense, if he determines his goals on the basis of ultimate values which structure his life and to which he adheres, and if, furthermore, he tries to achieve them by planning the necessary means to obtain his practical goals in a reflective and calculated manner. On the other hand, an individual who acts in an instrumentally rational manner in the restricted sense is not bound by a final value. His ends are not informed by values; they are dictated by material interests. The technical choice of means is far more important to him than the practical choice of ends. He arranges competing ends in hierarchical order according to the “principle of ‘marginal utility’” (E&S, 26): he chooses his ends on the basis of material interests; calculates costs implied by the achievement of the established goals in a reflective manner; predicts the manifest and latent consequences of his action; and, constantly weighs costs against benefits. The individual thus acts in an instrumentally rational manner in the restricted sense when he exploits the “expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings . . . as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’ for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends” (E&S, 24).

In contrast, the individual who acts in a value-rational manner (*wertrational*) is not concerned by the foreseeable consequences of his acts. He puts himself solely in the service of a value or a religious, political or other cause, in the belief that duty imposes itself unconditionally and personally on him. The paradigmatic instance of the value-rational act is the *praxis pietas* of the devotee or religious follower who is motivated by the fervor of his faith to respect theological precepts and put his life in the service of God. Thus, “the Christian does right and leaves success to God” (FMW, 339).

- 2 *Objectified rationality.* Weber claims that “rationalizations of the most varied character have existed in various departments of life and in all areas of culture” (PE, 26). He analyzed the processes of rationalization in different institutions, including economic and military organizations; political and legal settings; the fields of social stratification and education; religion and ethics; science, art, music, and erotic life. The following four types de objectified rationality

can be identified in his work, reflecting the objectification of the different kinds of subjective rationality: a) instrumental (or technical) rationality, b) theoretical (or conceptual) rationality, c) substantive (or real) rationality, and d) formal rationality. With a little imagination the four types of objectified rationality can be found in “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” particularly in the section where Weber dissects the concept of rationalism:

We have to remind ourselves in advance that ‘rationalism’ may mean very different things . . . [It may refer to] 1) an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts [theoretical rationality] . . . 2) the methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means [instrumental-technical rationality] . . . 3) rational in the sense of a belief in a valid canon [material rationality] . . . 4) ‘rational’ may also mean a ‘systematic arrangement’ [formal rationality].

(FMW, 293)

- a Instrumental and technical rationality is associated with manipulation, control, and conscious, practical mastery of the environment with a view to obtaining goals and satisfying purely pragmatic needs. It can be considered as the objectification of the instrumentally rational act (in the strict sense) or, better yet, to avoid confusion with the specifically Western instrumentally rational act (in both the wide and restricted sense), to the teleological act. Since “the mere adherence to the technical maxim of the ‘optimum’ – the relatively greatest result with the least expenditure of means” (E&S, 339) is universal, Weber also views instrumental rationality, which implies a subjectively rational technique and, hence, the calculation of means, as universal.
- b Theoretical and conceptual rationality is connected with theoretical mastery of reality through systematization, clarification, integration, and the generalization of abstract concepts. This “intellectual rationalism” (GARS, 254) is subject primarily to an imperative of coherence or “demand for consistency” (FMW, 324). Weber views this form of rationality typically as the product of the intellectual strata: religious intellectuals in the rationalization of world views, and secular intellectuals in the rationalization of philosophy, science, law, and art. The rationalization of world views will be shown later to play an essential role in the analysis of the socio-genesis of modernity.
- c Substantive or real rationality is the form of objectified rationality which takes its inspiration from “ultimate values,” whether they are “ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic, feudal, egalitarian, or whatever” (E&S, 85), to orient actions in the different spheres of life and to even organize them in a methodical and rational conduct of life. In as much as substantive rationality is not based solely on technical considerations, but responds instead to “*ethical* postulates or other forms of absolute value”

- (E&S, 104), it is able to determine “in what direction” (PE, 26) life is rationalized. In this respect, it is important to recall that Weber claims there are an infinite number of value postulates, which cannot be founded in reason. Consequently, something that appears rational from one point of view may very well be considered irrational from another view point.
- d Rationality is described as formal in as much as formalization relates to the systematic organization of means, not to substantive ends. It is based on the maximum calculability of means and processes, as well as the maximal predictability of abstract rules and activities for a given sphere of action. The distinctive characteristics of this form of rationality are objectivity, impersonality, ethical indifference, and discipline. This formal rationality is an objective property of the social structures of modern society. Indeed, unlike the other forms of objectified rationality identified here, formal rationality and its penetration into all spheres of life, even as far as the life-world, is specific to the West, and is not universal, hence the Weberian refrain “only in the West” (PE, 13–31).

Formal rationalization and reification

Weber’s pessimistic diagnosis of modernity ascribes a critical role to formal rationality. His fundamental thesis, which was adopted, amplified, and radicalized first by Lukács, then later by the Frankfurt school, is essentially that formal rationalization inevitably leads to a loss of freedom (*Freiheitsverlust*). Formal rationality is cold and pitiless. For Weber, “formal and substantive rationality . . . are always in principle separate things” (E&S, 108); they never coincide under any circumstances. In this sense, formal rationalization is not reasonable. “Without consideration for persons” (*ohne Ansehen des Persons*) is a key phrase for understanding the specificity of formal rationality. Formal rationality is objective, and depersonalizes everything it touches. Since it tends to invade all spheres of life, it threatens and undermines human dignity and freedom. Consequently, given the inevitable process of formal rationalization, Weber wonders how it is possible to “save the debris of individual freedom” (FMW, 321).

This existential question goes right to the heart of Weber’s analysis (Hennis, 1987), for instead of realizing the Enlightenment ideal of autonomy, formal rationalization saps the foundations of individual freedom. The logical conclusion is that formal rationalization is substantively irrational, and collapses into reification. The connection between Weber’s category of formal rationalization and the Marxist category of reification is not accidental. Although the category of reification is primarily concerned with the domination of humans by things and the category of formal rationalization, as Weber defines it in his theory of bureaucratic domination, emphasizes the forms of domination of humans over one another in a Nietzschean sense, the link between the Marxist critique of capitalism and Weber’s critique of modernity is justified by their shared insistence on the value of autonomy and the alienating effects of rationalization (Löwith, 1982: 28–67).

As we shall see in later chapters, Lukács and the members of the Frankfurt school from Horkheimer to Habermas, construct their critical theories on the basis of a synthesis of the categories of formal rationalization and reification. When Weber falls into the pathos of despair, it is because he sees that the advance of reification opens up a “new servitude” (GPS, 320) in all areas. In the lengthy passage in which Weber introduces the sadly famous image of the “iron cage of despair,” the obvious conclusion is that the objectification of the instrumentally rational act inevitably leads to the autonomization of formally rational systems and that this autonomization results in a loss of freedom:

For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order . . . which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter’s view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the ‘saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.’ But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage . . . No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance.

(PE, 181–182)

Clearly Weber does not have any great expectations for the future. Starting from the thesis that the gradual process of bureaucratization of all sectors of life is irreversible, he believes that the dynamic of formal rationalization inevitably points to reification. He does not totally exclude the possibility that new prophets and new political or ethical ideas might deviate the advance of reification from its logical path, but, nevertheless he affirms that “this whole process of rationalization, in the factory as elsewhere . . . more and more restricts the importance of charisma” (E&S, 1156).

On this matter Weber declares, with some resignation, that “the charismatic glorification of Reason [in the French Revolution] is the last form that charisma has adopted in its fateful historical course” (E&S, 1209). As the domination of monocratic bureaucracy, formal law, and rational capitalism advance, substantive reason, which is the normative foundation of the social and political order, loses credibility. The ideological foundations of individualism, as found in the Declaration of the Universal Rights of Man or in natural law, are threatened. From now on, impersonal norms and rationally calculated rules replace the ethical and moral norms of social life.

In Weber’s post-Nietzschean perspective, political and moral values no longer claim objective validity since they are now a matter of personal decision. Moreover, this decisionism also explains his defense of democracy and his call for

a strong parliament (Vandenberghe, 1999a). Democracy is no more a value for Weber than for Schumpeter. When he argues for parliamentary democracy, which he does not hesitate to present in *Economy and Society* as a sub-type of charismatic domination, thus clearly revealing his position, it is not in defense of democratic values, but for more basically pragmatic reasons: first, because he believes that only a parliament can control an administration and second because, in his view the parliamentary regime is the best guarantor and means of recruiting a charismatic political leader (*Führer*) with a strong personality.

The socialist ideal of participatory democracy holds no attraction for Weber. He invariably describes the electorate of mass democracy in terms that are closer to crowd psychology than to the sociology of new social movements. The alternative he sets up is not a choice between power by the people or over the people; it is power over the people by a charismatic leader or by a headless bureaucratic apparatus.

Meta-theoretical analysis of reification

In the Introduction, I presented the thesis that meta-theoretically reification is the result of the conjunction of a concept of strategic action and a materialist concept of structure. In the chapters on Marx and Simmel, I demonstrated that reification results from the reduction of expressive-communicative action (Marx) or affective action (Simmel) to strategic action. I now want to show that in Weber we find the same reduction of a multi-dimensional concept of action to the one-dimensional concept of strategic action. In the section above, I distinguished between a wide and a restricted concept of instrumentally rational action. The difference between the two is that one refers to values orienting action, while the other does not. This distinction is important, for if instrumentally rational action loses its axiological element, it also loses its voluntarist quality. Since it is no longer determined “from within” (E&S, 1116), the logical result is that action is determined only “from the outside” (E&S, 1116).

In Parsons’s terms, once ends and values do not direct action, the *unit act* is directly determined by material conditions. For all that Weber claims that “we associate the highest measure of an empirical “feeling of freedom” with those actions which we are conscious of performing rationally” (MSS, 124), if the freedom he is referring to is freedom from the coercion of affects and material values, then we must conclude that instrumentally rational action in the restricted sense is anything but free. Because it is externally determined by material conditions, it is entirely predictable – as predictable as the mechanical action of an inert object. If the interests dictating ends are given in a univocal manner, and if the material conditions of action are known, instrumentally rational action is an absolutely necessary consequence, as Weber in fact recognizes: “The choice of means was ‘inevitable.’ In such cases it is legitimate to assert that insofar as the action was rigorously rational it could not have taken any other course because for technical reasons, given their clearly defined ends, no other means were available to the actors” (E&S, 18–19).

Not only does Weber explain that instrumentally rational action is only apparently free, he also shows that the objectification of purely instrumentally rational actions gives rise to a formally rational and reified macro-social order. In other words, the aggregate of instrumentally rational micro-actions brings out an instrumental social order that is stable, alienating, and governed by quasi-natural laws: “The more strictly rational (*zweckrational*) their action is, the more will they tend to react similarly to the same situation. In this way there arise similarities, uniformities, and continuities in their attitudes and actions which are often far more stable than they would be if action were oriented to a system of norms” (E&S, 30).

In his socio-historical analyses of modernity, Weber tends to present the existence of a fundamentally instrumental stable social order, which may be characterized in terms of the objectification of instrumentally rational action in the strict sense as a simple empirical fact or even inevitability, even though in meta-theoretical terms, it is just one possibility among others. Instead of refracting the reified social order he encounters factually from the point of view of meta-theoretical possibilities, Weber presents it as if it were now the only possible order.

To understand how Weber arrived at this point, it is important to understand the meta-theoretical link he establishes between his thesis about a loss of meaning and his thesis about the loss of freedom, thematized respectively in terms of disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*) and the reification (*Versachlichung*) of interpersonal relations and forms of power. Let us start this analysis by considering the mechanical petrification of the mind that Weber presents in the last pages of *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The central thesis of this classic sociological text is that originally instrumentally rational action was inseparable from value rational action. The action of a protestant entrepreneur is rational in the wide sense: he organizes his life in a methodical manner and pursues his ends rationally precisely because he is motivated by religious values.

But, the perversely paradoxical result of the objectification of instrumentally rational action is the emergence of a formally rational social order grounded on mechanical bases and no longer requiring religious support. The typical sequence of the dialectic of rationalization is thus re-enchantment, disenchantment, and the dehumanization of the world. For both Weber and Simmel, it seemed inevitable that rationalization would prompt reification. Once it is established, the formally rational social order becomes the only possible order. It makes itself autonomous and self-perpetuates by externally imposing its constraints on actors who reproduce it. Instrumentally rational action is thus no longer optional, it is “prescribed in all relevant respects by objective situations” (E&S, 1186). There is a world of difference between the action of the Calvinist entrepreneur, which is the origin of the emergence of capitalism, and the action of a capitalist, which perpetuates it. “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so” (PE, 181).

The epistemological foundations of interpretive sociology

From a methodological perspective, Weber’s sociology is radically subjectivist. Unlike Marx and Durkheim, Weber starts from the subject’s “constitutive

operations,” rather than from social macrostructures. As he explained in a discussion with Schumpeter: “You are interested in the cobwebs and I prefer to pay more attention to the spiders who create these systems” (cited in Tritesch, 1991: 267). In principle, Weber’s sociology opposes all forms of methodological thingification, but as is often the case in sociology, there is a gap between the methodological principles he proclaims and their implementation in his sociological research. In fact, some of his comparative socio-historical studies seem to be closer to the principles of determinist materialism than to interpretive sociology. He never applied the methodological principles he espoused strictly (Fullbrook, 1978). In the following analysis, however, I emphasize the anti-reifying nature of Weber’s epistemology as much as possible. To do so, I present Weber’s methodology as a sophisticated conjunction of the principles of individualism, anti-naturalism, nominalism and anti-emanatism.

Individualism

Weber’s interpretive sociology, which had a great influence on the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, is radically subjectivist. It clearly belongs to the German tradition of the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). This respectable tradition, of neo-Kantian inspiration, emphasizes the meaningful activities of individuals and the objectification of subjective meanings in the world of the objective mind (*objektiver Geist*). In contrast to material determinists and collectivist idealists, neo-Kantians assert the autonomy of individuals (Arato, 1974; Levine, 1995: ch. 9). The insistence on individual autonomy and the meaningful character of action account for the privilege interpretive sociology accords the individual. It is important, however, to note that the link between understanding and individualism is not an analytic link. For example, in Dilthey (1957) the theory of understanding is “holistic”: to understand is to integrate the meaningful elements of action into a cultural whole in which they make sense. In this neo-Hegelian tradition, the insistence on culture is not in opposition to individualism; but is seen as one of its preconditions. Wary of all Hegelianisms, Weber emphasized the individualist assumptions of interpretative sociology.

Since the only understandable actors for meaningfully oriented autonomous action are individual persons, interpretive sociology views “the isolated individual and his action” as “the base unit, as its atom” (WL, 439). In a letter to Robert Liefman, which Boudon and Bourricaud (1989) chose as an epigraph for their *Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, Weber states:

The reason why I eventually became a sociologist . . . was essentially to put an end to these exercises based on collective concepts whose specter is always looming. In other words, sociology can only ever proceed on the basis of the actions of one, several or many separate individuals. That is why it must adopt strictly individualistic methods.

Rigorously applying the percepts of ontological individualism, Weber quite simply denies the existence of any “collective personality which ‘acts’” (E&S, 14). Only

individuals are real and “when reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family, or an army corps, or to similar collectivities” (E&S, 14) they must always be reduced in the last instance to the individual actions from which they result. In no circumstances can they be substantiated or hypostasized in real structures that directly determine individual action. For Weber, social structures do not exist in time and space, they exist only as mental structures orienting individual action. Collective structures may, and in fact do, have considerable causal influence on the way individual action takes place, but since this causal effectiveness is always mediated by consciousness, it is always indirect. Weber argues that to impute direct causal effectiveness to social structures is to reify concepts and fall into the trap of “false conceptual realism, (*falscher Begriffsrealismus*)” (E&S, 15)) which allows its concepts to be illegitimately reified.

Weber’s methodological individualism can provocatively be seen as a form of “methodological existentialism” (Torrance, 1991: 179). Weber believes that institutions and social structures are reducible in principle to the understandable activities of individuals, not just because only consciousness can be understood and there is nothing but individual consciousness. The individualist reductionism and basic nominalism that ensue are as much the result of his disillusioned view of the modern world as his normative view of man.

Like Simmel, Weber believes that the intellectualized modern world is characterized by “loss of meaning” (*Sinnsverlust*). The cosmologic unity which offered a transcendent meaning to life in the past is broken. God is dead. The intellectualism characteristic of modernity has destroyed “metasocial guarantees.” Modern man knows and feels that the world is a human product and that meaning is no longer inscribed in the structural autonomy of the universe. In the post-cosmological world, there are no more absolute, transcendent values; meaning is immanent, it is the work of men’s will:

However bitter yet inevitable the fruit of the tree of knowledge is for our human convenience, it is no other than the need to . . . understand that every individual action and, ultimately, life in its totality . . . has no other meaning than a chain of final decisions through which, as in Plato, the soul chooses its destiny – which means the meaning of its acts and of its being.

(WL, 507–508)

The oblique reference to the *Phaedrus* here masks a reference to Nietzsche and his aristocratic view of personality (Fleischmann, 1964; Stauth and Turner, 1988: ch. 3; Hennis, 1987: ch. 4). For Weber, a “personality” is a man [sic] who rises above the brute, establishes his essential values independently, turns his values into constant ends, and rationally selects the means best adapted to these ends: “Find the devil that holds the strings to your life and obey him” (WL, 613). This heroic imperative which Weber shares with Nietzsche (and Simmel) is expressed in a veiled manner in his defense of methodological individualism.

Anti-naturalism

The key question in the philosophy of the social sciences is no doubt the “problem of demarcation” (Popper, 1959: 34 ff.), in other words, the definition of social and natural phenomena and the correlative definition of the social and natural sciences. The demarcation can be established formally, following a methodological criterion, or substantially, according to an ontological criterion. For the formal demarcation approach, represented by Rickert, the dividing line lies between the idiographic and nomothetic sciences (interpretation of individual cases versus causal explanation of general instances); in the substantial approach, represented by Dilthey, it goes between the natural and cultural sciences (natural objects versus socio-cultural objects). The problem for Weber, who was familiar with the work of both Dilthey and Rickert, was how to combine both approaches: unlike Rickert he believes that all sciences advance through causal explanation, but like Dilthey, he retains the emphasis on the signification and interpretation of meaning. Weber’s proposal for resolving the problem was to view the social sciences as nomologico-interpretive sciences.

Weber conceives of sociology as a science that tries to understand individual action. Given that action is determined by the meaning an actor ascribes to it, sociology is necessarily an interpretive science and thus belongs to the cultural sciences. Weber follows Dilthey in this respect; however, since he refuses the psychological foundation and Dilthey’s view of empathy and introspection, Weber detracts from him to join Husserl (Muse, 1991). For Weber, the fundamental problem is that the researcher cannot grasp the meaning the actor ascribes to the action immediately. All he can do is construct an ideal type of meaning or motivation of the action, which is categorically evident and forms an intelligible whole that “makes sense.”

Weber advances the ideal type of the meaning or motives informing action as a hypothesis. This hypothesis does not claim that the meaning or motives the researcher intuitively grasps are the actor’s, but it does assert that the meaning and hypothetical motives can explain the unfolding of the action and make sense of it. However, since the researcher’s interpretation of the actor’s subjective meaning is only a hypothesis, it is not sufficient. Even if it is evident from the perspective of meaning, it is not necessarily valid from the causal perspective. This is why Weber believes that the interpretation must be tested again by confronting it with the real manner in which the action occurs.

This is the point where Weber introduces the important distinction between a “subjectively adequate” (*sinnhaft adäquat*) interpretation of action and a “causally adequate” (*kausal adäquat*) one. Weber believes that the interpretation of action is “‘subjectively adequate’ (or ‘adequate on the level of meaning’), insofar as, according to habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component parts as seen in their mutual relation are recognized as a ‘typical’ complex of meaning. This is more often described as ‘correct’” (E&S, 11). To put it simply, an interpretation is subjectively adequate if it “sticks,” that is, if it makes it possible to show that the action makes sense, either as a means to an end or as the understandable expression of an emotion or value.

An interpretation is “causally adequate” if, by appealing to the “rules of experience,” it is possible to establish that “there is some kind of proof for the existence of a probability that action in fact normally takes the course which has been held to be meaningful” (E&S, 12). In other words, an interpretation is causally adequate if it allows empirical generalizations about the real unfolding of the action. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to note that even if the action can be explained causally, it cannot be deduced from a covering law. The category of causality only intervenes to corroborate the subjectively adequate action interpretation.

Since these distinctions are all formulated at an abstract level that is somewhat difficult to grasp, an empirical example may be helpful. We can understand murder in legitimate self-defense in a subjectively adequate manner by constructing an ideal type that illuminates the meaning or hypothetical motives behind an action (“he felt threatened, so he pulled the trigger”); but by observing several real instances of murder in legitimate self-defense, we can establish an empirical generalization that corroborates the subjectively adequate interpretation (“in x% of cases, we observe that when a person is threatened, he will shoot his adversary”).

Once it is understood that Weber considers the meaning informing an action as a cause that explains it, his definition of sociology becomes clear: “sociology is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding (*deutend Verstehen*) of social action and thereby with a causal explanation (*ursächlich Erklären*) of its course and consequences” (E&S, 4). By arguing in favor of interpretive sociology (*verstehende Soziologie*), Weber contests all forms of naturalist observation that abstract from meaning, thus transforming psychic events into physical facts and reducing culture to nature. As Weber says, following Rickert, “an item *becomes* a part of “nature” if we cannot raise the question: What is its ‘meaning?’” (CS, 110).

Although on first glance, statistically established “social laws” are related to physical laws, they are ontologically distinct in that they result from the aggregation of a mass of individual actions which are perfectly interpretable in principle. In the end, for Weber “sociological laws” are no more than the quantitative expression of the “social rules” actors follow. The possibility of the re-translation of causal explanation into meaningful understanding – which Weber identifies through his concept of “subjective causality” (WL, 434) – is an important contribution to sociology. By emphasizing meaning and the need to interpret it, it discredits all purely naturalist interpretations of the social and supersedes naturalism, since unlike naturalism, interpretive sociology “can accomplish something which is never attainable in the natural sciences” (E&S, 15).

Although interpretive sociology initially aims to understand the subjective meaning of action, it eventually drifts off in the direction of rational choice. Indeed, in so far as Weber tends to associate understanding more and more closely with understanding in the instrumentally rational act in the strict sense, he leans towards a methodological individualism that is utilitarian rather than hermeneutic, undermining his own project in the process. We have already seen that when values disappear as the cause of action, action becomes logically determined in a univocal manner by external material conditions. If this is the case, then there is

not much left to understand and the reference to meaning becomes largely superfluous. It is then enough simply to intercalate an algorithm between the objective conditions and the subject, and the action follows as an inevitable necessity. By privileging rational choice in his methodological texts, Weber grants the heritage of Western rationalism, which he analyses in his historic sociology a transcendental status (Benhabib, 1981).

Nominalism

To fully grasp the theory of the “pure fictions” (MSS, 44), which Weber calls “ideal types” (*Idealtypus*) following the jurist Jellinek, it must be related to the vitalist vision of reality that Weber shares with Dilthey and Simmel, as well as to the concept of the “relevance to value” (*Wertbeziehung*) that he adopts from Rickert. Like Simmel, Weber understands reality as an “ontological infinitude” (LP, 139): life manifests itself in and outside of us through an absolutely infinite diversity of coexistences and successions that appear and disappear; the flux of incommensurable becoming flows endlessly towards eternity. The infinite diversity of the “irrational reality of life” (WL, 213) can never be understood in its totality. The scientist who wishes to study reality must define his object of investigation, but is only able to do so on the basis of his own “knowledge interests” (*Erkenntnisinteresse*, WL, 161). Like a browser who goes into a bookstore or library without really knowing what he is looking for, the researcher selects the limited fragment of reality that interests him and that becomes his object of investigation according to his individual values. The relation to values not only affects the selection of the object of investigation, it also constitutes it (Habermas, 1985: 77–85). Whatever the means and particular values that cause the scientist to select and constitute his object of investigation – a “historic individuality” for a historian, a “type” or a “general rule” for a sociologist (E&S, 17) – it must then be stylized, organized into an analytic order, and given a logical meaning. In short, an ideal type must be constructed.

Unlike Ranke who wishes to grasp history as it really was (“*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*”), but like Simmel, Weber defends a constructivist and anti-realist philosophy of history. The ideal type is not a reflection of reality, it is an “intellectual construction . . . an image of homogenous thought . . . a utopia which is achieved through unilateral emphasis . . . through the thought of the determined aspects of reality . . . which are nowhere to be found in their conceptual purity” (WL, 190–191).

Ideal types should not be construed as representative copies of objective reality. On the contrary, they are purely conceptual constructions that are put into relation with reality to see how far it deviates from them; the more it deviates, the better they fulfill their heuristic role. The researcher constructing ideal types can never substitute them for reality. This is a clear indication of Weber’s nominalism. Ideal types are not synthetic constructions of the objective mind, used by actors to orient themselves in the world; rather, they are purely arbitrary analytic constructions that the researcher uses to organize the chaos of reality. Weber constantly warns us against the reification of ideal types. To forget their constructivist nature

and purely heuristic role or to attribute them a constitutive function, is to give in to false conceptual realism, transforming concepts into mythical characters. All it takes is for the schemas to be confused with reality and sooner or later they will be substituted for each other, as is often the case with Marxist concepts.

However, on closer analysis, we again see a tension emerging between the assertion of nominalism and the flaunting of realism. Indeed, ideal types are not so much arbitrary constructions used by the researcher to organize the chaos of reality, as synthetic constructions which have an objective or real existence in society for the actors themselves, revealed by the sociologist who undertakes a work of abstraction on the basis of vast historical and comparative material. In other words, ideal types are not analytic constructions, but rather synthetic constructions of categories which actors (sociologists included) use to orient themselves in the social world.

Anti-emanationism

The Marxist theory of “predominant factor” (Gurvitch) leads to idealism one way or another. The popular critique of Marxism is only a special case of the critique of what Weber, following Lask, calls “emanationist logic” (Oakes, 1988: 49–53). With reference to Hegel (but without criticizing it at this stage) he characterizes it as follows:

Given this ‘emanatist’ conception of the nature and validity of the ‘ultimate’ concepts, the view of the relation between concepts and reality as strictly *rational* is logically unobjectionable. On the one hand, reality can be deduced from the general concepts. On the other hand, reality is comprehended in a thoroughly perceptual fashion: with the *ascent* to the concepts, reality loses none of its perceptual content. . . . the ‘most general’ concept, from which everything must be deducible, would be the concept which is richest in content. Discursive knowledge of this sort . . . is possible only if it is conceived as a species of knowledge analogous to – but not the same as – mathematical knowledge. The following is a metaphysical presupposition of the *truth value* of this sort of knowledge. The conceptual contents function as metaphysical entities: they stand behind and buttress reality. Reality is a necessary consequence of these contents in a sense similar to the sense in which the propositions of mathematics ‘follow’ from one another.

(LP, 66–67)

Weber’s sociology offers a strategy for “retaliating to the Hegelian challenge” (Bouretz, 1996: ch.1). In a letter to Franz Eulenburg, Weber writes: “[In the social sciences] there are but two paths: Hegel’s or mine” (quoted in Colliot-Thélène, 1992: 5). Why does Weber make this claim? First, because as a neo-Kantian, he is allergic to metaphysics; second, because he believes that a deductive social science is impossible. In fact, according to Weber, the *hiatus irrationalis* (Fichte, LP, 66) between concept and reality, which Hegel’s transcendental system tries to

overcome, cannot be reduced, since the more general concepts are, the less able they are to apprehend concrete reality (Cassirer, 1964, I: 249 ff.). “The wider the validity, in other words, the extension of a generic concept, the further it takes us from the wealth of reality” (WL, 185). What Simmel called “the tragedy of the conceptualization” reappears in Weber as an anti-Hegelian argument. Besides the fact that the most general concepts abandon concrete content and that emanatist logic eliminates all contingences from reality, deductivism is still problematic, in that it assumes the conclusion of science, the point at which science becomes “a ‘completed’” (MSS, 106) science. The *intellectus intuitivus*, that is, divine understanding that cannot think of anything without thereby creating it, which Kant rejected as a fiction, is rejected by Weber, as it was later by Adorno, as a reification, in the Nietzschean sense for this conception incorporates the singular concrete reality in his system of universal, hypostasized concepts and thereby reifies it.

The genesis of capitalism and formal rationality

In the opening section of this chapter, I presented Weber as a prophet of misfortune who predicted the decline of the West in a manner akin to Spengler. Yet, in the methodology section, I described him as a thinker opposed to all forms of determinism, emanatism, and historicism. These two interpretations are not necessarily contradictory, but they are indicative of a tension in Weber’s thought. The “iron cage” of modern capitalist civilization is neither the necessary outcome of “progress,” nor an inevitable consequence of human or social nature. It could be viewed as a historical accident, since it is the result of a series of singular, contingent circumstances (Collins, 1986a: 81–97; 1986b: 19–44). However, today the capitalist economy, bureaucratic administration, and formalist justice, all of which are saturated with formal rationality and are thus calculable and predictable, form a “reified cosmos” (*versachlichte Kosmos*, E&S, 592) whose dissipation Weber does not anticipate in the near or distant future. In theory, history is still open and everything is possible, but in practice Weber views the advance of reification as the most likely outcome. There is no need to repeat the many famous passages in which Weber presents his somber thoughts on the “new servitude” (GPS, 320) that awaits us. The following section begins with the genesis of Western rationalism, and then analyses its structure.

Enterprise capitalism

There is no doubt that Western rationalism is Weber’s main theme. Initially, however, his research did not concern the emergence of rationalism, but the genesis of capitalism. Rationalism gradually replaced the theme of capitalism later on, when Weber began his comparative studies of the great religions.

Weber believed that rational capitalism could develop only in the West; in other parts of the world there are nothing but rough approximations. The thirst for acquisition and the search for profit are of course universal, for as Weber says, the “*auri sacra fames* is as old as the history of man” (GARS, 41). Various forms of “politically orientated capitalism” (E&S, 166) (for instance, imperialist, colonial,

adventurer, fiscal, and booty capitalism) are common and can be found in the different regions of the world. But *Betriebskapitalismus*, that is, bourgeois enterprise capitalism founded on “bookkeeping,” “accurate calculation,” and “the rational capitalistic organization of (formally) free labour” (PE, 18–21), only developed in the West. It does not exist anywhere else, except where it was imported.

Formally rational capitalism can be defined most succinctly as a continuous, intensive, market-oriented system of industrial production that seeks profitability above all else and is based on capital accounting and the prior evaluation of potential profit in monetary terms. While Marx sees the market and exploitation as the *differentiae specificae* of capitalism, Weber views capitalism as characterized by methodical and rational calculation above all else. As he says, “the theoretical possibility of the use of capital accounting” (E&S, 156) is the decisive point for modern capitalism. Weber is adamant about this. In *General Economic History* he emphasizes: “The most general presupposition for the existence of this present-day capitalism is that of rational capital accounting as the norm for all large industrial undertakings which are concerned with provision of everyday wants” (GEH, 276).

The institutional prerequisites of rational accounting

Since rational accounting assumes a predictable, accountable economic system, Weber describes it as the “most general presupposition of capitalism.” Capitalism is not just a system for the production and distribution of commodities; it involves, and even creates, an entire world. In capitalism, the principle of calculability becomes universal, invading all sectors of modern society. Furthermore, in capitalism instrumentally rational action in the strict sense becomes widespread and as formal rationality advances it collapses into reification. This explains why capitalism is without doubt “the most fateful force in our modern life” (PE, 17).

However, Weber does not believe that capitalism causes formal rationalization. In fact, formal rationalization is the presupposition of capitalism, as Weber’s analysis of the institutional prerequisites of rational accounting makes absolutely clear (GEH, 276–278). For Weber, capitalism presupposes: 1) the appropriation of all material means of production (land, apparatus, machinery, tools) as private property; 2) a mass market, free of all irrational limitations on trade, such as, class-based monopolies over production and consumption; 3) rational technology based on mechanization, enabling maximal calculation in the spheres of production and circulation; 4) a state administration and a rational and predictable system of law; 5) freedom to work, in the Marxist sense, where workers are forced to offer their labor force on the market “under the compulsion of the whip of hunger”; 6) the complete separation of household and company enterprise; 7) the commercialization of economic life and the development of negotiable securities (shares); 8) the development of the Western city and the political right of the citizens, and 9) modern science as the “technical basis of capitalism.”

According to Weber, these external conditions, which are essentially the conditions of market development according to neoclassical economics, and hence for instrumentally rational action in the strict sense, are the necessary institutional

conditions for the full development of capitalism. However, even if all the conditions are satisfied, the expansion of capitalism is not yet conceivable. This brings us to Weber's most famous thesis, namely, the Protestant ethic thesis: "In the last resort the factor which produced capitalism is the rational permanent enterprise, rational accounting, rational technology and rational law, but again not these alone. Necessary complementary factors were the rational spirit, the rationalization of the conduct of life in general, and a rationalistic economic ethic" (GEH, 354).

The rationalization of images of the world

Weber claims that "the main question of the motive forces in the expansion of modern capitalism is not in the first instance a question of the origin of capital sums which were available for capitalistic uses, but, above all, of the development of the spirit of capitalism" (PE, 68). To understand the development of the capitalist rational spirit, it is necessary to understand the Protestant ethos, since the spirit of capitalism that ultimately produced capitalism is itself the product of the Protestants' inner-worldly asceticism. To confirm a causal link between Protestantism and capitalism, a program of comparative research had to be developed to find out why the religious evolution that took place in the West was not replicated elsewhere. Weber therefore studied world religions from a comparative perspective to identify the specificity of Protestantism. Since Protestantism was the outcome of a long evolution of metaphysical and religious images of the world (described below), to understand the genesis of capitalism requires a historical understanding of world religions. Religion is just one element among others in the causal series. In *Economy and Society*, Weber also studies the historic development of the economy, political regimes, modes of administration, law, and cities from a comparative perspective. His research is so vast that it cannot be summarized, which is why I do not even attempt to present it systematically and limit the presentation to religion.

Weber views the formally rationalized Western world as the result of a process of theoretical rationalization of images of the world, or as he says, using Schiller's expression, of the "disenchantment of the world." The theoretical rationalization of world images determines the extent, and above all, the economic mode of rationalization of the world. As Weber explains in a famous passage in the introduction to the economic ethic of world religions: "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (FMW, 280).

In other words, images of the world determine "in what direction" (PE, 26) the spheres of life have been rationalized. Although world images are determined by material conditions, they are not a "simple reflection" of economic organization; in fact, they influence it. Weber's argument is not a refutation of Marxism any more than it is a rapprochement with Durkheim's position. As he explains, "it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history" (PE, 183).

Weber's greatest theoretical achievement is the "fine dialectic" he establishes between material and ideal factors. He succeeds in transcending the dire opposition between materialism and idealism in a synthesis that is truly multidimensional (Alexander, 1982–1983, III: ch. 2). Weber transforms the two great sociological traditions, one that emphasizes the material determinants of action (Marx), the other that focuses on ideal determinants of action (Durkheim), into analytic variables. For Weber, it is not a question of choosing between the two positions, since he seeks to combine them instead. Ideas do not exclude interest any more than interest excludes ideas; they are two different elements in the environment, informing every action. Thus, the capitalist entrepreneur, who is the instigator of capitalism, certainly acts in an instrumentally rational manner, but this instrumental rational action is influenced by religious motives. *Zweckrationalität* and its paradoxical objectification in reified forms of the objective spirit are significantly determined by *Wertrationalität*. In a somewhat paradoxical, but typically Weberian, formula, it could be said that by reenchanting the world for a moment, Protestantism ultimately provoked its definitive disenchantment, and that this loss of meaning spread further, resulting in a loss of freedom in all spheres of life.

To understand the explanatory logic underlying Weber's work, it is important to grasp the following causal movement: the rationalization of religious images of the world (cultural rationalization) brings about the motivational foundations for the methodical organization of life (rationalization of the individual) and, in a non-intentional manner, the objectification of the instrumentally rational action generates a formally rational social system (social rationalization) (Habermas, 1981, I: ch. 2).

Genealogy of inner-worldly asceticism (cultural rationalization)

In his monumental comparative sociology of great world religions, Weber studied Chinese religion (Confucianism, Taoism), Indian religion (Buddhism, Hinduism), and antique Judaism (Bendix, 1960: 103–275), but was unable to complete his research into Christianity and Islam. Having established that rational capitalism developed only in the West and that its development is genetically linked to the inner-worldly asceticism unique to Protestantism, Weber aims to explain the genesis of this very specific form of asceticism and sketches out the following developmental typology of the evolution of religious world images (see Figure 3.1).

Weber's sociology of religion analyses the theoretical rationalization of religious world images from an essentially evolutionary perspective (Parsons, 1949: 214–228; Roth and Schluchter, 1979: 16–32; Schluchter, 1981: 156–166; Habermas, 1981, I: 279–298). This approach was very unusual for Weber, but is explained by the fact that he believes that all religions are confronted with the *problem of theodicy* and that the gradual elaboration of an answer to the question: "If God is good, why is there evil in the world?" motivates the process of theoretical rationalization of world images.

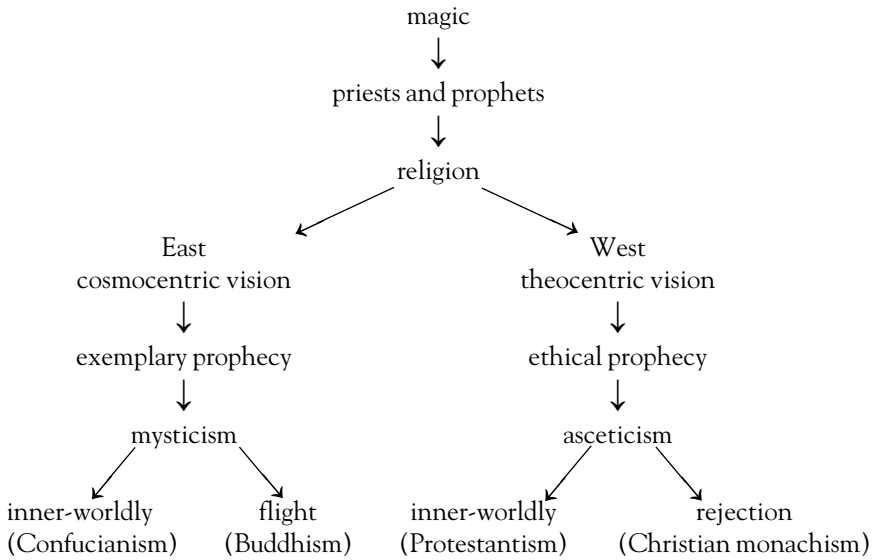


Figure 3.1

A good starting point for understanding the structure of evolution of world images is Weber's contrasting definition of magic, which "coerces demons by magical means" (E&S, 425) and religion, which is concerned with "the relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the forms of prayer, sacrifice and worship" (E&S, 424).

In the beginning, the vision of the world is *magical*; the world seems like an "enchanted garden" (RI, 336). Although spirits and demons hide behind the world of objects and events, the vision of the magical world is monist: there is no radical divide between this world and the other world. Relations between men and demons are based on coercion, rather than adoration. Men try to escape suffering by controlling demons with magic.

The vision of the world changes dramatically with the new idea that divinities establish laws for certain fields of action, and that they supervise the observation of these laws. This heralds the shift from magic to *religion* and from a monist to a dualist vision of the world: the world here-below is debased and subordinated to the other world. Divinities are personified and brought together in a pantheon. The systematization of the idea of divinity leads logically to an evolution towards monotheism, although the shift to monotheism is not inevitable, since strictly speaking, only Judaism and Islam are monotheist religions.

The distinction between *sorcerers* and *priests* mirrors the distinction between magic and religion. Given the dualist separation between this world and the other world, worship overseen by priests provides a link between men and God. The establishment of the priesthood is critical for the "rationalization of metaphysical views" of the world, as well as for the development of a "specifically religious ethic" (E&S, 426).

In Weber's sociology of religion, the figure of the *prophet* assumes a position that is just as important, if not more important, as that of the priest. Weber sees the prophet, a "purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment" (E&S, 439), as the historically decisive agent for breaking with rigidified, established clerical institutions. Furthermore, by devaluing magic, and by thus bringing disenchantment into the world, prophecy leads the masses in a "religious movement of an ethical character" (FMW, 277). The disenchantment of the world means that the demand for ritual purity becomes rationalized in terms of ethical rectitude. This process of worldly disenchantment and ethicizing of human behavior, initiated by the prophets, continues for several centuries until its culmination in modernity.

However, we have not yet reached modernity; we have only come to the decisive point at which Western and Eastern paths of rationalization separate. Western religions are predominantly *theocentric*, while Eastern religions tend to be *cosmocentric*. Unlike the theocentric conception, which is based on the concept of a personal, other-worldly God who created the universe, the cosmocentric conception is based on an impersonal divine power. In this typically Eastern conception, the universe is a cosmos that was not created (FMW, 285–286; 324–326).

The distinction Weber draws between *exemplary prophecy* and *ethical prophecy* (E&S, 447; FMW, 285; RI, 342) corresponds to the distinction between Eastern cosmocentric religions and Western theocentric religions. Either the prophet sees himself as "the instrument of annunciation" reflecting the will of a personal God who demands obedience as an ethical duty because of his mission (Muhammad, Jesus); or the prophet is an "exemplary man" who shows others the way to religious salvation through his personal example (Buddha). Whether the prophecy is ethical or exemplary, it is always associated with a total vision of life that comes from a consciously meaningful and unitary position towards life.

To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. [Prophetic revelation] always denotes . . . an effort to systematize all the manifestations of life; that is, to organize practical behavior into a direction of life.

(E&S, 450–451)

The methodical way of living adopted by the prophet and his followers, who are, as Weber puts it, "virtuosi" of salvation, may be either *ascetic* (*vita activa*) or *contemplative* (*vita passiva*). In the ascetic mode, ethical and religious action is accompanied by the awareness that God directs all action: the individual sees himself as "god's 'instrument'" (E&S, 546; GARS, 559). In the contemplative mode, the individual does not see himself as an instrument of God, but as "god's 'vessel'" (E&S, 546) or divine "receptacle" (GARS, 539). In this case it is no longer a question of acting in accordance with divine will to glorify God, but rather to achieve a state of inner illumination or mystic union. The tendency towards contemplation, led by "strata of genteel intellectuals" (FMW, 285) predominates in the East; while active asceticism, predominates in the West, especially, but not exclusively among the bourgeois "civic strata" (FMW, 285). As Weber explains, "In the Occident . . . even religions of an

explicitly mystical type regularly become transformed into an active pursuit of virtue, which was naturally ascetical" (E&S, 551–552).

The explanation of the genesis of capitalism involves another typological division: believers either engage in the world or turn away from it. Both asceticism and mysticism can be *inner-worldly* or *other-worldly*. Since worldly interests disturb the search for the unity of man and the principle of being, the mystic abandons the world. The mystic may radically reject the world ("contemplative flight from the outside world" such as Buddhism) or he can exist in temporal institutions, living in, but not of, the world ("inner-worldly mysticism" such as Confucianism).

Although the ascetic refuses the world, which from his perspective is a *massa perditionis*, a "natural vessel of sin" (E&S, 543), asceticism also has two forms. The ascetic may flee the world, avoid acting within temporal institutions and break with family and society to put himself at the service of God (flight or "ascetic refusal of the world" as in Christian monachism). Or the ascetic may take part in the world to rationally reform it, to glorify God through professional activities, exemplary family life, and rigorous conduct in all areas of life ("inner-worldly asceticism," such as Protestantism). This form of asceticism, which is the contingent result of a unique combination of a theocentric vision, ethical prophecy, asceticism, and inner-worldliness, is definitely in the purview of Protestantism (in the widest sense). As I explain in the following section, the specific consequence of the inner-worldly asceticism soberly practiced by Protestants is "the rational organization of social relationships" (E&S, 556).

Elective affinities between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (rationalizing the individual)

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (written in 1905, revised in 1920), Weber explains the birth and rapid expansion of capitalism by demonstrating that there is an "elective affinity" (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) (FMW, 284) between the methodical Protestant lifestyle (*ethos*) and the spirit of capitalism (*Geist*), or as he says, the "habitus" (PE II, 157). The metaphor of elective affinity, around which Goethe constructed a novel, originates in eighteenth-century chemistry. The technical term *tractio electiva* refers to a chemical process in which different, bonded substances break their connection to form a link with another substance. In his analysis of the genesis of capitalism, Weber examines the elective affinity between Protestantism and capitalism in two stages: first, he analyses the mutual attraction of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; then he demonstrates that this mutual attraction breaks up in favor of a new alliance between the spirit of capitalism and utilitarianism.

Weber's examination of the elective affinity of Protestantism and capitalism exhibits a form of weak causality and reveals the long-term interaction established at the end of the seventeenth century between the economic sphere (interests) and the religious sphere (ideas). The demonstration of the coincidence of ideas and interests, which each followed a distinct and independent evolution, though they ultimately converged, involves three stages: a) an analysis of the spirit of

capitalism, b) an analysis of the protestant ethic, and c) relating the spirit of capitalism and the protestant ethic through proof of their mutual attraction.

a) *The spirit of capitalism*

The capitalist habitus differs from the traditional habitus in the same way that the “principle of performance” (Marcuse) differs from the “pleasure principle” (Freud). While the traditional spirit is characterized by a natural tendency for enjoyment and rest, the spirit of capitalism is characterized by a crazed and relentless pursuit of acquisition. Unlike modern man who lives to work, traditional man works to live. He does not wish to earn increasing amounts of money, but wishes simply to live as he is accustomed, earning just as much money as his life style requires. The Silesian worker who worked twice as little after his wages were doubled is the perfect example. In contrast, the capitalist seeks to combine all means and take advantage of every chance to increase and accumulate his profit. He views both accumulation and work as duties that are ends in themselves. Weber claims that the “canine hunger for money” (Marx) and “the instinct of the workbench” (Veblen) are distinctive traits of the spirit of capitalism:

[Money] is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational. Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs
(PE, 53)

...

man exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse.

(PE, 70)

b) *The protestant ethic*

Protestantism is not a product of nature. In fact, it is the outcome of a long, protracted process of cultural rationalization which, if considered solely in terms of Western cultures, presupposes: Jewish prophecy (religious ethic and elimination of magic), Hellenist culture (the notion of an intelligible natural order), the teachings of Jesus and Paul’s mission (anti-intellectualism, eschatology, the ideal of fraternity, and charity), the monachism of the Middle Ages (ascetic refusal of the world), Catholicism (the universal church), Lutheranism (the concept of *Beruf*), and Calvinism (inner-worldly asceticism) (cf. Ladrière, 1986).

Of all the different forms of ascetic Protestantism (Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and the Baptist sects), Weber is most interested in Calvinism, since he sees it as the true father of bourgeois capitalism. He identifies three important aspects of Calvinism: 1) the idea that the universe was created *ad maiorem gloriam Dei* – “God does not exist for men, but men for the sake of God” (PE, 102); 2) the primacy of the Old Testament’s “hidden God” (*deus absconditus*), that is, the idea

that all his Majesty's motives are beyond human understanding; and above all 3) the doctrine of predestination: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death" (Confession of Westminster, PE 100). Human behavior cannot influence this unfathomable decree in any way: a Puritan has grace eternally or not at all. The logical conclusion of the doctrine of predestination should be fatalism, yet it had exactly the opposite result. Indeed, to deliver himself from anguish, it was crucial that the Calvinist knew he was in a state of grace (*certitudo salutis*).

Since he was never sure whether or not he was chosen, the Calvinist sought signs in this world. He organized his behavior methodically to create an entire way of life. Self-disciplined, rigorous, calculating, conscientious, every action of the Puritan forms a seamless, coherent whole. Unceasing and joyless, the Calvinist worked for the glory of God and to deliver himself from anguish. His way of relieving his fear of damnation is to adopt the maxim "every good tree is known by its fruit." Preachers even recommended diligent and devoted work as the best technical means of ensuring the *possessio salutis*. The result of this compromise was that the industrious labor and spirit began to be viewed as a duty towards God. In short, to confirm his chosen status (*Bewährung*), the Puritan, like the Jesuit, led an ascetic life in the world. Weber claims that this was the key contribution of the Reformation: by abolishing "the dualistic ethics, of the distinction between a universally binding morality and a specifically advantageous code for virtuosi" (GEH, 366), the Reformation brought monasteries out of Christian rational asceticism and methodical life and put them at the service of an active life in the world. As Sebastian Franck puts it: "Now every Christian had to be a monk all his life" (PE, 121; PE II, 153; GEH, 366).

c) *Elective affinity*

The capitalist's rational spirit and the Protestant ethos are mutually attractive and conjoined in the methodical behavior of the Calvinist entrepreneur. Even as he is wary of the fruits of this world and condemns all enjoyment as temptations of the flesh, the Calvinist entrepreneur works ceaselessly, rationally, and methodically at his task (*Beruf*) *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*. "You may labour to be rich for God, though not for the flesh and sin" (PE, 162), as Baxter preached. Weber claimed that this religious view of work and profit was "the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of that attitude toward life which we have here called the spirit of capitalism" (PE, 172). Since rational work for a profit and condemnation of carnal pleasures is synonymous with the constant investment of unconsumed profit, the inevitable result of the Protestant entrepreneur's economic activities is the accumulation of capital: "When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save" (PE, 172).

By explaining that the search to appease their conscience and save their soul is the motive that leads both the Calvinist entrepreneur to accumulate wealth and

workers, especially Pietists, to accept alienated work, Weber provides the religious underpinnings for the Marxist analysis of capitalism. However, the complementary aspects of these approaches should not mask the differences that separate Marx from Weber: essentially, where Marx sees capitalism as a production system based on exploitation, Weber sees it as an action system based on calculation (Löwith, 1982; Weiss, 1986; Sayer, 1991).

The accumulation of wealth was hardly the explicit goal of the founders of the Protestant ethic; it was a paradoxical consequence that confronts “all rational asceticism” (FMW, 332). This consequence is all the more perverse since once capitalism is established, it becomes autonomous and then undermines the religious foundations responsible for its emergence. It is paradoxical that by re-enchancing the world momentarily, Puritan asceticism disenchanting it definitively. Gradually, the ardor of *homo religiosus* was replaced by the coldness of *homo economicus*. Religious utilitarianism was supplanted by ordinary utilitarianism and the religious roots of instrumental rational action faded away. In Luhmann’s terms, normative expectations were replaced by purely cognitive ones (Luhmann, 1969b). The objectification of instrumental rational action corresponded to the emergence of a formally rational self-referential economic system with a mechanical foundation. Ultimately, religious support was a *caput mortuum* which capitalism no longer needed. All that was left was the compulsive efficiency of the *Berufsmensch*, the workaholic. As Weber says, “the idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs” (PE, 182). The capitalist system imposes its constraints and that which was initially a choice becomes destiny: “The Puritan wanted to work for a calling; we are forced to do so” (PE, 181).

The protestant ethic and the spirit of de-personalization (social rationalization)

Weber’s thesis of the “iron cage” describes the widespread objectification of instrumental rational action in the restricted sense. Formal rationalization did not stop at the factory gates; it spread into bureaucratic administration and a formalist justice system, deploying a quasi-imperialist dynamic and tending towards absolute supremacy. Drawing out the elective affinity of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of functional depersonalization (*Geist der Versachlichung*), Wolfgang Schluchter has presented a highly interesting interpretation of Weber that helps explain the genesis and spread of formal rationality: “In my view, the cultural significance of ascetic Protestantism lies more in having favored the spirit of depersonalization (*Versachlichung*) than the spirit of capitalism” (Schluchter, 1981: 156).

There is no textual basis for claiming explicitly that Weber saw Protestant asceticism as a necessary condition for the emergence of the bureaucratic administration and formal law. Unlike capitalism and, to a lesser extent, modern science, the state and legal systems did not come out of the Reformation. The bureaucratization of the state resulted from the prince’s desire to expropriate feudalists (GPS, 497–499). Formally rational law owes its existence both to the centralization of theocratic or princely power and the professionalization of jurists (E&S, 880).

However, although Protestantism is not the origin of the emergence of the formally rational administrative and legal system – and according to most historians it is not the origin of bourgeois capitalism either (Fischhoff, 1991) – the functional depersonalization favored by Protestantism did stimulate the institutional spread of formal rationalization. Bureaucratization, the formalization of the law, the expansion of the market, and the emergence of modern sciences are all independent processes with their own autonomous dynamic. The specific contribution of Protestantism, particularly its insistence on reification or the strategic objectification of inter-personal relations, is to have converted these partial processes into a unified movement of formal rationalization. In this sense, the Protestant ethic can be viewed as the catalyst for the “great transition” towards modernity. Weber concludes: “The clear and uniform goal of this [inner-worldly asceticism] was the disciplining and methodical organization of conduct . . . its unique result was the rational organization of social relationships (*rationale Versachlichung und Vergesellschaftung*)” (E&S, 556).

From the point of view of truly ethical religions, the “reified cosmos” that no longer knows fraternity except in the interstices of society, in “the direct and reciprocal relations between isolated individuals” (WL, 612), is an abomination of the imperative of brotherly love. It is not just by chance that these religions came into conflict with “the functionally (*sachlich*) rational universe” of the economy and administration since the formally rational universes eliminate all affectivity in the name of efficiency. This conflict was exacerbated as social and cultural universes gradually became autonomous and evolved following “its own immanent laws” (*innere Eigengesetzlichkeiten*, FMW, 331). Again we find a conflict based version of Simmel’s theme of the autonomization of spheres of value. Unlike Simmel, Weber believed that spheres of value cannot coexist peacefully. In his famous *Zwischenbetrachtung*, “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions” (FMW, 323–359; see also E&S, 576–634), Weber claims that the post-cosmological differentiation of autonomous spheres of value, which characterizes the beginning of cultural modernity, produces only axiological rivalry:

The rationalization and the conscious sublimation of man’s relations to the various spheres of values, external and internal, as well as religious and secular, have then pressed towards making conscious the *internal and lawful autonomy* of the individual spheres; thereby letting them drift into those tensions which remain hidden to the originally naïve relation with the external world.
(FMW, 328)

Weber distinguishes six autonomous spheres of value (economic, political, religious, aesthetic, erotic, and intellectual) and two types of autonomy: instrumentally rational sub-systems and value rational systems. The autonomy of formally rational systems differs from the autonomy of cultural systems, in that formally rational systems coerce individuals “from without” (E&S, 1116), that is, they demand instrumentally rational actions for the individual to obtain his goals, while cultural systems coerce individuals “from within” (E&S, 1116), demanding

value rational actions for the individual be consistent with the achievement of his ultimate values. Weber's thesis is that the autonomy of instrumentally rational sub-systems leads to a loss of freedom and that the autonomy of cultural sub-systems leads to a loss of meaning.

The structure of formal rationality

Weber believed that the West is unique because of formal rationality. After analyzing the genesis of formal rationality at length, I turn now to an examination of its structure. Formally rational institutions are generally characterized by objectivity, impersonality, a lack of ethics, and discipline. Whether in the economy, administration, law, or science, the disenchanting form of modes of action predominates. Sub-systems of relatively autonomous action emerge everywhere, conforming to their own logic and tending to impose their constraints on individuals. In the following section, I analyze the structural characteristics of the economy (1), law (2), and administration (3) and conclude with some brief comments on the disenchantment of the world by science (4). This completes Weber's diagnosis of modernity and brings us to the conclusion that the world has lost not only freedom, but also meaning.

1 Capitalism and accountability

We have seen that Weber believes that rational capitalism is characterized primarily by the principle of accounting. He explains: "Each individual operation undertaken by a rational profit-making enterprise is oriented to estimated profitability by means of calculation" (E&S, 91). In general, Weber views the free market and free labor as absolutely necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for accountability and predictability in commodity circulation and production. By enabling the precise determination of commodity values, money is "the most 'perfect' means of economic calculation: it is "formally the most rational means of orienting economic activity" (E&S, 86). The free market – which is free in that it is "not bound by ethical norms" (E&S, 637) – is the most impersonal form of association: "the market and its processes knows no personal distinctions: "functional" interests dominate it" (E&S, 936). "The market is allowed to follow its own autonomous tendencies; its participants do not look toward the persons of each other but only toward the commodity" (E&S, 636).

The principle of accountability is not limited to the sphere of circulation, for once the following three conditions are satisfied, it spreads to the production process:

- 1 The centralization of control over the means of production by entrepreneurs and the appropriation of the means of production by owners. Weber follows Marx in this respect, but extends the application of his analysis: not only is the worker separated from the means of production; the soldier is separated from the "means of destruction," the administrator from the "means of

- administration,” and the university researcher from the “means of academic research” (GASS, 498–499).
- 2 Technology or “the practical and methodical inclusion of the natural sciences in the service of the economy” (PE II, 325). Man is the “servant” (GEH, 302) of the fully mechanized machine, which allows “the uniformity and calculability of performance, both in quality and quantity” (E&S, 121).
 - 3 Labor discipline or “the consistently rationalized, methodically prepared and exact execution of the received order” (E&S, 1149). The threat of redundancy forces workers to obey their superiors’ orders without criticism or resistance. The training of docile bodies and the disciplinary reduction of the individual to a function enables the calculation of return to the nearest decimal point. This applies not only to workers, but also to entrepreneurs, who must subject themselves to the imperatives of the reified economic subsystem: “The growing impersonality of the economy . . . follows its own rules, disobedience to which entails economic failure and, in the long run, economic ruin” (E&S, 585). Since the fetishistic functioning of the economy forces each person to act in an instrumentally rational manner in the strict sense, once again there is a clear logical connection between a substantive concept of structure and a strategic concept of action. Theoretically, utilitarianism appears to be a consequence of reification; meta-theoretically, however, it is without question utilitarianism that causes reification.

2 *Law and formalism*

While calculability is the distinctive feature of capitalism, modern law is characterized above all by formalism. The case of English law notwithstanding, Weber suggests that formally rational law is a necessary requisite for the expansion of capitalism: “What it requires is law which can be counted upon, like a machine” (GEH, 342–343). Weber claims that this type of formally rational, predictable law exists only in the West. Formally rational law systems are characterized by a high degree of rationalization and formalization in both legislative and jurisdictional processes.

This form of rationalization has two implications: (i) the law frees itself from morality to establish itself as an autonomous, auto-poietic system and (ii) the general and universal rules of the law system are formulated consciously and precisely. Formalization also has two implications: (i) the rules of legal procedure are prescribed in minute detail and (ii) the substantive content of the law is systematized in a logical and deductive manner.

Weber distinguishes four ideal typical phases in the evolution of the law, which are, however, more reflective of the internal logic of the formal rationalization of law than its chronological development (Freund, 1978; Trubek, 1991).

- 1 In the primitive phase, law is formal and irrational. The legislator and judge are guided by norms outside of reason; they make their decisions on the

basis of revelations or oracles (ordeals). This law is characterized by formal rituals:

Questions of right and wrong cannot be settled by any magical method indiscriminately or arbitrarily selected; each legal problem has its own technique appropriate to it . . . even the slightest error by one of the parties in his statement of the ceremonial formula will result in the loss of the remedy or even the entire case.

(E&S, 761)

- 2 In the traditional phase, law is substantive and irrational. Law is no longer revealed; it is created and discovered empirically. Patrimonial or theocratic powers judge individual cases from the perspective of political opportunity, substantive justice, or feeling, with little concern for formal procedure or the logical consistency of legal content. Khadi justice is an ideal typical example of traditional law.
- 3 In the transitional natural law phase law is substantive and rational. This law is based on a set of moral and practical norms legitimized by extra-judicial religious, metaphysical, or ideological factors.

'Nature' and 'Reason' are the substantive criteria of what is legitimate . . . Those norms, which are arrived at by the logical analysis of the concepts of law and ethics, belong, just as the 'laws of nature,' to those generally binding rules which 'not even God Himself could change,' and with which a legal order must not come into conflict.

(E&S, 869)

Weber believes that it is no more possible for moral principles to be founded in reason than for ultimate values to claim objective validity. Since he understands "Nature" and "Reason" as arbitrary substantive content, Weber believes that a purely formal natural law cannot exist (Strauss, 1953; Habermas, 1992).

- 4 Modern law is rational because it is based on general, formal rules, from the perspective of both procedure and logic. Procedure is formal in modern law because legislation and jurisdiction are only valid from a legal perspective if they conform to external characteristics (for example, the pronouncement of a particular phrase or a signature) whose symbolic meaning is established once and for all.

Modern law is logically formal because it is systematized according to the precepts of deductive logic: "it represents an integration of all analytically derived legal propositions in such a way that they constitute a logically clear, internally consistent, and at least in theory, gapless system of rules" (E&S, 656). The systematization of legal rules is implemented by professional, specialized jurists, trained in universities. Weber claims that these jurists are only interested in the logical consistency of legal propositions, and are not at all concerned with the values the propositions express. Like scientists, lawyers leave aside personal conviction to focus entirely on the systematizing process. The result of their efforts is a rigorously formalist positivist law whose functioning is entirely predictable:

The conception of the modern judge as an automaton into which legal documents and fees are stuffed at the top in order that it may spill forth the verdict at the bottom along with the reasons, read mechanically from codified paragraphs.

(E&S, 979)

...

Juridical formalism enables the legal system to operate like a technically rational machine. Thus it guarantees to individuals and groups within the system a relative maximum of freedom, and greatly increases for them the possibility of predicting the legal consequences of their actions.

(E&S, 811)

3 *Monocratic administration and bureaucracy*

Weber believes that formally rational legal domination is historically bound to bureaucracy: “for in [everyday affairs], the exercise of authority consists precisely in administration” (E&S, 220). The purest form of legal domination appears in bureaucratic and monocratic administration. Its distinctive features are impersonality and legal formalism (E&S, 217–220). The administrator is free as an individual; he obeys impersonal, objective, legally-decreed orders, and the superiors whose tasks are deformed by statutory regulations. The system’s hierarchical order is defined once and for all by the organigram, while its authority is limited to the statutory function of its employees. A cosmos of abstract rules divides and distributes functions unambiguously, as well as the powers of decision necessary to complete the task. Hiring occurs on the basis of objective selection criteria that specify the educational and technical qualifications required of the bureaucratic candidate. Nomination to a position involves a contract that guarantees carefully defined privileges (fixed salary, retirement) and the possibility of promotion is based on objective criteria (seniority, degrees). Fulfillment of the function is based essentially on knowledge (*Fachwissen*) of technical rules and administrative and legal norms. The administrative specialist is a rule expert: his function is that of a paper shifter. In the end, the professional bureaucrat “is only a small cog in a ceaselessly moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march” (E&S, 988). The functional routines of administration based on general rules results in a cold and impassive execution of the function, as well as the continuous categorization of individual cases: “*Sine ira ac studio*,’ without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm” the civil servant fulfills his function without regard to personal considerations. “Everyone is subject to formal equality of treatment; that is, everyone in the same empirical situation” (E&S, 225).

The “formally rational functionalism” (*formale rationale Sachlichkeit*) that characterizes bureaucracy and which “is appraised as its special virtue by capitalism” (E&S, 975), presupposes the reification of the world. Weber observes with resignation that functional depersonalization and a radical alienation of interpersonal relations ensures that a bureaucracy works like a well-oiled machine: “Bureaucracy

develops the more perfectly, the more it is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (E&S, 975).

More than anything else, Weber emphasizes the efficiency and technical superiority of a formally rational administration. Given this technical superiority and the needs of the mass administration of individuals and goods, he believes that the advances of bureaucracy "make it today completely indispensable" (E&S, 223).

The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely *technical* superiority over any other form of organization. The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, unambiguousness, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of the friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form.

(E&S, 973)

While Weber emphasizes the technical superiority of bureaucracy in *Economy and Society*, his political writing focuses on the tendency for a universal bureaucratization of mind and society. With characteristic pessimism, he envisages a society dominated by *Ordnungsmensch*, men "who need 'order' and nothing else, who are so totally adjusted that they become nervous and cowardly if this order wavers for even an instant" (GASS, 414). For Weber, the main question is not therefore how to improve bureaucratization, but rather, how to counteract reification of the spirit and its crystallization in a dead machine: "What can we oppose to this machine, in order to maintain a portion of humanity away from this fragmenting of the mind, this total domination of the bureaucratic ideal of life?" (GASS, 414).

4 Science and intellectualism

The world around us is a reified cosmos, saturated with formal rationality. Although the world and related processes are calculable and predictable, they have lost all meaning. There were periods in the past when divinities gave meaning to the world, and where they answered the ultimate questions of life, but that is no longer the case. The gods are silent; the world is disenchanting. For us, as for Schopenhauer, there is nothing now but a "mechanism subject to the laws of causality" (GARS, 564):

We know or we believe that in every instant we could, if only we want to, prove to ourselves that in principle there is no mysterious and unpredictable power that interfere in the course of life; in short, we can master everything through prediction. . . . This is the essential meaning of intellectualization.

(WL, 594)

Reality can be mastered intellectually, but it is a dull, insipid, and utilitarian reality, which leaves a great void and sense of absurdity in the soul. Science helps us understand what we cannot understand, such as the way the metro runs or an elevator works, but it teaches us nothing about the meaning of the world, assuming the world has a meaning. Puritans still believed that science leads to God. Swammerdam began his course on zoological anatomy stating: "I am bringing before you here, in the anatomy of the louse, the proof of divine providence" (WL, 597). But how many people believe this nowadays? Isn't science the a-religious power *par excellence*, eradicating vile superstition to the core? Science has no answers for the questions that really matter: what should we do in life? How should we live? What is the meaning of the world? It is unable to answer these questions, and besides, that is not its role. Weber suggests that all these areas are a "matter of faith" or a "task for speculative thought." They are certainly not the objects of empirical science, which deals only with "the means adequate to the realization of an absolutely unambiguously given end" (MSS, 26).

Science cannot resolve the insoluble question of ends. At the very most, it can determine the means for a given end; predict the secondary consequences of the use of the unavoidable means; clarify the meaning of the ends; and demonstrate their internal contradictions. In a word, "An empirical science is utterly incapable of teaching anyone what to do, and can only indicate what he can, and possibly what he wants, to do" (WL, 151).

Modernity is radically lay and pluralist. Our era is indifferent to God and the prophets; it no longer enjoys the moral certitude of the past. The cosmological and unitary vision of the world has broken into a myriad of irreducible, autonomous, axiological spheres: "One thing can be true, although it is not, and although it is neither beautiful, saintly, nor good" (WL, 604). Values have also become arbitrary. After the elder Mill, Nietzsche taught us as much: values are "always" and "everywhere" opposed, "they lead to a deadly and insurmountable battle, like the conflict between God and the devil" (WL, 507). Weber's advice for those who cannot bear the death of God with virility is simply: "go back in silence, simply and without ado, into the wide open arms of the old churches full of compassion" (WL, 612). For those who are more heroic, in a very Nietzschean manner, he advises them to find and follow the stars that give meaning and direction to their life. "The day before me, and behind the night. The pathless waves beneath, and over me the skies" (Goethe-Faust).

Conclusion

Now that we have reached the end of Weber's analysis of the genesis and structure of formal rationalization, let us draw out a few meta-theoretical conclusions. Weber is far more tedious than Simmel, but what we lose in entertainment we gain in rigor and depth. His analyses excavating the material and ideal conditions of the emergence of *Betriebskapitalismus*, the bourgeois enterprise capitalism founded on the methodical pursuit of profit, are exemplary. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is rightly considered a monument in the history of sociological thought,

even if the central thesis remains open to debate. Weber succeeds magnificently in going beyond the dire opposition between idealism and materialism that gnaws at Marxist analyses of capitalism when he demonstrates how the capitalist entrepreneur's self-interested pursuit of profit is motivated by a whole backdrop of religious and normative beliefs and when he explains that instrumentally rational action in the wide sense (*Zweckrationalität*) and its paradoxical objectification in the reified forms of the objective spirit, are significantly determined by substantive rationality (*Wertrationalität*). Weber is more successful than both Marx and Simmel in showing us that in meta-theoretical terms reification is without doubt the result of the reduction of the concept of action to its solely instrumental and strategic dimensions, and that this reduction cannot be separated from the determination of action "from outside" by substantive structures. Weber helps us interpret reification as the alienating objectification of instrumental rational action in the strict sense in institutional structures that undermine the human dignity and freedom.

However, although Weber offers us an admirable diagnosis of man's modern condition, he has no remedy. Just as Simmel neglected the possibility of fixed forms becoming fluid in his theory of the tragedy of life and culture, Weber excludes the possibility of breaking out of reification through social movements. The dialectic of formal and substantive rationalization does not lead to a synthesis. Weber does not even pause to consider that a new conjunction of instrumentally rational and value rational action is possible; that new "prophets" may emerge; that, in principle, material values could reorient the course of history. In short, Weber fails to see that reification is a challenge that lies before us, not an inevitability. Everything points to the fact that Weber is convinced that history's pendulum has swung to its limit. With capitalism, we enter into "post-history." We may try to slow the advance of reification, but one way or another, the cards are already down, since the switching is stuck, and we cannot turn history away from the track it is on.

The iron cage of despair is locked shut, and as we have seen, in the end, this pessimistic vision affects even the methodology that Weber recommends for the social sciences. Critics have often remarked that there is a hiatus between methodology and its implementation in Weber's work. In some ways, Weber is a structuralist unbeknown to himself, since that which he methodologically de-reifies is methodically reified in his historical research. In my mind, it is fortunate that his process leads him to drop his eliminative nominalism and to recognize the relative autonomy of social structures. But when his interpretive sociology is misdirected from its hermeneutical tangent to return to the utilitarian orbit of rational choice, it seems to me that Weber undermines his own humanist project. Methodologically, since from then on the anti-positivism of the cultural sciences is no longer valid, and then ideologically, since salvaging the debris of freedom necessarily implies a reference to a meaning that guides action. Existentialist individualism is incompatible with methodological individualism. Nietzsche saw this clearly when he attacked the British utilitarians. I do not mean to imply, however, that Weber was not Nietzschean enough; on the contrary, I fear he was too Nietzschean, and this is why I conclude regretfully that Weber succumbed to the irrational charms of *amor fati*.

4 The young Lukács

Reification and redemption (first synthesis)¹

In the preceding chapters, my analysis focused on the concept of reification as manifested in the thought of Karl Marx (alienation, exploitation, and fetishism), Georg Simmel (tragedy of life, culture, and society) and Max Weber (formal rationalization). In this chapter, I demonstrate that the young Lukács was influenced significantly by his illustrious predecessors and explain how he synthesized their different and sometimes contradictory influences in what became the classic formulation of the theory of reification.

Introduction: from academic neo-idealism to revolutionary Hegelian-Marxism

In certain Marxist circles, Georg Lukács (1885–1971), born György Bernát Löwinger, is considered “the most important philosopher since Marx” (Goldmann, 1978, 271; Rockmore, 1988, 2). His main contributions are in the fields of political philosophy and the sociology of literature. Lukács is an ambiguous and controversial figure, however, both politically and intellectually. While some people admire him as a young critical Marxist, others charge that he is a romantic Stalinist. Of course, the two views are not mutually exclusive. In Lukács’ case, they are in fact perfectly complementary, through a ‘titanic’ Marxism that starts with the utopia of the new man and total revolution and ends with the manipulation of society and the dictatorship not of, but *over*, the proletariat. Lukács’ perverse humanism is simultaneously attractive and repulsive, even if the repulsion outweighs the attraction in the end. The main origin of aversion is the sublime and sublimated dogmatism that characterizes Lukács’ sectarian vision of Marxism. What are we to make of a man who shamelessly declared that he had “always been convinced that it was better to live under the worst socialist regime than under the best capitalist regime” (Eörsi, 1986: 12)? For Lukács, as for his friend Ernst Bloch, nicknamed “the two evangelists” by members of Weber’s circle (Karadi, 1986), Marxism is more than a science of society: it is a religion, and consequently implies a *sacrificium intellectus*.

Lukács was not always a Marxist. Somewhere between 1907 and 1924 he abandoned academic neo-idealism for revolutionary Hegelian-Marxism. This shift from an essentially tragic and pessimistic vision to a chiliastic, millenarian

utopianism was not at all a gradual change. "From one Sunday to the next, he transformed from Saül to Paul"; this comment by Anna Lesznai's (cited in Kettler, 1971: 68) suggests that it was in fact a conversion. What interests me in this transition, however, is not so much the Kierkegaardian 'leap,' as the break that it involved first with Simmel, then with Max Weber.

Before the caesura, Lukács, who had studied with Simmel in Berlin and Weber in Heidelberg, was inspired by bourgeois sociology. In *Mein Weg zu Marx* [My way to Marx], he writes that in his mind "Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and Max Weber's work on Protestantism" represent "the models for sociology of literature" (SIP, 324). After the caesura, he no longer accepted the typically bourgeois irrationalism, fixation on the past, and fatalism, of his mentors (Lukács, 1962, IX: 387–401 and 521–537). From then on, he allied himself entirely with the ultra left-ist activism and romantic utopianism of a young, thoroughly Hegelianized Marx. In contrast to Simmel and Weber, who wanted to interpret the world, Lukács wanted to change it. If one had to pinpoint the principal aspect that separates Simmel and Weber's end-of-the-century academic perspective from the messianic militancy of Marx and Lukács, the key is no doubt this difference in "structures of feeling." As I explain, this shift from academic neo-idealism to revolutionary Hegelian-Marxism has important consequences for the theory of reification.

Although Lukács always constructed his theory of reification by synthesizing the analyses of Hegel, Marx, Simmel, and Weber, the synthesis is different in the idealist phase and in the Marxist phase. While in the first phase, he conceives of reification in a non-dialectical manner, as the other side of formal rationalization, in Weber's sense, in the second phase he views it dialectically as the moment when reification is sublated. To Weber or Simmel's Marxist perspective, which interprets rationalization as reification, he thus superimposes the standpoint of Hegelian-Marxism. The proletariat's awareness of reification then appears in a truly Hegelian light as the decisive moment that enables the overcoming of the schism between subject and object.

Lukács views revolution as the *telos* of reification, thereby assuming a redemptive philosophy of history which, in my opinion, is not only philosophically dogmatic and epistemologically untenable, but also politically dangerous. One way or another, any attempt to develop a substantial philosophy of history runs the risk of being caught up in conceptual mythology. The philosophy of history, in Hegel and Marx's sense, must be submitted to a critique of the philosophy of history, such as those of Dilthey and Simmel. Here as elsewhere, the only path open is the critical path.

The starting point and main area of investigation in Lukács' early work is the problem of reification, or the schism of subject and object. Following the young Hegel, Lukács presents philosophy as a "symptom" of the schism between subject and object: "Philosophy is always a symptom of the rift between 'inside' and 'outside', a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed" (TN, 29).

Between 1906 and 1923 Lukács approached the philosophical problem of alienation at two levels. On the one hand, he treats it in an essentially metaphysical

manner – this is the case in *Soul and Form* (SF); while on the other, he analyses it from a sociological perspective – as in *Towards a Sociology of Modern Drama* (SD), *The Theory of the Novel* (TN), and *History and Class Consciousness* (HCC). The sociological analyses can in turn be subdivided into three groups: in *Towards a Sociology of Modern Drama*, the influence of Simmel and Marx is visible – it is a sociological-historical analysis; in *The Theory of the Novel* there are traces of Hegel and Weber – this is a philosophical-historical analysis; and, finally, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács builds on Hegel, Marx, and Weber to present an analysis that stands half-way between sociology and the philosophy of history.

In the following pages, I reconstitute Lukács' intellectual development by again centering the analysis on the theme of reification. The analysis is limited to Lukács' early writings. In so far as his theory of reification synthesizes all the analyses in the preceding chapters and anticipates those that follow, from Horkheimer to Habermas, this reconstitution is in many ways the pivot of this book. Along with Honneth (1990: 9–24), I believe that Lukács is still relevant not because he came up with the right answers, but because he asked the right questions, including the key question of reification.

Soul and form: metaphysics of the absence of form

Soul and Form (1911), whose title alone suggests Simmel's influence, is a collection of essays on literature in which Lukács sublimates his autobiographical experiences in a metaphysics of tragedy (Heller, 1983). This collection of essays, which Polanyi described as reminiscent of a “cemetery in bloom,” discusses life, art, *eros*, death, and philosophy. An analysis of the relation between the human soul and the Platonic absolute, as well as the forms that express the different modalities privileged by this relation, is the leitmotiv that links together the different essays. In the first essay – an essay on the essay – Lukács takes his inspiration from Nietzsche and Simmel to introduce a disjunctive distinction between “*life*” and “*living*” (SF, 4). *Life* is ordinary, concrete, empirical, and sensible, at the level of individuals; it is inauthentic existence in the reified world, in the “world of things” (SF, 7). *Living*, by contrast, is the life of metaphysical essences, universals, and ultimate values; it is spiritual existence in the realm of “Plato's Ideas” (SF, 4). The point of departure for Lukács' reflections is immediately posited through this stark distinction between reified facticity and idealized validity.

For Lukács, both the reified world of things and the realm of ideas are real, even if they can only be lived simultaneously through the mediation of a form. “Form,” which Lukács later called “totality,” is a meaningful, meta-subjective, transcendental structure that manifests or generates meaning within empirical life. Indeed, as a category, form is so central to Lukács' thought that according to Tertulian, it justifies defining his work as a “true theodicy of totality.” Superficially, form is the unifying principle of literary content (for example, the idyll, tragedy, or poetry). Yet, on closer inspection, it turns out that because it enables a lightening expression – *blitzhaft*, Adorno later calls it – of the union of

essential and empirical existence, it is in fact similar to the awakening or religious revelation of the present as *nunc stans*. At least that is how I interpret his definition of form as a “mystical moment of union between the outer and the inner” (SF, 8).

Nowadays, form is the great absence, as Lukács later explained when he said “meaninglessness as *meaninglessness* becomes form” (TN, 51). Nostalgic for the past, Lukács romantically contrasts loss of meaning and the anomie of modern times with the time when form was nothing but the natural language of the manifestation of the immediate energy of lively emotions. What were “those times,” he asks himself, when “no one asked questions about the nature of form, no one separated form from matter or from life” (SF, 114)? Without doubt, they were the periods of social and cultural flowering, when social values were univocal and clear, when individuals were intimately and organically linked to the community, and when daily life related directly to essence, and soul to form. Lukács is thinking here about the Greece of antiquity (the “beautiful totality” of Hegel and Hölderlin) and the small world of the old bourgeoisie (the ethical world of vocation and asceticism). This peaceful world, with its calm rococo and Biedermeier houses, is the hidden theme in the poetry of Theodor Storm (SF, 55–78). Lukács describes this traditional world on the edge of modernity in a magical, romantic manner that only barely hides the influence of Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*, revisited by Tönnies:

A bourgeois profession as a form of life signifies, in the first place, the primacy of ethics in life: life dominated by something that recurs systematically and regularly (*regelmäßig*), something that happens again and again in obedience to a law (*pflichtgemäß*), something which must be done without concern for desire or pleasure.

(SF, 57)

There are no dilemmas in this ethical world. Thanks to work, life has a meaning: “Work is the purpose and meaning of life” (SF, 57). According to Lukács, the modern world no longer knows this happy unity of life and meaning. For we who are uprooted and plunged into absurdity, this plenitude can be no more than a dream, the object of a search for times past, an “unattainable blue flower” (SF, 55) as Lukács says.

In modernity, forms are no longer given immediately, either in art or in daily life. In terms of art, form only becomes perceptible through constructive abstraction, through “an autonomous and integral giving-of-form to an autonomous and complete life” (SF, 18). This conciliation of particularity (*life*, expressed through art) and universality (*living*, expressed through philosophy) cannot be achieved by the artist alone. It is the task of the critic, the result of the essayist working on the artwork. Reconciling experience and essence is the task of the essay, but this task can only be accomplished negatively. The essayist who asks essential questions receives no answer. From now on, the gods are quiet. “A question is thrown up and extended so far in depth that it becomes the question of all questions, but after that everything remains open” (SF, 14).

Nor is it possible to access forms on the level of existence either. Kierkegaard wanted to create forms from life: "His tragedy was that he wanted to live what cannot be lived" (SF, 40). The romantics wanted to poeticize fate, yet "this made the gap between the peaks and the plains ever greater" (SF, 43). Stefan George detached himself from the community only to find himself in the glacier of the "new solitude" (SF, 79). In short, faced with reality, we must keep mum and accept the inevitable absurdity of life as fate. Lukács sees no solution other than heroic resignation. Given the terrifying void that surrounds him, he considers that the tragic attitude is now the only one possible, the only one that is still somewhat authentic. Ultimately, Lukács believes that the attitude one adopts to life is inseparable from the attitude one adopts to death. Death is the limit. It is devoid of meaning; it saps all projects and steals all importance from the individual by suddenly interrupting the course of his or her life. Like Simmel (1922: ch. 2), who in his philosophical testimony suggested that death could in some ways give form to life, the young Lukács, Simmel's "personal student" (SIP, 324) who is constantly tempted by suicide, believes that the grandeur of tragic man resides in a calm refusal of a life in which no project can reach fruition, in the experience of the fatal limit that awakens the soul to self-awareness. For the tragic hero, death has a meaning: "death – the frontier as such – is an always immanent reality, inseparably connected with every tragic event. . . . death is also – in a purely positive and life-affirming sense – the immanent reality of tragedy" (SF, 161).

Towards a sociology of modern drama: the reification of life and the crisis of individualism

In *The History of the Development of Modern Drama* and *Towards a Sociology of Modern Drama*, Lukács, theater-lover and co-founder of Thalia Theater, brings a sociological and historical, Simmel-Marxist interpretation to cultural decline. Simmel is present in his interpretation, for as Lukács states in an interview, "the philosophy of my work on drama is, truth be told, Simmel's philosophy" (Lukács, 1986: 48). But Marx is also present, although "it was Marx the 'sociologist' that attracted me – and I saw him through spectacles tinged by Simmel and Max Weber" (HCC, ix).

The influence of Simmel's formal sociology is clear. It is evident in Lukács' insistence on the concept of form: "form is what is truly social in literature" (SL, 71), and in his definition of the task of literary sociology: "The central aim for a sociology of literary forms is to reduce the historical-temporal elements of life, as well as the content of art forms, to a formal type (*formale Typus*) and then to study the interaction between forms of life and forms of art" (SD, 303).

Although Marx's influence is less visible, it is evident in Lukács' analysis of the indirect conditioning of artistic forms by economic conditions. In the case of modern drama, Lukács claims that the economy affects performance, causally through the intermediary of the public and bourgeois ideology, and structurally through the secondary effects of objectification and rationalization in daily life. As we shall see, this is the means by which Lukács first introduces his analysis of reification in modernity.

Modern drama has a limited audience. For economic reasons, only the rich can afford to go to the theater. The elitist nature of theater is further reinforced by the intellectualism of modern drama (*Buchdrama*). As a result, modern drama has lost the universal character that characterized classic drama. It is no longer addressed to the masses, but is instead directed towards a bourgeois elite whose minority attitudes reflect the status of the bourgeoisie as an aggregate of isolated individuals. In modern drama, which Lukács explicitly defines as “a weapon in the ideological battle of the rising bourgeois classes” (SD, 308), conflicting world views form the dramatic core of plays. Yet, the struggle to impose a definition of the world, raging within the bourgeois classes in a Mannheimian battle of the generations, is equally important (SD, 334 sq). Classes, generations, and individuals are constantly engaged in a Hobbesian war of all against all – which is always a sign of reification, for in meta-theoretical terms, it is simply the conjunction of a concept of utilitarianism and a materialist concept of social structure: “The affirmation of personality becomes unthinkable without the submission to the personality of another, whose preservation in turn implies the ruthless annihilation of the first” (SD, 647).

One of the consequences of the fierce battle of each individual pitted against the other is that it displaces the confident from the stage. Interacting in the instrumental-strategic mode and relating to each other as subject to object, humans no longer understand each other. The intimacy of communal social relations lingers on as a nostalgic longing. Dialogue is torn apart, becoming increasingly impressionistic and intellectual. Since the communicative, affective, and expressive dimensions of action have disappeared, solitary individuals can no longer communicate what they are or what they really feel. Action loses its spontaneity. As strategic action, it does no more than reflect external conditions. Compared to the heroes of ancient drama, the heroes of modern drama are “far more passive than active, something happens to them, rather than them making something happen . . . ; their heroism is the heroism of despair, need, not courageous spontaneity” (SD, 343) and like “simple chess pieces, their will coincides with their possibilities of movement” (SD, 345).

Just as Simmel interpreted money as the symbol of modernity, here we see how Lukács analyses modern drama as the symbol of bourgeois culture in its totality, as the stylized expression of the reification of life and the depersonalization of the individual in the era of liberal modernity. This is how we should read his thesis that “the modern drama is the drama of the bourgeoisie; modern drama is bourgeois drama” (SD, 304). Following Simmel, or more precisely following a somewhat Marxized Simmel, Lukács presents reification as the distinctive characteristic of modernity. Since the French revolution, which Lukács saw as the threshold of modernity, the rising bourgeoisie experienced the tragic autonomization of social and economic forms: “This great experience taught them that history exists – as a form of life and not as a science – and this means that everything, no sooner has it appeared in life, leads an independent life, detached from its creator and goal. . . . Their life turns against them, means become ends” (SD, 322).

In the wake of Marx, Simmel, and Weber, Lukács then links the objectification of life (*Versachlichung des Lebens*) to the division of labor, and capitalism:

From the individual's perspective, the essence of the modern division of labor is that it separates work from irrational abilities, and, hence, from the qualitatively determinable abilities of the worker. The division of labor subordinates the worker to the objective criteria of performance, external to the worker's personality, and with no relation to it. The major economic trend of capitalism is similar: the objectification of production, its separation from the producers' personality. Through the capitalist economy, an objective abstraction, capital, becomes the effective producer. Capital no longer has any organic connection to the person of its occasional owner; whether or not owners are persons or a share company is of no importance whatsoever.

(SD, 665–666)

Although Lukács' analysis of the "drama of individualism" (SD, 662) is based on Simmel's analysis of the "tragedy of culture", it is clear that Lukács' analysis is more historical than Simmel's. Since he interprets the tragedy of culture as the tragedy of bourgeois culture, and the bourgeois drama as the drama of capitalism from the start, Lukács effectively corrected Simmel's formal analysis of reification through Marx and Weber. Later, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács did, however, historicize Simmel's analysis to such an extent that by definition, reification can only be capitalist. To avoid turning the theory of reification into a dogma, a correction from Simmel or Weber is therefore necessary.

The theory of the novel: the loss of the transcendental homeland

Filled with nostalgia for the golden age when gold did not rule the world, *The Theory of the Novel* (written between 1914 and 1915), with all its lyrical heights, is without doubt the most beautiful book Lukács ever wrote. As a stage on the road towards Marx, *The Theory of the Novel*, which Lukács later categorically rejected (TN, 11–23), marks "the shift from subjective idealism to objective idealism" (SIP, 325). Indeed, influenced by his friend Ernst Bloch, who opened up to him the horizons of German idealism, Lukács became a Hegelian. As a "typical product" (TN, 12) of the *Geisteswissenschaften* ('cultural sciences') of the time, this book, bathed in pre-war despair, is also eminently Weberian.

The influence of Weber is not only evident in Lukács' use of ideal-types and the vitalist rejection of mechanistic thought but also, and above all, in its emphasis on loss of meaning and loss of freedom as distinctive characteristics of modernity. On the other hand, traces of Marx disappear entirely. Consequently, *The Theory of the Novel* can be seen as a partial synthesis of *Soul and Form* (loss of meaning) and *Towards a Sociology of Modern Drama* (loss of freedom), but without its sociological specificity.

Even more than previous works, *The Theory of the Novel* is the exemplary expression of "anti-capitalist romanticism" (Löwy, 1976: 79 sq; Löwy and Sayre, 1992). The binary structure of *Soul and Form*, with its very Kierkegaardian contrast between *life* and *living*, reappears in Lukács' essay on the novel. *The Theory of the Novel* is structured around an opposition between Hellenity and modernity,

between the epic and the novel. Just like the young Hegel, or even Winckelmann, Lukács dreams of the Hellenic world as a “paradise forever lost” (TN, 85). It is an organic, transproblematic, and perfect community: the gods rule the universe; essence is immanent to the world and life; interhuman relations and the structures born of them are rich, close relatives to the “archetypal home: love, family, *polis*” (TN 33). In short, everything bathes in happy harmony, and above all, the world and life are not afflicted by any sort of schism. Yet, ever since the discovery that the mind is creative, this “beautiful totality,” defining our situation as its negative, has broken into bits. From then on, we observe at our expense that between knowing and doing, between the real and the ideal, between soul and world, between *I* and *you*, an insurmountable chasm has been cut, beyond which “all substantiality is dispersed in reflexivity” (TN, 34). Like the young Hegel, Lukács believed that the birth of the reflexive subject and disenchantment of the world, as well as the schism of the interiority of the individual and exteriority of society, are correlative processes:

The autonomous life of interiority is possible and necessary only when the distinctions between men have made an unbridgeable chasm; when the gods are silent and neither sacrifices nor the ecstatic gift of tongues can solve their riddle; when the world of deeds separates itself from men and, because of this independence, becomes hollow.

(TN, 66)

In other words, the modern principle of individuality is born of a dual process: the disappearance of the immanence of the meaning of life and the autonomization of social structures. While the loss of transcendental meaning, which makes action meaningful *a priori*, is felt in everyday life in the form of lived anomie, loss of freedom is manifested as alienation. Anomie and alienation are causally connected. Since loss of meaning signifies that action is no longer causally efficient, for the simple reason that since it is no longer oriented towards norms and values it is exodetermined by material conditions, loss of freedom can be seen as the corollary to loss of meaning.

The process of dual schism of subject and object has important consequences for the literary form. As evolution gradually renders the world ever more prosaic, the epic, whose object is not an individual destiny, but the destiny of a community, must disappear to give way to an absolutely new literary form: the novel. As Lukács states in a very Weberian expression, the novel is “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” (TN, 88). The novel’s hero is a man who is “transcendentally homeless” (TN, 41), alone, isolated, and lost in a contingent world. His world is a cold and objective world, devoid of meaning and ruled by anonymous laws. “Kant’s starry firmament now shines only in the dark night of pure cognition” (TN, 36). Even though this world is the product of human action, it follows its own laws and externally imposes them on its inhabitants. It is not a home, but a “prison” (TN, 64), a “house of servitude” as Weber would say. Here again we find the idea of reification, not *eo nomine*, but in the vitalist sense of “second nature.” As we shall see

below, this formulation later enjoyed great success in the Frankfurt School (Rath, 1982: 65–78).

The following lengthy quotation should be read closely, for it is a condensed reminder of the Hegelian theory of alienation, Simmel's philosophy of culture, and Weber's theory of the petrification of the mind:

The second nature, the nature of man-made structures, has no lyrical substantiality . . . This second nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless, like the first: it is a complex of senses – meanings – which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority; it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities . . . When the soul-content of these constructs can no longer directly become soul, when the constructs no longer appear as the agglomerate and concentrate of interiorities which can at any moment be transformed back into a soul, then they must, in order to subsist, achieve a power which dominates men blindly, without exception or choice. And so men call 'law' the recognition of the power that holds them in thrall, and they conceptualize as 'law' their despair at its omnipotence and universality: conceptualize it into a sublime and exalting logic, a necessity that is eternal, immutable and beyond the reach of man (TN, 63–65). . . . It is a second nature, and, like nature (first nature), it is determinable only as the embodiment of recognized but senseless necessities and therefore it is incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance.

(TN, 62)

This reified, soulless world is the "world of prose" (Hegel) that represents the transcendental terrain of the novel. The hero of the novel (the modern individual) constantly comes up against this mechanical exteriority. The values he cherishes and tries to objectify through his actions in the world are neutralized in their effectiveness, becoming powerless ideals that float in the air like bubbles, bursting on first contact with external reality, so that the chasm "between the reality that is and the ideal that should be" (TN, 78) cannot be bridged. The modern era is impermeable and indifferent to values. That is why, following Fichte, Lukács designates it as "the epoch of absolute sinfulness" (TN, 152).

Overwhelmed by the amorality of the world, the hero becomes demoralized and, like the Weberian mystics, flees the world. He renounces intervening in the world and withdraws into the interiority of his soul. There the battle continues, but it is a battle against boredom, against "the process of time as duration" (TN, 120). The hero is a fallen hero. The novelist knows this, and this is what explains the ironic structure that characterizes the novelistic form. As Lukács explains, the novelist presents the meaninglessness of the contemporary world as the ultimate meaning of our era: "The writer's irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god" (TN, 90). As Jameson (1971: 173) comments wryly, this means that the real hero of the modern novel is . . . the novelist himself.

The Theory of the Novel does not conclude, however, by giving up all hope. Lukács dreams of a future utopia, a "new world" (TN, 152), a new ethical

community without reification, in which the schism between subject and object would be overcome. Certainly in 1914, he could hardly hope to see a means of internal regeneration for Western civilization. Affected by the pathos of Russian nihilism, he asks himself: “Who was to save us from Western civilization?” (TN, 11). In his mind, salvation can only come from the spiritual world of Russia: *ex oriente lux*. Tolstoy would herald this new era; Dostoyevsky, who already belonged to the new world, would be its new Homer: “It will then be the task of historical-philosophical interpretation [of Dostoyevsky’s work] to decide whether we are really about to leave the age of absolute sinfulness or whether the new has no other herald but our hopes” (TN, 153).

This is the frontier between the literary and the political. From the messianic hope Lukács expresses in the final pages of *The Theory of the Novel*, it is possible to understand the leap from one utopia to the other. After rapidly dismissing a few doubts about the ethical character of the means advocated by the Bolshevik revolutionaries, Lukács converts to Marxism. From one Sunday to the next, aristocrat “von Lukács” metamorphosed into “comrade Lukács.” From that point on, however violent the revolution might be, it has become a moral imperative for Lukács.

History and class consciousness: from reification to redemption

Lukács’ conversion to communism can be seen as a “leap” from aesthetics to politics, for in becoming a Marxist, Lukács transposed his ideal of harmony from the realm of the aesthetic to the political. *History and Class Consciousness* (HCC), significantly subtitled *Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923), is the result of this Marxist transfiguration. Together with Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (1921) and Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927), despite all its weaknesses, this classic text is one of the three books that had the greatest influence on the twentieth century. This claim is no exaggeration, for *History and Class Consciousness* is the most important text in Marxist philosophy since the death of Marx.

At the origin of “Western Marxism” (Merleau-Ponty), influencing authors from Adorno to Zima, *History and Class Consciousness* can rightly be viewed as a paradigmatic work, in Kuhn’s sense, revolutionizing the foundations of scientific socialism. It is not by chance that those advocating an elementary Communism denounce the revisionism of this book, which traces a clear line of demarcation between the orthodox dogmatism of Russian Marxism and the heterodox dogmatism of Western Marxism (Arato and Breines, 1979: 163–189). What distinguishes Russian Marxism from Western Marxism is the “Hegelian holism”, the idealist, vitalized dialectic of totality that Lukács reintroduced to ossified Marxism, giving it back its insolent youthfulness.

The heart of Lukács’ Marxist classic, which is an explosive cocktail of utopian messianism, eschatological faith, romantic anti-capitalism, revolutionary moralism, classic sociology, philosophy of life, and Hegelian idealism, is the theory of reification. To truly grasp the paradigmatic meaning of *History and Class Consciousness*, and the way in which the theory of reification was later developed

by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, it is important to understand that it fuses Weber's and Simmel's approach to reification with a Hegelian-Marxist approach (Brunkhorst, 1983). While the first approach synthesizes Weber's theory of formal rationality and the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism, the second condenses Hegel's dialectical logic and the Marxist theory of class struggle. From the Weberian-Marxist perspective, reification appears to be the other side of the formal rationalization that characterizes capitalism; from the Hegelian-Marxist perspective, proletarian class consciousness is the harbinger of the identical subject-object of history.

In the following chapters, we shall see that the members of the Frankfurt School dismantle this fragile synthesis. They radicalize the Weber-Marxist perspective and replace the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic of consciousness with the Freudian theory of repressive sublimation, ultimately producing a one-dimensional theory of "total reification" (Adorno).

In meta-theoretical terms, Lukács' theory of reification is based on the same premises as Marx's theory, except that Lukács places greater emphasis on the dialectical epiphany of proletarian consciousness. This Hegelianization produces a Marxism that drifts towards objective idealism. The redemptive philosophy of history underpinning all Lukács' arguments "identifies a political will with a historic fate" (Touraine, 1992: ch. 3), reassures the proletariat that it can accomplish its historical mission to reconcile subject and object. Based as it is on philosophically dogmatic, epistemologically untenable, and politically dangerous principles, namely that Marxist theory incarnates absolute knowledge of historical totality (the epistemological principle) and that the proletariat is a unitary agent able to bring to fruition the promises of Marxism (the ontological principle), this Marxist philosophy of history begs the question twice over.

These problematic principles, that beg the question they are intended to answer, are presented as absolutes. Lukács does not justify them any more than he questions them. Like Hegel and Marx, Lukács eventually became entangled in the conceptual mythology of a speculative philosophy of history. While in Hegel, the totalization of history is always retrospective, in Lukács, as in Marx, it is prospective. The owl of Minerva does not fly off at dusk, but at the break of day. Having replaced the fiction of the Spirit by that of the Proletariat, it appears that Lukács sublimated his desires for prospective totalization in a super-Hegelian philosophy of history. Caricaturing the situation somewhat, we can summarize the essential aspects of Lukács' theodicy as follows: capitalist society is prey to reification, but the Proletariat, the identical subject-object of history, must restore, thus can restore, thus will restore the normative totality, thanks to its knowledge of the Truth.

History and Class Consciousness is a collection of dialectical essays, which all center on the issue of reification and one way or another consider three questions: the methodological question regarding the dialectic of totality as the determining weapon of class struggle; the sociological question regarding reification and alienation in capitalist society; and the political question regarding the Communist party and Revolution.

The methodological question: the Marxist dialectic

According to Lukács, the originality and superiority of Marxism is based not on the predominance Marx accords to the economic factor, but actually resides in the dialectic. Countering those advocating a return to Kant, Lukács claims that the dialectical method, which Marx borrowed from Hegel and set back on its feet, is the essence of Marxism. Lukács defends the unorthodox thesis that orthodoxy in Marxism relates exclusively to method. This implies the “scientific conviction” (HCC, 1) that the Marxist dialectic is “*the true method*” (HCC, xliii) for knowledge of society and history. For Lukács, all orthodox Marxists must accept this claim. Emphasizing the absolute primacy of the method, Lukács added that even if “recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses” (HCC, 1), Marxists would not necessarily be obliged to renounce Marxism. They could simply shrug their shoulders and answer as Fichte did: “never mind the facts!” (SIP, 30).

Mediation and totality

The fundamental principle of the dialectical method is to accord primacy to totality (Jay, 1977 and 1984: ch. 1). Parts are mediated through totality; isolated facts are abstract and only become concretized when grasped in their essential determination by the totality: “The parts should be interpreted starting from the whole and not the whole from the parts” (SIP, 25). “The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the [dialectical] method” (HCC, 27). “*Das Ganze ist das Wahre*, and that which is detached from the whole is not false, but is only a part of the truth” (SL, 133).

The parts that concern us here are social facts as they appear in their facticity and immediate fixity. To mediate is to interpret social phenomena starting from the whole. To mediate social facts implies that they are detached from their immediate given form and connected to the social and historical conditions which gave birth to them. Through mediation, social facts dissolve into process. Beneath the surface of appearance, their “essence” appears: social facts are human products, they are nothing more than objectified actions and social relations which are historically determined and transitory; they are neither natural, nor eternal. From the historiosophic Marxist perspective, which appears here in the form of a philosophy of life influenced strongly by Marx, actions and relations are historically condemned: “[Mediation] dissolves the rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions; it reveals their historical origins and shows therefore that they are subject to history in every respect including historical decline” (HCC, 47).

Mediation is always totalizing mediation for Lukács; in other words, it is mediation from the standpoint of totality. Although the category of totality is a methodological category, it is clear that drawing his inspiration from the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), Lukács grants totality an ontological dimension (Schnädelbach, 1987). Generally, totality can be defined as the assembling of all the social facts, as they *are*, that is, as they are interpreted from the perspective of the Marxist philosophy of history. To understand what Lukács means when he

refers to totality, imagine that an omniscient God is Marxist (or that Marx is an omniscient God, which is much the same). Totality is the comprehensive onto-teleo-theological perspective, in which history can be apprehended in all its extension, both past and future. The category of totality carries many weighty presuppositions: as a metaphysical guarantee (theology), as knowledge of the meaning of universal history (teleology) and as an ontologically privileged unitary subject to bring it into being (ontology). Grasped from the perspective of totality, social facts are understood as moments of the totality, in other words, as the dialectical process of the historical becoming of society in its globality. Since totality designates both a perspective and the perceived reality of this perspective, or in Kantian terms, both a category and the thing-in-itself, it can be defined as an ontologized historical epistemology, that is, as a hypostatized Marxist perspective.

It is not my intention here to present an in-depth neo-Kantian critique of dialectical holism. I believe that it is entirely possible to abandon the epistemological prerogative of the standpoint of totality, based as it is on the privileged ontological positioning of the universal class, without abandoning the critical perspective of Marxism. Furthermore, by freeing Marxism from its class essentialism, by abandoning the category of the subject as the unitary substrate of history, we open up a path for recognizing multiple agents and thus allow for the possibility of a pluralist and democratic conception of society (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

The proletariat

For Lukács, the standpoint of totality not only determines the object, it also determines the subject of knowledge. In this standpoint, the proletariat is epistemologically privileged. It is not individual proletarians, but the proletariat as a class *sui generis* that gains access to the perspective of totality. He justifies this identification from both the standpoint of totality and the standpoint of the proletariat, arguing that “the totality of an object can only be posited if the positing subject is itself a totality; and if the subject wishes to understand itself, it must conceive of the object as a totality” (HCC, 28). This argument amalgamates Kant, Hegel, and Marx. It integrates Kant, for the standpoint of the proletariat is clearly only a sociological version of the transcendental unity of consciousness; it includes Hegel, for to say that the subject thinks of itself as an object is another way of saying that the substance is a subject; and it involves Marx, since through the bias of reflexive automediation, the tare of universal alienation is transformed into a universal advantage, with the result that the formerly particular class of the proletariat is transformed into a universal class.

The identity of the totality and proletarian standpoints is an identity based on principle, rather than a factual identity, and is reminiscent of Lenin’s distinction between socialist and unionized class consciousness (1978: I, 166 ff. and 188 ff.). Lukács does not claim that what he calls “the standpoint of the proletariat” is identical to the standpoint of the empirical proletariat. On the contrary, it is precisely because the proletariat is factually indifferent to Marxism, because it remains entrenched in the immediacy of reified consciousness, that Lukács connects it to

Marxism through a “hyper-empirical link” and insists on the “objective possibility” (HCC, 51) of raising the consciousness of the proletariat to a degree where it corresponds to what he calls “possible” or “imputed” class consciousness (HCC, 51). This class consciousness is not an empirical consciousness, but a counter-factual consciousness, “imputed” from outside the proletariat by the Marxist theorist. Lukács defines “imputed consciousness” (*zugerechnetes Bewußtsein*) as “*the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class*” (HCC, 73). In terms that clearly indicate that the category of “objective possibility” is borrowed from Weber, he describes the counter-factual character of consciousness as follows: “By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were *able* to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society” (HCC, 51).

In fact, it might seem that class consciousness is a simple transposition of the standpoint of the Marxist intellectual to the workers’ consciousness. Given that, as we shall see below, the conception of the standpoint of the proletariat as a universal standpoint furnishes the theoretical foundation of the “transitory dictatorship” of the Communist Party over the proletariat, it is quite legitimate to ask, following Gouldner (1979: 75 ff. and 1985: 28 ff.), whether this totalizing conception is not in fact the expression of the interests of “organic intellectuals” rather than the workers. To put it bluntly, we might well ask whether the totalizing conception is simply a mystification that seeks to prepare the ground for the hegemony of revolutionary intellectuals.

Lukács believes that the optimal elevation of class consciousness is not only an objective possibility, but that it is also a practical necessity. For the proletariat, knowledge of totality, and thus of Hegelian Marxism, is an “existential question” (G&K, 87) of life and death. Only if the proletariat knows its destiny and identifies with it consciously and willingly can it fulfill its historical mission. When it is transformed from “class in itself” to “class in-and-for itself”, thanks to the category of totality that includes the revolutionary principle, praxis and theory automatically coincide (Mészáros, 1972b). The practical future of theory seems to be a sufficient condition to influence social evolution. Furthermore, if we are to believe Lukács, who is more of an idealist and voluntarist here than ever, then theory alone, as absolute knowledge becomes conscious of itself in the proletariat, already bears the guarantee of ultimate victory:

When the final economic crisis of capitalism develops, *the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, i.e. on its class consciousness.*

(HCC, 70)

...

For the proletariat the truth is a weapon that brings victory. . . . the proletariat and *only* the proletariat can discern in the correct understanding of the *nature of society* a power-factor of the first, and perhaps decisive importance.

(HCC, 68)

Nothing is automatic (Marxism's Iron Law), yet everything is automatic. This idealist synthesis of need and will – the proletariat that knows the script of History and that assumes its historical role with will and consciousness – is hardly credible. Given that Lukács does not have a meta-theoretical category of communication enabling him to explain consciousness raising and the way action is instigated, the dual reversal of class consciousness “in itself” to class consciousness “for itself” and that of revolutionary praxis, is no more than a dialectical quibble.

The triple veil

While the proletariat can accede to the correct vision of reality at least in principle, Lukács believes that the bourgeoisie is quite simply incapable of doing so. For Lukács, bourgeois, scientific, philosophical, and worldly thought is stuck in the immediacy of appearance and experience by definition, since it is necessarily missing the revolutionary category of mediation as methodological lever that makes it possible to place isolated facts in the framework of dialectical totality and thereby to supersede the fixing and naturalizing tendencies of reified consciousness.

Yet if this is the case, how do we explain that Marxism was developed by bourgeois intellectuals such as Marx, Engels, and Lukács? Even as he avoids the thorny question of the sociological determinants of Marxism, Lukács claims without further ado that the bourgeoisie must repress the truths of Marxism consciously or unconsciously, for if it accepted them, it would also have to recognize that it is cursed:

It would be suicidal for the bourgeoisie to grant recognition to historical materialism. Any member of the bourgeoisie who admitted the scientific truth of historical materialism would thereby abandon his own class consciousness and with it the strength needed to defend the interests of his own class effectively.

(HCC, 225)

The objective interests of the bourgeoisie structurally impede their accession to the standpoint of totality, which breaks through the fetishistic veils that hide reality. This structural impossibility leads to a systematic triple deformation of bourgeois thought: first, the transitory character of the capitalist forms of objectivity and the governing laws disappear behind a “veil of eternity” (G&K, 79); second, antagonistic social relations are hidden behind a “veil of thingness” (G&K, 79); third, the cultural character of social facts as socially constructed artifacts disappear behind a “veil of naturalness” (G&K, 79). The result of this triple deformation of consciousness is that it is no longer possible to see through objective social reification. The world, as it is, appears to the bourgeois as *the only possible world*.

In the following chapters, we shall see that what Lukács presents here as a thought experiment was transformed by the Frankfurt School first into a sociological hypothesis and then into an irrefutable metaphysical thesis. With Lukács, and against the members of the Frankfurt School, it is important to maintain the

eminently hermeneutic character of the social sciences and to advance the defetishizing method to dereify their theory of total reification. However, along with the Frankfurt School, Lukács' defetishizing method should be freed from its Hegelian-Marxist mythology of totality, for it is only on this condition that the defetishizing method, which cuts through the triple veil of eternity, thingness, and naturalness, can constitute an important stage for the human sciences. As a matter of fact, I believe that Vico's hermeneutic principle of the *verum factum* is sufficient. From this perspective, what is fetishistic is not bourgeois science as such, but the naturalist human sciences that reify social facts by ignoring their eminently historical, social and meaningful character, even if they do not wish to and usually without even knowing they are doing so.

The sociological question: reification and capitalist alienation

Generalizing the theory of fetishism

In "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (HCC, 83–149), the long and difficult essay that is the core of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács formulates the classic theory of reification (Arato, 1972; Arato and Breines, 1979: 113–141; 1986; Feenberg, 1971; 1986: 59–132; Markus, 1982; Danneman, 1987; Goldmann, 1959, 65–106; Frisby, 1983: 68–106; Lobeck, 1977: 59–89; Perkins, 1993: 125–154). In the first part of the essay, entitled "The Phenomenon of Reification", Lukács develops his concept of reification on the basis of the Marxist analysis of commodity fetishism. As we saw in Chapter 1, the central idea of this analysis is that in an economic system that is totally oriented around market production of exchange values, human actions are coordinated by the market, with the result that human social relations take the form of an abstract and pseudo-natural objectivity, which disguises the trace of its origins and social determinants behind a rigorous system of autonomous and oppressive laws. It follows, to cite Marx's famous phrase, that "it is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (XXXV: 82–83; HCC, 86).

Starting from the thesis that the distinctive characteristic of capitalism is the universalization of "market form", Lukács generalizes the theory of commodity fetishism beyond the field of economics and concludes that the problem of objective abstraction is "the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects" (HCC, 83). This conclusion is supported by the central thesis of his essay, namely that the structure of commodity-relations overdetermines "all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them" (HCC, 83).

By using the expressions "forms of objectivity" and "corresponding forms of subjectivity", Lukács draws attention to the dialectical relation between the pseudo-natural autonomization of objective social structures and the correlative practices of subjects affected by this autonomization not only in their form of existence, but also in their form of thought. Subjective forms appear as both the effect and cause

of objective forms and Lukács perceives the form of reification precisely within this dialectical relation.

Lukács begins his attempt to generalize the theory of commodity fetishism with an analysis of objective and subjective forms in the economic sphere:

Objectively a world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market). The laws governing these objects are indeed gradually discovered by man, but even so they confront him as invisible forces that generate their own power. . . . *Subjectively* – where the market economy has been fully developed – a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article.

(HCC, 87)

From the objective (systemic) standpoint, reification is related to the autonomous functioning of market pseudo-things as “second nature” (HCC, 86), whereas from the subjective (phenomenological) standpoint, it refers to alienation, the objectifying attitude that humans adopt towards the products of work that confront them as foreign objects, and thus their own labor force. As Habermas (1981, I: 475) says, subjects systematically assimilate social relations and subjective experiences to *things*.

Inspired by Simmel, Lukács deduces and rediscovers the theory of alienation of labor from the theory of commodity fetishism. As Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1884* were only published in 1937, Lukács could not have known them any more than Simmel. However, in this instance, it is less through a synthesis of Marx and Simmel – as was the case in *Towards the Sociology of Modern Drama* – than through a fusion of the Marxist category of “abstract work” and Weber’s category of “formal rationality” that Lukács reconstructs the theory of economic alienation. At the risk of repeating material from previous chapters, I shall briefly analyze this synthesis of Weber and Marx.

By eliminating the individual, concrete, and human character of work and reducing it to quantitative parameters (the conversion of concrete work into abstract work), a formally rational, efficient and predictable organization of work becomes possible (formal rationalization of the enterprise). As Weber demonstrated, one condition of the calculability that characterizes capitalism is the division of labor and rational decomposition of the complex production process into parts, dividing up work and reducing the worker to a partial function.

Breaking up the work process into partial operations inevitably fragments the product of work. Its organic unity disappears and is replaced by a mechanical unity, composed of assembled pieces, whose conjunction is determined by calculation. Just as specialization dislocates the object of work, Taylorization dislocates its subject: “[the worker] is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him” (HCC, 89). Faced with this reified system, the subject becomes and passively

adopts a “contemplative attitude”: “the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system” (HCC, 90).

Alienated from his work, the product of his work and himself, the worker is also alienated from those around him. Work no longer unites humans with one another in an immediate, organic fashion. The social cohesion of “isolated atoms” (G&K, 181) only occurs now through the medium of monetary exchange. The coordination of action is not undertaken by an agreement between human beings, instead it is imposed from outside by the autonomous movement of things on the market (*cash nexus*).

Transformed into objects of manipulation, actors adopt the objectifying attitude of instrumental-strategic action towards both themselves and others. Once thingness becomes the determining modality of thought and existence, everything that exists is thought in the form of the thing, so that eventually the subject even self-objectifies himself. Journalists selling their integrity, prostitutes selling their modesty, and marriages of convenience are just a few examples that bear witness to the self-objectification of the subject and the infiltration of venality into everyday life.

Transforming the worker into a commodity and an appendix to the machine, formal rationalization and the universal monetarization of human relations become widespread. Lukács claims that the rational form of organization characterizing the capitalist company becomes the core structure of all societies. As Weber showed, the rational formalization of the company is structurally homologous to the administration of the state, justice, the army or science. Objectively, there is “a comparable search for the rational formal laws of these carefully segregated partial systems” (HCC, 98); subjectively, the powerlessness of the individual is comparable in that it is also manifested in the adoption of a contemplative attitude to social structures and an objectifying attitude towards oneself and others. Just as Weber concluded his analysis of the protestant ethic by claiming that the monk’s fate has become the fate of all, Lukács concludes in a similar vein, stating “the fate of the worker becomes the fate of society” (HCC, 91).

Lukács explicitly develops Weber’s analyses, but by introducing Marx he deforms them somewhat. Unlike Weber, Lukács no longer presents the formal rationalization of the state, the law, etc., as a necessary precondition for the rise of capitalism; instead, he presents them as a consequence of capitalism: “Thus capitalism has created a form for the state and a system of law corresponding to its needs and harmonizing with its own structure” (HCC, 95). Since his entire edifice is based on the identification of formal rationalization and reification (which is capitalist by definition), he is logically forced to invert the causal sequence, interpreting the manifestations of Western rationalism as signs of the process of capitalist infiltration into all aspects of society.

The implication of this Marxist reductionism is that the reification mediated by the political sub-system can no longer be thought of adequately. Here we touch on one of the greatest weaknesses of the whole Marxist tradition: the systematic reduction of the political to the economic and the absence of a reflection on liberal

democracy and the dangers of totalitarianism (Ricoeur, 1964: 260–285; 1986: 433–448). Once the means of production are socialized, the concept of reification loses its critical edge. No doubt it was this conceptual link, connecting reification to capitalism, which led Lukács to proclaim the superiority of real socialism over all forms of capitalism and to legitimize Soviet totalitarianism.

From this perspective, Lukács' interpretation of Weber is regressive compared to Weber himself, and calls for a Weberian correction. It is not a matter of abolishing reification or capitalism as such, but of slowing down the progression of reification in all its forms or, better yet, of testing the limits of possible de-reification. If Lukács' historicism incites total revolution, Weber's historicism, as understood and reconsidered by "post-Marxists", incites radical reformism. For them, it is not so much a matter of inciting critical revolutionary action as of encouraging the evolution towards a radically democratic society.

The limits of bourgeois thought

Lukács believes that reification is capitalist by definition. It is enough to detach social reification from its capitalist terrain and reconnect it to modernity or else not to apply the canons of historical materialism to corroborate the suspicion of ideological reification (the veil of naturalness, thingness, or eternity). Yet, Marxism not only describes social reification, it also explains it. Since it also explains the reified consciousness of the ideologues of the bourgeoisie as an ideological reflection of the reified structure of capitalist society, its intellectual superiority is proven once again. The limit of bourgeois thought is capitalism: because it cannot think beyond capitalism, it cannot think it correctly either. Lukács sees the limit of bourgeois thought as the precise starting point of proletarian thought. If the standpoint of class is a belvedere – the higher up, the wider the horizon and the greater lay of the land visible – then the standpoint of the proletariat is right at the top (Löwy, 1985: 201 ff.).

Lukács believes that the panoramic position of the proletarian standpoint explains why Marxism was able to resolve all the antinomies which twenty centuries of bourgeois philosophy could not resolve. As a materialist philosophy of revolutionary praxis that virtually abolishes the schism between subject and object, Marxism is also the conclusion, and realization of, philosophy.

Convinced of Marxism's superiority, in the second part of "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", entitled "The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought", Lukács presents a materialist sociology of classic German philosophy from Kant to Hegel. Lukács believes that philosophy crosses the threshold of modernity with Kant's "Copernican Revolution": "Hitherto, it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. . . We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge" [*Critique of Pure Reason*, "Preface to the Second Edition", 22]. This revolution, which lies in seeing the world as the product of the knowing subject, launched philosophy into the orbit of systematic rationalism. It is a matter of constructing a formal system of concepts capable of

grasping the totality of content in a consistent, unitary, and thus deductive manner. By establishing the requirement for systematicity and inclusiveness, rationalist philosophy is necessarily confronted by the internal problem of the limits of rational understanding.

The problem of the limits of rational understanding, which, following Nietzsche, Simmel and Weber had already identified, is manifested in the existence of irrational residues, factual content which in principle cannot be derived from the principle of the formalization of the system and must consequently be recognized as contingent (i.e. “neither necessary, nor impossible”). This limit problem is important for Lukács, since starting from the limits of philosophical rationalism he demonstrates the social limits of formal rationalization (Rockmore, 1882: ch. 3 and 5). Since bourgeois thought does not recognize the problem of irrational residues as an eminently practical problem, Lukács believes that it is confronted by a triple dilemma: either it evacuates the problem by dissolving irrational content entirely in the conceptual system, so that thought then falls short of Kant, as in the case of “naive, dogmatic rationalism” (HCC, 118); or it takes the problem seriously and tries to resolve it through philosophical means, becoming lost in the antinomies of bourgeois thought, as in classic German philosophy; or else, it gives up on the problem entirely by refusing any philosophical attempt to master the totality of possible knowledge in a unitary fashion, and it is then unable to grasp its own material substrate, as in bourgeois social science.

The demonstration of the inability of bourgeois philosophy to overcome the irrationality of formal rationalization is based on the following core thesis: “Modern critical philosophy springs from the reified structure of consciousness. The specific problems of this philosophy are distinguishable from the problematics of previous philosophies by the fact that they are rooted in this structure” (HCC, 110–111). As the intellectual expression of false consciousness, classical philosophy must necessarily swing, from one moment to the next, between “the two extremes of crude empiricism and abstract utopianism” (HCC, 77): either consciousness is viewed as a power that can master the movement of things at will, at least subjectively (“abstract utopianism”); or noticing that something eludes it, it becomes an entirely passive spectator of this self-regulating movement in which it does not wish to intervene (“crude empiricism”). On the one hand therefore there is mental, *ergo* fictive, mastery of this reality – this is the structure of the bourgeois false consciousness of idealist philosophy; on the other hand, there is passive contemplation of external reality – the structure reappears now in the alienated worker’s reified consciousness in bourgeois science. These two modes of reified consciousness converge in classic German philosophy, producing insurmountable antinomies between subject and object, form and content, freedom and necessity, being and becoming, ethics and politics.

As a fine connoisseur of German philosophy, Lukács begins his analysis with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. With the notion of the “thing-in-itself”, Kant was the first to explicitly recognize and accept a “limit, a barrier, to the abstract, formal, rationalistic, ‘human’ faculty of cognition” (HCC, 114). From the outset, Lukács interprets the Kantian critique as an expression of the universalization of commodity

form in thought. By putting the Marxist problematic in parallel with human relations transmuted into opaque, apparently ungraspable, things and the Kantian concept of a noumenal realm of “things-in-themselves”, which is just as hermetically impenetrable, Lukács seeks to unveil Kantian dualism as the expression of the objective situation of society in thought: “The contradiction that appears here between subjectivity and objectivity in modern rationalist formal systems . . . the conflict between their nature as systems created by ‘us’ and their fatalistic necessity distant from and alien to man is nothing but the logical and systematic formulation of the modern state of society” (HCC, 128).

Starting from the hypothesis that the rational and formalist mode of knowledge is the only possible way (the only way possible “for us”) to grasp reality, Kant was led to recognize the impossibility of grasping factual data which is foreign to us (the “thing-in-itself”). But once the limits of rational understanding are reached, paradoxically Kant’s attitude becomes “purely contemplative.”

Having come up against the limits of rational understanding, Kant moves from epistemology to ethics in his search for the place of unity from which to overcome the schism between subject and object. Lukács interprets this move from knowing subject to ethical subject, introduced by Kant in the second *Critique*, as the “road that leads inwards” (HCC, 122). Since praxis is not externally oriented, the subject necessarily remains the object of the laws of the external world: the “conformity of natural becoming to the eternal laws of nature” and the “purely internal freedom of individual moral praxis” remain separate, as demonstrated in Kant’s mature theory of two worlds.

As we know, Kant subsequently moved from ethics to aesthetics. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he sought to overcome the dualism of subject and object through art. Although the spontaneity characterizing the intuitive rational understanding of the aesthetic subject supersedes the contemplation and interiority of pure and practical reason, after having been tempted for a short time by the third *Critique*’s solution, Lukács believes that art can endow the world with an aesthetic form at the very most; it cannot overcome the schism between subject and object. Lukács saw a path towards a definitive solution to the problem in Hegel. Going from art to history, he developed the dialectical method, the only one that allows a conception of history as a process of dissolution of the opposition between subject and object: “But only if that were the case, only if ‘the true [were understood] not only as substance but also as subject’ can the problem of dialectics, and with it the abolition of the antitheses of subject and object, thought and existence, freedom and necessity, be held to be solved” (HCC, 142).

Although Lukács praises Hegel for having discovered the solution, he still believes that he became lost in the labyrinth of “conceptual mythology.” The real subject, “the ‘we’ which is the subject of history, that ‘we’ whose action is in fact history” (HCC, 145) is not the Spirit. The Spirit, Hegel’s identical subject-object, does not make history. Lukács is certainly right about this, but I think he is mistaken when he believes that he has found Ariadne’s thread in the proletariat. The identical subject-object is not the proletariat; it is God, at least in scholastic philosophy.

The political question: redemption of the proletariat

We have seen that Lukács defines capitalism through reification, that is, through the dialectical process that connects the specifically capitalist form of the objectivity of social relations to corresponding forms of subjectivity. For Lukács, the fetishistic commodity is the prototype of all social relations under capitalism. Mediated by money, formally rationalized human relations autonomize and objectify to such an extent that they appear as relations between things. Reified consciousness is the ideological corollary of the reified structure of capitalist society. As ideological reification is connected to social reification by a circular causality, capitalism appears to be a totally closed system. Induced by the reification of social relations, false consciousness reproduces and reinforces social reification: “The structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man” (HCC, 93). . . . the reified world appears henceforth quite definitively . . . as the only possible world” (HCC, 110).

Only a spirit that has become conscious of itself and that defetishizes social relations can break through the closed system, which is why Lukács accords such importance to the dialectic of consciousness. Initially, the social being is immediately the same for both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Unable to pierce the triple veil of eternity, thingness, and naturalness that cloak social relations, both remain noologically stuck in the illusion of immediacy. But, while the dynamic of class interests imprisons the bourgeoisie in false consciousness, it pushes the proletariat to overcome it. To explain this privilege, Lukács transposes the analysis of the limits of formal rationalization from philosophy to the social field. If philosophical rationalization finds its limits in the “thing-in-itself”, social rationalization finds it in the “human thing.”

Here Lukács touches on an important point: even in extreme circumstances human beings can never be reduced to mere things. There is – if the expression still holds after Auschwitz and Srebrenica – an inalienable kernel in humanity. Unfortunately, Lukács then takes off on another tangent. Following Marx, he conceives the capitalist rationalization of the work process in terms of the reduction of labor force to a commodity, from concrete work to abstract work and from the worker to a state of calculable quantity. Moving from a systemic to a phenomenological analysis, Lukács notes that these reifying abstractions find their sensible expression in labor time. For the worker, time loses its qualitative nature. It becomes stuck on a clearly delimited continuum that can be measured quantitatively, and that ultimately turns into space, as Lukács says, taking his inspiration from Bergson (1988). With the spatialization of time, reification reaches its culmination. And it is exactly at that moment that the spell of reification is broken: “It is true that in the problem of labour-time, just because it shows reification at its zenith, we can see how proletarian thought is necessarily driven to surpass this immediacy” (HCC, 167).

The worker becomes conscious of himself as a commodity and, revealing the fetishistic nature of all commodities, he recognizes his own relations with capital. With this “transformation of quantity into quality” (HCC, 166), the object is

dialectically transformed into a subject. Consciousness ‘explodes’ (Mann, 1980: ch. 6) and, from then on everything follows automatically: “When the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical. *That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge. . . . its core, the relation between men, enters into the evolution of society*” (HCC, 169).

Following Lukács, up to this point we have only spoken of the individual worker. But Lukács is not Carlyle: “for the individual, reification and hence determinism . . . are irremovable” (HCC, 193). The individual, whether he is a worker or an entrepreneur, an illusionist or a philosopher, can change nothing: “Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way. (The ‘species’ cannot do this as it is no more than an individual that has been mythologized and stylized in a spirit of contemplation)” (HCC, 193). By telescoping the Hegelian categories of conscious reflection (*Phenomenology of the Spirit*) and totality (*Logic*), Lukács surreptitiously substitutes the proletariat for the worker: “The proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality” (HCC, 197). The proletariat then begins to act and, by putting “violence [in] the service of man and the flowering of man” (HCC, 251), it abolishes itself by simultaneously abolishing the enslaving domination of reified relations weighing on human beings. Thus, as in the young Marx, the Calvary of reification comes to its end in the redemption of humanity.

This dialectical description of the path from reification to redemption is extremely problematic for at least two reasons. The first is the problem of the functional differentiation that characterizes all modern societies; the second, the problem of the mediation of theory and practice.

To confront the first problem, we must return to Marx. In Chapter 1, we saw that Marx attacked the “second order mediations” that intervene between humans. His ideal is a simple, transparent society in which the state and economy, or in Habermas and Luhmann’s terms, auto-regulated sub-systems, would be reabsorbed, becoming coextensive with lifeworld. I commented that this refusal of mediations, which despite the fact that autonomy is inevitable in a modern society, fails to take the relative autonomy of social structures into account was historically superseded. Lukács shares Marx’s anachronistic ideal of a dedifferentiated world without second order mediations. But inevitably this somewhat anarchic ideal comes into conflict with his Weberian approach. As we have seen, Lukács generalizes Marx’s theory of fetishism by reconnecting it to Weber’s theory of formal rationalization. Following Weber, he conceives of social reification as a process of differentiation of sub-systems and lifeworld. Whether it is a matter of economics, state administration, law or army, he observes that formal rationalization is structurally homologous everywhere.

This parallel in the evolution of sub-systems, each following their own laws, implies that society can no longer be thought of as a unity (Luhmann, 1997, II: 743–805). But this is not the conclusion Lukács draws. Following Marx, he conceives of global society from the perspective of the economic factor as the last instance. From this reductionist perspective, the economic sub-system does not figure as one sub-system among others, but is essentially the system *par excellence*

that (over)determines all other sub-systems. It follows that all that is needed to abolish reification is the abolition of the relative autonomy of the economic sub-system, which thereby abolishes the relative autonomy of all other sub-systems. The revolution sets back the arrow of time and the differentiation of sub-systems is suppressed, as a result of which the system becomes coextensive with the lifeworld.

Retrospectively, it turns out that the differentiation and irreducibility of sub-systems was only apparent. In this instance, when the substance appears as subject, Lukács the Marxist proves to be hyper-Hegelian. The revolution overcomes the schism between subject and object, and the world appears once again as an immaculate “ethical world” (*sittliche Welt*) devoid of alienation. Thus, the revolution realizes the ethical utopia of a new Hellenism. Following the analyses of Lefort (1986: 17–30, 251–300) and Gauchet (1976), revolution might be seen as the pathological negation of the political divide and the desperate attempt to restore unity in a necessarily divided society, divided within itself by both conflict of interests and the separation of the state. From this perspective, revolution is the implementation of the logic of identification, and the implementation of the logic of identification is totalitarianism.

So far as the second problem regarding the mediation of theory and practice in the shift from reification to redemption is concerned, it is important to note that Lukács assumes that the ideological crisis of the proletariat can be superseded immanently within the production process itself. The proletariat spontaneously becomes conscious of itself as a commodity and theory becomes immediately practical. Since Lukács does not thematize the process of communication that allows this escape from reification, it is not clear how the self-consciousness of atomized individuals can give rise to intersubjective recognition of the other or knowledge of the totality. This difficulty presents a hiatus that the dialectic cannot easily overcome.

Reflecting on this problem, Lukács develops a theory of the Communist Party to resolve the problem of mediating theory and practice in the essay “Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization.” Convinced, as Lenin was, that the proletariat is still imprisoned by reified consciousness, he believes that it must be guided towards ideological maturity by an avant-garde, elitist minority party. His recourse to the idea of the avant-garde party implies dropping the Marxist thesis that knowledge of totality would intervene in a spontaneous manner and accepting the Leninist thesis that it should be externally introduced by the party that incarnates class consciousness and acts on behalf of the masses. By identifying the proletariat as the historical subject (utopia) and the historical subject as the party (ideology), Lukács justifies constraint through an appeal to the subject and takes the instrument of revolution as its achievement. Thus, utopia turns into ideology and ideology into utopia (Touraine, 1965: 164 ff., 1973: 173 ff.).

Even if we accept the idea that the revolutionary organic intellectuals can educate the masses and raise their consciousness to the standpoint of totality, Lukács cannot explain the process of emancipation in any satisfactory manner, for lack of a theory of inter-subjectivity. In *Theory and Practice*, Habermas (1973a: 32–40) identified the authoritarian consequences of the theory of organization of the

emancipation of the proletariat by the party. Since Lukács does not see the emancipation process as a communication process between equals, but rather, as a strategic stage in which the party imposes its points of view and decisions on the proletariat without discussion – his reference to “discipline” as “the first step to the freedom” (HCC, 361) is revealing in this regard – his attempt to cross the abyss separating actual class consciousness from possible class consciousness leads directly to the dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat and indirectly to the socialism of the Gulag. As Habermas (1973a: 36) concludes: “Stalinist practice has furnished the fatal proof that a Party organization which proceeds instrumentally and a Marxism which has degenerated into a science of apologetics complement each other only too well.”

If there is something to retain from Lukács, it is no doubt the negative idea of the justifying connection between the metaphysics of totality and totalitarianism. The identity of subject and object is only a myth, but it has real implications for organizing emancipation. The main faults of Marxism, namely its dogmatism and scorn for freedom and democracy (which Lukács considers a bourgeois product on a par with prostitution, quoted in Kadarkay, 1991: 227), are a call for intellectual modesty. Lukács will have at least taught us that we must break, once and for all, if not with the grand narratives of emancipation, then at least with the imposture of Truth.

Conclusion

In contrast to Simmel and Weber who were seduced by a Nietzschean inspired irrationalism of the right, Lukács deviates towards a hyper-rationalism of the left of Hegelian inspiration. In the previous chapters, I suggested that the attachment of bourgeois sociology to the past required correction through the injection of a good dose of the emancipatory interests found in Marx. At this point, Lukács’ correction appears to require correction through the introduction of neo-Kantian elements of epistemological criticism in Simmel and Weber. Indeed, although Lukács’ theory of reification is an admirable synthesis of Marx’s theory of alienation and fetishism, Simmel’s theory of the tragedy of culture and society, and Weber’s theory of formal rationalization, the synthesis is invalidated because it begs the question in a manner that is not only ontologically false and epistemologically untenable, but that also has politically undesirable implications.

From a critical perspective, the central category of “totality” presents the greatest problem. If we wish to retain totality as a defetishizing critical tool that breaks through the triple veil of naturalness, thingness, and eternity, then we must start by demythologizing it. First of all, the hegemonic intellectual pretensions of Marxism must be swept aside. Contrary to Lukács’ claims, Marxism is not the “Himalaya”, although he was certainly correct when he added that “the leveret that leaps from its summit is not for all that a greater animal than the elephant in the plain” (quoted in Lefebvre, 1986: 39). Next, we must question the very possibility of the perspective of the totalization of past, present, and future history as an onto-theo-teleological atavism. History has no *telos*, and even if it had one, only

God could know it, and even then . . . By definition, history is an open system, without a script and with no unitary substrate.

By letting go of Marxism's essentialist class fetishism, we arrive at a post-Marxist position, but what we lose in metaphysical guarantees is largely compensated for by what we gain in empirical depth. The new social movements, which are the inheritors of the worker movement, do very well without Marxist luminaries, and theorists of these movements must do without them, for the Marxist categories, oriented as they are to the "last instance", screen the political and hardly allow for a conceptualization of the attempts to make a radical democratization of society. Indeed, the political (in Lefort's sense) and the radical democratization of society that it implies, is the blind spot in the Marxist tradition. Since democracy is based on the pluralist debate, it assumes a dissolution of the markers of certainty. As such, it is incompatible with the theological and political perspective of totality. If the history of the twentieth century has taught us just one thing, it is that totalization and totalitarianism are not a good mix.

Part 2

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School

Second intermediate reflections

The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, as it is commonly known, is an academic myth. Strictly speaking, the very concept of critical theory is incompatible with that of a school and all that it connotes: unity of worldview and method, a defined orthodoxy, the constitution of dogma, and even a designated leader. While there is no single critical theory, and *a fortiori* no school, there are, however, several critical theories, or, better yet, several critical theorists dealing with a similar issue (domination) within a shared tradition of thought (Western Marxism). To treat “critical theory” as a homogenous entity is also to ignore the differences between its various periods (Frankfurt/New York/Frankfurt) and the different authors (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin).

That being said, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory title is part of common language of sociologists and philosophers, to refer to both a circle of para-Marxist intellectuals and a radical and totalizing theory of society (see Arato and Gebhardt, 1978; Held, 1980; Connerton, 1980; Kellner, 1989; Bernstein, 1994). All the intellectuals involved were associated with the *Institut für Sozialforschung*. This institute, founded in 1923 in Frankfurt-am-Main by Felix Weil, son of a very wealthy Jewish merchant, was the only Marxist institute in pre-war Germany. However, it was not until 1931, when Max Horkheimer became director of the Institute, that the ground was really laid for what later became the Frankfurt School – which is a misleading name, since the most important work was in fact written in exile in the United States (see Jay, 1973; Wiggershaus, 1988). When Horkheimer took over from Carl Grünberg, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* also became the Institute’s journal (Schmidt, 1974: 36–124). Under Horkheimer’s intellectual direction – if not, as some have claimed, under his “dictatorship” – the luxurious offices of the Institute of the Senckenberganlage were occupied by such famous names as Theodor W. Adorno (philosophy, sociology, musicology, literary criticism), Herbert Marcuse (social philosophy), Erich Fromm (psychoanalysis, social psychology), Friedrich Pollock (economics, specifically planning issues), Leo Löwenthal (sociology of culture and literature), Franz Neumann (economics, political sociology, sociology of law), Otto Kirchheimer (political sociology, sociology of law) and, last but not least, Walter Benjamin (philosophy, literary criticism). The core, or to use Axel Honneth’s (1987) expression, the “inner circle”, of the Institute that formed around Horkheimer included Adorno, Marcuse, Pollock,

Fromm (until 1939) and Löwenthal. In this study, I limit myself exclusively to the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno.¹

While the central question for bourgeois sociologists is the problem of social order, for Marxist sociologists the question is “social disorder” (Lockwood, 1992: x and 166–167): why is it that contrary to Marx’s predictions, the polarization of classes and the revolution of the proletariat has not taken place in the most advanced capitalist countries? The position of critical theory has evolved in response to this thorny issue. The course of the development of critical theory has been closely linked to Western society (fascism in Europe, Stalinism in the Soviet Union, mass culture in the United States, see Dubiel, 1985: Part 1), as it has gradually evolved from a critical and revolutionary theory of monopoly capitalism to a radical theoretical critique of formal-instrumental rationality. To grasp the shift in the 1930s from a Marxist revolutionary position to a melancholic leftist Weberian perspective that focuses exclusively on the issue of reification, it is important to understand that the origin (and conclusion) of critical theory’s evolution is the refutation of Lukács’ theory of class consciousness. Indeed, Lukács’ theory of reification, as presented in *History and Class Consciousness*, is the paradigmatic kernel of critical theory (Brunkhorst, 1983). As we have seen, Lukács’ theory integrates the Weberian-Marxist theory of reification with the Hegelian-Marxist theory of class consciousness in a problematic synthesis. Critical theory decomposes this synthesis, thereby destroying it: on the one hand, it abandons the Hegelian-Marxist theory of class consciousness (i) yet, on the other, it radicalizes the Weberian-Marxist theory of reification (ii).

i) *Refutation of the theory of class consciousness.* While Lukács might still have believed, within the framework of Hegelian logic, that reification would necessarily find its limits in the proletariat’s consciousness as self-consciousness of the commodity, the members of the Frankfurt School did not. They criticized the thesis that sees the identity of subject and object in the proletariat as a leftover of Hegelianism and turned it into an empirical hypothesis. In the end, it turned out that the proletariat is not at all revolutionary. On the contrary, totally integrated into society, it is in fact one of the great ramparts of late capitalism. Without the theory of class consciousness, the whole edifice of Lukács’ thought collapses, however, for if the proletariat is not replaced by something else, if it is no longer the agent of redemption, but is seen instead as the victim of domination and repression, the negation of reification becomes undetermined and abstract. Instead of abandoning the premises of the philosophy of revolution in favor of a post-Marxist theory of radical democratic reformism, the members of the Frankfurt School remained attached to the onto-theo-teleological figure of reification and redemption right to the end. In my opinion, this significant Marxist baggage, this *Restmarxismus*, explains why, after 1945, Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse desperately sought a replacement solution for the theory of class consciousness, in religion (Horkheimer), aesthetics (Adorno), or a philosophical-aesthetic-biological bric-a-brac (Marcuse). Yet in the end this research came to nothing. One way or another, it resulted in a perfectly utopian vision of what society ought to be, and thus of what it could be if it were perfectly adequate to its concept (the rational

identity of subject and predicate). Gradually, as Lukács' revolutionary messianism gave way to a sort of "melancholy of the left" (Benjamin) and to a "nostalgia for the Totally Other" (Horkheimer) – thus abstractly contrasting utopia to dystopia – the members of the Frankfurt School came to believe that there was no way out of reification other than through the utopian rupture (in Marcuse, a decisionist rupture) of the Event. In short, critical theory degenerated into a theoretical criticism of reification.

ii) *Verification of the theory of reification.* Without the proletariat, there is no hope. Without the Hegelian-Marxist element, all that remains is the Weberian-Marxist dimension of Lukács' theory of reification. This is the hard core of critical theory. From the start – from Horkheimer's first attacks on positivism to Adorno's analyses of fetishism in music and Marcuse's theory of one-dimensional society – the Weberian-Marxist theory of reification was apparently corroborated by the facts. In so far as all the writings of the inner circle of the Frankfurt School are constituted, originally and without an exception by what I call the *a priori* of reification, the *a posteriori* verification of reification is no mere chance. The members of the Frankfurt School never sought to refute, via Popper or any other means, the Weberian-Marxist thesis of reification. Whether in Horkheimer's Schopenhauer-inspired Marxism, Adorno's Nietzschean Marxism or Marcuse's Freudian-Marxism, they all radicalized, universalized, absolutized, and ontologized the theory of reification. Consequently, they all reached the same conclusion: reification is total.

I believe that this observation regarding reification, which in fact is self-refuting, saps the foundations of critical theory, for if reification is total, criticism essentially becomes impossible. Indeed, a theory of the social can only be critical on condition that it does not totalize social reification. Reification is certainly a methodological *a priori* of critical theory, but the theory can only retain its critical force and emancipatory drive if it consciously and reflexively controls its meta-theoretical assumptions. If the *a priori* of reification becomes a metaphysical *a priori*, that is, if it is not reflexively controlled and counterbalanced by the *a priori* of the autonomy of the subject, the meta-theoretical space of possibilities crystallizes and critical theory is transformed into a mere theoretical critique of reification. A critical theory that substitutes the metaphysics of reification for its heuristics is not a critical theory, but rather a one-dimensional theory of the social.

In Part 2, I demonstrate that the diagnosis of reification by the Frankfurt School is the result of a premature crystallization of the meta-theoretical space of possibilities. From the start, critical theory presents itself as a "functionalism of the worst case" (Bourdieu), so that it only includes social processes that contribute to the stabilization and reproduction of domination. By projecting its restrained and ultra-determinist meta-theoretical model (utilitarianism and materialist structure) on to reality and by later substituting one for the other, critical theory systematically and methodically reified the reifier. Whatever reification theorists say, their one-dimensional society is quite simply the result of their own one-dimensional theory. In this sense, critical theory well and truly becomes the symptom of its own diagnosis. Reification is not only the *a priori* of critical theory; it is also its blind spot.

Because critical theory starts with reification, it concludes with “The End” – the end of ideology, the end of history, the end of the individual. If there is one lesson to be learnt from critical theory, apart from its sensitivity to human suffering and its refusal to forget Nazi crimes, it is no doubt its meta-theoretical failure. Since a theory can only be critical by assuming an open social system, critical theory, oriented as it is towards the proof of the closure of the system, is a contradiction in terms. The theoretical and political impasse in which it became entrenched proves that if theory wishes to be critical, that is, if it wants to be more than a theoretical critique of domination, it must absolutely re-open the meta-theoretical space of possibilities of social theory.

5 Max Horkheimer

From the pseudo-natural organicity of society to total reification¹

In the space of forty years of intense intellectual activity, the thought of Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) evolved considerably. Horkheimer was the guiding spirit of what is now known as the Frankfurt School, by analogy with the Cologne School (König) and the Munster School (Schelsky). His thought, which was strongly influenced by the historical events of fascism, Stalinism and the rapid development of mass society, was in no way monolithic. In fact, his intellectual evolution can be characterized in terms of an increasing disillusionment with the postponement of the revolution, which first led him to undertake interdisciplinary research into the causes of the postponement of the revolution, then to a re-evaluation of Marxist philosophy, then to the radicalization of the critique of rationalization, and finally to a devaluation of civilization.

Introduction: from science to religion

Horkheimer distinguished two phases in his intellectual evolution in retrospect (see CT, 188 sq): “yesterday’s critical theory”, that is, the Marxist, revolutionary theory of the 1930s, and the “critical theory of today”, the post-war theory that both critiqued the administered world and explicitly abandoned the revolutionary project, withdrawing into strictly defensive, if not reactionary, positions.

On analysis it seems to me, however, that this bi-polar periodization is insufficient. Although it accounts for the pessimistic turn in Horkheimer’s thought, it neglects the fact that the “critical theory of yesterday” and the “critical theory of today” both underwent significant ruptures. This is why I reconstruct Horkheimer’s thought by distinguishing between four, rather than two, different periods: 1) inter-disciplinary materialism (1930–1936); 2) critical theory (1936–1941); 3) critique of formal-instrumental rationality (1941–1950); 4) metaphysical pessimism (1950–1973).

In the following pages, I show that from the start Horkheimer’s conception of his theoretical program included only processes that contribute to the reproduction of domination and to reification. From my own meta-critical perspective, the closed model of an entirely administered society is the direct result of a “functionalism of the worst case” founded in “the *a priori* of reification” – an *a priori* that obscures perception so that only processes of domination and reification can be

apprehended. Since Horkheimer limits the meta-theoretical space of sociology to a combination of a strategic concept of action and a materialist concept of social structure, it could be said, echoing Marcuse's famous book, that the one-dimensional society is the result of Horkheimer's own one-dimensional thought. While in Marx, Simmel, Weber, and Lukács, there was a gradual crystallization of the space of possibilities, it is closed from the start in Horkheimer. Reification is thus already incorporated into the metatheoretical premises of his social theory.

In so far as the "over-integrated vision of society" (Wrong) is present in Horkheimer's writings from the beginning, it is the most important element of continuity in Horkheimer's thought, along with Schopenhauer's influence. The mark left by Schopenhauer, the pessimistic metaphysician of blind will and pity, to whom Horkheimer owed his first contact with philosophy (TT, 12), is clear in his youthful writings prior to 1930, latent in his texts from the 1930s and 1940s, and reappears dramatically in his post-war writing. It is responsible for his refusal of any metaphysical transfiguration of evil, his refusal of any theory of the ruses of reason, as well as his reaction of protest, made up of a mixture of intransigent sadness and penetrating pity towards all suffering, whether animal or human, past, present, or future. Truth be told, this acute sensitivity to absurd pain, and the ethical radicalism that follows from it, explains the unique attraction of his last writings. Schopenhauer's influence is also responsible for making Horkheimer a profoundly tragic figure, not to say pathetic. Ultimately, he was consumed by a combination of metaphysical pessimism and negative theology, precisely because he wished to preserve human dignity in a ruined world, because he wished to be a humanist in a dehumanized world.

Interdisciplinary materialism (1930–1936)

Dialectical positivism

In his early writings, Horkheimer begins with the Marxist view that bourgeois society is in crisis. The central postulate, from which he develops his diagnosis of the crisis of liberal capitalism is *Naturwüchsigkeit*, the "pseudo-natural organicity" of society in general and the capitalist economy in particular. In competitive capitalism, society acts as a "second nature" that develops, evolves, and declines according to the laws of free-trade. For lack of a central organ that artificially identifies interests and rationally coordinates individual actions, social and economic processes occur in a blind, anarchic manner: "In the present economic system society appears to be as blind as sub-rational nature. For men do not use communal reflection and decision to regulate the process by which they earn their living in association with others" (CT, 81). Instead, each individual selfishly and strategically pursues his own interests, and this explains the pseudo-natural organicity of society in meta-theoretical terms.

In Horkheimer's view, the constraining necessity with which the production and reproduction of human life take place, the autonomy which economic forces have acquired over human beings and the dependency of all social groups in regard

to the economic apparatus are reflected in the logical necessity that characterizes the Marxist deductions of political economy. Indeed, at the entirely opposite pole from Adorno's anti-system, Horkheimer follows Marx in advocating a rigorously deductive theoretical system. He believes that the central category of political economy is free exchange. Starting from free exchange all categories (money, capital, exploitation) and all historical trends (concentration of capital, decline in the rate of profit, unemployment, and crises) can be deduced in flawless sequence:

Every thesis [of Marxist political economy] necessarily follows from the first postulate, the concept of free exchange of commodities . . . That men cannot shape their labor according to their common will . . . that they fall into misery, war and destruction instead of using the immeasurably increased social wealth for their happiness, . . . [that they] are the slaves instead of the masters of their fate – this finds expression in the form of logical necessity, proper to the true theory of contemporary society.

(FSR, 433–434)

Horkheimer interprets Marxism in a naturalist and positivist sense, presenting it as the “theory of current society.” Marxism studies historical phenomena with regard to their causal entanglement. It does not assume any *a priori* methodological differences between the natural sciences and the social sciences. On closer inspection, it turns out that the young Horkheimer's epistemological assumptions are barely distinguishable from those of the left wing of the Vienna circle (Korthals, 1985): not only does he claim openly that materialism shares positivism's empiricist criteria of verification, surprisingly he also defends the principle of axiological neutrality.

Everything changed in 1934. Horkheimer abandoned positivism and adopted a more dialectical position. Without ever adopting a hermeneutic approach, he became engaged in a virulent critique of positivism and exchanged the empiricist criterion for a historical-practical criterion of truth – the Marxist truth as a “truth to be made”, as a “moment of correct praxis” (PS, 200). Horkheimer believed that positivism's main flaw was its failure to recognize freedom. Since it is not founded on a dialectical philosophy of praxis, it does not see the schism between subject and object or individual and society as a stage that has been produced and that should be superseded, instead it views it as an irrefutable fact. Even worse, the schism between subject and object is the fundamental assumption of positivism. Although Horkheimer shares the positivists' *a priori* of reification, he distances himself from them by assuming that reification can be overcome through active, conscious, and voluntary human intervention. Like Marx and Lukács, Horkheimer thus assumes a voluntarist philosophy of praxis and a humanist vision of human beings. Paradoxically, the reifying analysis of society only serves to stimulate human consciousness and freedom. Nevertheless, as we shall see, this dialectical ruse fails to reduce the enormous gap between his methodological (defetichizing) prescriptions and his theoretical (reifying) descriptions.

In “Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics” (PB, 137–156), Horkheimer primarily attacks Hegel’s philosophy of history. In the name of science, he rejects the metaphysics of identity that seeks to found empirical data on absolute knowledge and in the name of morality, he rejects the transfiguration of reality and suffering. For Hegel (as for Lukács), individuals must suffer and sacrifice themselves in the name of a sublime goal or for the sake of Salvation. But for Horkheimer suffering is never justified and past injustices can never be repaired. Nothing will ever compensate the suffering of previous generations. This retrospective sadness, which he shares, moreover, with Walter Benjamin, is inherent to Horkheimer’s Schopenhauerian Marxism. The fact that the injustice of the past can never be repaired and that perfect justice will never be achieved explains the “pessimistic aspect” of materialism (CT, 122).

This compassion grounds Horkheimer’s critique of contemporary society. The suffering of living beings (plants and animals included) is the criterion by which he judges social formations. However, this pathocentric criterion strikes me as incompatible with the productivist criterion of judgment that Horkheimer also employs, and that ultimately gains the upper hand. The productivist criterion is industrial in nature: all that counts is the development of productive forces. The suffering of living beings is not taken into account, or else is simply considered necessary. Future society, as Horkheimer imagines it, is not a society without pain, it is rather a rationally managed society that has shed its pseudo-natural organicity. Following Saint-Simon and Marx, Horkheimer postulates that the rational domination of nature and the rigorous planning of the economy produce freedom, stating that: “real freedom is identical to the domination of nature” (GS3, 157) and “the freedom of individuals means the sublation of their economic independence in a plan” (PS, 37).

Only later did Horkheimer realize that this rationally planned society, in which “political problems are reduced to problems of material management” (TT, 186) can only ever be a technocratic and bureaucratic society, a formally rational and wholly administered society that eliminates all freedom. Indeed, as we shall soon see, while in the 1930s Horkheimer placed all his hopes in the dual process of dominating nature and planning society, in the 1940s this approach underwent a radical re-evaluation.

Interdisciplinary materialism

In his inaugural speech in Frankfurt in 1931, entitled “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research” (PS, 1–14), Horkheimer proposes a Marxist interdisciplinary and post-metaphysical research program intended to integrate philosophy and science into a theory of society that is both philosophically informed and empirically verifiable (Bonss and Schindler, 1982). The avowed goal of this research program is to “pursue their larger philosophical questions on the basis of the most precise scientific methods” (PS, 9). Reformulated in a manner closer to current research methods, the big philosophical questions have to do with “the question of the connection between the

economic life of society, the psychic development of individuals, and the changes in the realm of culture" (PS, 11). For Horkheimer, this ambitious project of a philosophical informed program of social research, later pursued by Habermas through other means, requires an organizational integration of the social sciences. This is why he proposes "to organize investigations stimulated by contemporary philosophical problems in which philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, and psychologists are brought together in a permanent collaboration" (PS, 9).

To achieve the union of philosophy and science, Horkheimer proposes the Marxist method of dialectical synthesis of presentation (*Darstellung*) and research (*Forschung*), a method that produces a totalizing, concrete, and living image of reality on the basis of empirical data (Dubiel, 1985: 141–149). The function of representation, which as Marx said, aims to "make frozen social relations dance by singing their tune" is to reconsider the data of empirical research and recompose it by placing it, following Lukács' principle of "concrete totality", in new conceptual frameworks that dissolve the fixity of recorded facts. According to the methodological principle of "mediation", an object of knowledge should never be seen as an isolated object, abstracted from its wider context, but should always be understood in terms of a totality given in a more or less latent manner together with the object.

In the framework of the interdisciplinary research program, the dialectic of research and presentation can be re-formulated in terms of the dialectic of specialized sciences and philosophy. The specialized sciences (economics, sociology, psychology, history) contribute to the creation of the image of the theoretical totality by giving philosophy the necessary elements for the theoretical construction of totality. Philosophy, as a theoretical pursuit oriented to the universal, takes scientific results and exceeds their limitations by integrating them into a synthetic and synoptic image of social reality, which then appears as an *a priori* construction. Thus, through the dialectic of scientific research and philosophical presentation, Horkheimer believes that he can supersede the deficits of positivism (hypostasis of facts and fragmentation of the image of reality) and metaphysics (hypostasis of concepts and dogmatism), as well as their dissociation.

The main question for Marxism is the question of "social disorder": why hasn't the revolution taken place? The Marxist analysis of objective social conditions, forces, and means of production, demonstrates that a highly productive and rationally planned socialist society is objectively possible. And yet the revolution is constantly postponed. The worker movement stagnates and the proletariat is divided between increasingly integrated salaried workers and the powerless and impoverished unemployed (DD, 61–65). Nonetheless, Horkheimer believes that despite everything Marxist theory still offers "a formulation of historical experience that corresponds to current knowledge" (GS3, 56). The contradiction between productive forces and the structure of capitalist society is just as deep, if not deeper, than at the time when Marx was writing. If the Marxist analysis of the objective conditions of the development of capital is still valid, then an explanation is needed as to why the subjective conditions of revolution are missing. The central question, at the heart of all the Frankfurt School research is thus the following:

“What are the origins of the psychic mechanisms that explain why the tensions between the social classes, which the economic situation pushes towards conflict, remain latent?” (GS3, 60).

The fact that Horkheimer asks this question shows that he had already conceived in detail the theoretical model of interdisciplinary social research: political economy is still the central discipline offering the key for understanding the structure and dynamics of society. But, since the conditions of its application have changed and its predictions have not materialized, a social depth psychology (*Tiefenpsychologie*) as well as a theory of culture have to be added as epicycles to explain the integration and conformism of individuals in capitalist society (Honneth, 1987: 347–358; 1989: 12–42).

To explain the persistence of outmoded social forms, Horkheimer proposes what was then a daring theoretical alliance between Freud and Marx (GS3: 48–69). He claims that the reason why men contribute to the persistence of economic relations that do not correspond to either the level reached in the development of productive forces or to their real interests can be explained by the fact that the actions of the majority are not determined by knowledge, but instead by “a dynamic drive that distorts consciousness” (GS3, 59) and which is itself determined “even in its finest ramifications” (GS3, 65) by the economic situation. Horkheimer’s analysis follows Erich Fromm (1932) who, in his outline of an analytic social psychology, developed a materialist version of the Freudian thesis of “repressive sublimation.” Unlike “self-preserving drives”, which must be satisfied by “real” means (for example, food appeases hunger), “libidinal drives” can be distorted, sublimated, or satisfied by phantasms or ideological trickery. Once this is understood, ideologies can be explained in terms of the influence of economic conditions on drives, and the perpetuation of capitalist society becomes intelligible. The rational perception of the true state of society is blocked because a process of irrational drives of negation and repression of reality transform lived powerlessness into an imaginary experience of personal power. Freudian psychoanalysis, which takes the place of the Hegelian dialectic in Lukács’ thinking, thus furnishes the link connecting the ideological superstructure to the economic base.

At this point, Horkheimer might have introduced a theory of culture to explode the functional circularity of political economy and psychoanalysis by demonstrating that socialized subjects are not simply “cultural dopes”, but that, whatever the social conditions, they are always active participants in the complex process of social integration. Yet, he does nothing of the sort. Instead, Horkheimer introduces culture as a third dimension of social reproduction between individual drives and the social labor system. Inspired by the second essay in Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals*, he argues that: “One function of the entire cultural apparatus at any given period has been to internalize in men of subordinate position the idea of a necessary domination of some men over others” (CT, 67).

For Horkheimer, who simply adheres to the faulty thesis of the dominant ideology (Abercrombie *et al.*, 1986) which is the Marxist variant of the functionalist myth of cultural integration (Archer, 1988: ch. 1), whether it is a question of religion or morals, law or literature, culture is only one ideological apparatus among

others. Culture acts as an instrument of the dominant classes who repress enjoyment and pleasure, inculcate self-discipline in work, obedience to authority, respect for the law, and all the while deliberately create a climate of satisfaction.

The result of this theoretical integration of political economy, psychoanalysis, and cultural theory is a monolithic, hyper-functionalist image of society as a vast enterprise of domination from which no one can escape. Consequently, the possibility of an oppositional politics is no longer even taken into account.

This totalizing vision, which entirely ignores the functional autonomy of systems of the individual, society, and culture, was present from the start: totalitarianism had already settled itself in critical theory before it found its place in society. In the program of interdisciplinary research presented by Horkheimer in 1931, two years before Hitler took power, his conception thus included only those social processes that contribute to the reproduction and expansion of domination.

Critical theory (1937–1941)

The critical theory manifesto

The 1937 publication of “Traditional and Critical Theory” (CT, 188–243) represented far more than a terminological innovation. The replacement of the term “materialism”, which was simply a code word for “Marxism”, with “critical theory”, parallels the move from an interdisciplinary, post-metaphysical Marxism to a radicalized philosophical Marxism. The “1937 Manifesto” thus marks the first break in the development of Horkheimer’s thought. He no longer argues for a theoretical and organizational integration of the specialized sciences and philosophy. Instead he establishes a clear “ideological break” between traditional theory and critical theory and launches an ideological-philosophical critique of the epistemological bases of the specialized sciences. Confronted with the “totalitarian empire of evil”, he no longer attempts to explain the powerlessness of the proletariat through a psycho-social study of its integration; instead he launches a pathetic appeal to its most advanced elements to implement the total transformation of society called for by critical theory. The move from interdisciplinary Marxism to critical theory thus coincides effectively with what Therborn (1970: 74) describes as a “dual reduction of science and politics to philosophy.”

The epistemological critique of the foundations of traditional theory is a form of ideological critique (*Ideologiekritik*). As a mode of knowledge whose original model is Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method*, which was subsequently generalized to apply to all domains of specialized science, traditional theory, or better yet – since it is a matter of theories about theories in the form of a set of logically consistent hypothetical propositions explaining reality by subsuming factual data within a deductive conceptual system – traditional metatheory considers the practical context in which theory is formulated and applied as external to the procedures of theoretical activity. This is the reason why Horkheimer views traditional theory as ideological. Traditional theory lacks reflexivity twice over: conceiving of theory as “pure theory” that develops in an immanent manner, it fails to recognize that prior to

this, its development is determined by extra-scientific factors and that it subsequently contributes to the renewal of existing society: "In traditional theoretical thinking, the genesis of particular objective facts, the practical application of the conceptual systems by which it grasps the facts, and the role of such systems in action, are all taken to be external to the theoretical thinking itself" (CT, 208). The self-interpretation of science is of no concern: since it reflects neither on the context of its genesis (retrospective reflection) nor on the context of its application (prospective reflection), willingly or unwillingly it constitutes a "factor in the conservation and continuous renewal of the existing state of affairs" (CT, 196).

"Critical or oppositional theory" differs from traditional theory primarily in terms of its political engagement. Unlike traditional theory, critical theory is revolutionary and has neither the conscious intention nor the objective effect of improving the functioning of existing society in any way whatsoever. On these grounds, Horkheimer concludes that because critical theory represents a "politically correct" position, it is "more true" than traditional theory. Counting the risk of intellectual totalitarianism, he reduces the epistemological criterion of truth to the ideological criterion of progressiveness, with all the risks of "intellectual totalitarianism" this involves.

For critical theory, "the organic existence" of society as a quasi-natural exteriority that is above history and to which humans submit passively is not inevitable. It is only the sign of a lamentable powerlessness to which one cannot resign oneself and from which humanity must definitely free itself. Critical theory not only posits emancipation as a moral imperative, it also demonstrates that it is objectively possible. Unlike traditional theory, it is thus not satisfied with simply making predicative judgments about social reality ("it is thus") but forcefully claims: "It need not be so; man can change reality, and the necessary conditions for such change already exist" (CT, 227, n.).

Critical theory assumes a philosophy of praxis (Feenberg, 1986: ch. 1): human beings make history, but they do so unconsciously, which explains why the society they have made escapes their control and appears to be a "second nature." Through a "defetishizing critique", it is the responsibility of philosophy to demystify society's apparent naturalness by showing that it is the product of human praxis and that they can re-appropriate it for themselves and shape it to correspond to their powers (Benhabib, 1986: 44–67, 154–155). Reconnecting critical theory to German Idealism, Horkheimer returns to Kant's theory of the constitution of objects of experience to reformulate it from a materialist perspective. The Kantian concept of transcendental constitution is replaced by the Marxist doctrine of the historical constitution of the social world through human labor. Although, following Lukács, Horkheimer offers one of the clearest presentations of the philosophy of praxis, his own analyses indicate not an identity, but rather an increasing distance between subject and object. Horkheimer believes that the empirical consciousness of workers is far from revolutionary. Since he believes that the proletariat is not only ideologically integrated, but also socially powerless, one might say that Horkheimer's Marxism is a revolutionary Marxism *à la* Lukács, but without the proletariat. Since the proletariat is no longer the subject of critical theory,

Horkheimer redefines it as its addressee. The real subject of critical theory then becomes . . . the critical theorist himself.

The pessimistic turn

The pessimistic turn in Horkheimer's thought, which was discernable from 1939 and fully complete by 1942, cannot be explained by simple reference to a failure in the subjective factor or by direct reference to fascism. The manifesto of critical theory dates back to 1937, by which time Hitler had been in power for four years. The pessimistic turn should thus be explained in immanent terms, that is, in relation to its intra-theoretical conditions. In 1937 Horkheimer still believed that revolution was possible, he was just unsure as to its probability, whereas by 1940, the very possibility of a revolution was in question. In 1937, Horkheimer still thought that the internal contradictions of capitalism would lead beyond capitalism, but by 1940 he had realized, following his friend Friedrich Pollock, chief economist at the Institute, that the crises of the capitalist system would not automatically lead to socialism, but might just as well lead to fascism.

To my mind, the theory of state capitalism, developed by Friedrich Pollock (1941, 1944) and adopted by Horkheimer and Adorno, is the decisive factor for understanding the pessimistic turn in Horkheimer's thought, as well as his break with Marxism. In his general theory of state capitalism Pollock broke definitively with the Marxist theorem of the immanent collapse of capitalism (*Zusammenbruchstheorie*), claiming that economic crises may be overcome in capitalism through governments' decisive interventions into economic affairs (Brick and Postone, 1982; Postone, 1993: ch. 3). While liberal capitalism has been truly replaced by the capitalism of monopolies, as Marx predicted, due to massive state intervention into the economy this capitalism of monopolies has subsequently been replaced by a qualitatively new form of capitalism, which Pollock terms "state capitalism."

From a strictly economic perspective, state capitalism is far better than monopoly capitalism. It brings to fruition the economic program recommended by Marxists (planning, nationalization, and centralization) and, from this perspective, is hardly distinguishable from socialism. Yet, clearly fascism and socialism are not at all the same. The fascist reality proves this, but Marxism, oriented as it is to the category of labor and planning policy, does not have the necessary analytic means to demonstrate it.

Horkheimer adopted Pollock's analyses, broke with Marxism, and began to develop a negative philosophy of history. His 1939 article, "Why Fascism?" was the last article he wrote which was still essentially Marxist, and the first to indicate the pessimistic turn in his thought. In this terrifying article, filled with a fear of universalized fascism, Horkheimer defends the strikingly determinist orthodox Marxist thesis that fascism is not an accident, but is rather the logical and necessary consequence of the constant state of crisis of capitalism: "Whoever does not wish to hear about capitalism," he says, in a notorious phrase, "must also be silent about fascism" (GSG 4, 308). In fascism, the old fetishes of exchange and the

anonymity of domination are replaced respectively by the “technological veil” and the direct domination of fascist cliques. Like Pollock, Horkheimer does not foresee the collapse of the new order in the short term: “Totalitarian society has long term economic chances . . . As for fascism as a global system, it would be impossible to predict an end. From the economic standpoint, we are witnessing the end of political economy. . . . The economy no longer has its own dynamic” (GSG 4, 301).

The economic system has become a static system, and Horkheimer loses all hope. In a 1942 article, entitled “The Authoritarian State” (FSR, 95–117), he returns to his analysis of state capitalism in Germany and for the first time launches a ferocious attack on Soviet state socialism, describing it as “the most consistent form of the authoritarian state” (FSR, 101).

The new form of planning might well conform to actual levels of technological development, but he now sees the primacy of politics – which was still part of the program of critical theory in 1937 – as a veritable perversion of socialist planning. The bitter observation that “state capitalism sometimes seems almost like a parody of the classless society” (FSR, 114) expresses his acknowledgement that fascism and socialism share the same material base. Planning and the rationalization of economic activities lead not to socialism, but to barbarism. A “second revolution”, this time a “political revolution”, is necessary, but, since he is still attached to the Marxist categories, Horkheimer does not have the analytic and conceptual means to think it. Indeed, Horkheimer hardly abandons his productivist model of labor. He continues to see history in terms of a constant increase in productive forces, but now he judges this process in negative terms. Technological progress and the increasing domination of human beings over nature do not free humans; it simply perpetuates their domination over one another. The immanent logic of production does not point towards a free, rational society, but to a closed, reified system, saturated in instrumental and administrative rationality.

With this radical transvaluation of progress, the premises of the critique of reason and the negative philosophy of history that Horkheimer later elaborated with Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are already spelled out. The dialectic of progress turns back into a negative dialectic of reification and we move from a continuist view of history to a discontinuist vision (Wellmer, 1976). Since a liberated society can no longer be seen as the logical result of progress, its advent is thought of as an event that breaks through the bad continuum of history. As Horkheimer comments, “Such an outcome is not a further acceleration of progress, but a qualitative leap out of the dimension of progress” (FSR, 107).

Horkheimer’s position at this point is similar to that of Walter Benjamin, theorist of Catastrophe and Redemption. Just as for Benjamin (1968) history presents itself as “a single and unique catastrophe, which ceaselessly piles ruin upon ruin”, Horkheimer claims that “only the bad in history is irrevocable” (FSR, 102). And like Benjamin who, as we know does not imagine messianic redemption as the immanent *telos* of real history, but as the utopian event of the end of history that transcends history, Horkheimer claims in the same spirit that “the rational is never totally deducible” (FSR, 107). Here, Horkheimer, who remains attached to the categories of Marxism despite everything, makes a decisive break with the Marxist

philosophy of history. He no longer sees socialist society (rational society without exploitation or domination) as the culmination of capitalism, but instead sees it as its total negation. Rational society no longer has any internal or logical relation to historical progress. Its arrival is understood in Benjamin's terms as a messianic event that interrupts the bad continuum of the prehistory of progress. Here and now there is nothing but bad totality and bad continuum whose invariants must be examined to critique them more effectively.

Critique of formal-instrumental reason (1941–1950)

Having lost any illusions about the Soviet Union, with no confidence in the working class, terrified by fascism and the integrating ability of American mass culture, Horkheimer's thought moved on to a new stage. Working with Adorno, he went from a critique of (post)capitalist economics to a critique of formal-instrumental reason, thereby also shifting from the Marxist paradigm of pseudo-natural organicity to Weber's paradigm of reification. Rationalization is no longer viewed as the solution; instead it is perceived as an integral part of the problem. *Eclipse of Reason* (1947) and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1947), both written in collaboration with Adorno, are historical testimonies to the radicalization of Horkheimer's critique. In these classics of critical thought, Horkheimer and Adorno try no less than to answer the question of "why humanity instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (DE, xiv). Their answer is to engage in a negative philosophy of history: not only the history of bourgeois capitalist society, but also the history of civilization as a whole are seen in terms of increasing reification, upset by a proto-historical act of domination of nature, and culminating in the concentration camps.

To fully grasp Horkheimer and Adorno's radical critique of reason, it is important to understand that they perceive fascism and the Holocaust as the ultimate consequence of formal-instrumental rationalization, the result of the perverted reversal of rationalization into reification. Thus, Horkheimer writes, "Fascism is reason revealing itself to itself as unreason" (ER, 234). Horkheimer and Adorno's view of the failure of the rationalization of Western society is so radical that they appear to be attacking reason itself. The critique of social reification is transformed, *ipso facto*, into a critique of the structure of reason – the reason which they identify immediately with objectifying-identitarian thought, or thought as the organ of domination. Through this acceptance of the Nietzschean doctrine of the "the near-identity of reason . . . and domination" (ER, 112), they appear to diagnose (like post-modernists today) not a "lack" of rationality, but rather an "excess" of it (Habermas, PDM, 120–121).

The Eclipse of Reason

In *Eclipse of Reason* Horkheimer presents a radical critique of modernity. On the basis of Lukács' interpretation of capitalist rationalization as reification, he follows Weber's dual diagnosis of loss of meaning and loss of freedom (Habermas, 1981,

I: 347 sq) Horkheimer elaborates the loss of meaning thesis by showing the gradual reduction of action to a solely strategic dimension, or, as he put it more philosophically, of reason to a uniquely subjective dimension. From Plato to Hegel reason was objective, referring not only to a faculty of the subject, but also to an objective order of reality, an inherent structure, requiring a specific mode of conduct oriented to ulterior ends. The ability of thought to reflect this objective order meant that not only was it seen as an instrument for regulating relations between means and ends, but also as an intrinsic instrument for determining ends. However, gradually the objective character of reason was eroded. Engaged in a process of disenchantment of the world, thought is now unable to conceive an objective order transcending the real and, consequently, it begins to deny its existence. Reason has thus been reduced to a subjective mental faculty, becoming purely formal.

Put simply, Horkheimer's thesis is that: "as reason is subjectivized, it also becomes formalized" (ER, 7). For formal subjective reason, no end is rational in itself; an end is only rational in as much as it serves the interests of the subject in relation to self-preservation (Spinoza's *sese conservare*). There is now a single criterion to determine what is rational: utility. As in Weber, who Horkheimer considers a perfect representative of the subjectivist tendency (ER, 6, n. 1.), ends are *a priori* subtracted from rational determination. Whether they promote or impede human destiny, they are arbitrary and irrational by definition. Since only the coordination of means with a given end is considered rational, reason is reduced to formal reason and action to strategic action.

For Horkheimer, the subjectivization and the formalization of reason are inseparable from the autonomization of the spheres of value and the corresponding fragmentation of being with regard to truth, the good, and the beautiful. Religion, philosophy, science, morality and art, which once were one (as in the scholastics *ens et verum et bonum et pulchrum convertuntur*), now each follow their own logic.

Horkheimer dramatizes the "departmentalization of culture" (GS7, 27) and ensuing schism of unitary reason in terms of the two aspects of relativism and scientism. On the one hand, he sees religion, morality, and truth as despoiled of all rationality, all pretensions to truth. Convinced, as Weber was, that reason ends with secularization, he claims that "it has become meaningless to speak of truth in making practical, moral, or esthetic decisions" (ER, 8). On the other hand, he sees the increased power of science, which appropriates truth by abusively identifying itself with reason. Science has nothing to do with values. It is concerned only with the observation, classification, and prediction of facts. It treats any idea that transcends reality with suspicion. Its axiological neutrality means that it can only confirm the world as it is. Horkheimer protests, but since he is convinced that following the simultaneous decomposition of unitary reason and the cosmological view of the world values can no longer be founded on reason, his protest is but a cry of despair.

While the loss of meaning thesis is based on the concept of formal reason, the loss of freedom thesis is developed from the concept of instrumental reason. Both theses are meta-theoretically linked through the eclipse of the axiological dimension of action and ensuing objectification of utilitarianism in a material objective

structure that imposes its external constraints on the individual who is forced to adapt for self-preservation. Horkheimer derives instrumental rationality from formal rationality on the basis of a logical argument: “If reason is declared incapable of determining the ultimate aims of life [it] must content itself with reducing everything it encounters to a mere tool” (ER, 92). Instrumental reason has just one criterion: operational value. Systematically inverting ends and means, it reduces everything to an instrumental level. The instrumentalization of reason has a double aim: the domination of nature and the preservation of the self. Drawing his inspiration from Freud’s late meta-psychological texts, Horkheimer wants to show that the dual goal cannot be attained, for the domination of external nature necessarily leads to the destruction of the self. The core argument of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is thus as follows: domination of external nature (*Beherrschung*: technology and industry) is inseparable from social domination (*Herrschaft*: discipline and submission), which itself is inseparable from domination of the internal nature of the subject (*Selbstzwang*: self-control and self-censorship).

Dialectic of enlightenment

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno return to an analysis of the loss of meaning and freedom, but focus it still more on the Weberian-Marxist theme of reification (Wellmer, 1985: 135–167). Indeed, the theme of reification, understood as the unification of formal and instrumental reason, is the one single theme that unifies the disparate “philosophical fragments” collected in this obscure, but now classic, text.

What Adorno and Horkheimer call “formal rationality” is exactly what I referred to as “theoretical or conceptual rationality” in the chapter on Weber. This form of rationality is subject above all to the “demand for consistency” (Weber, 1922, I: 537), that is, the principle of non-contradiction and systematicity. For Horkheimer and Adorno, who interpret Weber’s formal rationalization from a vitalist perspective, the principle of consistency is inherent to conceptual thought. Since thought is conceptual, it is identity thought, and, hence too, reifying thought, in Nietzsche’s sense (see Chapter 6 on Adorno). In other words, thought hypostatizes its concepts, subsuming reality in a conceptual “iron cage” and thereby suppressing the heterogeneity of being in the name of the identity of thought and Being, first mentally, then in practice.

Dialectic of Enlightenment develops two main theses. The first is the Nietzsche-Weberian thesis that “myth is already enlightenment” (DE, xviii). As Castoriadis (1975: ch. 5) says, the “ensidic” (ensemblist-identitarian) dimension of understanding is already present in *mythos* before it becomes fully evident in *logos*. As the infinite plurality of demons withers away and is replaced by the simple plurality of divinities, we move from the magical to the mythic stage of thought. With this shift, the gap between idea and reality increases, for unlike the magic demons who fill the animist universe, the divinities living on the Olympia are no longer identical to the elements, although they signify them (for instance, Zeus governs the firmament and Apollo guides the sun). The pre-Socratic cosmologies are already

rationalizations of the mythic approach. The elements (air, fire, earth, and water) replace divinities and adopt the intellectualized form of “ontological essences,” as Nietzsche said (1955, III, 315). The scientific logos continues its reductive work as it replaces the philosophical logos. Science disenchants the world by instituting the destruction of qualities and essences, systematically reducing all quality to quantity. What was previously differentiated is now reduced to equality: “Number became enlightenment’s canon . . . Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities. For the enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion” (DE, 4).

Ultimately, the identity of all things with each other is at the expense of the impossibility of the self-identity of each thing. Just as in exchange, concrete goods are supposed to be identical, metamorphosing into qualitatively undifferentiated commodities that differ from each other only in terms of price. Likewise science reduces the multiplicity of things and multiform creatures and, by abstracting from their uniqueness, makes them similar by retaining only what can be equated. Horkheimer and Adorno follow Lukács’ analyses of commodity fetishism, but by detaching identity thought from the specific historic context of the emergence of the capitalist economic system, they also separate it from it. Indeed, while in the Marxian tradition of the analysis of the logic of capital, from Lukács to Sohn-Rethel (1972), the forms of consciousness in bourgeois society emerge from the constraints of abstraction that characterize market exchange, in the global vision of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the abstraction of exchange is only the historical form in which identity thought unfurls its efficiency in terms of universal history, determining the market forms of capitalist society. In other words, for Adorno and Horkheimer, commodity exchange is simply a historical agent of identity thought. It is, however, an important agent in so far as identity thought only becomes universal with the universalization of commodity. Thus, compared to Lukács’ conception of the category of reification, in Horkheimer it undergoes a temporal generalization.

The first thesis is that “myth itself is already reason.” By absorbing that which is different and by reducing it in advance to what it identical and to what it can be equated with, reason, which assimilates thought to mathematics and therefore believes it is sheltered from myth, becomes further and further enmeshed in mythology. The second thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is consequently that “enlightenment reverts to mythology” (DE, xviii). By demonstrating that all novelty is predetermined, science joins mythology, for the principle of immanence and the explanation of all events as repetition is the actual principle of myth. Science believed it would disenchant the world, but by submitting it to logical-mathematical formalism, it in fact served to re-enchanted it. Unable to think alterity and multiplicity, science reduces thought to a simple tautology: the observation of what is and of what is repeated, and the claim that “the more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it” (DE, 20). This reproduction occurs blindly since science has no consciousness of what it is, namely a reduction of the world solely to its ensidic dimension, to a set

of “reified elements” (DE, 149) through the unconscious projection of the categories of understanding onto reality and the identification of appearance with the thing-in-itself.

This reification of being is not only methodological. In the era of total instrumentalization, it has real implications: just as society becomes a functional ensemble, human beings become manipulable things. Ultimately, “man becomes anthropomorphous for man” (DE, 7). The internal relation that Horkheimer and Adorno see between formal reason and instrumental reason is already emergent here. By becoming science, reason gives up on meaning. What remains is nature as a mass of demystified, inert, and manipulable matter. The theoretical knowledge of the natural sciences, which objectifies reality in a set of quantitatively nomological relations is already, through its very logical grammar, an instrumental and militant form of knowledge, a technical, useful, and usable knowledge: “technology is the essence of this knowledge” (DE, 2), and as Bacon and Descartes knew even before Nietzsche and Foucault, this kind of knowledge is the same as power, the power of human beings over nature and the power of humans over each other.

The exercising of power assumes the methodical alienation of nature, its objectification for utilitarian ends. In the era of technology, it is no longer a matter of influencing nature by assimilating it or of reconciling it with nature, understanding it by communicating with it as if it were a quasi-person (*mimesis*) as it was in the era of magic. Instead, it is a matter of strategically exploiting nature by distancing oneself from it so as to manipulate it more effectively. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it in a sentence that seems to be a direct borrowing from Klages’ philosophy of life: “In thought, human beings distance themselves from nature in order to arrange it such a way that it can be mastered . . . so the concept is the idea-tool which fits into things at the very point from which one can take hold of them” (DE, 31).

Whether things are dead or alive makes no difference in terms of the instrumental nature of militant reason. Cold and pitiless reason knows nothing but things, things it can manipulate, grasp, and subjugate. By nature, reason is an instrument of domination. The will to know is already the will to power, the will to subject the other (nature, woman, animal) to make use of it. Sade and Nietzsche took reason to the limit of its implications. Fascism applied them.

In the identity logic of instrumental reason, Horkheimer and Adorno recognize the original model of domination from which all other forms of domination are but derivatives. Reason is intrinsically totalitarian. It knows no subjects for it recognizes only objects. All reason meets is reified, methodologically and effectively. Formal rationalization already implies instrumental rationalization. Observing reason and militant reason are fused, reducing all that is to a state of dead and manipulable things. Reification is none other than the conjunction and generalization of these two forms of rationalization.

Horkheimer and Adorno believe that reification is now universal. Nothing and no one can escape it. This applies as much to the dominated as to the dominators. All have become happy automatons without freedom, “acolytes . . . bereft of self” (DE, 201), turning in circles while they await food like bears in a cage.

Interwoven throughout time, technological evolution and social evolution have converged at a point where human beings are totally imprisoned. The rationalization of labor and domination invade the sphere of the lifeworld: “Through the mediation of the total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses, human beings [become . . .] identical to one another” (DE, 29). Reduced to the level of pure objects in the system, as its epiphenomena, the individuals who have ceased to be themselves view their state of “amphibians” (DE, 28) as an objective necessity which it would be pointless to resist: “Reification . . . has been consolidated to the point where any spontaneity, or even the ability to conceive of the true state of affairs, has necessarily become an eccentric utopia, an irrelevant sectarianism” (DE, 170). What exists has become the sole reality to such an extent that Horkheimer and Adorno conclude that it represents “triumphant reification” (DE, 130).

The critique of reification implied by this philosophy of history is a non-specific, diffuse, and global critique. Since it universalizes and ontologizes the category of reification, it ceases to be a sociological critique, becoming instead a self-refuting metaphysical critique. For, from two things one: either reification is total – in which case Horkheimer and Adorno cannot escape its effects either; or, if they can escape it, it is not total. To my mind, this flagrant “performative contradiction” (Apel) is simply the logical result of the excessive radicalization of the Nietzsche-Weber-Freud-Marx critique of reason and its reversal into a negative philosophy of history, which despite everything looks like a simple inversion of the Salvationist philosophy of history found in Hegel, Marx, and Lukács. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* sought to open a way into a “positive concept of the *Aufklärung*, but gradually, as it illuminated reason by identifying it with reification, it reverted to mythology” (Schnädelbach, 1992: 232).

Metaphysical pessimism (1950–1973)

In *Eclipse of Reason*, and particularly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer undertook so radical a critique of Western thought and society that everything written afterwards was either a clarification or a last-ditch attempt to save some of the debris of declining Western culture (Post, 1970). Horkheimer’s post-war texts bear tragic witness to his desire to account for the inexorable evolution towards a “totally administered world” (*total verwaltete Welt*), devoid of freedom, meaning, and love, while, driven by despair, he also endeavors to conserve all that remains of freedom and meaning, even though he believes that they are inevitably destined to disappear. The task is thus two-fold: to designate Evil and preserve Good, “contributing to preventing these things from the old society from sinking too rapidly” (GS7, 428). The two-fold task that Horkheimer takes on is doubly paradoxical: to save the individual and to “save the *Aufklärung*” (GS12, 594 and 598), even though they are both not only victims, but also guilty of the regression of progress; to save the individual, freedom, culture, democracy, love, morality, and above all religion, although he claims that their death is imminent – if it has not already taken place (his work suggests both versions).

Horkheimer's project is an aporetic undertaking, and he knows it. As he says, "words assume the meaning whose loss they seek to express" (GS7, 196). Yet, he persists in acting as guarantor for grand Western ideas, even when he no longer believes in their attainment. He becomes profoundly pessimistic – as much, if not more than Schopenhauer, who Horkheimer believes is too optimistic (Raulet, 1981). Yet even in his despair he does not resign himself, and this is his nobility, which is expressed in his personal motto: "Be a theoretical pessimist and a practical optimist; expect the worst, but look for the best" (GS7, 467, cf. also Gramsci, 1971: 175).

Towards the end of his life Horkheimer became a quasi-reactionary conservative. He defended the role of the United States in Vietnam, adopted an anti-Communist position during the cold war, criticized 1968 student radicalism, rejected the liberalization of religion, and supported the pope in condemning the pill. He openly defended liberalism and free-trade as "an island in the ocean of rule by violence" (CT, ix). Furthermore, he even claimed that human freedom and the self-realization of the individual are intrinsically linked to liberal capitalism: "Man's development is linked to competition, thus, to the most important element in the liberal economy. . . . The idea that a society without competition favors the existence of free men is an optimistic idiocy" (GS7, 347).

Yet despite his conservative apologies for capitalism, Horkheimer remained an intransigent critic of modern society. Far from idealizing current society as the best of all possible worlds, he castigated it as a radical evil, the negation of absolute good, and he never justified the horror it perpetrates. As he put it, "blood and poverty stick to the triumphs of society. All the rest is ideology" (GS7, 125).

The elder Horkheimer is convinced that society is moving inexorably towards "a totally administered world", towards "an absolutely rationalized and completely automated society" in which everything will be regulated and everyone will have enough to eat, but individual and cultural autonomy will no longer be important. Now and again Horkheimer recognizes that we do not yet live in this world, but he still believes that the "immanent logic", or even the "internal necessity", of history will inevitably lead to it, unless the "irreversible evolution" is interrupted by nuclear catastrophe and human beings regress brutally to the troglodyte stage. Horkheimer clearly became extremely pessimistic. Material progress is at the terrifying cost of cultural and individual regression. Marx was wrong; Tocqueville is right. What awaits us is not the reign of freedom, but the despotic reign of democratic equality (Tocqueville, 1961, I, 37–54; II, 431–438). Marx did not see "the dialectic of justice and freedom" (GS7, 355), the fact that the price of equality is freedom. For Horkheimer, we have almost reached that point today: justice and equal conditions have been achieved, but freedom has been eliminated. Human beings disappear behind their functions and individuals lose their autonomy. All that is left is the automatism of the abstract, heteronymous individual adapting to the autonomous social apparatuses that condition him. We see it in the street: "At the red light, men stop, at the green light, they go. They obey the signals" (GS7, 402). The concept of the subject has become flatly romantic. The human species is regressing and becoming the "sophisticated animal species" that Schopenhauer always thought it was.

Just like individual autonomy, the spiritual characteristics that distinguish humans from animals are “transitional phenomena” (GS7, 250), destined to disappear. Philosophy, religion, and art are functionalized, losing their constitutive function for the subject. From now on, these spheres which once gave meaning to life have lost all social effectiveness. In the administered world, meaning is eclipsed. The pragmatic-technological faculties triumph, while the dialectical imagination atrophies. Everything that is not directly useful and that transcends the actual order is empirically stripped of all meaning. Expressing the truth of a present without ideals and, consequently, without a future, positivism now appears to Horkheimer as the philosophy of the present: “European history is finished, and therefore positivism is right” (DD, 173).

It is the end of the individual, meaning, and history. Given this situation, critics are powerless. The gap between ideal and reality is so obvious that the critic who wants to criticize it “only emphasizes his own uselessness” (GS7, 101). Given these circumstances the status of criticism changes. It no longer militates for change, but instead for the preservation of what is still positive in the world, although, according to Horkheimer, that’s not much, just a few remnants of meaning and a freedom already on the way to extinction. Criticism thus becomes authentically conservative. Horkheimer falls into cultural pessimism, and openly argues in favor of tradition. Only religion remains to give meaning to life and to transcend pure self-preservation. For the elder Horkheimer, reason has lost its privileges. Paradoxically, to save the *Aufklärung*, the only recourse is religion. It has become the one and only instance in which true and false, good and evil, can be separated. God is the only guarantor of truth and justice. This is how Horkheimer explains it:

To save an unconditional meaning without God is vain . . . With God eternal truth dies too.
(GS7, 184)

...

It is outdated to believe that moral commandments are a part of reason
(GS7, 193)

...

In the last instance, everything that depends on morals logically relates to theology, or in any case, it does not have a secular foundation.
(GS7, 350)

As a meta-social guarantor of truth and good, religion clearly becomes the new foundation for critical theory (Habermas, 1991: 110–126). If thought wants to remain critical and negative, and if it wants to judge the world here-below without capitulating to its total power, then it must preserve the notion of the Totally Other (*das ganz Andere*).

However, following the Jewish prohibition on divine representation (Jes. 44.9 sq), Horkheimer refuses to say anything more about Alterity. “We can point to evil, but not to absolute justice” (TC, 361). For Horkheimer, “the opposition between atheism and theism is no longer relevant” (GS8, 185). Given the

suffering in this world, it is no longer possible to believe in the dogma of the existence of God. Religion does not transfigure suffering; instead, by feeding longing for the Other, it expresses “the hope that the injustice that characterizes this world will not have the last word” (GS7, 389). As an expression of the “longing for the Totally Other”, religion not only feeds the hope that suffering will not rule eternally, but, for Horkheimer, it also feeds compassion and pity for others, thereby forging the motivational basis for human solidarity.

The metaphysics of pity and resulting universal solidarity are the other side, the intra-worldly side, of the longing for the divine. If critical theory turns towards God, it is not because it has found a new heaven, but because it hopes that the hell here-below will not burn eternally. The pathos of Horkheimer’s metaphysical despair is without doubt somewhat excessive – particularly his view of the administered world; but nonetheless, his moral sensibility is a great lesson for the social sciences and it must be preserved.

Conclusion

Horkheimer was without doubt more important as instigator of the Institute and organizing force behind the *Zeitschrift* than as a critical investigator of the human condition in late modernity. It is better to look for the establishment of the solid philosophical foundations of a critical sociology of reification in Adorno’s negative dialectic. Indeed, the reason why the radicalization of critique, as expressed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was so well-received is thanks to Adorno’s philosophical genius. However, the evolution of Horkheimer’s thought – from an interdisciplinary, post-metaphysical Marxism to an anti-Marxist metaphysics with religious tendencies – clearly reveals the aporia of a philosophy of history that remains, despite everything, even negatively, attached to the instrumentalist premises of Marxist productivism.

From start to finish, Horkheimer’s thought remained stuck in the category of the domination of nature. In its simplest terms, while at the beginning, he saw the increasing mastery of nature as progress, in the end he viewed it as a form of regression. The subject-subject relation is never taken explicitly into account, or if it is, it is systematically reduced to the subject-object relation, and this soon degrades into an object-object relation. Consequently, the instrumentalist dimension of action is never superseded.

Since he is more affirmative than Adorno, Horkheimer saw clearly that the subject-subject relation is immanent in language as such and that the word in language is a critical and transcendent power that cannot be eliminated even in the most extreme situations. In a letter to Adorno (cited by Wiggershaus, 1988: 563), he wrote the following:

To speak to someone is, ultimately, to recognize him as a potential member of the future association of free men. The word aims at a communal relation to truth, and thus the deepest affirmation of alien existence to which it is addressed, and indeed, to all existence, according to their possibilities. . . . The

word of a concentration camp guard is in itself a terrifying contradiction, whatever its content, unless it sentences the function of the very speaker.

This deep intuition, which was later taken up and developed systematically by Habermas in a theory of communication, did not however succeed in breaking through the *a priori* of reification. Although Horkheimer wanted to save the *Aufklärung*, his critique of it is so radical, destructive, and overarching that ultimately he undermines his own project. By identifying the rationalization with reification from the start, and by projecting it in the proto-history of an initial missed connection between human beings and nature, he implicitly condemns reason, in the name of a different reason which he is unable to conceptualize other than by recourse to the objective reason of the past, whose irrevocable downfall he had already analyzed.

The exercise is aporetic and Horkheimer is fully aware of it, but instead of resolving his own contradiction by enlarging his meta-theoretical framework – by introducing new analytic categories that would enable him to supersede reifying instrumentalism – he falls back on negative theology and the longing for the Totally Other. From a philosophical perspective faithful to the project of the Enlightenment, this amounts to a capitulation; but since universal solidarity is the intra-worldly aspect of divine nostalgia, it points towards an ethic of universal solidarity founded on sympathy. Since any ethics necessarily presupposes a sociology, Horkheimer thereby opens the way to a theory of emotional action that unfortunately he did not explore himself, and which still awaits development.

6 Theodor W. Adorno

Anti-system and reification¹

Unlike Horkheimer, whose thought evolved so dramatically that it can only be understood in terms of its evolution, Adorno's thought (1903–1969) is all of a piece – to the point that his texts can be cited without making constant reference to their context. Although Adorno emphasized the dialectical relationship between thought and history, his sociological philosophy evinces a remarkable constancy, which is hardly surprising given that he believes that until now history has only ever been the (mythical) repetition of the eternal same: “*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*” (ISM, xi).

Although the structure of Adorno's work is monolithic, it is not systematic, or at least, only in so far as it is both systematically anti-systematic and anti-systematically systematic. Behind the anti-system, there lies a hidden system awaiting exposure. This is what I hope to do by showing that Adorno's philosophy is an anti-system in the two meanings of the word: it is both a non-system and a system against the system. As a sociologist, my prime concern is to analyze the theoretical system that Adorno advances against the social system. This is a fairly controlled, methodical choice, in the light of which Adorno appears to be far more of a reification theorist than a redemption theorist. Of course, a different, more philosophical or theological, less sociological perspective, placing greater emphasis on knowledge of utopia and the utopia of knowledge, would present a different image, one closer to Benjamin – his mentor who was also his best student – more angelic perhaps.

The constraints of identity

Every sentence Adorno ever wrote was a sentence against the system and against reification; and every sentence also proves once again that he already presupposes reification. His language is intentionally complex and obscure. He deliberately gives up any attempt to communicate with the reader, for he believes that to make theory grammatically and conceptually accessible by adapting to reified language and the logic of domination would be to compromise with precisely the society his theory riles against. Unlike Habermas, but seemingly in agreement with Heidegger (Mörchen, 1981), Adorno believes that to communicate is to compromise. For Adorno, hermeticism and commitment are one. Critical theory tries to escape the

stranglehold of formal-instrumental reason via form, employing free argument and an idiosyncratic style of exposition, or better yet, a style of “paratactic composition” that is “musiclike” (NL I, 131), juxtaposing propositions without coordination or subordination. Gillian Rose (1978: ix) is entirely right to claim that Adorno’s thought depends fundamentally on the category of reification, but it should be added that this occurs even at the level of style. Adorno’s texts are written at the limit of German syntax: articles are omitted; pronominal references are obscure, sometimes even irreducibly ambiguous; the reflexive personal pronoun is sent to the end of the sentence; presuppositional objects are elliptical; the subject of a sentence is omitted only to reappear in a relative sentence; adverbs are placed ungrammatically; and foreign, technical, or archaic terms are used constantly. Adorno’s detractors claim that he wrote in this hermetic style because he knew all too well that to understand his texts was also to refute them. Like Nietzsche, whom he surpasses in his contempt for the *perceptio clara et distincta* and his penchant for aphoristic expression, Adorno has very little respect for Cartesian rules of method. In response to the “terrorism of Latin clarity”, which imprisons thought in the conceptual iron cage of definitions, Adorno feels that “German obscurity”, which allows him to think the thing in all its complexity and internal development without cutting it off from its particularities embodies “an amount of utopia equal to the amount of enlightenment” (NL I, 125).

The appealing aspect of Adorno’s philosophy is its declaration of solidarity with all threatened particularities and anything in danger of being swallowed up by the system. This philosophy that cherishes the non-identical, the fragment that resists the system, does not try to extract the eternal from the ephemeral; instead, it tries to make the ephemeral eternal for an instant. What classic metaphysics treats as accidental, Adorno views as essential. He adopts the role of spokesman for everything that refuses subordination to the reigning principle of identity, everything that still escapes the law of exchange, everything that cannot be assimilated by concepts, in short, everything that is lost in shadow and oblivion, fixed in the unknown land between being and nothingness, in order to speak to us of the Other, if only for a moment. By acting as the memory of the suffering accumulated in history and expressing the pain of inflicted violence, Adorno continually honors the victims of injustice in the name of what could be other and which has not yet started: this is his grandeur. After reading Adorno, what remains are the small utopian upheavals we find in the crevices of his texts, buried between the lines, the “weak messianism” (Benjamin), the glimmer of hope, even if it is hard to put one’s finger on it. This is what we must hold onto as we think with Adorno against Adorno.

I do believe, however, that the project of saving the non-identical was doomed to failure from the start. By starting with the *a priori* of an entirely closed system, a totalitarian totality incapable of tolerating anything outside it and therefore devouring it, Adorno retains barely anything other than the permanent failures of the individual and culture. In the end, by autonomizing the logic of identification and hypostasizing reification, Adorno paradoxically liquidates the non-identical he wanted to protect from reification by reifying it. As Wellmer (1986: 31) points

out, Adorno's critique of the logic of identity appears to be still attached to, and tainted by, the logic of identity. Adorno did not know how to rid himself of the constraint of identity he criticizes, and this is what explains that instead of enabling the non-identical to speak, he incorporates it into his system. Paradoxically, he who wanted to denounce the system's reification stifles the non-identical by reifying it. This contradiction between his philosophy, which wants to save the non-identical from reification, and his sociology, which reifies everything it meets, is not accidental. It is a tendency that runs through all his thought, undermining it. Just as Schoenberg's atonal revolution in the new music ultimately became stuck in the twelve-tone technique (PMM, 29–133), Adorno built up his anti-systematic drives in a closed system that ultimately became the symptom of his own diagnosis.

Even by the 1960s, Adorno's system was historically condemned to obsolescence because it had become more one-dimensional than the social system he was criticizing for being a total system. It was becoming evident that his frozen system was only, as Piccone (1976:141) puts it, "a frozen expression of a pre-World War II reality stopped in its tracks by Auschwitz and Siberia" and that, having become as autonomous and autarkic as a symphony, it could no longer grasp the movement of reality. The world revolution of 1968 revealed this breach in Adorno's system. The many altercations between the new left and Adorno, who eventually called the police to evacuate the premises of the university they had occupied, are a dramatic illustration of his theoretical inflexibility. From this point of view, the attack of bared-breasted women, who assailed him with flowers and erotic caresses, might be seen as the most extreme refutation of his sociology.

The philosophy of the non-identical, or the logic of aporia

In his 1931 inaugural speech, "The Actuality of Philosophy" (GS1, 325–344), Adorno presented what amounted to a methodological counter-program to Horkheimer's inaugural pronouncement made the same year, in which, as we saw in the previous chapter, Horkheimer argued for an interdisciplinary research program inspired by Lukács that would seek to cognitively and institutionally supersede the opposition between philosophy and the social sciences (Buck-Morss, 1977; Jay, 1982). Adorno believed that given the actual conditions of the universalization of the market form and capitalism, society had become so frozen that the union of philosophy and science, which seeks a totalizing image that fluidifies reality, has already been superseded by the facts. In the absence of the identity of the subject and object, or even of some kind of historical subject capable of escaping the grip of reification, society can no longer be interpreted as an "expressive totality" (Jay, 1977).

Adorno abandons the philosophy of the subject in both its variants, in the philosophy of *praxis*, and the philosophy of reflection. He explicitly attacks Lukács' "illusion of the possibility of grasping the totality of reality through the power of thought" (GS1, 325) as idealistic optimism. Reality can no longer be interpreted in terms of a possible movement towards the unity of subject and object. The actual

world is a totality, but not a positive totality; since as effective unreason, it is negative. For Adorno, reason only appears now outside the frozen totality in vestiges, fragments, and rubble (GS1, 325, 335, 360). In these circumstances, philosophy must adopt the form of a micrological study of ephemeral traces, which must be decoded and interpreted (*deuten*) by philosophy.

The philosophical method Adorno advocates is hermeneutic, but his hermeneutics has absolutely nothing to do with traditional hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Dilthey and Gadamer. Adorno's hermeneutic method is concerned with structure, rather than processes. Having abandoned Vico's principle of *verum factum*, Adorno categorically separates truth from its genesis, whether individual (as in Weber) or classist (as in Lukács). As he says, "the task of philosophy is not to seek out the latent or manifest intentions of reality, but to interpret non-intentional reality" (GS 1, 335). In referring to "non-intentional reality", Adorno is following Benjamin (1978) who, in the "Epistemological-Critical Preface" of his obscure *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, wrote: "Truth is the death of intention", implying that philosophy must focus on details, on what Freud called the "residues of the phenomenal world", concentrating on what details say that goes against the intentions of actors. From this perspective, interpreting non-intentional elements involves treating them as a "monad" or "expression" of a contradictory reality, discovering traces of the whole in the particular, without subsuming it under the general, starting from the concrete and seeing traces as "scars" (G18, 193) inflicted by the system, finding the image of negative totality in the fragment and discovering in the "traces of violence . . . the lettering of a possible emancipation" (GS8, 194). In every instance, the *interpretandum* is the negative totality that leaves its traces on the particular as a mutilation. The micrological method is inductive-experimental: it reorganizes non-intentional elements in a readable constellation that illuminates the conflictual state of society like a lightning flash (*blitzhaft*, GS1: 325). This method is always critical: in each instance, the particular is read in the light of the painful contradiction between universal and particular, system and fragment, illuminating the irreducible tension that lies between them.

Adorno believes that the critique of philosophy is always, in one form or another, a critique of idealist identity thinking, in other words, of thought that seeks to integrate everything it meets and to assimilate that which it cannot logically assimilate into a unitary system of concepts by privileging one pole of the internal relation. Combining Franz Rosenzweig's philosophy of non-identity and Nietzsche's vitalist theory of reification, Adorno believes that this approach is impossible. A philosophical system cannot include everything without contradiction, without reifying the non-identical. "There is no system without its residue" (P, 257). By trying to integrate the residue in the system, inevitably it is reified.

Adorno adopts an immanent approach that consists in looking for faults in the system and revealing the residue that contradicts its claims to completeness. By emphasizing the non-identical, that which eludes the system, Adorno makes it explode from within. The logic of his approach is a "logic of its aporia" (P, 32), a "logic of disintegration" (Dews, 1987) that retraces the antinomies inherent to

any systematic philosophy. In Adorno's thought antinomies – the conflicts between two contradictory arguments or doctrines which are valid separately but not together – remain antinomical. The antinomy explodes from inside; it cannot be sublated (*aufgehoben*) by extorting an externally imposed dialectical reconciliation.

“The only way out of the dialectical context of immanence is by that context itself” (ND, 141). With this abstruse formulation, Adorno summarizes the difference between Hegel's positive dialectic and his own negative dialectic. Unlike Hegel, who overcomes oppositions by integrating them into a positive totality, and who is able to do so because the totality is originally presupposed, Adorno insists on conflict, not so much as a “vehicle of total identification”, but as “the organon of its impossibility” (ND, 153). In other words, unlike Hegel whose negation of negation leads to an ascending series of positives, Adorno emphatically claims that, because of the insoluble contradiction running through society, “even in *extremis* a negated negative is not a positive” (ND, 393). The raging contradictions within society cannot be eliminated within thought: “the difference between subject and object cannot be eradicated in theory any more than it has been resolved in the experience of reality in the present” (H, 85).

Negative dialectics is “the ontology of the wrong state of things” (ND, 11). Hegel proclaimed the rational identity of subject and object too soon. Driven by the logic of identity, Hegel did violence to subject and object. By rendering them equal, he rendered invisible the differences between the general and the particular. For Adorno, this reconciliation by the mind within the antagonisms of the real world is only an apologetic application of the principle of identity. By philosophically anticipating the reconciliation, Hegel gave his blessing to the real contradiction he eliminated in thought, thereby thwarting real reconciliation. But his philosophy cannot be reduced to ideology. Through its very form, the Hegelian system unintentionally expresses the truth of the administered world, but by aligning himself with the conquerors of history and transfiguring the suffering of the vanquished, Hegelian philosophy becomes false, for Adorno believes that “the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth” (ND, 17–18).

Like Nietzsche, Adorno is suspicious of “systemizers” who treat thought as absolute and evaporate being in thinking (Rose, 1978: ch. 2). Adorno considers Nietzsche's refusal to pay homage to the speculative concept and the hypostasis of the mind as a liberating act that represents a real turn in Western thought. Since then, first philosophy (*prima philosophia*), which in an idealist fashion poses a conceptual void as the autonomous foundation of knowledge and sets up an encompassing system on this *proton pseudos*, is unmasked as a tautological abstraction, a direct substitution of thought for things and thus as an immense reification. The “weavers of ideas” (Nietzsche), who believe they have grasped reality in its entirety in their conceptual nets, are deluded. By reducing reality to the conceptual, objectivity to subjectivity, and multiplicity to unity they catch only what they themselves include in reality: “the system is posited as the thing itself” (DE, 159). The system becomes the world and the world becomes the system.

In his introduction to *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique* (AEM, 3–40), following Nietzsche, Lask, Simmel, and Weber, Adorno attacks the principles of first philosophy. First philosophy cannot keep its promises, neither the promise of completeness nor the promise of the logical identity of thought and thing, for if it wants to include everything, it must become increasingly abstract and abandon real content, thereby directly contradicting its own principles:

The First must become ever more abstract to the philosophy of origins. The more abstract it becomes, the less it comes to explain and the less fitting it is as a foundation. To be completely consistent, the first immediately approaches analytic judgments into which it would like to transform the world. It approaches tautology and says in the end nothing at all.

(AEM, 14)

Taken to its logical conclusion in this manner, first philosophy consumes itself. Its flaw is its only merit: it shows what philosophy tries to hide, namely that “the identity of thought and Being always presupposes an internal non-identity” (Rosenzweig, 1976: 14) and that, consequently, “at its extreme, identity becomes the agent of the non-identical” (H, 69).

Reification and abstraction are the original sin of idealist philosophy. Idealist philosophy absolutizes the constitutive function of thought and poses the subject as first principle. Countering idealism, Adorno introduces the principle of the “primacy of the object.” According to this principle, thought must enter an object and entrust itself to the thing, even when, and in fact all the more so, when it believes that it is constituting or even producing it. The principle of the primacy of the object does not stipulate that the object be an immediacy. The critique of naive realism still holds. The object exists “for us”; without a concept, we cannot grasp it, but unlike the old subjectivist mediation, the new mediation no longer says that everything disappears in it. The object does not allow itself to be dissolved into concepts; instead, the subject mediatizes a non-disappearing objective.

The principle of the primacy of the object also has consequences for the supposedly idealist category of reification. In the following passage, which is directed explicitly against Lukács, Adorno appears to repeat the young Marx’s criticism of Hegel, namely that he confuses alienation (*Entfremdung*) and objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*):

the category of reification, which was inspired by the wishful image of unbroken subjective immediacy, no longer merits the key position accorded to it, overzealously, by an apologetic thinking happy to absorb materialist thinking . . . The total liquefaction of everything thinglike regressed to the subjectivism of the pure act. It hypostatized the indirect as direct. Pure immediacy and fetishism are equally untrue.

(ND, 374)

Adorno's tirade against Lukács – which repeats the verdict of the Second International – does not mean that Adorno repudiates the category of reification; all it implies is that if reification wishes to retain its key position, it must become more objectivist and relieved of its Hegelian burden. The *telos* of reification is not the incorporation of the object by the subject. The total mediation of the object by the subject does not sublimate reification, since the subject incorporates the object in an idealist fashion and therefore perpetuates it. For Adorno, mediation is not total. Faced with the subject, the object maintains its primacy. It is not dissolved in mediation, but instead retains its autonomy. If we could imagine a non-regressive sublation of reification – although we cannot, since in a false world, we cannot imagine what the true life would be – then we would not see “the undifferentiated unity of subject and object”, but rather a pacified state in which the subject does not dominate the object, nor the object the subject, but where both human beings and things can understand and communicate with one another without violence. Or as Adorno puts it, transgressing the Jewish prohibition on images: “Peace is the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other” (CM, 247).

Mimesis is the organ of peace. As an aesthetic form of rationality which philosophy shares with art, mimesis refers to both the ideal relation – non-formal and non-instrumental, sensual, and receptive, expressive and communicative – between subject and object, and the result of this relation (Wellmer, 1985: 9–47). As a “non-repressive synthesis of differences” (AT, 207), peace is not only the utopia of knowledge, but also the knowledge of utopia. The encounter between reason and mimesis in the domain of the fine arts and philosophy prefigures the state reconciled to the world as it will appear after the apocalypse, in the messianic light of redemption. According to Adorno, only then – when the world is pacified and differences mimetically reconciled – can one truly speak of truth and knowledge. This is how we should interpret the final aphorism of *Minima Moralia*, which contains the seed of the guiding idea of the *Negative Dialectic* and *Aesthetic Theory*:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption . . . Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought.

(MM, 247)

From the point of view of the utopian possibility, which Adorno can only think through the theological category of the Messiah's redemption, and thus implicitly beyond historical reality, things appear as they are under the conditions of their ideal existence. This means that the concept is identical to the actual thing. To say

that an object is rationally identical to its concept means that the object is what it wants to be and what it should be, that it satisfies its ideal properties. Under actual conditions, no thing is rationally identical to its concept. Yet identity thought, which is our paradigmatic mode of thought, suggests through its reified concepts that the thing is adequate to its concept, and thereby misleads us about the actual state of reality. As soon as this is clear, we also understand that “identity is the primal form of ideology” (ND, 148). By identifying the actual object with the potential object, the thought of identity reifies the potential object in its actuality, presenting it as the only possibility, and making us believe that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

From the messianic point of view, the actual world, with all its cracks and crevices, must appear as the “consummate negativity” (MM, 247), or as Adorno says elsewhere “as hell seen from the perspective of salvation” (P, 269). Once we understand the indissoluble link between Adorno’s messianic materialism and his negativism, between his pursuit of absolute utopia and his tragic vision of the world, we see how the fixation on reification is the mark of his sociology. Indeed, society allows itself to be subsumed under the concept of total reification only from the point of view of redemption. In the following pages I explain that the blaze of messianic light blinded Adorno and that because his sociology is centered on the category of reification it is in fact far more reflective of this messianic blinding than it is reflective of the context of social blinding (*Verblendungszusammenhang*) it claims to reflect.

Sociology, or the reifying apperception of the reified

I have presented Adorno’s critique of the conceptual imperialism of “ensemblist-identity thought” (Castoriadis, 1975: ch. 5). “Ensidic” thought is totalitarian in that it knows no limits. Whatever is different, other, or non-identical is systematically amputated and violently incorporated into the system, with the result that all things are identical with one another, though none is self-identical.

Identifying thought is a form of reifying thought. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, analyzed at length in the previous chapter, Adorno and Horkheimer tried to show that formal reason has significant implications for the real world. Abstraction is interpreted in (Nietzschian-Marxist) terms of rationalization; rationalization in (Weberian-Marxist) terms of reification; and reification in (Nietzschean-Weberian-Freudian) terms of the mortification of the *ego*. When formal reason is applied, it is transformed into instrumental reason, and identity thinking enters into action and leads to the effective reification of human beings and things. Yet, a full contextualization of the analysis involves an understanding that this use of the concept of reification does not originate in Lukács, but derives from Nietzsche (Rose, 1978; Jay, 1984b: 68–69). Indeed, reification is not related to the alienated objectification of subjectivity, but to the mental and effective suppression of heterogeneity in the name of identity. Thus, when Adorno adopts one of Nietzsche’s ideas, repeating that “all reification is forgetting” (DE, 191; GS5, 222; VES, 154), he does not mean, like Lukács, that reification can be overcome through the

subject's re-appropriation or re-interiorization (*Erinnerung*) of that which is objectified. On the contrary, for Adorno, the reversal of forgetting does not imply the anamnestic re-establishment of an original, harmonious unity through the incorporation of the foreign (*das Fremde*); rather, as for Benjamin, it refers to the re-establishment of difference and non-identity in a state of peace. In other words, peace is a non-hierarchical constellation in which the subject does not annex the object, nor the object annex the subject, but in which both are reconciled in their differences. To end reification in the Hegelian sense, through the incorporation of the foreign, as Lukács proposes in his attempt to (re)Hegelianize Marxism, only perpetuates reification in the Nietzschean sense of the word as used by Adorno.

If we move from philosophy to sociology, reification clearly remains the central category of Adorno's thought. Although Adorno rejects Lukács' young Marxist interpretation and drops the Hegelian fiction of the identity of subject and object, as well as the Marxist fiction of the proletariat as the meta-subject of history, none of this implies a rejection of the category of reification as such or a rejection of Lukács' category of reification. Adorno simply strips Lukács' category of its humanist and optimistic connotations, inflecting it in a proto-structuralist direction that is closer to the elder than the younger Marx, and more fatalist than revolutionary in its implications. Indeed, Adorno's theoretical description of social reification conforms to Lukács' description except that in Adorno there is no more proletariat, no more identity of subject and object, and consequently no more hope. There is nothing but reification, which is now triumphantly "total" (DE, 130; P, 102; NL I, 89, 245).

Adorno's sociology can be read as an ongoing attack on total reification. Fearing neither exaggeration nor tragic pathos, he claims that "the autonomization of the system faced by everyone, including leaders, has reached its limit." He then adds immediately that reification has become an "inevitability" (GS8, 369) for everyone. He portrays society as monolithic, a society in which "in principle everyone . . . is an object" (MM, 37). By offering an image of the world, which he admits is similar to the image forged by the delirium of persecution (CM, 119), Adorno has apparently forgotten his own methodological admonition that "the knowledge of the reification of society must not be reified" (VES, 157). Here as elsewhere, reification is the result of an omission. Adorno desperately takes truths to their logical conclusions, until they self-destruct and disappear in the abyss of aporias. Both fascinated and horrified by identity thinking, in the end he gives in to it. Since the *a priori* of reification is the constitutive principle of his system against the system, it seems that by absolutizing, or even by ontologizing, reification, Adorno succumbs to the very idealism he criticizes.

In this sense, Adorno's anti-system well and truly duplicates the system it opposes. Contrary to his claims, reified thought appears not so much the result of reified society, but rather the reverse. As the totalization of reification, total reification is simply the hypostasis of his entirely reified metatheory. The proof is that one has simply to revise his (false) metatheoretical premises to reopen the meta-theoretical space of possibilities, and the (false) observation of total reification dissipates. Once again, the question is: if reification is total, how can Adorno see

through it? It is not enough to return to this stroke of “undeserved luck” (ND, 41) – he escaped the gas chambers – to explain his experiential privilege, for no biographic accident, however significant, is enough to found a critical theory. Baron Munchausen is pulling his own hair – or gets stuck in the swamp.

In Adorno’s thought the critique of knowledge is a critique of society and *vice versa* (Beier, 1977). The apparent immanent critique of the logic of identity thought is in fact a critique of social domination cloaked in logical-philosophical language. To demonstrate this, I shall translate the system of idealist philosophy into sociological terms and re-situate it in the social reality from which it was abstracted. The junction point allowing this transfer is the exchange principle, a principle whose importance in Adorno’s thought cannot be underestimated. It is so central that it enables both the articulation of the negative dialectic and Marxism and the conjunction of Lukács’ and Nietzsche’s categories of reification.

Adorno’s thesis is as follows:

The process of abstraction – which philosophy transfigures . . . is taking place in the factual barter society.

(ND, 178)

...

The barter principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter; it is through barter that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical.

(ND, 146)

In other words, the exchange principle is structurally homologous to the identity principle, and acts as its social instantiation. Both principles – the principle of identity and the barter principle – are essentially forms of abstraction. However, unlike philosophical abstraction, which is first and foremost a mental abstraction (*Denkabstraktion*), market abstraction is a real abstraction (*Realabstraktion*) (Sohn-Rethel, 1972: 38–45, 1976: 59–69). In a market society, the form of exchange becomes the “universal form”, determining as Lukács says “all manifestations of life, both subjective and objective.” In this type of society, in which the social connection is constituted by the cash nexus, violent abstraction is thus “not so much the sign of feeble thinking as it is that of a shabby permanency in the constitution of society itself” (POS, 13).

Although Adorno adopts the thesis of the “primacy of politics” (Pollock, see the Horkheimer chapter above), he does not hesitate to present the principle of exchange as the synthetic principle of society, that is, as its primordial principle that holds together society and structures it as a system of functional connections linking all humans to each other: “The exchange relation which encloses virtually all those who participate in this concept of society is what makes society a social thing, that by which it is in a specific sense constituted both conceptually and in reality” (VES, 33). To speak of society constituted “conceptually and in reality”

through the abstraction of exchange, then to add that the “concept of society has its objective basis in conceptual essence, in the abstract relation established by exchange” (VES, 46), and finally conclude in Hegelian language that “conceptuality which holds sway in reality (*Sache*) itself” (POS, 80), is to flirt with abstract idealism. The world is dominated by the concept, the concept dominates the world. Following Hegel’s teachings on the emphatic concept of the concept, Adorno moves from the “concept of society” to “society as a concept” – “something conceptual . . . which constitutes the whole” (POS, 81). Although it is an intangible abstraction, it is far more real than the tangible concrete, if only because the abstract entirely determines the concrete.

Adorno’s version of the base-superstructure relation is that the universal abstract (society, system, totality, exchange principle) as a noumenal essence is the immediately unknowable infrastructure which one way or another determines particular phenomena as they appear concretely on the surface: “formulated provocatively, totality is society as a thing-in-itself, with all the guilt of reification” (POS, 12).

Adorno’s idealist concept of society is a realist one. It is objectively oriented. Its referent is not a rational entity (*ens rationalis*), but instead is a real entity (*ens realis*): “The concept of a capitalist society is not a *flatus vocis*” (ND, 50, n.), although it is an abstract, transcendently real, and objectively constraining entity pre-ordained for all individuals and predetermining them, just as in the past the spirit determined the empirical particularities in the Hegelian system.

One hundred and fifty years after Hegel’s death, the Hegelian system reveals its diabolical truth. The completely socialized society, fatally unified and bewitched by the principle of exchange, is the realized system to which absolutely nothing remains outside. The all-powerful system and its correlative, the despairing powerlessness of each individual, corroborate Hegelian thought today. In this sense, “the whole is the truth” (P, 62) and this is not contradicted by Adorno’s most famous aphorism, “the whole is the false” (MM, 50). This cryptic aphorism is not directed against the methodological maxim that says that the truth is the whole, but rather against Hegel’s ideological statement that the whole is truth. In a society in which the particular and the general have not been reconciled, except in a diabolical manner by liquidating the particular, the identity of subject and object, individual and society, is not positive; it is perfectly negative. The tension between subject and object has become so extreme that there is no longer any tension between incommensurable poles. As Adorno says, “the violence of repression and its invisibility are the same thing” (GS8, 377).

Every aspect of Adorno’s sociology is so centered on reification that it becomes a virtually ontological category. Grenz (1974: 49) rightly concludes that in Adorno, reification becomes “the structure of all being and all relations.” By applying the methodological principle of historical retroaction, current reification is pushed into the past and universalized, and then appears as a constant in history: “The meaningful times for whose return the early Lukács yearned were as much due to reification, to inhuman institutions, as he would later attest it only to the bourgeois age” (ND, 191).

Since the beginning of time, reification has threatened humans. Before the subject constitutes himself – the subject is not *eidōs*, the individual is a historical category – the lack of differentiation between subject and object signified a fear of blind nature. After the period of undifferentiation came separation and, with it, a new mythic fear of a blind society, society as second nature. Given the continuity between origin and end – since for Adorno the origin is the end – we might ask where mimesis should be situated historically. If mimesis is situated before the human domination of nature, then we must conclude that it is pathological and that non-violent relations between humans and things are impossible unless humans give up their hold on nature. But if they do so, they themselves would then fall under the control of nature. As we can see, there is no way out, for if history is a dead-end, then mimesis is a false concept, but if mimesis is not false, then history is not necessarily a path that leads nowhere. In any event, the narrative structure of Adorno's dialectic of reason is that it succumbs to myths (Schnädelbach, 1987a: 137–147; 1992: 231–250).

In *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno applies the principle of historical retroaction so that “luridly the horror of the ending lights up the deception of the origin” (MM, 226). In a negative version of the philosophy of history, he presents a counter-eschatology in which the process of hominization appears as a protracted process of increasing reification that originates in a contingent act of dominating nature and culminates in the gas chambers and atomic bomb: “No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the total menace which organized mankind poses to organized men” (ND, 320).

Adorno rightly rejects the Salvationist version of history, but only to put a history of damnation in its place. What Marx called “prehistory” is none other for Adorno than the totality of history up to the present. History has always been nothing but the bloody repetition of the eternal same. The mythical wheel keeps on turning. Adorno believes that progress has not yet started and in any event, is limited to techniques of domination and destruction. For Adorno, the emblem of progress is insecticide (NL I, 270).

As the perverse effect of its emergence, society is the unintentional product of the actions of individuals; it is an objective product that imposes its external constraints on individuals even as it eludes their control. Social integration is not a function of solidarity, but of competition between individuals. Each individual pursues his or her own interests, each assumes a function in the whole, and the law of exchange subsequently coordinates the activities of each, after which society becomes a system, a cloth of functional interconnections that are mechanically superimposed on its elements. Everyone must submit to the natural law of exchange or perish. Whether or not they are subjectively guided by the profit motive is of no importance. “Fear is more essential than the subjective motive” (GS8, 47) – and this is the fear of going under. Self-preservation, the utilitarianism imposed by the reification of the social system, becomes the dominant mode of action, and even the one and only possible mode of action. That which must be preserved, the self, is liquidated:

Self-preservation forfeits its self (MM, 230). . . . Humans do not only become objectively an increasingly single element in the machinery, but they also become mere tools for themselves, in their own consciousness, they become means instead of ends. . . . Humans have become strangers to themselves.

(GS8, 451)

Adorno believes that to speak about “alienation of the self” in this respect is “simply romantic” (DN, 71). The non-deformed essence that the concept of self-alienation presupposes does not exist. Humans are not, and have never been, human. The concept of self-alienation is a false concept which must be eliminated (VES, 47). To speak about a “reification of the self” is certainly an improvement, but is still misleading. Since the concept suggests an ontic interiority onto which external influences impose certain alterations, it hides the fact that the mechanisms of domination no longer act solely on the individual, but also in and through the individual. Once it has become total, reification no longer acts from outside; instead, it is introjected. Adorno summarizes his thesis regarding the introjection of reification in a brilliant formula: “Reification finds its limits in reified men” (GS8, 391). Following introjection, domination no longer imposes itself against the dominated; it now imposes itself through them. Absurdity is thus perpetuated. Humans become servile executants for the social functions they reproduce, thereby acting as agents in their own liquidation. Adorno repeats the “end of the individual” thesis *ad nauseam*: “To think that the individual is being liquidated without trace is over-optimistic (MM, 135) . . . The concept of the individual, which arose historically, has reached its historical limit” (GS8, 450). There are many other similar comments, some more cynical than others, but best avoid misunderstandings by citing only this: “the ‘deliverance of man’ . . . presupposes, to the extent that it is possible at all, that one think through the most extreme catastrophe” (NL II, 242).

“Sociology is not a cultural science (*Geistwissenschaft*)” (GS8, 481; AS, 124; POS, 74). In a society dominated by pseudo-natural laws of exchange, any attempt to understand social phenomena as if they have a meaning is illusory and apologetic. Adorno argues that those who attack the transfer of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences forget that society has become frozen in second nature:

The usual objection, that empirical social research is too mechanical, too crude, and too unspiritual, shifts the responsibility from that which science is investigating to science itself. The much-castigated inhumanity of empirical methods still is more humane than the humanizing of the inhuman.

(AS, 123)

But although Adorno stubbornly refuses to accord a place to the interpretative method – ultimately because he believes that Auschwitz, the extreme instance which represents for him the paradigmatic case of the social, cannot be

understood – he is not ready to align himself with a positivist position. For even if he recognizes that the reifying method of the natural sciences is adequate to the object, he believes that the reifying method is itself reified.

The third German social science dispute, the famous *Positivismusstreit* (Frisby, 1974, 1976) which opposed first Popper to Adorno, then Albert to Habermas, concerned precisely this question. As Adorno says, “a dialectical critique of positivism finds its most important point of attack in reification” (POS, 63). It is the most important point of attack because instead of reflecting on reification, positivism reflects it. “Scientific mirroring indeed remains a mere duplication, the reified apperception of the hypostatized, thereby distorting the object through duplication itself. It enchants that which is mediated into something immediate” (POS, 75–76). Unlike Adorno, who presents a reifying apperception of the reified, but one that is at least reflexive, positivism offers a reified apperception of the reifier. Positivism does not think through reification, but instead reflects it without comment, and for Adorno this is where it all goes wrong. To become true, positivism still needs a dialectical self-reflection that would empirically unveil truth as normatively false and the immediate as the result of mediation. Unlike positivism, which duplicates and accepts reification as given by hypostatizing it as a positive fact, the dialectic defetishizes it through a second reflection, in other words, it understands it in its historical and social determination and dissolves the fixity of the object in a field of tension between the poles of reality and possibility.

Positivism is the archetypal expression of reified consciousness. Not only does it confuse reality and possibility, it also confuses method and object. It accords primacy to method, not to the thing, and by projecting the method onto the thing it substitutes the method for the thing, and ultimately takes the observed thing as the thing-in-itself. In this sense, positivism can be seen as a form of idealism or subjectivism. Mainstream positivist sociology, which is characterized by a fetishism of method, idealizes the object of investigation in three respects: i) by superimposing the instruments of research onto the thing, it transfers the reifying character of the method and its innate tendency to pin the states of things onto observed objects, as if they were things-in-themselves and were not reified; ii) by operating through a system of grids and superimposed schemas that systematically fix the thing, it eliminates the antagonistic character of society in a series of coherent, logical deductions; and iii) by privileging surveys, it does not start from the objectivity of society, but begins instead with the subjectivity of opinions, and, since it does not take into account the fact that opinions are entirely determined by the context of social totality, it does not realize that it is dealing with mere epiphenomena.

While positivism accords primacy to the subject, the dialectic accords primacy to the object. Dialectical objectivity is not an objectivity of method, but an objectivity of the object of investigation. “The objectivity of the structure . . . is the *a priori* of cognitive subjective reason” (POS, 8), because without reference to society, as a real, objective structure, nothing social can be thought. This is precisely what the idea of totality expresses, and it has significant consequences for the category of causality. According to Adorno, the universal interdependence of all

moments, which the dialectical category of totality tries to grasp, renders the idea of linear causality obsolete. Within society, causal series intersect to such a degree that there is no point looking for the cause. “Only that society itself remains the cause” and Adorno then concludes in realist mode that “causality has withdrawn to totality, so to speak” (ND, 267). From a realist perspective, this conclusion is not objectionable, but everything points to the fact that Adorno’s realism is only a materialist return to Hegel. Even set back upright, the dialectic is a machine that continues to turn imperturbably the same way in whatever position it is placed.

The positivist dispute should not cause us to forget that Adorno undertook various empirical studies, ranging from the Princeton Radio Research Project to the *Gruppenexperiment*. This empirical research includes the now classic work on “the authoritarian personality” which is without doubt his most well-known, but probably also most misunderstood, investigation. On more than one occasion, *The Authoritarian Personality* was criticized for establishing the subjective foundations of anti-Semitism, although it did nothing of the sort. The explanation of the syndrome of the authoritarian or potentially fascist personality, measured on the famous *F-scale*, is rigorously sociological. Furthermore Adorno’s sociology of anti-Semitism is none other than an application of the theory of reification, the more or less direct translation of his (meta)theoretical premises to an empirical research project – which proves, if need be, that Adorno is not thinking from the thing itself, but that, like others, he is thinking the thing by subsuming it within the system. This is what I hope to show in three stages.

- 1 *Anti-Semitism as reified thought and as a pathological appendage to ensemblist-identity thought.* Anti-Semitism is a closed, systematic thought system that reduces multiplicity to unity in a single formula: “The existence of the Jews is the *key* to everything” (AP, 619). The world is divided into two polar categories, “Jews” and “non-Jews”, and these categories govern the world. Furthermore, for the anti-Semite, the stereotypical system of classification becomes identical to the world. Entirely independent of all interactions with reality, the pseudo-rational system of pathological projection free-wheels and substitutes itself for it. Objectifying, abstract, and sick thought reduces non-identity to identity, and thereby already inflicts on it in thought the violence to which it will later subject it in practice. As soon as the Jew is identified, he or she is transformed into an object liable for extermination. Adorno concludes: “in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died, but a specimen . . . Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death” (ND, 362).
- 2 *The manipulative individual as the prototypical incarnation of the instrumental actor.* In a typology of anti-Semites, the manipulative individual represents “the type of *reified consciousness*” (CM, 199). For this type, which corresponds more or less to today’s “control freak”, characterized by an organizational mania, the inability to immediately experience the relation to others, the absence of sensitivity to the object and, above all, through “a kind of compulsive overrealism which treats everything and everyone as an object to be

handled, manipulated, seized by the subject's own theoretical and practical patterns" (AP, 767), the whole world is seen as an administrative field. Children who dissect flies and Nazi leaders managing the gas chambers are "exemplary" cases of the manipulative individual type.

- 3 *The economist's and sociologist's explanation of anti-Semitism.* As a form of applied stereopathic thought, anti-Semitism cannot be explained by subjective factors. Adorno writes that it has "a specific economic purpose" (DE, 142) and by provocatively revealing his lingering attachment to the most vulgar Marxism, he adds that "mass-murder is indeed explicable by the falling rate of profit" (MM, 234). The explanation is that the anti-Semite projects his hatred of the bourgeoisie onto Jews. In fact, the Jews are quite powerless since, as most are confined to the sphere of circulation, generally they do not participate in production. But the masses, to whom liberalism promised happiness without the ability to deliver it, turn their destructive anger on Jews, wrongly believing that what they had been refused had been given to Jews: "that is why people shout: 'Stop the thief!' – and point at the Jew" (DE, 142). The Jew thus functions as a scapegoat to whom the economic injustice of the capitalist system is falsely attributed.

The ultimate reason for this false attribution is the opacity of reified socio-economic structures. The objectification of social processes, the fact that they become autonomous and that a social veil hides the mechanism that drives them, is at the base of the cognitive and social powerlessness experienced by individuals in society. Not knowing what the mechanisms are that rule their life, they attack Jews. From this perspective, anti-Semitism acts as an easy formula that enables a condensation of all social ills in the figure of the Jew. This personalization, which is only the flip-side of reification, of course, evades it: "personalization dodges the real abstractness, that is to say, the "reification" of a social reality which is determined by property relations and in which the human beings themselves are, as it were, mere appendages" (AP, 666).

Critique of culture, or the blinding context of the world

Up to this point I have knowingly ignored by far the largest part of Adorno's texts – the more than ten volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* in which Adorno discusses art and culture, with particular attention to music. However, since like all the rest of his work, Adorno's sociology of culture and aesthetics focuses on the theme of reification, the conceptual foundations and metatheoretical premises of these texts is already familiar. Thus, since these texts are an application of the theory of reification to the domain of culture, they are already partly understood.

Simplifying to the extreme, Adorno's writing on culture divides into two distinctive categories: one is concerned with mass culture, illuminating the reified nature of cultural products; the other is concerned with art, emphasizing the way cultural products resist reification. This artificial compartmentalizing of texts corresponds to the equally artificial "great divide" (Huyssen, 1986: vii–x), Adorno

draws between “kitsch and avant-garde” (PMM, 10). I shall now discuss first his thesis regarding the end of ideology, then his critique of mass culture, and finally his aesthetic theory.

Culture is not an immaculate sphere transcending material interests, nor is it a mere ideological reflection of the material base. Arguing against Marxists who reduce culture to epiphenomena as well as against fascists and capitalists who pull out either their gun (Goering) or their check book (Godard) when they hear the word “culture”, Adorno insists on both the ideological and critical dimensions of cultural products.

If material reality is called the world of exchange value, and culture whatever refuses to accept the domination of that world, then it is true that such refusal is illusory as long as the existent exists. Since, however, free and honest exchange is itself a lie, to deny it is at the same time to speak for truth: in face of the lie of the commodity world, even the lie that denounces it becomes a corrective.

(MM, 44)

Here we encounter once again the typical Frankfurt thesis regarding the inherent bivalence or, to use a more Marcusean expression, bi-dimensionality of culture and ideology: ideology, as an objectively necessary justificatory consciousness is not false in itself, but it becomes false in relation to the problematic reality it assumes. The task of “immanent critique”, which finds its model in the Marxist critique of religious and political alienation, is to take the claim of ideology at its word and to confront it with raw reality to demonstrate their mutual contradiction.

Yet Adorno claims that immanent criticism is becoming increasingly anachronistic. Even if it is still valid for philosophy and art, which retain a degree of autonomy in regard to the material base of society, it is losing its validity for the more ordinary spheres of the superstructure. In the era of advanced capitalism (*Spätkapitalismus*), which consists of a capitalism of directed monopolies, mass culture becomes an apparatus of ideological control. Having lost its autonomy and bivalence, it becomes one-dimensional, a functional extension of the base and a pure confirmation of what is. In these circumstances, in which the base becomes, so to speak, its own superstructure, it is no longer really possible to refer to ideology in the proper sense of the word. In so far as ideas are no longer trying to trick the masses, but are a mere tracing of the world, claiming nothing except the world is what it is, the world no longer has an ideology for it is itself ideological through and through: “Ideology is no longer a veil, but the threatening face of the world . . . because ideology and reality are converging . . . because reality, due to the lack of any other convincing ideology, becomes its own ideology” (AS, 202–203).

Adorno’s version of the “end of ideology” thesis is thus as follows: in a totally or totalitarian administered society – Adorno pays no attention to this subtle distinction – social blindness becomes total (*totaler Verblendungszusammenhang*). Since everything is one, there is no further ideological contradiction to dissipate.

Since reification is total (both society and consciousness are reified), immanent critique loses its object and becomes impotent: “The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own . . . Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge [of absolute reification]” (P, 34).

Given the reification of the mind, determinate negation must give way to abstract negation. This involves moving from “immanent criticism” to the “transcendent criticism” of ideology (P, 19–34). Unlike immanent criticism, transcendent criticism no longer takes place within totality, but instead places itself outside of culture and blindness – at Archimedes point, if you like – denouncing all culture as “garbage” (ND, 367). To my mind, this form of radical critique is highly problematic for at least two reasons: first, because the normative foundations of transcendent critique are uncertain; second, because its radical position and tremendous scorn for culture connect it to the barbarity it wishes to denounce – as shown in the well-known, but poorly understood, phrase: “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (P, 34).

The concept of “culture industry” (DE, 94–136; GS 10.1, 337–345) is introduced to replace the concept of “mass culture.” Adorno suggests that the concept of mass culture is misleading since following contemporary theory regarding the uses and gratifications of the media, it suggests that culture emanates spontaneously from the masses, while in fact it is explicitly prepared as a consumption item which is then imposed on the masses as a commodity, an item of consumption without any cultural value. Mass culture, which emerged in the nineteenth century, was born in the sphere of circulation. From the start, it was produced as a commodity, but since the culture industry is taking charge of it directly, they are no longer anything but commodities: “The *praxis* of the whole of the culture industry transfers the profit motive part and parcel to cultural forms. . . . The forms of the spirit that are typical of the culture industry are no longer commodities in addition; they are commodities through and through (*durch und durch*)” (GS 10.1, 338).

The culture industry functionalizes art and reverses the aesthetic principle of “finality without end” (Kant) into “purposelessness for purposes dictated by the market” (DE, 128). The interests of the culture industry are directly economic. Its only goal is to sell, and kitsch, fun, easy entertainment sell best – just turn on the television at prime time . . . The processes of cultural production are modeled on industrial production. For the sake of mass sales, cultural products are standardized, streamlined, coordinated, and planned in the most minute detail. Everything is mediocre and identical. The result of all this activity is

the reproduction of sameness . . . What is new in the phase of mass culture compared to that of late liberalism is the exclusion of the new . . . In film, any manuscript which is not reassuringly based on a best-seller is viewed with mistrust. That is why there is incessant talk of ideas, novelty, and surprises, of what is both totally familiar and has never existed before.

(DE, 106)

As industrial production of similar, serially produced goods progresses and excludes the individualization of the product that characterizes the craft or artistic production model, the culture industry tries to hide the abstract identity that affects all its products by giving them some semblance of originality. This is the “marginal differentiation” technique, or as Adorno calls it, the “pseudo-individualization” of commodities – from the cinema star who must have a cowlick or a French accent to be recognized as a star to the editors of weekly papers who create their own competition by publishing the same magazine under four different names (see Baudrillard, 1968: 189–217).

In evaluating the effect of mass media, Adorno adopts exactly the opposite position to Benjamin. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Benjamin, 1968: 211–244) Benjamin, like Brecht, welcomed new techniques of mass reproduction such as cinema and photography with great enthusiasm, as potential catalysts of liberation. Benjamin believed that the new mechanical techniques, which break with the solitude of bourgeois contemplation, substituting “exhibition value” with “cult value” (Benjamin, 1973: 218) and thereby freeing the work of art from its magical aura, can provoke a consciousness-raising with potentially revolutionary effects. But for Adorno the loss of aura and aesthetic distance is not at all politically progressive. The techniques of mass reproduction, reclaimed by the culture industry, transfer the aura onto reality itself. Thus, because film eliminates the distance between art and life, it does not produce the consciousness Benjamin and Brecht expected, but instead generates the fetishistic illusion that “the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema” (DE, 99). The aura does not disappear; instead it is directly transferred onto reality itself, making a fetish of it – an artificial object that looks natural and which the masses worship in distracting entertainment.

Disagreeing explicitly with Benjamin, Adorno believes that the overall effect of mass media is devastating. Through a sort of conspiracy, mass media contributes to the perpetuation of the *status quo*. Instead of raising consciousness, the culture industry replaces consciousness with conformity. By instilling its message about conformity, adaptation, and obedience to passive consumers it “reifies the resistance to reification” (MM, 202). The result is that “the spell of reification itself, becomes imperceptible . . . The total interconnectedness of the culture industry, omitting nothing, is one with total social delusion” (MM, 206). Everything would be possible if not for mass media. But the media exists and apart from what is, there is nothing more: such is the more or less metaphysical thesis of total reification.

Adorno’s hyper-functional field of vision of the media is untenable (Kellner, 1984; Thompson, 1990: ch. 2). It misses the fact that the media does not function according to a “hypodermic needle” model, in other words, its effects are indisputably powerful (*agenda-setting, agenda-building, gate-keeping, framing, priming*) and even deep (see McLuhan, Meyrowitz), but that they are nevertheless limited (see Lazarsfeld, Katz), and filtered by “defense mechanisms” such as selectiveness, aberrant decoding, and interpersonal relations (see Stuart Hall and the work of the Birmingham CCCS). In a word, he does not see that the media’s influence is neither total, nor direct, that there is no single dominant, unitary, and homogenous

ideology (see Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner). Nor does he reflect on the fact that the media can also be a liberating, critical medium (see Habermas, Thompson, Curran) or any other long-established factors in the media debate. In the end, Adorno is so fixated on reification that he systematically reifies anything and everything that contradicts him.

Adorno is a *musician-manqué* (Sziborsky, 1979). It is therefore logical that his critique of the culture industry includes the “music commodity” (QF, 37). His main thesis, developed in “The Social Situation of Music” (GS18, 729–777), an essay to which, he acknowledges, all his later sociology of music research can be traced (CM, 216), is that fetishism does not spare music. While music was initially able to acquire its autonomy in relation to the practices and rituals of everyday life through the market, later the market is blamed for transforming music into a commodity: “The same reifying drive that constituted music as art . . . has today confiscated music from men, leaving them with just the illusion (*Schein*) of music” (GS18, 730).

“The illusion of music” implies that although music still appears as an “in itself” (use value), it is now just a “being-for-other” (exchange value). Given this situation, the musical sphere inevitably splits into two categories: either music unconditionally recognizes its commodity character and capitulates to the market, as in the case of “light music”; or it refuses to submit to commercialization on principle and protests reification intra-musically by expressing alienation and suffering, which is what “serious music” does.

The more music is able to express, within the antinomies of its own formal language, the distress of the social situation and to call for change, in the coded language of suffering, the better it will be . . . Music fulfils its social function with all the more precision in that it represents social problems in its own material, following its own formal laws.

(GS18, 731)

In “Fetishism in Music and the Regression of Listening” (GS14, 14–50), Adorno systematically transposes the Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism and Lukács’ analysis of reification to the production and reception of music. In this essay, which is not easily summarized, Adorno tries to show that the universalization of exchange in capitalist societies goes hand in hand with the creation of a music industry and the regression of listening, or rather, since this is really what it is about, the regression of listeners. At its apogee, the liberal bourgeoisie produced total compositions whose unity and aesthetic consistency could be appreciated by the attentive music lover. Although the bourgeois does not listen to music in a structural manner, like an “expert” – for instance, Adorno himself – he or she is still a “good listener”: “he hears beyond musical details, makes connections spontaneously, and judges for good reasons . . . but he is not, or not fully, aware of the technical and structural implications” (ISM, 5).

With the triumph of the culture industry and its standardized musical hits, whose parts are assembled mechanically without really forming an organic whole,

the “good listener” becomes increasingly rare and eventually disappears. The good listener is replaced by the “cultural consumer” who is characterized primarily by reified listening and a fetishistic relation to music. Unable to concentrate or to perceive the immanent development of a composition in its overall scope, the cultural consumer hears snatches of music. The cultural consumer’s listening is neither structural, nor synthetic; it is just atomistic. These listeners like what they recognize, and recognize the constant hits heard on the radio which soon become the same old song. The fetishistic relation to music manifests in celebrity culture (for example, the three tenors) and the conductor (for instance, Karajan), in the obsession with technical aspects of the hi-fi, as well as in the impoverished listening which only lends an ear to the voice of the diva or the violin, especially when told that it is a Stradivarius or an Amati.

The aesthetic, or positive reification

Culture, which used to be one, has split into mass culture and pure art. Mass culture affirms reality, while art is its negation, but neither escapes reification. Unlike mass culture, which immediately succumbs to reification, art tries to defend itself in order to preserve its integrity by ruthlessly following its own immanent laws without concession (Zuidervaart, 1991). While total heteronomy is the distinctive sign of mass culture, art is characterized by its opposition to heteronomy, ultimately through its radical autonomy. Of course, this is not the case of all art, only the kind of art that interests Adorno: modernist, avant-garde, and expressionist art, or the ugly, non-auratic, non-communicative art of Schönberg and Alban Berg, Kafka and Joyce, Beckett, Celan, and Mallarmé. Thanks to its radical autonomy, simply through its existence this type of esoteric and intellectualized art can both avoid incorporation into the reified system of market production and protest the functionalized exchange society in which everything exists for something else and nothing exists for its own sake.

By opposing the exchange principle that has enchanted the world, works of art anticipate the dawning of a society freed from it. In this sense, art is essentially, in Stendhal’s famous expression, a “*promesse de bonheur*” (AT, 17, 178, 393) – a promise of happiness that no longer exists, and which no doubt never existed, a betrayed promise that art can only evoke through negativity, through the total negation of existing reality. Adorno suggests that through negation, thus, through its asocial aspect, autonomous art becomes social: “Art, however, is social primarily because it stands opposed to society. Now this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous (AT, 321). . . . What is social about art is not its political stance, but its immanent dynamic in opposition to society” (AT, 322).

Unlike Sartre and Brecht, Adorno objects vehemently to committed art, for he believes that art can only retain its polemical-critical position if it frees itself from society, consciously keeps its distance from reality, and does not give in to the heteronomous sphere of extra-aesthetic concerns, whether economic, political, or didactic. As he explains clearly, “all commitment to the world has to be canceled if the idea of the committed work of art is to be fulfilled” (NL II, 90). Yet art pays a

handsome price for this negativity. It must go to the limit of its autonomy and break loose of all contact with the world, becoming incomprehensible and abandoning all social effectiveness. “Between unintelligibility and the inevitability [of heteronymous incorporation], there is no third way” (GS14, 21). And if there is no third way between autonomous and heteronomous art, then art is completely polarized in terms of both negation and ideology.

A critical, comprehensible, yet socially effective art, such as the art of Hans Haacke, John Tagg, Hal Foster, and Victor Burgin, for example, then becomes a contradiction in terms. The social situation of art, as Adorno outlines it, is strictly speaking aporetic: if art cedes its autonomy, it submits to the mechanisms of existing society; if it retains it, not only does it lose all effectiveness, but it is also integrated as a harmless field, a tolerated isle of negativity. What Adorno fails to envisage is the possibility that art can be critical without being marginal and that institutions can offer means of access and spaces of contestation.

The rigorously autonomous and intellectual art favored by Adorno is strictly fetishistic in three respects: first, the autonomous work of art presents itself as a superior cultural entity, detached from the conditions of economic production; second, it hides the social labor necessary for its production and appears as a reality *sui generis*; and third, it is there as an end in itself, without any other goal than existing. Not only does Adorno recognize the fetishistic nature of art, he even assumes it entirely. Furthermore, in moving from the sphere of commodities to the artistic sphere, he “transfunctions” (Brecht) the role of the artwork by giving it an eminently positive function. By becoming autonomous, hypostasized as in-itself, and ridding itself of all appearance for society, the work of art reifies and alienates itself from all extra-aesthetic ends. This reification is positive and necessary: “reification belongs to the essence of art works” (AT, 146) for thanks to this “immanent process of reification which endows them with self-sameness, identity” (AT, 128) works of art are able to preserve their integrity and oppositional force. The following sentence, which is perhaps the most paradoxical sentence in the whole *Aesthetic Theory*, expresses it perfectly, in a peremptory tone that leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the positive connotation of the concept of reification in this instance: “Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society. If it refuses to reify itself, it becomes a commodity” (AT, 321).

By exceeding fetishism, Adorno believes that the work of art becomes an “absolute commodity” (AT, 32), thereby ridding itself of “the ideology inherent in the commodity form. The latter pretends it is a being-for-other whereas in truth it is only for-itself, i.e. for the ruling interests of society” (AT, 336). In other words, by becoming radical, ideology becomes truth; by following its own intra-aesthetic finality to its logical conclusion and giving up any extra-aesthetic finality, the work of art, having become the absolute fetish, transforms itself dialectically into a defetishizing fetish, that is, into a counter-fetish that counters the apparent autonomy of commodities that hide their heteronomy, through its own autonomy. Although it is autonomous, the work of art is also simultaneously a social fact. Adorno believes that the social mediation of art is achieved by the work of art. Its social character is not imposed on it from outside, but expresses itself in the form of

the art work. Not that art reflects the world like a mirror, as in Lukács, quite the opposite: the world reflects itself in the work of art, which Adorno explains as follows: “The immanence of society in art is not the immanence of art *in* society but the essential social relation *of* art” (AT, 330). Society appears in works of art, not in their content, but in their form, in the crystallization of their own formal law. In this sense, according to Leibniz’s formula which Adorno adopts from Benjamin, the work of art is effectively a “monad”: “in relation to one another, art works are hermetically closed off and blind, yet able in their isolation to represent the outside world” (AT, 257).

If this is the case, then the role of the sociology of art is to study “how society objectifies itself in works of art” (GS 10.1, 376). It must adopt an exclusively immanent approach. By immersing itself in the work by applying its concepts externally, sociology must establish how the whole of society, as a contradictory, unitary structure, appears in the work of art. There are two possibilities. The first is ideological: a work that offers a beautiful totality seeking to successfully reconcile form and content and trying to evade extra-aesthetic contradictions intra-aesthetically, which Adorno claims shows in its “technical insufficiency” (AT, 187). The second, critical alternative is a work of art that expresses itself without pretense, as shown by its ugliness, internal tearing, and dissonance, in short, the “sinister qualities” that make of it a work of art that is true, authentic, and successful. Works of art are all the more successful when they give form to the contradiction, in the process revealing it in the marks of their imperfection.

The marks of imperfection in an art work are like scars. They unintentionally recall and express the pain inflicted by the world, they evoke the cries of the Jews tortured and gassed at Auschwitz. In the era of total reification, art is pushed to a de-aesthetization (*Entkunstung*): in order to evoke a horror of the world, it must become ugly and inhuman, imitating the world, pushing it to its limits. Essentially, it must reify the world once over in the hope that “by duplicating the myth, [it] robs it of its power; it is as if the Gorgon were to catch sight of herself in the mirror” (QF, 62). Adorno claims that art becomes modern precisely through this “second alienation of the alienated world” (NL I, 176), through the “*mimesis* of reification”:

the modernity of art lies in its mimetic relation to a petrified and alienated reality.

(AT, 31)

...

Art works are negative *per se* because they are subject to the law of objectification; that is, they kill what they objectify, tearing it away from its context of immediacy and real life. They survive because they bring death. . . . Art’s opposition is thus in part identification with what art opposes.

(AT, 193–194)

Art brutally reveals the monstrosity of the world, it shocks and distances the world, alienates it a second time, and breaks the spell of reification. In a word, art uses the Brechtian tactic of *Verfremdung* to show that the world that believes it is

paradise is in fact hell. The totalitarian nature of society, which Adorno thinks through theoretically, is torn from the lofty heights of ideas to become a sensible fact. Beckett's characters, for instance Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, embody exactly what Adorno means when he theorizes the end of the individual. Beckett's plays are painful; they produce the experience of reification and angst that Adorno can only describe. Likewise, reading Kafka, the reader fears the same fate might befall him as Joseph K. The shocking thing is not that reification is monstrous, but that it goes without saying. Kafka doubles reification, and presents it in all its immediacy. The role of philosophy is to interpret it, but there is no clearly established criterion for tracing a line between the negation of reification and its duplication. This is not only the case for Kafka, but for all expressionist, avant-garde art that mimetically gives in to reification and no longer bears any other visible sign of commitment or caricature. The *Angelus Novus*, Paul Klee's drawing of the angel-machine, owned by the fortunate Benjamin, is exemplary in this regard. "With enigmatic eyes, the machine angel forces the viewer to ask whether it proclaims complete disaster or the rescue hidden within it" (NL II, 94).

This ambiguity in art applies to the whole of society. Utopia is now technically possible in the here and now. The elements of salvation exist in reality. As in the Jewish *theologoumenon*, all it would take would be for slightly modified elements to shift into a new constellation to attain utopia. All it would take would be for reason to think through the irrationalism of rationalization, for humanity to become conscious of reification, and thereby to break the spell, for history and progress to truly begin. But this is exactly what is impossible. For Adorno, the world moves towards a hell that it has in fact already reached. The catastrophe is imminent. Yet works of art are made, anticipating the transformation of reality in their form, since the law of the form of art corresponds to the law of society, but without the violence that characterizes society. As a moment that organizes the unity of the elements, mimetic reason connects to formal rationality, but differs from it in that it does not borrow its reifying categorical ordering. In art, form is not superimposed onto elements. There is no form/content dualism, such as unity/plurality, identity/non-identity, but rather a non-repressive mixing of the two terms:

Aesthetic form ought to be the objective organization of all that appears in a work of art, with an eye to rendering it consistent and articulate. Form is the non-repressive synthesis of diffuse particulars; it preserves them in their diffuse, divergent and contradictory condition. Form therefore is the unfolding of truth.

(AT, 207)

Truth is peace: live and let live, without domination; in a foreshadowing of the Other. In the end, the theory of imitation must be either reversed or realized. Adorno's last word is both theological and aesthetic: "in a subtle sense reality ought to imitate art works" (AT, 192).

Conclusion

Adorno's thought is complex, subtle, and difficult. Since I understood virtually none of it initially, I had to read almost everything he wrote, and as that was still not enough to grasp the core of his thinking, I also had to read much of the secondary literature. Having spent a great deal of time with Adorno, I now conclude that his work is a superb failure.

I say superb because in the philosophy of non-identity that Adorno develops – primarily in his major work, *Negative Dialectic*, which I also consider his most utopian text – he adopts the role of spokesperson for suffering and declares his solidarity with all threatened particularities, everything threatened with being unjustly crushed by the system. Through this, he joins and puts to music the normative intuitions of the late Horkheimer, without giving way to the platitudes and repetitive phrases that characterize his collaborator's late texts. But Adorno's work is nevertheless a failure because of the tension between his philosophy, which wishes to salvage the non-identical of reification, and his sociology, which eliminates the non-identical by reifying it. It is also a failure because at the end of this process, it is hard to avoid the impression that his sociology dominates his philosophy. It could not have been otherwise, since as I have tried to show in the analysis of the central category of the exchange principle, which articulates Lukács and Nietzsche's categories of reification, the immanent critique of identity thinking is simply a critique of social domination, cloaked in logical-philosophical language. In this sense, the philosophical critique remains effectively over-determined by the sociological critique of the system, and so far as this is concerned it clearly does not pass the test of my meta-critique. In Adorno, reification is not a heuristic *a priori*, it is a metaphysical *a priori* that constitutes his system.

By absolutizing reification, Adorno ultimately ontologizes it, and thus succumbs to the identity thought he wishes to denounce. The reification he criticizes is not so much a tare on society as a hypostasis of his reified metatheory. His diagnosis is simply the symptom of his own metatheoretical failings. To salvage the non-identical, it is therefore necessary to think with Adorno against Adorno, using his normative intuitions to develop a sociological theory that is compatible with those institutions. His assistant Habermas understood this clearly; by developing a theory of communication, Habermas does not totalize reification, but instead conceives of action in such a way that it functions as a rampart against reification.

Part 3

The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas¹

Third intermediate reflections

In Part 2 I tried to show how critical theory became lost in a political and theoretical impasse due to a lack of reflexivity about its own metatheoretical premises. Critical theory came up against a *theoretical* impasse because by artificially restricting the metatheoretical space of possibilities, it became fixated from the start on the themes of domination and reification, to the point that everything countering them was inevitably excluded from its restricted field of vision. Furthermore, by declaring that reification and domination are “total”, critical theory became stuck in an assumption of negativism that freezes society in its *status quo*. It encountered a *political* impasse because by fixing reality in this way it systematically eliminated everything that eludes or counters reification, precisely by reifying it. It was therefore unable to think social transformation adequately, except for transformations that reinforce the progression of domination. The result is that while it appears to be a theory of radical social change, critical theory in fact turns out to be a theory of social *stasis* (Bronner, 1994: 195).

It seems to me that this is the conclusion we can, and indeed must, draw from a metacritical analysis of the Frankfurt School’s critical theory. This is not necessarily a negative conclusion, however, for the failure of critical theory proves that it is imperative to say goodbye to the *a priori* of reification and reopen the metatheoretical space of possibilities. Society cannot be understood solely in terms of the conjunction of a strategic concept of action and a materialist concept of social order. Nor can it be analyzed in terms of the metastable reproduction of the dominant order. As Touraine (1978: 76) says: “it is not enough to criticize the order; it is also important to show that it is not all-powerful, to find the living source under the cement, the word beneath the silence, the debate behind the ideology.” In other words, a theory of society cannot be limited to an analysis of its reproduction; it must also be able to think the production and creation of society. If it restricts its conceptual apparatus so that it inevitably overlooks social mobility, then it is not a critical theory; it is a one-dimensional theory.

Taking a lesson from the theoretical and political failure of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, who was once Adorno’s assistant and became Horkheimer’s successor at the University of Frankfurt-am-Main, gradually freed himself from the totalizing analyses of his predecessors. Up to a certain point, his intellectual path can be seen as guided by a single purpose: to escape the distressing

assertion of the universality of reification by reintroducing bi-dimensionality into the heart of critical theory. Indeed, one way or another all Habermas' theory is based on a simple metatheoretical distinction, namely the distinction he draws between "work" or "strategic action" and "interaction" or "communicative action." A series of derived or added metatheoretical dualisms, for instance between the philosophy of the subject and intersubjectivity, formal-instrumental and communicative reason, and even the lifeworld and the system, each of which seeks to escape the impasse of the old critical theory, shows that this fundamental distinction appears in many different forms. While the importance of these distinctions is only indirectly political, they are directly relevant to my own metatheoretical point of view.

Although I believe that Habermas somewhat over-estimates the reach of his paradigmatic revolution, I respectfully acknowledge his achievement, for in one fell swoop it allows us to break through the crystallization of the space of possibilities of the old critical theory. However, it is important to repeat what I said in the introduction: all it takes to move beyond the impasse of reification is a non-strategic conception of action. By identifying non-strategic action with symbolic action, and symbolic action with communicative action as such, Habermas adopts a solution that does the job, but which still strikes me as overly maximizing, in as much as it tacitly assumes that the communicative concept of action is superior to any other non-strategic conception of action.

I return to this point later, but for the moment it is important to see that by distinguishing symbolic and communicative action in addition to instrumental and strategic action, Habermas explicitly broke with the monist determinism of the Frankfurt School and implicitly reopened the metatheoretical space of the social sciences, which as our lamentations testify, remained hermetically closed from the point when Lukács established the foundation of Western Marxism. Forty years of sterile intellectual activity, which came to nothing since it was fixated on the universality of reification and domination, have finally come to an end. We can now think the social in an adequate fashion again, without immediately collapsing into the paranoid despair of an ultra-Weberian diagnosis, which ultimately is only the symptom of its own metacritical weaknesses. Consequently, the "gesture of great discouragement" can be replaced by the "gentle, but ultimately encouraging, alarmism" (Habermas, KPS 8: 75). In principle, this metatheoretical breakthrough takes us from a strictly determinist social theory to one that is voluntarist. Once the possibility of the active determination of the social structure by social actors has been recognized, politics, in the grand meaning of the word, becomes conceivable once again. The *a priori* of reification becomes outdated and the one-dimensionality of society ceases to be a metaphysical postulate to become a scientifically verifiable and practically refutable hypothesis. Once the normative dimension of the social sphere is recognized, the Hobbesian problem can once again be posed in such a way that the social order no longer appears uniquely, by definition, as the result of the physical and psychic constraints imposed by a social structure that externally implements an imperative to conform on individuals. In principle, the one-dimensional vision of a totalitarian, over-integrated society has been

superseded, which does not mean that we must go to the opposite extreme and adopt the equally one-dimensional vision of Parsons's over-socialized conception of society. As we shall see, Habermas steers skillfully between the Scylla of the materialist determinism of the Frankfurt School and the Charybdis of Parsons's idealist voluntarism.

The theory of communicative action is a monument of contemporary sociological and philosophical thought. Habermas' elaboration of a sociological theory of communicative action is closely linked to the move from the paradigm of the philosophy of the subject (production and reflection) to the paradigm of the philosophy of intersubjectivity (language and communication). Habermas believes that with this philosophical shift, the primacy post-Cartesian philosophy ascribed to the monological subject-object relation has become obsolete. For the philosophy of communication, the dialogical subject-subject relation is paradigmatic. Consequently, the first and second person, Buber's I and thou, come to the foreground. As a correlation, the objectifying look of the third person is partially devalued. This paradigm shift also affects the sociologist's relationship with the object, for it goes hand in hand with an altered perspective: the attitude of the external observer objectifying the social world with a coolness that verges on cynicism is replaced, or rather, complemented by the performative attitude of the participant. From a performative perspective, the world no longer appears as a system of total blindness, but is instead revealed as a foyer of resistance against total domination.

While the theory of communicative action is closely linked to the paradigmatic revolution, in turn, this revolution is closely connected to the metacriticism of a logocentric identification of the rationalization with reification that characterizes reification theories. Whether we are reading Marx and Marcuse or Luckás and Weber, all of these theorists tend to identify the autonomization of sub-systems in relation to the lifeworld with the colonization of the lifeworld – the term Habermas uses to thematize the phenomena of reification. According to Habermas, this dual identification of rationalization and autonomization of sub-systems with reification is due to the fact that the Hegelian and Weberian-Marxist theories of modernity all remain attached to the paradigm of the philosophy of the subject.

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas distinguishes two variants of the philosophy of the subject (PDM: 75–76). The first is the “philosophy of reflection,” which privileges knowledge and sees the process of development of the spirit as a consciousness-raising process. The second variation is a “philosophy of praxis” that privileges the relation of the acting subject with the world of manipulable objects and sees the process of development of the human species as a process of self-production. In this framework, the constitutive role of self-consciousness is replaced by labor. In both instances, however, the subject-object relation remains paradigmatic.

Habermas believes that the break with the philosophy of the subject makes it possible to break with the logocentric reduction of reason to its cognitive-instrumental dimension. Since the reification theorists did not make this break, they remained attached to a restricted concept of reason and to the corresponding concept of instrumental-strategic action. Furthermore, Habermas believes that this is

what explains why they saw social rationalization as an institutionalization of rational activity in regard to an end and understood the categorical error of identifying rationalization with reification. To unveil this categorical error and to be able to grasp formal-instrumental rationalization as one selective mode of rationalization, Habermas believes that we must take leave of the paradigm of the philosophy of the subject and move on to the paradigm of the philosophy of communication.

Only then will it be possible to distinguish different forms of reason (cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and expressive-aesthetic) and to imagine a fully rationalized lifeworld in which cognitive-instrumental rationality would not predominate to the extent of absorbing other forms of rationality, and in which there would be a well-balanced relation between cognitive, normative, and expressive aspects of reason. Even if this type of projection of counter-factual possibilities is not without difficulties, it does make it more or less possible to show that reification is not the inevitable counterpart to rationalization, but that it is the result of a selective, unilateral process of rationalization of current communicative practices. In agreement with Habermas (KPS 5: 136) and against the post-modernist International, we can therefore conclude that “the Western logocentrism . . . that reflects the unilateral rationalization of the modernized capitalist lifeworld . . . is not due to an excess, but rather to a lack of reason.”

Although I share Habermas' concern to introduce a wider concept of reason, the narrow correlation he establishes between the philosophy of the subject and the logocentric concept of reason is not very convincing. After all, Kant also favored the philosophy of the subject but apparently that did not stop him from writing his three *Critiques*. Furthermore, it seems to me that it is not possible to conclude the failure of the philosophy of the subject from the impasse of theories of reification, especially the impasse of the Frankfurt School (Grondin, 1988; Demmerling, 1994: ch. 3). Thus contrary to Habermas, I do not believe that it is necessary to break with the philosophy of the subject in the name of an alternative paradigm in order to criticize the identification of rationalization and reification. A critical theory of reification should not so much demand a change of paradigm as a multi-dimensional concept of action. A metacriticism of reification, which sees it as the result of the reduction of the metatheoretical space of possibilities is thus enough to satisfy our purposes.

7 Towards a synthesis of the philosophies of consciousness and emancipation

By way of introduction: Habermas, a living classic in the human sciences

Some people consider Jürgen Habermas, the leading figure of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, to be the Kant of the twentieth century. His work is still unfinished, but already he is a classic in the human sciences. A rapid count of the proper name indexes of a selection of philosophical encyclopedias shows that he is the most oft-cited contemporary author. His omnipresence in intellectual debates is the result not only of the consistent quality, density, and rigor of his writing, but also of the encyclopedic breadth of his theory and the exceptional mastery he demonstrates in many different fields of knowledge. Habermas' thinking is in fact developed and informed through systematic incursions into various disciplines within the human sciences (philosophy, political economy, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics). Usually these incursions involve an extensive, critical, and reconstructive assimilation of the various theories he encounters. Whether it is Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, or Nietzsche, Peirce, Mead, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Austin or Searle, Chomsky, Freud, Piaget or Kohlberg, Marx, Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse or Benjamin, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim, Parsons, Luhmann or Foucault (to mention just the main influences), Habermas' analyses, which often become key references in the subject, are always refined and instructive. However, these analyses and his revisions of the classics are not an end in themselves, since from the start his work is informed by a systematic project. As we shall see, his analyses of the classics are only the building blocks of a monumental – not to say monstrously overwhelming – theory of modernity, which engages with both its pathologies and its promises.

Habermas is more than just a scholar. He has become an unavoidable reference as an authority – not just in the limited field of philosophy and the social sciences, for he has also acquired a considerable reputation in a wider social field thanks to his moral sensitivity and many political interventions in the public sphere. Although Habermas shares the critical drive and interest in emancipation that drove the Frankfurt School, he declares that he has “no intention to continue the tradition of a school” (KPS5, 209). Times have changed: now that Fascism and Stalinism are defeated the point is to promote democracy. Rigorously applying

Horkheimer's rule of dual reflexivity (i.e. retrospective reflexivity on the context of emergence and prospective reflexivity on the context of application), Habermas readily abandons the historically outdated theoretical content to which Horkheimer and his followers remained attached. Habermas' concern with the normative foundations of critique leads him from a deconstructive analysis of formal-instrumental reason to a reconstructive analysis of communicative reason, thus directing critical theory towards a normative theory of critique.

In retrospect, Habermas considers that the primary weaknesses of the old critical theory can be described in the following three key phrases: "1) the concept of truth and its relation to the sciences, 2) normative foundations and 3) the underestimation of the state based on democratic law" (KPS5, 171). To measure the theoretical, philosophical, and political distance between first and second generation critical theory (Wellmer, 1976; Honneth, 1979; Dubiel, 1989), I shall briefly discuss the ways in which Habermas tried to confront and overcome these three weaknesses.

- 1 The first feature that distinguishes Habermas' "post-metaphysical" approach from the approaches of his predecessors is a two-fold desire to systematically assimilate traditional theories and to methodically rally to the canons of scientific thought. Although Habermas appreciates Horkheimer and his associates' critical perseverance, he does not disguise his "irritation" with their radical critique of science. He shares neither the radicalized suspicion nor the fundamental hypotheses of the dialectic of reason. Rather, he wishes to revise the metatheoretical premises of the Frankfurt School and renew Horkheimer's project of interdisciplinary and postmetaphysical materialism of the 1930s.
- 2 The break with science and the radicalization of the Weberian critique of reason could only lead critical theory into the wasteland of an abstract critique of reification unable to account for its own status. For lack of a clear conception of its normative foundations, critical theory inevitably comes up against a "performative contradiction" (Apel), and thus becomes self-refuting. The baron von Munchausen sinks deeper into the swamp.

The question then arises: how can critical thought establish its own justifications? No doubt Adorno would have refused any attempt to found criticism, but that does not stop Habermas from prolonging the critique of the old critical theory with a study of its lawful foundations. He identifies these foundations within a communicative concept of reason, thereby anchoring rational action in anthropological structures and institutional forms of reaching understanding.

- 3 Epistemologically, Habermas' mode of presentation of critical theory is based on the Peircian conception of the "unlimited community of scientific communication" (cf. Apel, 1981, II: Part II). The conviction that all theory must be able to justify itself before the scholarly tribunal is the other side of the positivist dispute. Unlike Adorno, Habermas no longer wishes to exempt his theory from intersubjective verification. His debates with, amongst others, Hans Albert's critical rationalism, Gadamer's hermeneutics, and Luhmann's

systems theory, show how his theory of communication develops in and through dialogue (Holub, 1991). In this way, there is no hiatus between the theory of communication and theoretical practice.

Whatever holds in the sciences is also valid in politics. Transposing the Peircian principle of “logical socialism” into a democratic principle of the publicity of political debates (*Öffentlichkeit*), communication theory seeks to promote a radical democratization of society. Like most young Germans of his generation, Habermas was a member of the *Hitlerjugend* for a period of time (KPS, 512) and he does not hesitate to describe himself, without the slightest irony, as a “product of political re-education” (KPS, 513). Not only does he adopt the moral principles on which the democratic constitution and the rule of law are based, but these are the principles that truly form the starting point of his critical analyses of modernity. Habermas takes the bourgeois tradition of democracy very seriously, in contrast to the entire Marxist tradition, including the Frankfurt School. In so far as he revalorizes politics and looks towards new social movements rather than the old worker movement, his thought can truly be described as “post-Marxist” (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 70–71).

The break with the old critical theory can be described at a deeper level as a change of paradigm, moving away from the purportedly exhausted paradigm of the philosophy of the subject (or consciousness) towards the paradigm of communication (or intersubjectivity). As we shall see, this paradigm shift and the implied reopening of the metatheoretical space of possibilities have significant consequences for the category of reification. Ultimately, the return to the theory of reification and its reformulation within the communicative paradigm is the defining theme of the theory of communicative action. Habermas recognized this in an interview. In response to the question: “why has ‘rationality’ become the key concept for a critical theory of society?” he replied:

the concept of instrumental rationality was already the key with which Horkheimer and Adorno reformulated the theme of reification. . . . The real motive for beginning the book [TCA] in 1977 was to clarify the way in which the critique of reification could be reformulated . . . without giving up on the project of modernity and without falling back into post- or anti-modernism.
(KPS5, 180, 184)

In short, Habermas’ aims are to revise the theory of reification in the framework of the communicative paradigm and to defend the project of the Enlightenment against irrational involution. Although it is virtually impossible to follow all the twists and turns of the development of this vast project, I shall nevertheless attempt to systematically reconstruct the evolution of Habermas’ thought, from the writings of his youth to his most recent writings on the state of democratic law, focusing again on the analysis on the question of reification. Given the tremendous breadth of Habermas’ texts and their complex convolutions, I have divided the presentation into three separate parts.

I Towards a Synthesis of the Philosophy of Consciousness and the Philosophy of Communication

In the first part, I analyze the texts preceding the 1970s “linguistic turn” (Rorty), which was essentially a “procedural-linguistic turn towards action.” This involves distinguishing two main axes in Habermas’ thought: one develops within the paradigm of the philosophy of the subject (production and reflection) and is centered on the Hegelian-Marxian theme of the historicity and self-production of society; the other works through the paradigm of the philosophy of intersubjectivity (language and communication) and is centered on the Kantian idea of emancipation (*Mündigkeit*).

In texts written prior to the linguistic turn, Habermas worked within both the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness and the paradigm of the philosophy of intersubjectivity. The first area of investigation, built around the program of an empirically based philosophy of history with a practical orientation, still operates under the aegis of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. Initially, this direction is deployed in a philosophy of *praxis* in *Theory and Practice* (1963)¹ then, as a philosophy of reflection in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968). The second area of investigation, in which Habermas vigorously develops a program for a radical democratization of society, was presented in *Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and was later extended in a series of texts whose provisional conclusion is *Between Facts and Norms* (1992).

Initially, the two philosophical orientations coexisted side by side. It was only when the categorical distinction between work and interaction was established theoretically, in the 1962 Marburg inaugural lecture (TP, 41–81), that Habermas reached the point where the two philosophical orientations could be synthesized and the theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School reopened. This synthesis was initially developed in *Toward a Rational Society* (1968) and, then afterwards in his masterpiece, the magisterial *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981).

II The Procedural-Linguistic Turn towards Action

Although there is certainly some continuity between *Toward a Rational Society* and *Theory of Communicative Action*, it is important to note that they are separated by the philosophical interlude of the 1970s. After the publication of *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), Habermas realized that the reflexive philosophy of history had led him to a theoretical impasse and that he must break with the philosophy of consciousness. For a decade he worked on the philosophical underpinnings of the theory of communicative action. This is the famous “linguistic turn” analyzed in the second part, a turn that essentially marked the shift from a theory of knowledge to a theory of action.

III The Theory of Communicative Action

In the third part, I develop a critical analysis of the theory of reification presented in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. I begin by reconstructing the concepts of

communicative action and lifeworld, in order to deconstruct both the thesis of the disjunction between system and lifeworld and the thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld by the sub-systems of the economy and the state. I conclude the reconstruction of Habermas' work with a short analysis of the main theoretical changes introduced by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*.

Marxism and its revisions, in this case, its reconstruction within the tradition of Western Marxism, are the background to Habermas' early writings. Through his reading of Lukács, Bloch, and Adorno, Habermas realized that Marx was not a "dead dog" (KPS, 469), that the Marxist tradition was of more than just of historical-philosophical interest, and it could be used in a systematic, creative manner to answer contemporary questions. Like his predecessors, Habermas refused the Marxist straightjacket and did not hesitate to revise several of its categories.

From Heidegger to Marx: technology and technocracy in the early texts (1952–1957)

A critical distancing *vis-à-vis* Marxism is already evident in Habermas' first texts of the 1950s. However, until now most commentators (with the exception of Keulartz, 1992, 1995: ch. 2) have entirely neglected these texts, which were collected in a pirate publication (AEF). This lack of interest is partly due to the fact that the texts are not readily available, and is no doubt also partly due to an assumption that they were insignificant in regard to Habermas' later thought. But this assumption is erroneous. In an interview with Peter Dews, Habermas referred to an important article from 1954 entitled "The Dialectic of Rationalization. On Pauperism in Production and Consumption" (AEF, 7–30), acknowledging that "the key ideas in this article contain the kernel of much of what I later came to write in *The Theory of Communicative Action*" (D, 191).

In the 1954 article, as well as in other texts from the same period concerned with labor and leisure, the influence of Heidegger (1974) in regard to the question of technology is only barely veiled. The core of Habermas' critical concerns is the supremacy of a style of life in which the instrumental relation predominates over the symbolic relationship with things (he refers to things here because he has not yet thematized the intersubjective relationship). To describe this alienated life style, Habermas borrows Heidegger's distinction between *Verfügen* (to arrange) and *Vernehmen* (to hear), corresponding to two ways of doing or producing (*Herstellen*), namely, one that tries to "provoke" (*Herausfordern*) nature and one that seeks to "pro-duce" (*Hervorbringen*) it. By "pro-duction," Heidegger refers to a mode of revealing reality that shows things as they appear to themselves and that therefore allows humans to conceive of the means to implement them from the perspective of the completed thing seen as a whole. By "provocation" he refers to a mode of revelation that hides and supplants "pro-duction" and that instructs nature, forcing things to appear in a certain way, namely, only in terms of use and availability.

Habermas follows Heidegger's teachings on technology without reservation. He believes, as Heidegger did, that science and technology are characterized by a blind

expansion that infiltrates all sectors of culture, lowering them to the status of leisure. The mode of constituting reality belonging to science and technology is so dominant that it enables a definition of “life style” (Simmel) in terms of objectification or thingification, that is, in terms of the predominance of the *habitus* of “disposition” (*verfügende Haltung*) over the *habitus* that “answers” things (*vernehmende Haltung*) – or as he would later put it, instrumental action over communicative action. “The obscuring of reality by a methodically autonomous science is harnessed to an objectification (*Versachlichung*) of nature that can be defined vaguely, but more or less correctly, as the predominance of the disposition attitude (*verfügend*), over the receptive attitude (*vernehmend*), or domination (*bewältigend*) over preservation (*bewahrend*). Furthermore, the balancing of the two attitudes is significant, since it defines an important aspect of what we are accustomed to calling style” (AEF, 44).

On the basis of this conception of technology and corresponding objective lifestyle, Habermas undertakes a critique of the Marxist conception of pauperism. In his “seminal analysis of alienated labor,” Marx fully described alienation, but he was unable to distinguish it analytically from exploitation and economic poverty. Convinced that there was an internal connection between alienation and the capitalist mode of production, he refused to link alienation to the mechanization of production as such. This is the point that Habermas critiques in Marx, appealing to the Heideggerian conception of technology: “Marx never understood that this ‘machinery’ (and the whole social system that frames it), that technology itself, and not the economic order within which it functions, exposes humans, as both producers and consumers, to alienation” (AEF, 80).

As for the question as to how the alienation raging in the sphere of production can be defused, Habermas responds by distinguishing three types of rationalization: “technological rationalization,” achieved via mechanization and automation, “economic rationalization,” associated with the horizontal and vertical concentration of companies, and “social rationalization,” which somehow initiates a counter-movement to the other rationalization processes. Habermas is most interested in social rationalization. Historically, the process of social rationalization began with Taylor’s “scientific management.” After severe criticism, Taylorism was followed by Mayo’s human relations approach, which emphasized factors such as the spirit of camaraderie, a pleasant environment, and the organization of free time. According to Habermas, this type of rationalization “from the top,” which tries to create a good social climate within the factory, is still too closely associated with the logic of technological and economic rationalization to achieve worker satisfaction. Social rationalization does not obey the same imperatives as technological and economic rationalization and is not simply its extension. Unlike economic rationalization which is top-down, social rationalization is bottom-up. Through the creation of a space of autonomous activity within which workers can organize their work themselves without being subject to functional imperatives it puts limits to the extension of economic rationalization. In the distinction between technological and economic rationalization, on the one hand, and social rationalization on the other, we can see an early formulation of

the distinction between “labor” and “interaction” that characterizes Habermas’ later work. Similarly, his plea for a self-limiting organization and an extension of self-organization, suggests the rudiments of a systematic defense of the lifeworld against its colonization by sub-systems.

In his 1958 “Sociological Notes on the Relation between Work and Leisure Time” (AEF, 31–46), which discusses the effects of automation on leisure time, Habermas retracts and revises his conception of technology. In some senses Marx replaces Heidegger. In contrast to his previous conception, he now has a more positive view of technology and predicts two evolutionary trends: first, thanks to a reduction of work time (four working days a week in the next ten years), the sphere of work will lose its hold on leisure time; secondly, thanks to the quantitative increase in goods and services offered, a saturation point will be reached, after which the artificial constraints on consumption will disappear. Together, these two possible evolutions open the way to massive political participation to counteract the other evolution, which also derives from automation, namely, the probable evolution towards an authoritarian and technocratic system. The danger of authoritarianism results from the exclusion of the majority of the population from the main production and administrative functions, as well as the subsequent concentration of power in the hands of a technocratic elite. It is then not so much technology itself that presents a problem, but technocratism. To prevent this, it is not a new style of life that is needed, but a democratization of factory and society at large. With this introduction of the theme of democracy and technocratism, we are already at the heart of a problematic that Habermas was to develop in a long series of publications. Nevertheless, in parallel with this line of thought, in which the Kantian idea of emancipation (*Mündigkeit*) is central, Habermas develops another more Hegelian-Marxian line of thinking, predominated by the idea of historicity or the “possibility of making history” (*Machbarkeit*). This line of thought proceeds within the philosophy of consciousness and can be deployed either as a philosophy of praxis or as a philosophy of reflection. Habermas explored the Marxist variant in *Theory and Practice* and the more Hegelian variant in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

Empirical philosophy of history with practical intent: the philosophy of praxis (1957–1962)

In *Theory and Practice* (TP, 195–252; TPf, 387–463) Habermas proposes a reading of Marx that revisits and revises Horkheimer’s project for a critical theory that would reconcile philosophy and science. As a defetichizing critique, Marxism unmaskes the ideological relations that deform consciousness and block the awareness that humanity can make history with will and consciousness. Driven by the practical interest that seeks to free itself of reified powers, Marxism analyses the alienation from the totalizing perspective of its practical sublation: “Every moment in the analysis of alienation is the analysis of its sublation. In this analysis, the perspectives of sublation are not satisfied by simply observing alienation. On the contrary, the perspective of its suppression always orients the observation towards that which is supposedly suppressed” (TPf II, 178).

Through this theoretical anticipation of the practical suppression of the pseudo-natural organicity of history and society, Marxism retains the utopian content of the grand philosophical tradition. However, the hope of seeing philosophy realized in the world through its dialectical suppression as philosophy, or, to use a formula already present in Marx's doctoral thesis, the replacement of the "becoming-philosophy of world" by the "becoming-world of philosophy" is not enough. Philosophical critique must be connected to the analysis of social and economic crisis; the view point of what is "practically necessary" must be complemented by a scientific analysis of what is "objectively possible."

If we now compare the "philosophy of history, explicitly undertaken with political aims" (TP, 212) which Habermas advocates to the traditional philosophy of history from Hegel to Lukács, we note that it assumes the idealist heritage of the promises of the traditional philosophy of history, without however giving up on the positivity of scientific rigor. Furthermore, the sense of history, its goal, is no longer the object of a metaphysical hypostasis, but rather of a practical projection in a concrete historical situation. In fact, history no longer has an *a priori* meaning, except in so far as humans make it themselves, through consciousness and will, and knowing the objective conditions of its practical attainment. By thus placing the meaning of history in the hands of those who must bring it to fruition, Habermas reintroduces contingency to history. As soon as "the logic of history loses its 'metaphysical guarantee', it becomes solely dependent on human behavior" (TPf, 201).

However, although Habermas gives up on all "metaphysical guarantees" for the philosophy of history, this does not mean that he gives up on the idea of the subject of history. Only later does he drop the thesis of humanity as a unitary subject of history (Jay, 1984a: 486–494). After the "linguistic turn," he revises the concept so that the metasubjective attributes refer only to "something shared that can only be produced through the concerted effort or cooperation of individuals living together" (KK, 398). But we have not yet reached that point, we have only reached the point where Habermas introduces a second line of thought which is not as focused on the Hegelian-Marxist possibility of making history as on the Kantian idea of the public use of reason. With the concept of the public sphere, Habermas is already moving within the paradigm of communication, without being fully aware of it.

The structural transformation of the public sphere and democracy: the philosophy of communication (1957–1962)

In "On the concept of political participation" (1958) (KK, 9–60) and *The Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas presents a *Verfallsgeschichte*, a history of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere, from its emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was a development of the medieval representative public sphere, to its twentieth century decline. Although Habermas approaches the theme of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) from a socio-historical perspective, his intention is mainly normative. The goal of his study of the collapse of the bourgeois public sphere, which was caused by the transition from

the liberal state to the social state, is to develop a normative concept of democracy in which the public sphere acts as an ideal mediation that democratically regulates the relations between civil society and the state.

The public sphere is a unique political sphere in which private individuals gather to form a public, employing their faculty of reason. Habermas presents it as a critical forum, a tribunal of reason before which power must legitimate the rules it decrees and submit itself to the enlightened popular will formed discursively in the political discussions that take place variously in social gatherings, salons, cafés, and the press. The discursive model for the formation of enlightened public opinion postulates counterfactually that the process of reasoning and discussion between autonomous individuals takes place in a context of freedom, in an environment in which argument prevails over force. This model limits absolute power by forcing it to take the demands of civil society into account. The notion of discussion devoid of power, in which all constraint is excluded except the force of the better argument, is the pivot of the consensual theory of truth Habermas later developed. Habermas introduces the concept of discussion here as the foundation for the validity of the norms and laws and thus as a foundation for the legitimacy of power:

The 'domination' of the public, according to its own idea, was an order in which domination itself was dissolved: *veritas non auctoritas facit legem* . . . A public sphere as a functional element in the political realm posed the issue of *pouvoir* [power] as such. *Public debate was supposed to transform voluntas into a ratio that is the result of the public competition of private arguments and results into a consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all.*

(PS, 82–83)

Habermas is clearly aware of the fact that the political ideal of the “transposition of *voluntas* into a *ratio*,” the liberal-communitarian ideal of a deliberative democracy in which reasoned public opinion “reigns,” has never actually been realized. For the effectiveness of publicity – as the principle of democratic mediation between society and the state – not only depends on the quality of the political debates (the critical principle of discussion and the force of the best argument), but also on the quantity of citizens who participate in it (the principle of inclusion). In this regard, it must clearly be recognized that the majority of the population was simply excluded from the debate: neither women, nor those lacking economic and/or cultural capital had access to the patriarchal bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun, 1992: ch. 5 and 11; Meehan, 1995: ch. 3 and 4). But the fact that the public sphere does not meet the ideal does not mean that the ideal of the public sphere does not exist. On the contrary, the immanent critique of the public sphere takes the ideal at its word and confronts reality with it.

Starting from the ambivalent, partial institutionalization of liberal principles, Habermas undertakes an analysis of the “structural transformations” that have caused the decline in the public sphere. Paradoxically, the decline was precipitated by electoral reform at the end of the 19th century and the inclusion of excluded

groups in the public sphere. Indeed, as the masses were given the right to vote, associations (unions, patronage, and churches) and political parties began to defend the interests of their clients by giving them a direct political form. As a result of these neo-corporatist interventions, some domains that previously answered to public authority (legislation, administration) befell to private right organizations. A correlative to this “progressive ‘socialization’ of the state” is a simultaneous strengthening of the opposite trend towards a “statization’ of society” (PS, 142; KPS, 22–23). To correct the disequilibrium caused by both market anarchy and the concentration of capital, as well as to palliate material inequalities, the neo-mercantilist state began to intervene extensively in fields such as exchange and labor, which previously belonged to the private sphere. Eventually, this “structural transformation,” precipitated by the increasing interpenetration of the two simultaneous processes of the “‘socialization’ of the state” (neo-corporatism) and “‘statization’ of society” (neo-mercantilism), produced a “refeudalization of society” (PS, 142, 231; KK, 68). This refeudalization ultimately sapped the structural conditions of the public sphere, namely, the fundamental separation of society and state and the interstice between them in which the public sphere is situated as a mediator.

This interpenetration of public and private domains gave rise to a corporatist system in which organizations, parties, and the state conduct their affairs and make general decisions without any mediation by private individuals making political use of their faculty of reason and hence without any democratic control. Thus we witness a “politicization of society” hand in hand with a “depoliticization of the masses” (KK, 34). By substituting itself for the public sphere, whose functions it takes over, this new intermediary corporatist sphere does not just install itself between the private and public spheres; it also supplants and asphyxiates them. While the private sphere, freed of its economic functions, is reduced to the intimate sphere of family, invaded by media and mass consumption, the public sphere is “refeudalized,” and the consensus once established through discussions outside of power gives way to compromise decisions determined by power relations within and between organizations.

Habermas appears to accept Carl Schmitt’s diagnosis of the crisis of parliamentarianism and the substitution of “critical publicity” with “demonstrative publicity” (Schmitt, 1985), even if he in no way accepts his authoritarian solution. Recognizing that the interpenetration of state and society has undermined the structural conditions of the public sphere, Habermas wishes to mobilize critical publicity against politicians’ subversion of the principle of publicity and its resulting degeneration into demonstrative-acclamatory publicity. Although the very principle of classic publicity is entirely functionalized, Habermas believes that its purpose can be preserved through an intra-organizational democratization of parties, para-state institutions, and public associations, followed by an inter-organizational democratization that would extend the publicity principle to the relation connecting organizations to one another and to the state. Habermas thus argues in favor of the strategy of the “long march through the institutions” (Dutschke).

In making this argument, Habermas has clearly failed to overcome the tension that runs through his entire analysis: while he claims that bourgeois publicity

principles are still valid, he asserts with equal force that the structural grounding of these principles has been destroyed. In the final analysis, his second claim carries the day. The “refeudalization of society,” in other words, the turn towards a “total state” (Schmitt) due to the interpenetration, or quite simply the fusing of state and society, has permanently destroyed the vital space that mediated them. Affected by reification, commercialization, and instrumentalization, the public sphere has crumbled.

Only later, in *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), when social analysis leads Habermas to break definitively with the Frankfurt thesis regarding the universality of reification and to place critical theory on solid normative bases (universal pragmatics plus theory of evolution) does he correct his pessimistic diagnosis of the public sphere (Cohen, 1982b). In fact, he abandons the immanent criticism strategy at the same time as he abandons the Frankfurt vision of a static, monolithic system in favor of a theory of the crises of late capitalism. As we shall see, Habermas’ thesis was essentially that the process of “refeudalizing society” and, more specifically, the process of “the statization of society,” must ultimately lead to a repolitization of the masses. Habermas argues that this is so because by intervening in domains belonging to the private sphere (for example, education or family planning), the state destroys the pseudo-natural character of cultural traditions and thereby destroys a necessary condition for the maintenance of the existing political system. Habermas concludes that the state is therefore subject to an increasing demand for legitimation, which it can only satisfy through radical democratization.

The work/interaction dualism: first synthesis (1962–1968)

Work and interaction

So far we have seen how Habermas explored two questions in parallel: first, the idea of an empirically based philosophy of history with practical intent; second, an analysis of the rise and fall of the public sphere. However, these two directions, one within the paradigm of the philosophy of production, the other within the paradigm of the philosophy of communication, coexisted in his work without any real articulation or mediation. Only when Habermas explicitly enlarged his meta-theoretical framework by introducing a series of dualisms (work and interaction; subsystems and lifeworld; rationalization and emancipation; forces and relations of production) did he succeed in synthesizing the Hegelian-Marxian idea of the possibility of making history with the Kantian idea of the public use of reason. The fundamental idea of this synthesis, which he later presented in *Technology and Science as Ideology* (1968), is that to make history with consciousness and will is to master the hitherto uncontrolled process of social evolution. This mastery is not a technological task, however; it is entirely practical. There is no automatic continuity between the ability to technically manipulate objective processes and the practical mastery of historical processes, as Habermas explains bluntly: “*Liberation from hunger and misery* does not necessarily converge with *liberation from servitude*

and degradation, for there is no automatic developmental relation between labor and interaction” (TP, 169).

Countering the domination of technological reason, Habermas seeks to revalorize practical reason. His aim is immediately political; it seeks to counteract the tendency towards a scientization of politics, which reduces practical problems to technical problems, thereby eradicating the possibility of public opinion enlightening political decision making. Against this technocratic tendency, which occurs at both the theoretical level (scientization of practical philosophy – see TP, 142–169; TPf, 48–88, 307–335) and the practical level (scientization of the lifeworld – see TRS, 62–80, TPf, 336–358, KK, 70–86), Habermas advocates a democratic debate on the meaning and stakes involved in scientific research. Reacting against the depoliticization of the masses, he advocates a repoliticization of science through dialogue, undertaken according to the tried and tested model of the “round table” (Beck, 1993: 189–193) between scientists, politicians, and citizens, as well as arguing for a radical democratization of the public sphere. This would make it possible to rationalize the mediation between technical progress and social lifeworld, by means of a democratically planned society.

There is no underestimating the importance of the distinction Habermas draws between “work” or “purposive-rational action” and “interaction” or “communicative action.” In so far as this distinction re-opens the metatheoretical space of possibilities in a single gesture, it essentially enables a break with the *a priori* of reification. By “purposive-rational action” (Weber), Habermas means either instrumental activity or rational choice, or a combination of the two (TRS, 91). In any event, purposive-rational action is monological. Instrumental action obeys technical rules, based on empirical knowledge that involves conditional predictions about observable facts. The conduct of rational choice is decided through strategies, based on analytical knowledge, which employ deductions on the basis of rules of preference (value systems) and general maxims. Over and against purposive-rational action, Habermas defines “communicative action” as interactions that are mediated by the symbols of everyday language. This type of dialogic action, which includes both *praxis* (action) and *lexis* (dialogue), conforms to social norms that define the expectations of mutual behavior and that must therefore be understood and recognized by acting subjects (TRS, 91).

Although I recognize the meta-theoretical importance of the work/interaction distinction without reservation, as I shall explain below, the way in which Habermas articulates it appears to me to be problematic (Keane, 1975; Honneth, 1980; Giddens, 1982: ch. 8). For now, I wish simply to point to three aspects that challenge the implementation of this distinction: i) by reducing work to instrumental action, Habermas clears the concept of work of all the normative, expressive, and cooperative aspects it carries in the work of the young Marx; ii) although he introduces the distinction as an analytic distinction, he later uses it in an empirical sense; and iii) the contrast suggests that purposive-rational action is not governed by norms and that communicative action does not have any strategic or instrumental aspects. Despite these weaknesses, however, all of Habermas’ work is constructed on the basis of this distinction.

Habermas develops the distinction on the basis of an original and subtle interpretation of the young Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Spirit* (Habermas, TP, 142–169 and KHI, 43–63). Starting with a philosophy of intersubjectivity – which the young Hegel later abandoned in favor of the philosophy of reflection (PDM, ch. 2, see also Honneth, 1992) – Habermas tries to show that the Jena *Philosophy of Spirit* does not share the monist philosophy of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, but that instead, Hegel developed a systematic trichotomy on which he based the process of the formation of the spirit. Indeed, the young Hegel does not see the formation of the spirit in the idealist terms of a unitary dialectic of self-reflection, but as a triple dialectic of language, work, and interaction. Habermas is most interested in the analysis of the dialectic of work and interaction, to the point that he neglects the dialectic of language or representation (Ferry, 1987: 340–355). The interest he shows in the dual dialectic of work and interaction is linked to the fact that the young Hegel presents it in an entirely disjunctive manner, thus, in such a way that “a reduction of interaction to labor [as in Marx] or derivation of labor from interaction [as in the late Hegel] is not possible” (TP, 159).

Through the category of “work,” Habermas thematizes the process of control and manipulation of nature; while the link and social relations between individuals capable of communicating with one another is thematized through the category of “interaction.” These relations can be called “moral,” so long as they are not understood in a directly consensualist manner, as Kant does in the second *Critique*. Habermas emphasizes this point, arguing against Kant and in favor of Hegel that the intersubjective understanding that constitutes moral relations cannot be understood in terms of a pre-established harmony between individuals. Habermas considers that the Kantian case of pre-established synchronization between subjects who act by assuming that the universal moral law that is valid for them is also *a priori* valid for others is only an imaginary limiting case. Communication is not the same as communion. The reaching understanding that occurs by overcoming a prior conflict is acquired only through effort and is not given in advance. “In so far as the dimension of the possibility of contradiction and difference is excluded, communication in some senses shrinks into a sort of communion which no longer needs language as a means of reaching understanding” (TK, 32).

The reason why I emphasize the fact that conflict precedes reaching understanding is that later in Habermas' work the conflictual dimension falls so far into the background of the analysis that it may seem that he is defending a naively consensualist position. The best way to avoid this enduring misunderstanding is to see Habermas' theory of consensus as a reflective continuation of the Frankfurt theory of conflict. From this perspective, critical theory looks like a two-storey building: on the ground floor there is the Frankfurt School's theory of domination, while Habermas' theory of communication lives upstairs. Paradoxically, the reason why Habermas emphasizes the consensual dimension is that he is fully aware of the conflicts and domination woven into the social fabric. In a word, one might say that just as communication presupposes and overcomes conflict, Habermas' project continues and corrects the Frankfurt School's diagnosis.

The scientization of politics

The distinction between “work” and “interaction” intersects with the Aristotelian distinction between *technè* and *praxis* (Vollrath, 1989). Habermas borrowed it from his reading of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, and particularly from his study of Hannah Arendt’s *Human Condition*, in which Arendt distinguishes three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. Habermas reduces Arendt’s trichotomy to the Aristotelian dichotomy of *technè* and *praxis*.

In his inaugural lecture at Marburg (TP, 41–81), Habermas develops the distinction between *technè* and *praxis*, describing the evolution that led from Aristotle’s classic political philosophy to Hobbes’ political science in terms of a gradual reduction of practical reason to technology. For Aristotle, politics is a continuation of ethics; it is therefore seen as a doctrine guiding life according to the good and the just. Conceived as a practical, rather than a technical or poetic matter, in principle politics is connected to communal action (*praxis*) prepared through dialogue (*lexis*) in which citizens, gathered together in the public square (*agora*), debate the best ends for the community. Aristotle did not see practical philosophy in terms of a model of unchanging contemplation (*theoria*) seeking apodictic knowledge (*épistémè*), but instead viewed it as an intervention into the changeable and contingent framework of practice. Politics does not therefore demand the theoretical certainty of the *épistémè*, but rather *phronèsis*, the practical wisdom that carefully judges a concrete situation with a view to practical intervention (Ladrière, 1990).

Yet with the rise of modern science from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the classic conception of the relation between theory and practice underwent a radical transformation. Habermas suggests that this transformation, anticipated by Machiavelli and Thomas More, culminated in Hobbes’ social philosophy. Hobbes adopts an entirely opposing position to Aristotle in several respects. First, he detaches politics from morals; then, after adopting Bacon’s maxim that the only goal of science is power (*scientia propter potentiam*), he presents the relation between theoretical theses and practical application as a merely technical relation. It follows that in so far as theoretical knowledge of social laws can be used to create the desired social state, Hobbes considers theory to be an instrument of power. Finally, Hobbes thinks that the task of social philosophy, which develops its theses within the framework of science, is to identify the conditions of the correct organization of society once and for all, in other words, independent of time, place, and circumstance. Together, these revisions of the classic doctrine lead to a technically oriented and potentially totalitarian conception of politics as “holistic social engineering” (Popper).

Habermas believes that a scientization of politics will inevitably fail. This is the case because as politics is rationalized by science and practice is guided by a theory fed on technological recommendations, the problems of practical orientation in regard to the domain of *phronèsis*, which can never be entirely eliminated, can no longer be treated in a rational manner.

This is when the question of Schmitt’s decisionism arises. Decisionism fully recognizes the specificity of practical questions, but asserts that they cannot be

justified by or founded on reason; in the final instance, they can only be the object of a decision. If this is the case, then a division of labor between scientific analysis and political decision is required. "Scholars without practical intelligence" (Vico) can very well make judgments about the economy and the effectiveness of the means to be implemented, but they must withdraw when it comes to deciding the ends to be obtained, passing the torch on to politicians to decide the matter with authority according to their beliefs or interests. By splitting practical guidance in this way – between a rational determination of the technology to be implemented and an irrational choice of the ends to be attained – decisionism involuntarily proves that "progress of a rationalization limited in terms of empirical science to technical control is paid for with the corresponding growth of a mass of irrationality in the domain of praxis itself" (TP, 265).

Meanwhile, however, technological rationalization has advanced to the point where our scientifically-oriented civilization has placed the ends under its jurisdiction. Under the combined Weberian pretext of ethical relativism and the axiological neutrality of the sciences, decisionism first eliminates the ends and values of scientific argument and the decisionist model then gradually gives way to the technocratic model in which the objective constraints of the technology conceived of by experts appear to eliminate all other choice alternatives, imposing themselves to the detriment of the decision making power of the politicians. Ultimately, the total cybernetization of practical issues – the apogee of the reduction of *praxis* to *technè* – reverses the relationship between science and politics: "The latter [the politician] becomes the mere agent of a scientific intelligentsia, which, in concrete circumstances, elaborates the objective implications and requirements of available techniques and resources as well as the optimal strategies and rules of control" (TRS, 63–64).

Habermas views the technocratic model as unacceptable. Eliding the fundamental difference between *technè* and *praxis*, it sees politics through the technological model of instrumental and strategic rationalization. By reducing practical questions to technical questions, the theorists of technocracy theoretically suppress the need to address the citizens. Although rationalization is confined to the narrow frontiers of the technical manipulation of objects, the logical consequence is that a scientifically-oriented politics no longer needs to address the consciousness of men and women living together and talking to each other; it simply limits itself to managing society by accepting, so to speak, an instrumental manipulation of their bodies and a strategic manipulation of their souls. The citizens are thus ejected from politics.

Arguing against decisionist and technocratic models, Habermas wishes to rehabilitate both the use of practical reason as a communicative form of rationality and the idea of democracy as a discursive formation of collective will. He draws on John Dewey's (1991) political philosophy to propose a pragmatic model of mediation between technology and politics which fully assumes the process of technological rationalization without accepting its substitution in the process of practical rationalization. In response to the question "how can the power of technical control be brought within the range of the consensus of acting and transacting citizens"

(TRS, 57), Habermas' sets up a reflexive dialectic between technical power and democratic will.

This "dialectic of potential and will" (TRS, 61), which currently takes place in a non-reflective manner, in response to interests that are not publicly justified, can only be attained if political decisions regarding the orientations of technological development are informed by an open public discussion about the principles and norms guiding action. This type of discussion is only possible on the basis of a permanent dialogue between citizens, who are the depositaries of practical knowledge, and scientists, who have technological knowledge. In this dialogue, the decision about what is objectively possible (the actual state of scientific knowledge and technological means) and the articulation of what is practically desirable (social needs and aspirations) become inter-related. By appealing to scientifically enlightened public opinion in deciding the direction of technical progress, politics then becomes responsible for articulating a long-term planning program.

The scientization of the lifeworld

Corresponding to the distinction between work and interaction, Habermas distinguished two social systems, depending on whether purposive-rational action or communicative action predominates. In the "system" or "sub-systems" of purposive-rational action, such as the economic system or the state apparatus, the dominant activity is oriented towards success. In the "social lifeworld" or "the institutional framework of a society," action guided by norms and oriented towards mutual understanding predominates (TRS, 93–94). This distinction enables Habermas to revise Weber's thesis of the dialectical reversal of formal rationalization into reification by reformulating it in terms of an increasing domination of the system of purposive-rational action over the lifeworld. Consequently, the system increasingly represses communicative action and substitutes it by purposive-rational action. In metatheoretical terms, reification is therefore related to the process of reducing the multi-dimensionality of the concept of action only to its instrumental-strategic dimension, a reduction that produces, and that is empirically produced by, the alienating autonomization of the sub-systems of the state and economy. This dialectical revision of reason within the communication paradigm has important implications for the theory of reification. First, because unlike the Frankfurt School Habermas no longer identifies formal rationalization directly with reification; secondly, because the metaphysical postulate of reification is transformed into a theoretically verifiable and practically refutable hypothesis; and thirdly because Habermas subsequently adopted a more sophisticated form of this model in *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

Habermas presents the historical process of the reversal of formal rationalization into reification through a developmental model composed of three phases. Adopting an ideal-typical approach to development, the model defines the relation between system, lifeworld, and the legitimation of domination characterizing respectively traditional societies, modern capitalist societies, and the post-industrial societies of advanced capitalism.

Traditional societies are characterized by the predominance of the institutional framework over the sub-systems of purposive-rational activity. They have never expanded to the point that their action presents a danger for the authority of cultural traditions and the mythical, religious, or metaphysical interpretations of reality that legitimate domination. The emergence of the capitalist mode of production definitively shook the traditionalist preeminence of the institutional framework in regard to productive forces. The capitalist mode of production establishes the permanent expansion of sub-systems and gradually extends purposive rationality into all spheres of existence, as a result of which traditional structures are slowly subjected to instrumental-strategic rationality. What Habermas later termed the “colonization of lifeworld by sub-systems,” he refers to here as the “urbanization of the form of life” (TRS, 98). Since the traditional forms that legitimated domination are no longer suited to the demands of purposive rationality, they gradually lose their force of compulsion. The bourgeois ideology of equitable exchange then emerges, offering a legitimation of domination that no longer derives from cultural tradition, but instead derives directly from the base of society. The Marxist theorem that politics is related to the economy as a superstructure relates to an infrastructure expresses this transformation of the structures of legitimation.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, advanced capitalist societies have experienced two developmental trends that have radically transformed the relationship between the institutional framework and the sub-systems of purposive-rational activity that characterize liberal capitalism: i) increasing state intervention, ii) the emergence of the scientific and technical complex as the principal productive force.

i) To ensure the stability of the capitalist system, without challenging its characteristic form of private accumulation, the state intervenes directly in economic life, linking itself to private interests. This intervention needs legitimation, but as it can no longer appeal to the liberal ideology of free-trade, nor to traditional world images, it needs to identify a replacement solution (*Ersatzprogramm* – *Offe*). The state finds a solution partly by becoming the welfare-state, which reduces social inequalities by managing well-being in a technocratic mode “[The state] is oriented toward the elimination of dysfunctions and the avoidance of risks that threaten the system: not, in other words, toward the *realization of practical goals* but toward the *solution of technical problems*” (TRS, 102–103). Since it eliminates practical problems, the state’s intervention policy requires a depolitization of the masses. The question is: how can this depolitization be made plausible to the masses?

ii) Habermas answers this question by referring to the second developmental trend that characterizes advanced capitalism, namely, the emergence of the technoscientific complex as the primary production force and “main axis” of economic growth (Bell, 1973). In advanced capitalism, the state and major industry systematically stimulate the development of science and technology to advance their own interests. Huge investments in scientific and technological research lead to the formation of an integrated science-technology-industry-army-administration

complex that functions like a system of connected vessels (TPf, 121). Although individual social interests always determine the direction, functions, and speed of technological progress, these interests are essentially excluded from the discussion, producing an impression that technological progress is an autonomous process and a quasi-natural determinant in the development of the system social. The immanent dynamic of this progress produces objective constraints (*Sach- or Systemzwänge*) to which a policy responding to functional needs must conform.

This is the well-known thesis of technocracy (see Koch and Senghaas, 1971), which Habermas believes is faulty. But more important than its error is the fact that it acts as an “invisible ideology” (Lefort, 1978: 318 sq) penetrating the consciousnesses of the depoliticized masses and exercising a legitimating force. As Habermas explains, the new technocratic ideology that fetishizes science is far more dangerous than the old ideologies it replaces, “for with the veiling of practical problems it not only justifies a *particular class’s* interest in domination and represses *another class’s* partial need for emancipation, but affects the human race’s emancipatory interest as such” (TRS, 111). Habermas believes that this is so since by erasing the “dualism of work and interaction” from human consciousness, technocratic ideology hides the interest of maintaining intersubjective understanding and implementing a form of communication without domination behind the interest of enlarging the power of technically arranging things. From that point on “the culturally defined self-understanding of a social lifeworld” runs the risk of giving way to a “self-reification of men” (TRS, 105–106). Humans then risk taking themselves (and others) for things that can be arranged and adopting a reactive model of behavior directed by external stimuli. Thus communicative action, which is oriented by an articulation of meaning and assumes the interiorization of norms, would be reduced and replaced by conditioned behavior. Habermas believes that while we have not yet reached that point, if that type of process of human self-objectification did develop, it would lead to an “entirely rational reification which would finally confirm the truth of the technocratic conception of society” (TPf, 128).

Faced with the possibility of total reification, that is, a total phagocytosis of the institutional framework by sub-systems of purposive-rational activity and the total substitution of norm-oriented communicative action by adaptive reactive action and resulting self-preservation, Habermas proposes a revision of historical materialism in which the reifying technicization of the lifeworld comes to be seen as a one-sided or restricted form of rationalization. To this end, he distinguishes two forms of rationalization: the formal-instrumental rationalization accompanying an increase in forces of production and, thus an extension of the power to technically arrange things; and the communicative rationalization of production relations underlying emancipation and individualization, as well as the gradual extension of communication without domination.

This distinction between two irreducible forms of rationalization is of the utmost importance, for it enables a break, once and for all, with the negativist counter-eschatology of the Frankfurt School and its underlying romantic anti-modernism. By employing a monist conception of rationalization that identifies rationalization directly with reification, Horkheimer and Adorno were led to

believe that the domination of internal nature obeys the same logic as the domination of external nature, which, as we have seen, led them to identify the formation of the self with self-reification. As a consequence, they saw universal history in terms of increasing reification, that is, as a pathological but inevitable extension of formal-instrumental rationalization to all spheres of life. In short, reification became an ontological characteristic of the world for these thinkers. Vaguely glimpsing another form of reason, Horkheimer and Adorno called for the “resurrection of fallen nature” (TRS, 86), that is, the replacement of the attitude of disposition over nature (*Verfügen*) by a communicative attitude (*Vernehmen*). But Habermas now refuses this solution, although, as we have seen, he advocated it implicitly in his early texts. Formal-instrumental rationalization itself is not in question; it is only its excessive expansion at the expense of communicative rationalization that is problematic. Habermas believes that the instrumental relation to nature that typifies work is unavoidable; it is an anthropological invariant. So long as the human species is organically what it is, there is quite simply “no functional alternative” to the rational structure of science and technology.

Arguing against Marcuse and other Heideggerians, Habermas defends the Marxist thesis of the innocence of technology. Technology as such is not the greatest danger; the danger is that it tends to spread all through society. Formal-instrumental rationalization is thus not in question, but it must be circumscribed. It only becomes pathological when it represses communicative rationality and substitutes itself for it. By directly opposing Marcuse’s (1964) theoretical Luddism, Habermas asserts that technical rationalization is a necessary condition of progress. But, arguing against Marxist technical-determinism, he adds that it is not a sufficient condition. He criticizes Marx in this regard for conceiving socialism from a technicist perspective (KHI, 43–63; Wellmer, 1974: ch. 2). In his empirical analyses, Marx clearly understood the history of the human species in both the categories of work and interaction, thus in terms of an overall rationalization of production forces and relations; but, in his philosophical system, where he is trapped by his own scientific bias, he systematically reduces the self-constitution of the species to the dimension of work, and thus to formal-instrumental rationalization.

Yet the rationalization of productive forces is quite different from the rationalization of production relations. Technical rationalization does not automatically lead to socialism, for if that were the case, Marx would have done better to become an engineer rather than inciting political action. Instead, according to Habermas, only if the process of formal-instrumental rationalization is associated with a process of communicative rationalization can the ideals of a democratic socialism that represents more than electricity for all be attained. Only then will humans make history with will and consciousness.

Knowledge and human interests: the philosophy of reflection (1968–1972)

One of Habermas’ key concerns is the predominance of formal-instrumental rationality over communicative rationality and the consequent reduction of

practical issues to technical issues. He demonstrates and criticizes this phenomenon at two levels: first, as a theory of society, through a critique of technocracy, then as a theory of knowledge, through a critique of positivism. At the sociological level, as we have seen, Habermas argues that the scientization of politics, that is, the elimination of practical questions at the level of political theory, is extended and implemented at a practical level via a depoliticization of the masses and self-reification. But the progression of technocratic ideology and the implied gradual reduction of practical questions to technical questions lead to more than just the depoliticization of the masses and legitimation of the particular interests of one dominant class: Habermas suggests that they also affect a vital interest of the human species as a whole, in this instance, the practical interest in emancipation and the achievement of non-violent communication. Consequently, the critique of ideology “must penetrate beyond the level of particular historical class interests to disclose the fundamental interests of mankind as such, engaged in the process of self-constitution” (TRS, 113). At the point where the critique of ideology is extended into anthropology, the critique of positivism supplants the critique of technocracy.

Positivism is the underlying epistemological support of technocracy (Fay, 1975), for like technocracy, it amputates the practical dimension of reason. Under the cover of axiological neutrality, it seeks to impose the hegemony of scientific rationality and thereby commits itself willingly or unwillingly to a limited, one-sided rationalization. “A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism” (*positivistisch halbierter Rationalismus*) (POS, 198–225), which only recognizes the formal-instrumental mode of rationality, hypostatizes science to the point of making a cult of it, in which the main dogma is based on the reductive identification of knowledge and science (KHI, 5). By entering into the positivist dispute, unlike Adorno and Marcuse, Habermas is not attacking science as such, but scientism, that is, the epistemological imperialism of science that assumes a monopoly of knowledge.

My criticism is not aimed at research practices in the exact empirical sciences . . . My critique is exclusively directed at the positivistic interpretation of such research processes. For the false consciousness of a correct practice affects the latter. . . . At the same time, however, the positivistic self-understanding has restrictive effects; it silences any binding reflection beyond the boundaries of the empirical-analytical (and formal) sciences.

(POS, 198–199)

Habermas’ aim was to free a correct practice from its false consciousness, resist the claim to exclusive knowledge, critique the axiological pseudo-neutrality of the empirical-analytic sciences, and debunk the objectivist conception the sciences have of themselves by showing, in a philosophical reflection on the sciences, on their context of origin and application, that technical interests are not the only motive capable of guiding knowledge. The privilege positivism accords to technical interests can only be obtained via a joint exclusion of practical interests and the emancipatory interest of the specter of the interests of knowledge. Habermas

refutes the scientific claim to a monopoly on knowledge by taking a detour through an “anthropology of knowledge” (Apel, 1981, II: 7–154, esp. 9–27 and 96–127), which seeks to establish the very conditions of possibility of knowledge in the natural history of the species in a quasi-naturalist manner, in short, by exposing the internal connection between knowledge and human interests (Held, 1980: ch. 11; McCarthy, 1984: ch. 2; Ricoeur, 1986: ch. 13 and 14).

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt (KHI, 301–317) nearly thirty years after Horkheimer’s publication of the critical theory manifesto Habermas returned again to the program of a critical theory of society that would be a “theory of the sciences and a practical philosophy at once” (P, 17). Habermas shares Horkheimer’s conviction that traditional theory can only see itself as “pure” theory, that is, a theory purified of practical interests, so long as it has not thought about the way it is anchored in the social world. Unlike Horkheimer, who tried to thematize social interests and link the truth of theoretical statements to the correctness of practical interests, with all the risks of “intellectual totalitarianism” inevitably involved in this approach, Habermas sought to thematize the (quasi) transcendental interests that determine the possibility of knowledge, instead of truth.

Following the late Husserl (1954), Habermas (1962: 314–348) attacks the sciences’ objectivist illusion, according to which there is an “in-itself” of facts structured according to laws, although actually these facts are previously constituted at the pre-predicative level in the lifeworld. Nevertheless, following Horkheimer, Habermas turns against Husserl in criticizing his solution for escaping the crisis afflicting the European sciences. In cutting the connection with interests in order to devote oneself, like the ancients, to the disinterested contemplation of essences Husserl falls back to the illusion of disinterestedness that characterizes traditional theory.

Habermas refuses this type of approach. Following the Marxist transformation of Hegelian philosophy, which consists in seeing history no longer as the product of the spirit, but instead as the history of humanity, he replaces the transcendental subject with the human species. However, countering Marx, he emphasizes the fact that the human species constitutes and reproduces itself not only through work, but also through interaction. To survive, humans must not only produce what is necessary for their material existence through the manipulation and control of objects, they must also communicate amongst each other through intersubjectively recognized symbols within a normative institutional framework. These vital necessities – to produce and to communicate – explain why it is in humanity’s interest to generate the knowledge that enables it to control objectified natural processes and to maintain the intersubjectivity of understanding between individuals who are capable of guiding action. Habermas adds a third type of interest to the first two, which is derived from them. This is the human interest in reflecting on its origins, the interest that ensures the connection between knowledge and lived practice. Without connection between knowledge and interest, the relation between the sciences and their context of application cannot be grasped. This interest in self-reflection, or to use Fichte’s expression, in the “reflection on reflection,” through which humanity reappropriates its objectifications

and becomes self-transparent in a very Hegelian manner is an interest in reason and thus an interest in human emancipation and self-determination (Kortian, 1979: ch. 2–4)

Once it is understood that Habermas replaced the transcendental subject with the human species, it is possible to grasp the central thesis underlying *Knowledge and Human Interest*, namely, that the transcendental conditions of knowledge are founded on the natural history of the species. And once it is understood that the interests of knowledge (*Erkenntnisinteresse*) mediate the contexts of life and knowledge, and function as a hinge between a theory of the constitution of objects and a theory of the constitution of the human species, it is also possible to grasp the very specific and rather problematic status Habermas grants them by calling them “quasi-transcendental” (KHI, 194; TP, 14, 20–21; see also McCarthy, 1984: 111). Indeed, as the conditions of possibility of all possible objectivity, the interests of knowledge have a transcendental function in the framework of scientific research, although, as a result of the natural history of the species, they come from factual life environments and thus also have an empirical status.

Now that I have presented the logic underlying Habermas’ attempt to overturn the positivist hegemony, I am in a position to describe the architecture of the edifice he constructs. Habermas distinguishes three fundamental cognitive interests (“basic orientations,” “general cognitive strategies,” “transcendental points of view”), three environments (“ontological elements of the species formation process”), and three sciences. The cognitive interests are the technical, practical, and emancipatory interests. These interests, guiding knowledge, are formed in the three environments of work (purposive-rational action), interaction (language), and domination (*Herrschaft*). Three sciences correspond to the three interests that originate in three environments, namely, the empirical-analytic sciences, historical-hermeneutic sciences, and the critical sciences of social action.

The empirical-analytic (or nomological) sciences are naturalistic sciences, as understood by positivism and analyzed by Popper. Constituted by technical interests, the field of objects of these sciences includes “objects of the type of moving bodies; here we experience things, events, and conditions which are, in principle, capable of being manipulated” (TP, 8). These sciences are analytic because their method is hypothetical or nomological-deductive; and empirical because they submit theories to tests under experimental conditions. Empirical-analytic research systematically extends the process of technical manipulation of objects which, at the pre-scientific level take place in the field of instrumental activity (the work environment). Physics is the paradigm of these sciences.

Through an immanent critique of the nomological sciences, Habermas refutes their scientific claim to a monopoly on knowledge. Radical positivism defends the thesis of “methodological solipsism” (Apel, 1981, II: 375), in other words, the thesis that objective knowledge is possible in the absence of a possibility of intersubjective understanding. But this thesis is untenable, for there is no science without a scientific community, and there is no scientific community without communication. The limits of scientism therefore appear in the fact that in so far

as the “communicative community of researchers” seeks to justify the objectivizing sciences’ claim to exclusiveness, it cannot justify itself, precisely because it lacks the category of interaction.

The historical-hermeneutic (or interpretative) sciences place interaction at the center of their considerations. Constituted by practical interests, the field of objects of these sciences includes “objects of the type of speaking and acting subjects; here we experience persons, utterances, and conditions which in principle are structured and to be understood symbolically” (TP, 8). These sciences are historical because they deal with meanings bequeathed by tradition; they are hermeneutic because their method works via the interpretation and understanding of texts. Hermeneutic research gives a methodical form to the processes of understanding between individuals which, at the pre-scientific level, take place in the cultural domain in which individuals interact and speak to each other (language or interaction environment). As Habermas says, “hermeneutics is the scientific form of the interpretative activities of everyday life” (KHI, 175). The paradigm of the historical-hermeneutic sciences is philology.

Having criticized positivism’s scientific claim to epistemological hegemony in his dispute with Popper and Albert, Habermas attacked hermeneuticists’ claim to universality in a polemical argument with Gadamer (Apel *et al.*, 1973). A hermeneutics that does not think about the limits of hermeneutic understanding tends to ontologize language and hypostasize the method of reaching understanding. A hermeneutics that universalizes its pretensions inevitably falls into ideology, for it does not know its own limits and it assumes the ideal form of life enabling universal mutual understanding without constraint already exists (LS, 270).

By ignoring the environment of work and domination and reducing the objective context of social activity to its linguistic dimension, hermeneutics succumbs to “linguistic idealism” (LS, 174). Yet, the linguistic infrastructure of society is simply “a moment in a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraints of reality: by the constraint of external nature, which enters into the procedures of technological exploitation, and by the constraint of inner nature, which is reflected in the repressions of social relationships of power” (LS, 174). These constraints, especially social constraints, act on language and distort communication. Since language is not only a medium of cultural transmission, but “*also* a medium of domination and social power” (LS, 172) the human sciences must give way to the sociological sciences and hermeneutics must transform itself into a critique of ideology and the reified social powers affecting language.

The critical (or self-reflexive) sciences of social action focus their reflections on reified social powers and ideologies. These sciences are sociological sciences because their object is organized human activities; they are critical because they aim to free consciousness from its dependency on certain hypostasized powers. In the critical sciences, as understood by Habermas, the metaphysical *a priori* of total reification that marks the theories of Horkheimer and Adorno is transformed into a methodological *a priori*. Constituted by an emancipatory interest, in other words, by “an attitude which is formed in the experience of suffering from something man-made, which can be abolished and should be abolished” (D, 198), the field of

objects of these sciences includes the reified powers that distort communication and prevent the dissolution of pseudo-natural appearances and block emancipation. Although Habermas does not say so, the distinctive characteristic of the critical sciences is in fact that they aim to abolish their own field of objects, and thus to abolish themselves in order to make space for the historical-hermeneutic sciences.

Methodologically, the critical sciences sit at the intersection of nomological and interpretative sciences. Like interpretative sciences, self-reflective sciences proceed hermeneutically, but by replacing subjectively offered meaning in the objective context of social reproduction, they exceed subjective meaning. In this way they avoid the risk of ideologization that exists so long as hermeneutics remains attached to the dogmatism of daily life and understand meaning in a subjective manner. In this respect, the critical sciences are similar to the nomological sciences, although they are also different, for unlike nomological sciences, they are not satisfied with the establishment of causal invariants.

A critical social science, however, will not remain satisfied with this. It is concerned with going beyond this goal to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed . . . [it takes] into account that information about lawlike connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about. Thus the level of unreflected consciousness, which is one of the initial conditions of such laws, can be transformed. Of course, to this end a critically mediated knowledge of laws cannot through reflection alone render a law itself inoperative, but it can render it inapplicable.

(KHI, 310)

By distinguishing between the causality of the natural domain and the quasi-causality of the social domain, Habermas returns to Lukács' theme of "second nature": intelligible relations between humans appear as if they were causal relations between things. This is an illusion, but not a mere illusion, since as long as humans do not make history with consciousness and will, these relations, which are intelligible in principle, in fact appear to be pseudo-natural relations. This is why a purely hermeneutic approach is not adequate and must temporarily be replaced by a critical approach that detects, analyzes, and dissolves their quasi-causal character, thereby preparing for the dawning of a transparent, intelligible, and rational society.

This return to a theory of "pseudo-natural organicity" (*Naturwüchsigkeit*) within a transformed transcendental analysis is problematic, however, in as much as the very possibility of distinguishing between causal relations, quasi-causal relations, and hermeneutically intelligible relations assumes a realist ontology of corresponding domains (Keat, 1981: ch. 3, esp. 86). Yet, the theory of the constitution of objects that Habermas proposes is anything but realist. Indeed, in Habermas' work, the domains of the respective objects of the sciences appear under the criteria of

method, rather than under the criteria of object. The ontological mediations are thus systematically transformed into epistemological divisions (Bhaskar, 1989: 92).

This means concretely that the respective domains only differ from each other in virtue of the different cognitive interests constituting them. But if that is the case, if “nature,” “culture,” and “second nature” are only, so to speak, the crystallization of points of view, then Habermas does not have a real basis for critiquing the claim to universalism of positivist naturalism or culturalist hermeneutics. It seems to me that he is inconsistent on this point. Indeed, to speak of reification as he does assumes an ontological theory of domains of objects that is not formal. Since he does not have this type of realist theory, he has to sneak from a formal conception to a material conception of the fields of objects. In other words, to be able to think reification, Habermas must either reify the fields of objects or abandon his theory of the constitution of objects by cognitive interests. I favor the second option.

The paradigm of the critical sciences of social action is psychoanalysis. In the last part of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas presents a reconstruction of Freudian psychoanalysis, which he views as the “the only tangible example of a science incorporating methodical self-reflection” (KHI, 214), in terms of a theory of systematically distorted communication. Following Alfred Lorenzer, Habermas views repression, “the ego’s flight from itself” (KHI, 214), as a process of “excommunication” or “desymbolization” of the semantic content of the *psyché*, as a result of which the expressions of needs without social legitimacy are involuntarily expelled by the subject of public communication. Yet, these expressions, repressed in the unconscious and essentially deprived of language, do not lose their motivating force. Reified by the self into a neuter thing or “id,” unbeknown to acting subjects repressed needs become sedimented as unconscious motives that act as if they were external causes: “They are twisted and diverted intentions that have turned from conscious motives into causes and subjected communicative action to the causality of “natural” conditions” (KHI, 256) This type of causality of natural conditions is a quasi-causality. The semantic content of consciousness, self-objectified by the ego and put in a “situation of extra-territoriality” (Freud), is frozen into a “second nature” that can be dissolved through the power of reflection.

According to Habermas this reflection effects a “translation” of the unconscious into consciousness. He sees it in terms of the Hegelian model of reconciliation, as the alienation and appropriation of objectivity: “The ego of the patient recognizes itself in its other, represented by the illness, as in *its own* alienated *self* and identifies with it” (KHI, 235). The result of this reflection process is emancipation: there where there was an id (id = alienated self) there is now an ego.

At this stage, the weaknesses of the Fichtean-Hegel model become clear. In so far as Habermas tends to identify the *Anerkennung* with the *Aufhebung* in an idealist manner, he adopts Freud’s motto – *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* (where the id was, the ego shall be) – quite literally. This literal interpretation leads to an entirely non-Freudian conclusion: the id (in other words, unconscious influences and

instinctive drives) is not only ready to disappear, it in fact must disappear (Whitebook, 1985: 154–157).

Transposed to the social sphere, the Freudian theory of the repression of needs is transformed into an analysis of collective neuroses and repressive institutions. From this sociological perspective, which Freud applied to his theory of civilization, institutions appear as the social equivalent of the neurotic symptoms of individuals. According to Freud, the function of the institutionalization of values is to channel the energies of drives via the dual paths of repression and sublimation to guarantee the organized self-preservation of collective life. The institution has two functions: first, it organizes the violence that enables the imposition of the necessary repression for the satisfaction of drives; second, it compensates for the frustration imposed by repression through a system of cultural heritage. Freud calls this system of cultural heritage the “spiritual patrimony of civilization” (1927, *Future of an Illusion*, 15–20). It essentially contains the interpretations of needs that are not satisfied in the established system and that are incorporated in mythic or religious views of the world, ethical systems, and artistic practices. A part of the utopian content is deformed and used to legitimate domination. Following Marcuse (1974), Habermas now emphasizes the fact that at each stage the development of productive forces produces the objective possibility of weakening the repressive power of institutions, and thus of diminishing their ideological content and attaining utopian content. Having incorporated the elements of historical materialism into Freudianism, Habermas then clarifies the task of a critical “socio-analysis”: it must grasp the ideological content excluded from critical public discussion as frozen and positive forms of consciousness, in Hegel’s sense, and stimulate the self-reflection that dissolves ideological “over-repression” (Marcuse). By gradually dissolving ideological over-repression, self-reflection also frees utopian energies. The task of critical theory is to gradually and experimentally attain the utopian aspirations of the species: “Hence we must comprehend the actions of the Enlightenment as the attempt to test the limit of the realizability of the utopian content of cultural tradition under given conditions” (KHI, 284).

Habermas qualifies his discussion by explaining that this “attempt to test the limit of the realizable” is subject to the “logic of trial and error” and that although it is founded on the rational hope that scientific and technical progress will enable the realization of certain content that had hitherto been a utopian dream, this attempt may be invalidated by practice. Thus, this “logic of justified hope and controlled experiment” excludes “the totalitarian *certainty*,” in that a legitimate attempt oriented towards emancipation is attainable in all circumstances (KHI, 284–285).

If we compare *Technology and Science as Ideology* with *Knowledge and Human Interests*, it is striking that the dualism of work and interaction has been replaced by the tripartite distinction between work, interaction, and power. The fact that Habermas distinguishes interaction from power and introduces language and power as distinct environments of socialization can no doubt be explained in terms of his critique of Gadamer’s claim to universality. Nevertheless, by proceeding in this way, Habermas changes his critical program drastically. He no longer situates

resistance to the imperialism of the sub-systems of purposive-rational activity that tend to undermine the institutional framework of society in communicative action, but instead ascribes it to the self-reflection of a subject who is constantly confronted with the conflict between social demands and individual libidinal drives. The problem is no longer the technocratic erasure of the distinction between *praxis* and *technè*, for this has been replaced by the repression of the Marcusean distinction between “basic repression” and “over-repression” (Marcuse, 1974, 42). In this way Habermas’ specific project to attain a form of communication without power essentially deviates from its correct path and is hijacked by the Marcusean project of attaining libidinal desires.

Furthermore, by injecting a good dose of Fichtean-Hegelianism into his Marcusean return to Freudian meta-psychology, Habermas was led to treat the human species as a higher-level subject that becomes self-transparent through self-reflection (Theunissen, 1969: chs. 3 and 4). In this way, he becomes lost in the aporia associated with the reflective philosophy of the subject which reduces history to the grandiose drama of alienation and reconciliation, projection and introjection. If we add the wave of criticism that followed the publication of *Knowledge and Human Interests* to the problems posed by a Freudian-Hegelian philosophy of history (Dallmayer, 1972, 1974), it is entirely understandable that Habermas wished to escape what he himself described as a “dead-end” (LS, 4). To escape the impasse of a philosophy of the reflexive subject, Habermas undertook what Wellmer (1976), borrowing a phrase from Rorty, called the “linguistic turn.” With this turn, Habermas broke once and for all with the philosophy of consciousness, moving from the theory of knowledge to the theory of communication.

8 The procedural-linguistic turn to action (1972–1981)

In the 1960s Habermas approached the issue of the connection between theory and practice more or less directly. The analysis of social domination and the critique of ideology were at the forefront of his concerns. These questions were informed by the political ideal of the democratic organization of social relations in which any political decision ultimately depends on a consensus obtained through communication without constraint; however, at that time the question of the foundations of this ideal were just a dim horizon within his approach. By contrast, in the 1970s the relation between criticism that analyzes and criticism that justifies and founds, or between the critique of ideology and what we might call the critique of foundations, was reversed. Habermas became so concerned with the philosophical and normative foundations of his discourse that it almost looked as if he had abandoned sociology. But then in 1981 the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action* proved that sociologists had nothing to fear. Habermas remains the most philosophical sociologist or, if one prefers, the most sociological philosopher.

Retrospectively, the philosophical interlude of the sociologists of the 1970s appears as the prelude to a grandiose critical social theory. For the sociologist, the question as to whether the democratic project is founded historically (Castoriadis), transcendently (Apel), or universally (Habermas) may be of little importance. But in so far as universal pragmatics form the philosophical basis of the sociological concept of communicative action, the sociologist cannot fail to be interested. Although even post-modernist detractors of “grand discourses,” from Lyotard to Rorty, consider Habermas’ two-fold attempt to found social theory on the quasi-transcendental metatheory of universal pragmatics and the socio-historical theory of evolution superfluous and vain, that is precisely my topic in the following pages.

In the previous section, I reconstructed Habermas’ intellectual development by showing the intersection of two theoretical directions, one within the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, the other developed within the paradigm of the philosophy of language. Towards the end of the 1970s, Habermas abandoned the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness in favor of the paradigm of the philosophy of language. This paradigm shift is the object of the famous “linguistic turn”, which should really be called the “procedural turn” or simply the “turn to

action.” In concrete terms, this paradigm shift meant that “the transcendental critique of language takes the place of that of consciousness” (LS, 117).

Habermas became convinced that a critical theory of society must break with the philosophy of consciousness by assimilating hermeneutics (Gadamer) and British ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle). This move from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language was not, however, undertaken all at once. After some analysis, it seems that the shift from the theory of knowledge to the theory of action was preceded by four metatheoretical changes which came together to form the conceptual framework of the theory of communicative action. These four shifts, presented below, can be described under the following headings: from reflection to reconstruction; from the theory of constitution to the theory of consensus; from immanent critique to transcendental critique; from the philosophy of history to the theory of evolution.

From reflection to reconstruction

Various critics of *Knowledge and Human Interests* have criticized Habermas for succumbing to the “idealist illusion” whereby reflection coincides directly with emancipation (*Anerkennung ist Aufhebung*, Apel, 1981, II: 154). In his important 1973 postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas recognizes that this is fair criticism and admits that he confused the Kantian and Hegelian moment of reflection.

It occurred to me only after completing the book that the traditional use of the term ‘reflexion’, which goes back to German Idealism, covers (and confuses) two things: on the one hand, it denotes the reflexion upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking and acting subject as such; on the other hand, it denotes the reflexion upon unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject . . . succumbs in its process of self-formation.

(KHI, 377)

From that point on, he distinguished two modes of reflection: “rational reconstruction” and “self-reflection.” This somewhat technical distinction is at the heart of his work from the 1970s, and is driven by the ambition to found the emancipatory interest that guides the critical theory of society through an attempt to undertake “the rational reconstruction of universal competences.” By distinguishing rational reconstructions from critical reflections, Habermas also introduced a new scientific category: the reconstructive sciences (Alford, 1985). These sciences are destined to succeed transformed transcendental philosophy that Habermas developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. The object of investigation of the reconstructive sciences, such as general linguistics and universal pragmatics, are universal systems of generative rules (Chomsky’s “deep structures”), which in principle all competent subjects are able to follow. Their aim is to transform the implicit pre-theoretical knowledge of rules (*know how*) into explicit theoretical knowledge (*know that*).

Habermas distinguishes between two sorts of reconstructions, namely “horizontal reconstructions” and “vertical reconstructions” (TG, 174–175, n.). Horizontal reconstructions of universal competences study the morphology of generative rule systems at the synchronic level. Chomsky’s transformational grammar is the paradigm of the horizontal reconstructive sciences. Vertical reconstructions of universal competences study the developmental logic of rule systems at the diachronic level of ontogenesis and phylogenesis. The paradigm for vertical reconstructive sciences is Piaget’s genetic structuralism. Horizontal reconstructions are both the start and end point of vertical reconstructions. For example, the reconstruction of the developmental logic of communicative competences occurs so that the last stage of development corresponds to the ideal speech situation reconstructed horizontally by universal pragmatics. Developmental logic outlines possible ideal evolutions, or to use one of Habermas’ favorite expressions “counterfactual” developments. Whether or not these possibilities are effectively attained depends on contingent historical circumstances. This is why Habermas distinguishes possible (counterfactual) “developmental logic” from real (factual) “dynamics of development” (CE, 98, 140). This distinction is of capital importance for Habermas since it allows him not only to break with the classic philosophy of history, but also, and above all, to talk about specific developments and to critically compare actual development with possible development. This then is the methodological framework of the reconstructive sciences. However, Habermas did not just sketch out the program of reconstructive sciences; he himself undertook a horizontal reconstruction of communicative competences (universal pragmatics) and a vertical reconstruction of the evolution of the species (a reconstruction of historical materialism).

The core of Habermas’ thought is grounded in the intuition that “reaching understanding is the inherent *telos* of human speech” (TCA I, 287). This intuition was clear in 1968, though it would take him more than a decade to spell it out: “the human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended *a priori*. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we know: *language*. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus” (KHI, 314). Universal pragmatics can be seen as an attempt to found the intuition that there is an internal connection between language, reason, and consensus via a horizontal reconstruction of the “universal conditions of the possibility of reaching understanding.”¹ This reconstruction is “pragmatic” because it studies how language is used in communication; it is “universal” because it is related to rule systems that structure the speech situation in general. The key issue for universal pragmatics is the Kantian question: “How is a use of language oriented to reaching understanding possible?” (R, 233). To answer this question, Habermas takes John Austin’s (1980) speech act theory as a starting point. Speech act theory elucidates the performative character of linguistic statements, that is, how by saying something, one does something, for example, by saying “I bet X will win,” I commit myself to a wager; by saying “I name X Captain of the Sixth Division of the Air Force,” the general effectively names X captain of the division in question.

According to Habermas, Austin's achievement is to have identified the "double cognitive-communicative structure" (VE, 81) in every speech act: any language act can be split into a "locutionary act" (the speaker expresses objective content or says something) and an "illocutionary act" (the speaker undertakes an action by saying something – "doing things with words"). Thus, in explicit speech acts, such as "I assert P," "I promise P," "I order P," the first part of the speech act represents the illocutionary element, while the second part is the propositional element.

Habermas returns to Austin's distinction between illocutionary and locutionary acts, but revises it so that illocutionary acts now serve to establish an interpersonal relation between speaker and counterpart. From that point on, the first presupposition for reaching understanding is established: understanding can only occur if participants simultaneously reach the two following levels of communication: "(i) the *level of intersubjectivity* on which speaker and hearer, through illocutionary acts, establish the relations that permit them to come to an understanding with one another, and (ii) the *level of propositional content* about which the wish to reach understanding in the communicative function" (SI, 64).

At this point Habermas is forced to diverge from Austin, for, unlike Austin, he is not trying to reconstruct the conditions of success of speech acts linked to specific social institutions (betting, naming, marriage, baptism), but of speech acts in general. However, once the institutional guarantees of reaching understanding are abrogated, the question arises: how can it be assured? Habermas' response is his claim that "with their illocutionary acts, speaker and hearer raise validity claims and demand they be recognized. But this recognition need not follow irrationally, since the validity claims have a cognitive character and can be checked. I would like, therefore, to defend the following thesis: in the final analysis, the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice versa because speech-act-typical commitment are connected with cognitively testable validity claims" (CE, 63).

The main thesis of universal pragmatics is that validity claims are universal and unavoidable, since every speech act implicitly contains them; it is not necessarily irrational to recognize them, since the validity claims can be criticized if they are not justified by arguments; and this rational recognition guarantees reaching understanding, since by accepting validity claims, speaker and listener establish *eo ipso* an agreement about their well-foundedness.

When a communicative actor engages in a process of reaching understanding by entering into a communicative act (as opposed to a strategic act), Habermas claims that the actor cannot avoid making four validity claims that are equally original and irreducible: intelligibility (the speaker claims to express himself or herself in an intelligible manner through grammatically well-formed sentences); truth (the speaker claims to intend to communicate true propositional content); justice (the speaker claims to choose a just statement with regard to prevailing norms and values); and sincerity (the speaker claims to wish to express his or her intentions sincerely).

There are four distinctive sectors of reality corresponding to these four claims, namely, language (the medium of language); external nature (the totality of things that can be represented and manipulated); society (the totality of legitimately

established interpersonal relations); and internal nature (the totality of subjective experiences to which the speaker has privileged access). Just as each statement implicitly expresses the four sectors of reality it also implicitly introduces the four validity claims. Since claims are universal, they are always simultaneously issued and recognized as justified even when they cannot be simultaneously included in the discussion.

Each speech act implicitly contains four validity claims open to explicit critique. The attempt to reach understanding only succeeds if the listener accepts the speaker's validity claims. To accept these claims is to recognize their well-foundedness, which presupposes that the listener implicitly or explicitly takes a position on the justifications on which the speaker's claims are based. Validity claims are naively accepted in daily life, for they are, so to speak, already validated in advance by a basic agreement that is always tacitly assumed. Yet this fundamental consensus that is naively assumed in everyday life can be put into question by explicit refusal to honor one or more validity claims. Then, understanding can no longer be reached, or at least not immediately, and communicative activity is suspended. Those involved then find themselves faced with the following alternative: i) interrupt all communication, suspend the validity of the validity claims, and move onto strategic activity, or ii) take up communicative activity again at the level of argumentative discourse in order to examine the problematic claim in discussion. Habermas is most interested in the second option, which he develops in his consensual theory of truth.

From theory of constitution to consensus theory

While criticism of the "idealist illusion" led to the shift from reflection to reconstruction, critique of the "transcendental illusion" – in which the conditions of objectivity are identical to the conditions of truth – led the way from the theory of constitution to the theory of consensus.² In the postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas recognized that he had not distinguished sufficiently between the conditions of the objectivity of experience – analyzed in the theory of knowledge interests – and the conditions of justification of validity claims, which are the object of a discursive or consensual theory of truth. Habermas emphasizes that the problem of the validity of statements cannot be resolved by a theory of the constitution of the object, for although the objectivity of experience is clearly a necessary condition of truth, contrary to the claim of the theory of truth-correspondence, it is not a sufficient condition for it.

A claim grounded in experiences is not yet by any means a justified claim. The validity claim of constative speech acts, that is, the truth that we claim propositions to have by asserting them, depends on two conditions. First, it must be grounded in experience . . . Second, it must be discursively redeemable ; that is, the statement must be able to hold up against all counterarguments and command the assent of all potential participants in a discourse.

(PSI, 89)

Experience and truth

Although Habermas clearly indicates that experience is a necessary condition of truth at this point, he later tends to entirely neglect the evidential or referential dimension of truth, presenting a one-sided view in which consensus is no longer so much the result of truth as truth is the result of consensus. Although the theory of truth-correspondence certainly needs the complement of a consensus theory, the opposite is equally true, since pushed to its logical conclusion a purely consensual theory of truth implies that experiments, observations, and scientific research are superfluous. In that case, all that would be needed for science to progress would be a guarantee of the institutional conditions of the discussion, which is patently absurd.

Discussion and truth

Starting from the Peircian version of the consensual theory of truth, which says that a statement can be called true if, and only if, it is granted universal and counterfactual assent in the unlimited communication community, Habermas wishes to both clarify the conditions of truth and to extend them to normative justice. To this end, he returns to the question of the discursive justification of validity claims. We have seen that in the communicative action of everyday life, validity claims are tacitly accepted. A background consensus guarantees the smooth functioning of ordinary language. When the language game is disturbed and the consensus is affected, it is assumed that subjects can move from communicative action to discussion (*Diskurs*) in order to subject validity claims to explicit discussion. To presume that at any moment we can shift from communication to discussion to justify truth claims is counterfactual: factually, we act as if this assumption was real: “this inevitable fiction is based on the humanity of human relations, among people who are still human, in other words, who have not yet become entirely foreign to themselves as subjects through self-objectification” (TG, 120).

In discussion we justify truth claims by producing arguments. Although discussion is simply the pursuit of communicative activity by other means, it differs from action oriented towards reaching understanding in that it requires a “suspension of all practical constraints” in order to invalidate all constraints other than “the ‘force’ of the argument” (KHI, 363). Aside from this suspension of all practical constraints, discussion also demands a “virtualization of all truth claims” (LS, 279), in other words, a move from the natural to the hypothetical attitude in order to consider facts and norms from the perspective of their existence or possible legitimacy, as hypotheses that can be retained, revised, or refuted.

Although Habermas introduces argumentative discourse as the medium for thematizing truth claims, it is important to note that the possibility of a discursive justification does not count for intelligibility or sincerity. Intelligibility is not a validity claim in the strict sense, rather it is a “[pre] condition of communication” (LS, 288). In so far as communication occurs smoothly, it is already satisfied. On the other hand, sincerity is clearly a real validity claim, but unlike truth and justice,

Habermas believes it cannot be honored by discussion, but only by the consistent behavior of the subject whose authenticity is in question. Thus, only truth and justice can be honored by discussion. This leads Habermas to distinguish two sorts of discussions, namely “theoretical discussions” and “practical discussions.” The aim of discussion is to reach either a rationally motivated consensus or a rationally motivated dissensus about controversial validity claims. Habermas only mentions in passing the possibility of a rational dissensus (ED, 204), yet it seems to me that the rational refusal of validity claims is just as important as their rational recognition. It is entirely possible that after a long discussion the parties are led to conclude that in the present situation rational consensus is not possible. In this case, the parties have reached what must be called rational dissensus. Furthermore, it is important to note with Perelman (1988: Part 1) that in truly important discussions about philosophical, religious, moral, artistic, political, or social questions, pluralism reigns.

Habermas introduced the famous concept of the “ideal speech situation” (LS, 320–328; TG, 136–141) in the context of theoretical and practical discussions. The ideal speech situation defines the formal properties that discursive arguments must fulfill in order for the consensus obtained to represent more than a mere compromise or circumstantial agreement. In this sense, the ideal speech situation is a metanorm that serves to distinguish a simple factual or empirical consensus from a true rational consensus. This distinction is important, for the rational consensus of all possible participants in the discussion, excluding no one – counterfactually, since Habermas even includes the deceased – is the criterion of truth and justice.

The formal conditions of the ideal speech situation, which counterfactually guarantees a rationally motivated consensus only via the force of the best argument, are: (i) each participant in the discussion has an equal opportunity to initiate and extend communication activity; (ii) each participant has an equal opportunity to present claims, recommendations, and explanations, and to challenge others to justify themselves. These two conditions are the conditions of symmetry that guarantee opportunities in the choice and implementation of speech acts; (iii) each participant has an equal opportunity to express his or her positions, sentiments, and wishes; (iv) each participant has an equal opportunity to order and oppose, allow and prohibit, summarize and ask for explanations. Together, these last two conditions, which relate to existing action contexts, are the conditions of reciprocity that guarantee both sincerity and the lack of power and social privileges.

The formal conditions of symmetry and reciprocity, which characterize the ideal speech situation and guarantee the exclusion of systematic deformations of communication, are the sufficient conditions for rational agreement. Of course, Habermas is aware that any empirical discussion is subject to fundamental restrictions that exclude the complete attainment of ideal conditions – that is precisely why the situation is called ideal, in a Kantian sense.³ But faced with all the pseudo-materialist objections that emphasize the empirical constraints obstructing real communication, it is essential to emphasize the fact that “just because there is no ideal communication does not mean that there is no communication ideal” (Hunyadi, 1996: 426).

By claiming that any empirical discussion anticipates the ideal speech situation, even when it does not attain it, Habermas not only establishes a critical standard that makes it possible to put into question any consensus that has been effectively established and to examine whether it presents the sufficient guarantees to found a consensus, he has also laid down the normative foundations of critical theory. This is the case in so far as the pragmatic counterfactual conditions of the ideal speech situation happen to be the conditions of an ideal life form in which all important political decisions result in a consensus forged by discussion within specific institutional structures.

From immanent criticism to transcendent criticism

Let's recapitulate: Habermas' fundamental intuition is founded on a conception of the *telos* of language, which becomes a model for universal, unconstrained consensus. Universal pragmatics founds and develops this intuition; speech act analysis shows that speech acts are oriented towards reaching understanding; analysis of mutual understanding establishes that it is possible if four types of validity claims are recognized; validity claim analysis shows that these claims can ultimately be justified by discussion; discourse analysis indicates that it presupposes the ideal speech situation; analysis of the ideal speech situation leads to presuppositions about an ideal form of life. The conclusion of this series of arguments is that the very structure of speech acts anticipates a communicative life form in which ideas of "truth" (reaching a rational consensus), "freedom" (the right to concede only to the force of the best argument), and "justice" (the symmetrical and reciprocal distribution of rights among participants) will be attained (TG, 139). Consequently, the normative foundations of critical theory are not at all arbitrary; they derive from the very structure of communicative action. The internal link between language, reaching understanding through consensus, and reason is thus established.

Thanks to this quasi-transcendental founding of critique in communicative reason, Habermas is now in a position to break definitively with the theory of universal reification of his predecessors. Universal pragmatics shows that the critical moment in communicative reason is indestructible and that the claim of communicative reason can never be silenced by the structural violence of reification. As Habermas says, reason is "a stubbornly transcending power, because it is renewed with each act of unconstrained understanding" (R, 221). At the same time as he refutes the totalizing thesis of reification, Habermas abandons the strategy of immanent critique in favor of a more transcendental approach. He no longer looks for the universal principles that found critique in historical reality; instead he is interested in the unavoidable, universal presuppositions of communication. Critique no longer takes bourgeois ideals literally to confront them with reality. Furthermore, Habermas believes that it is no longer even possible to do so, for since "bourgeois consciousness has become cynical" (CE, 97; also LC, 122), the norms and values that could be called upon for an immanent critique are missing.

Through the rational reconstruction of the universal pragmatic presuppositions of communication and the procedures for justifying norms and values, critique

finds a quasi-transcendental solid grounding in the constitution of the human species. As long as humans do not become automatons, in other words, as long as communication is part of the reproductive conditions of the species, the normative bases of the critique are secure, for as soon as one speech act is made, or to be more precise, as soon as a judgment is solicited, the structure of communal life within the framework of communication without constraint is already implied. Since any discussion counterfactually presupposes and anticipates the ideal speech situation and thereby anticipates an ideal life form, Habermas can claim that “the truth of propositions is bound up with the intention of leading a genuine life” (P, 107).

Habermas emphasizes the fact that rational consensus not only functions as a criterion of truth (or rather, a criterion of falsity) in theoretical discussions, but also as a criterion of justice (or rather, injustice) in practical discussions. Indeed, without ignoring the difference between questions relating to truth and those related to justice, he believes that it is possible to found just norms in reason in a way that is analogous to the one used for true statements. In other words, Habermas believes that “practical questions admit of truth” (LC, 111). Discourse ethics is concerned with a systematic defense of this cognitivist thesis.

Although the expression “discourse ethics”⁴ is widely used in philosophical seminars and beyond to refer to Habermas’s attempt to undertake rational reconstruction from a moral point of view, the expression is misleading on two counts. First, because discourse ethics is not an ethics, but a “metaethic”: it is not concerned with the formulation of concrete norms or values, but with the formulation of the metanorm of normativity itself. Its central problem is the *Begründungs*-problematic, the problem of foundations, that is, the rational validation of prevailing norms and the specification of the appropriate procedures for discursive justification.

The key element of discourse ethics is the metanorm U, the revised Kantian principle of universalization. In an ethics of discourse “only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity *as participants in a practical discourse*” (MC, 66). Since discourse ethics is a metaethic, it can quite rightly be accused of being procedural and formal. Besides, Habermas is not afraid of being accused of the formal vacuity which he fully assumes: “The principle of discursive ethics . . . provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure: practical discourse. Practical discourse is not a procedure for generating justified norms but a procedure for testing the validity of norms that are being proposed and hypothetically considered for adoption” (MC, 103).

The second reason why the expression “discourse ethics” is misleading relates to the fact that discourse ethics are not concerned with ethical questions, that is, questions about the “good life”; rather they concern moral questions about “justice” (ED, 100–118). Ethical or evaluative questions, which appear to be concerned with the “self-realization” (BFN, 99) of an individual or a particular community, are only accessible to practical argumentative discussion in the framework of the natural horizon of a historically given life form or an individual conduct. Evaluative questions about the “good life,” which are caught up in concrete life forms and in this sense remain particular, are not a matter for discourse ethics,

which is only concerned with strictly moral questions, that is, questions about the “self-determination” (BFN, 99) of the individual or humanity. Questions regarding autonomy concern the universalization of interests and can be rationally assessed from the impartial perspective (the so-called “moral perspective”). In short, discourse ethics is a deontologically universalist ethics, concerned not with preferential choices of values that can earn the recognition of members of a particular community, but only with the prescriptive value of universalizable norms that garner widespread adherence because they clearly incarnate an interest shared by all. The field of jurisdiction of discourse ethics is therefore characterized and defined by the rigorous application of a Kantian principle of universalization. “The principle of universalization functions as a scalpel that separates ‘the good’ from ‘the just’ [and] evaluative questions from strictly normative questions” (ED, 35).

From the philosophy of history to the theory of evolution

The shift from the philosophy of history to the theory of evolution is the corollary to the shift from reflection to reconstruction. While universal pragmatics offers a horizontal reconstruction of the implicit system of rules of communicative action, the theory of evolution offers a vertical reconstruction of the logic of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of noological structures. In this sense, the theory of evolution effectively completes universal pragmatics, and acts as its diachronic counterpart. Both aim to found the emancipatory injunction of critical theory quasi-transcendentally. Universal pragmatics does so because it is always already implicated in communicative action by showing that the demands for validity – which point in an immanent fashion towards rational consensus (or dissensus) – and the theory of evolution does likewise by outlining the vanishing point of an entirely rationalized lifeworld.

The theory of evolution can be seen as an attempt to reconstruct historical materialism. Inspired by Piaget’s developmental psychology of morals, the theory of evolution aims to rid Marxism of its productivist emphasis, as well as its presuppositions which lend themselves to the classic criticism of the philosophy of history.

Habermas believes that a renovated historical materialism that seeks to break with the premises of the philosophy of consciousness must start by giving up the Hegelian presupposition of the identity of subject and object. Recognizing that he himself had remained attached to this idealist paralogism in previous texts, Habermas now corrects himself: “Social evolution is not a macroprocess taking place via a generic subject” (AM, 243). Returning to certain arguments from Luhmann’s systems theory, Habermas abandons all reference to the subject of history. From this point on, he no longer sees universal history in terms of a reflexive constitution process of humanity, but in terms of trans-subjective processes of learning via socio-cultural systems:

Since the collective subject of transcendental philosophy turns out to be a fiction that leads to errors, at least in sociology, the concept of system is

advisable. Social systems are the units that can resolve problems that present themselves objectively through processes of supra-subjective learning.
(TG, 271)

Although Habermas replaces the Hegelian-Marxian concept of the expressive subject with Luhmann's concept of system, this does not stop him from criticizing Luhmann and challenging the imperialist claim of his structuralist-functionalist systems theory (see TG). Resisting being swallowed up by Luhmann's systems theory, Habermas suggests that evolution cannot only be understood in terms of the extension of the complexity of interdependencies between system and environment. The rise in the ability of systemic regulation is only one aspect of evolution, namely its strategic aspect. While systemic functionalism takes the strategic aspect of evolution into account, it neglects both its instrumental aspects (scientific-technical progress) and its normative aspects (potentially emancipatory transformations of the institutional system) aspects (TG, 276).

Furthermore, so long as the transformatory mechanism that allows the growth of systemic complexity is not explained, evolution cannot be explained either, since growth alone is not a sufficient explanation. Habermas suggests "directional learning processes that work through discursively redeemable validity claims" (LC, 14) as the transformatory mechanism. For him, the transformation of normative structures and the deployment of productive forces both follow an irreducible, autonomous logic: the evolution of productive and normative forces depend respectively on the increasing justification of the truth claims (the cognitive dimension) and claims to justice and sincerity (the normative and expressive dimension). By reducing evolution to the growth of complexity, without taking learning processes that help resolve regulation problems through an evolutionary push into account, Habermas claims that Luhmann proceeds like a Linean biologist who limits himself to describing natural evolution in terms of morphological differentiation without grasping the transformation mechanism (RhM, 134).

Habermas is interested in precisely the aspects that Luhmann ignored: the cognitive and normative aspects of evolution and learning processes. He is interested in these two aspects in as far as the recognition of a dual learning process, which is simultaneously a double process of rationalization (technical and communicative rationalization), enables a revision of the productivist schema of the base and superstructure characterizing the historical materialism Habermas' had tacitly accepted up until then.

Whereas Marx localized the learning processes important for evolution in the dimension . . . of *productive forces* – there are good reasons meanwhile for assuming that learning processes also take place in the dimension of moral insight, practical knowledge, communicative action, and the consensual regulation of action conflicts – learning processes that are deposited in more mature forms of social integration, in new *productive relations*, and that in turn first make possible the introduction of new productive forces. The rationality structures that find expression in world views, moral representations, and identity

formations, that become practically effective in social movements and are finally embodied in institutional systems, thereby gain a strategically important position from a theoretical point of view.

(CE, 97–98)

The development of productive forces sets off the infrastructural problems that exceed the system's controlling abilities and lead to crisis. Only the development of consciousness structures, particularly normative structures, enables the system to increase its complexity and resolve problems of regulation by instituting new productive relations which, in turn, make the introduction of productive forces possible at a higher level. In short, "the development of these normative structures is the pacemaker of social evolution" (CE, 120). This is the central thesis of the renovated historical materialism.

Habermas appeals to Piaget's genetic structuralism to reconstruct the developmental logic of learning processes underlying the transformation of noological structures of communicative rationality. Like Piaget, he starts from the following methodological premise: learning processes are teleologically oriented processes with which development may be reconstructed in terms of qualitatively distinct phases arranged in an irreversible, invariable, and hierarchically structured sequence such that no subsequent phase can be reached without going through all the previous phases (RhM, 90, n.).

By returning to Piaget's concept of developmental logic, it might seem that Habermas is logicizing the history of the spirit in a manner reminiscent of the Hegelian philosophy of history, but he claims that this is not the case. The irreversible, linear, rising development outlined in developmental logic is conceived as a possible process of development, rather than a factual development process. The latter is related to the "dynamics of development" rather than "developmental logic" (CE, 140, 98). Whether or not developmental possibilities are realized in fact, and whether or not humanity reaches the supreme stage of moral development, whether history progresses, stagnates or regresses, depends entirely on contingent conditions, which are entirely ignored by the logic of development. This is a problem of course: if the logic of development detaches itself from real historical processes, it is no longer possible to see how potential development can guide actual development, especially since the development possibilities glimpsed belong to the human species in general rather than any particular group. We might also do well to consider whether Habermas does not in fact remain attached to the premises of the philosophy of consciousness despite everything. Does he really succeed in evacuating the concept of humanity as the subject of history? Or does he simply evacuate humanity as the subject of history only to surreptitiously reintroduce it as the subject of evolution at a later date? We might also ask whether the distinction between history and evolution is credible, or whether it is simply a subterfuge to undertake a philosophy of history without appearing to do so, to do what might be called a "counter-factual philosophy of history"? I am afraid that this is the case, and as we shall see in the section on the *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the slippage from the logic of history to the dynamic of history only

reinforces the concern that Habermas is writing history, as Althusser so rightly remarked about Hegel (1970, I: 51), in “the future perfect tense.” Nevertheless, despite the problems involved in a counterfactual philosophy of history, the distinction between the logic of possible development and the dynamic of real development is of capital importance for Habermas, for it allows him to speak of selective developments and to make a critical comparison of actual and virtual development. We shall see below that this confrontation of the logic of rationalization with its dynamic allows Habermas to reformulate the concept of reification in terms of selective rationalization.

Habermas addressed the logic of different developmental processes at both the ontogenetic and phylogenetic level (KK, ch. 7; VE, ch. 3; RhM, ch. 3 and 4; ND, ch. 9). His central thesis is that there is a triple structural homology between ontogenetic and phylogenetic structures of consciousness: there is structural homology between the development of (i) structures of the self and views of the world, (ii) individual and collective identity, (iii) individual moral judgment and moral and legal systems.

- (i) Structurally, the development of structures of the self and views of the world is characterized by an increasing “decentering” (Piaget) of the interpretative system.

In both dimensions, development apparently leads [the child, but also societies] . . . to an ever-clearer categorical demarcation of the subjectivity of internal nature from the objectivity of external nature, as well as from the normativity of social reality and the intersubjectivity of linguistic reality.

(CE, 106)

For Habermas, this delimitation of the different domains of reality is essential, since without it differentiation, the thematizing of validity claims would be simply impossible. Given that evolution in general and scientific and moral development in particular is dependent on truth and justice, decentering is a necessary condition for development.

- (ii) Structurally, the formation of individual and collective identity is characterized by a tendency towards universalization, abstraction, and increasing reflexivity.

In both dimensions [individual and collective] identity projections apparently become more and more general and abstract, until finally the projection mechanism as such becomes conscious, and identity formation takes on a reflective form, in the knowledge that to a certain extent individuals and societies themselves establish their identities.

(CE, 116)

Habermas believes that the development of a reflexive, cosmopolitan identity is important for political reasons. In the “historians’ quarrel”

(*Historikerstreit*) that erupted in 1986 around the collective identity of the Federal German Republic (KPS6: 115–158), Habermas defended – against conservative historians (Stürmer, Nolte, Hillgruber) who instrumentalize historiography and trivialize the extermination of the Jews in order to settle German identity at the level of a conventional national identity – the necessity for post-Nazi Germany to construct its identity on values based on a “constitutional patriotism” (*Verfassungspatriotismus*). He summons his compatriots to identify with the principles of universality, autonomy, democracy, and the rule of law that are enshrined in the constitution and to construct a “post-national identity” (KPS6, 159–179; KPS7, 147–175).

- (iii) The development of normative structures, which enable the settling of conflicts that arise in action not through violence or compromise but on a consensual basis, is the heart of Habermas’ concerns. Habermas believes that placing the reconstructive studies of Kohlberg’s (1981) developmental psychology and Klaus Eder’s (1985) historical sociology in parallel reveals that the development of individual and collective normative structures – from the pre-conventional to the conventional stage, and from the conventional stage to the post-conventional stage – is characterized structurally by an increasing devaluation of tradition as a resource for justifying or legitimating norms (CE, 156; RhM, 133; TCA II, 174). Gradually, as moral development progresses, traditional normative content, which is transmitted narratively, loses its natural validity. At the postconventional stage of morality, traditional normative assumptions are questioned, become hypothetical, and, ultimately, are only considered valid if they pass the discursive test of universalization. At the final stage of moral development, which corresponds exactly to discourse ethics, “the formal conditions of justification themselves obtain legitimating force” (CE, 184). Unlike Kohlberg, Habermas believes that socialized individuals of advanced capitalist societies have already attained this supreme stage of morality. As the learning processes of individuals can be transferred, through the interventions of social movements, from the individual to the collective level, Habermas believes that highly developed societies can now reach another level of learning at which practical discussions are institutionalized so that all important political questions are ultimately subject to the verdict of popular will.

In *Legitimation Crisis* Habermas refers to his theory of social evolution, and especially to the developmental logic of moral structures, arguing that advanced capitalist societies have a tendency to crisis, more specifically, a legitimation and motivation crisis caused by the increasing dissonance between the level of institutionalized moral learning and the immediately higher level which might exist, but which does not yet. His argument is essentially that the stability of capitalism runs up against the contradiction of the private appropriation of public wealth, or, to put it in terms of the discourse model of practical reason, the repression of universalizable interests, and that it can only be preserved if legitimations that cannot stand up to the test of practical discussion – were it to take place – remain effective.

Although the crisis originates in the economic system, Habermas believes that it only becomes a threat to the stability of the system if it in some ways is displaced from the economic towards the political system, and from there on to the socio-cultural system. It is only possible to speak of crisis when the crisis of sub-systems extends into the lifeworld, when the members of society see through the contradiction underlying the disturbance of sub-systems and consider the structural transformations as critical for the very existence of the system. In other words, objective difficulties in integrating the system are dangerous for the very existence of the system only in so far as social integration is at stake (Lockwood, 1964).

To grasp the progression of the crisis of sub-systems towards the lifeworld, Habermas develops a typology of crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism which is actually none other than the logic of their development. He distinguishes four crisis tendencies that form the stages leading to the possible collapse of the capitalist system and, eventually to a democratic transition to socialism. The economic crisis is not so much superseded as displaced from the economic system towards the political system (rationality crisis) and, from there, towards the socio-cultural system (legitimation and motivation crisis).

Economic crisis

Unlike Marx's law of the declining rate of profit, Habermas does not exclude the possibility that the economic crisis might be permanently amortized by a combination of the state's neomercantilist policy and associations's neocorporatist policy, but if this were to happen, the contradictory imperatives of the regulation imposed by constraints on the exploitation of capital would lead to a steering crisis

Rationality crisis

This steering crisis is a displaced economic crisis. The state's increased intervention, which seeks to stabilize the conditions of valorization of capital and compensate for the consequences of private production, as well as the political institutionalization of the class compromise, run the risk of overloading the state apparatus, leading to a "crisis in crisis management" (Offe, 1984): on the one hand, the increasing expansion of administrative structures risks causing difficulties of ungovernability due to over-complexity, while on the other, the increase in the state budget risks emptying its coffers and causing permanent inflation. If the system does not manage to sufficiently assume the tasks of regulating economic crisis, the rationality crisis can be transferred, through the disorganization of the state apparatus, into a legitimation crisis.

Legitimation crisis

While the rationality crisis, which affects the integration of the system, is an output crisis for the political system, the legitimation crisis, which affects social integration, is an input crisis for the political system. The failing political system no

longer manages to obtain the mass's loyalty and approval which it needs in order to function, so that its margin of maneuver shrinks right at the moment when it should in fact be expanding. The reason why the socio-cultural system – or as Habermas later puts it, the lifeworld – tends towards an identity crisis is that the state's increasing intervention into spheres of existence – employment, health, or education for example – which were previously associated with the private sphere goes together with an increasing demystification of the pseudo-natural character of social development. The mere fact of intervening in these spheres reveals their contingent nature – things could be different – and thus re-politicizes them.

Political decisions taken in regard to the crises must be legitimated, but since they are not taken in response to universalizable interests, but rather in terms of private interests, the risk of having the “fundamental contradiction of capitalism” explode becomes real. Faced with this situation, the political system can have recourse to the regulation of normative expectations through an ideological planning of public awareness (Luhmann' 1969a: 233–241), but according to Habermas – and this is the novelty compared to the analysis offered in *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which, as we have seen, was still attached to the Frankfurt thesis regarding reification – this type of manipulation of legitimation by the state is self-destructive: “*There is no administrative production of meaning. . . . The procurement of legitimation is self-defeating as soon as the mode of procurement is seen through*” (LC, 70). Once the pseudo-natural character of cultural traditions has been destroyed, they become the object of a public discussion which, ultimately, can only make them obsolete even though they are absolutely necessary for satisfying the state's increasing need for legitimation.

Motivation crisis

In so far as motivation depends on norms and values, the legitimation crisis is accompanied by a motivation crisis. But Habermas sees the most important political implication in the universalist moral: since he believes that the universalist morality has in the meantime acquired a motivating power in the various social strata, this excludes the possibility of accepting a norm or decision without discursively justifying it with good reasons, so that it is clear that it submits the political system to legitimation demands that are incompatible with the class structure of advanced capitalism. From that point on, the collapse of the system can in the end only be avoided through the following alternatives: “[either] the latent class structures of advanced-capitalist societies are transformed or the pressure for legitimation to which the administrative system is subject can be removed” (LC, 93). Either the socio-cultural system is “separated” from the political and economic system so that they no longer depend on it, which implies total reification; or else the socio-cultural system is “connected” to the economic and political system in such a way that the discursive principle is institutionalized, implying a shift to democratic socialism. Taking up the challenge, *The Theory of Communicative Action* seeks to prove that total reification is not inevitable and that modernity opens up the possibility of democratization.

9 The theory of communicative action

The Theory of Communicative Action was published in 1981 in two volumes. In this majestic, dense, seemingly interminable synthesis Habermas presents thirty years of thought and research. Although Habermas analyses the work of Weber, Lukács and critical theory at length, as well as the thought of Durkheim, Mead, and Parsons, *The Theory of Communicative Action* is not a historical commentary on general sociology. Through the theory of communicative action, Habermas pursues the old critical theory program that sought to diagnose the contemporary era with a view to emancipation, but this time he formulates it on a solid normative and communicative basis.

In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas reformulates the dialectic of reason within the communication paradigm, introducing four conceptual and theoretical displacements in regard to his earlier texts. The first displacement is a move from universal pragmatics to communicative praxeology. The second is the replacement of the concept of socio-cultural system, as Habermas employed it in *Legitimation Crisis*, with the non-systemic concept of the lifeworld. It opens the way to the introduction of a “two-level concept of society” (*zweistufiges Gesellschaftskonzept*) (TCA I, xl) which takes both the lifeworld and system into account, and which in turn leads from the critique of instrumental reason to the critique of functional or systemic reason. This final displacement enables a return to the theory of reification, reformulated in terms of a theory of the colonization of the lifeworld by forces deriving from economic and administrative sub-systems.

This is the plan. First, I present the meta-theoretical introduction to an enlarged pragmatic-formal concept of reason and the sociological concept of communicative action (1); then I discuss the concept of the lifeworld and the theory of rationalization of the lifeworld (2); next, in a more critical view, I consider the thesis of the uncoupling of the lifeworld from sub-systems in terms of both its analytical-methodological and historical-theoretical aspects (3); afterwards I offer a detailed critical analysis of the reformulation of the theory of reification within the communication paradigm (4); I conclude with an analysis of the modifications of the theoretical framework of the theory of communicative action, introduced by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* (5).

Communicative action and reason

The single most important topic in German philosophy is probably reason. The fundamental question is how the unity of reason can be retained in a post-cosmological world. Ever since Kant separated the faculties of practical reason and judgment from theoretical knowledge by giving each its own foundations, the substantial concept of reason has decomposed into its elements. Habermas resolutely places himself in the Kantian tradition, believing that the emphatic, metaphysical concept of reason (Horkheimer's "objective reason") could not be resuscitated and that the unity of reason can no longer be anything other than formal. Through universal pragmatics, he tries to save both "the unity of reason" and "the multiplicity of its voices" (ND, 153 sq) by appealing to procedural rationality. From this perspective, discussed above, rationality is the faculty of responsible individuals participating in an interaction that enables them to honor validity requirements discursively and orient themselves in response to intersubjective recognition. The fact that these truth claims can be founded and criticized, thus, that their recognition can be rationally motivated provides the "key" (VE, 445, n. 5) that enables Habermas to reconstruct an "interpretative concept of rationality" that does not derive from the logocentric restriction. This is possible because unlike "Western logocentrism" (Klages) the procedural concept of rationality does not restrict reason solely to its cognitive and instrumental dimensions. Procedural rationality integrates a practical and moral dimension, as well as an aesthetic and expressive dimension.

Universal pragmatics, which analyses the approach to validity claims as a precondition for mutual understanding, is limited by the fact that the act of reaching understanding is still not apprehended as a mechanism for coordinating action. The coordination mechanism only exists when one moves from universal pragmatics to communicative praxeology, in other words, through the move from the pragmatic-formal analysis of reaching understanding to the sociological analysis of communicative action (see TCA I, 84–102, 273–337; VE, 441–472; VE, 571–606; ND, 63–105).

While reason and the unity of reason are the central problem of modern philosophy, social order and the coordination of action are fundamental issues for sociology. How is society possible? How can *ego* convince *alter* to extend an interaction in the desired manner? How can a conflict that would break the continuity of interaction be avoided? To answer these questions, Habermas distinguishes two types of social action, namely, communicative action and strategic action. These two types of action, which, like work and interaction, are not analytical, are differentiated by their coordination mechanisms, enabling a connection between interactions. "Concepts of *social action* are distinguished according to how they specify the *coordination* among the goal-directed actions of different participants: as the interlacing of egocentric calculations of utility (whereby the degree of conflict or cooperation varies with the given interest positions) [strategic action] . . . or as reaching understanding in the sense of a cooperative process of interpretation [communicative action]" (TCA I, 101).

Of course the interpretative process characterizing communicative action implies the use of language, but this does not necessarily mean that any given linguistic interaction is already an instance of communicative activity. To define his concept of communicative action more closely, Habermas therefore introduces the disjunctive distinction between performative attitude (a first or second person attitude oriented by validity claims) and objectifying attitude (a third person attitude oriented towards success) as the second criterion of demarcation: "Social actions can be distinguished according to whether the participants adopt either a success-oriented attitude or one oriented to reaching understanding" (TCA I, 286).

In the performative attitude another person appears as an *alter ego* or partner (*Gegenspieler*) or with whom one interacts with a view to reaching agreement; by contrast, in the objectifying attitude the other appears as an object (*Gegenstand*), an instrument that can be manipulated with a view to anticipated success. By differentiating these two attitudes, which are exclusive and incompatible from the perspective of the participants, Habermas is able to introduce an additional distinction between two sub-types of strategic action, namely "open" strategic action, in which case all participants proceed strategically, and "hidden" strategic action, in which at least one of the participants (wrongly) believes that all the participants are acting communicatively. "I regard as linguistically mediated [masked] strategic action those interactions in which at least one of the participants wants with his speech acts to produce perlocutionary effects on his opposite number" (TCA I, 295). The function of the concept of "perlocutionary effects," which Habermas borrows from Austin, consists in discriminating masked strategic actions from communicative actions. Communicative actions can be untangled from masked strategic actions depending on whether or not the intentions of the actor, and hence the objectives sought, are declared during the coordination of speech acts. For reasons which will become clear later, I wish to insist on the importance of the concept of masked strategic action, particularly since Habermas later ignores it.

Although these distinctions allow us to define communicative action as a form of interaction mediated by a language that excludes "perlocutions," in other words, consciously masked manipulations, this definition is still not sufficiently discriminatory, for it does not include the case of open strategic actions in which all participants declare their intentions and do not disguise the fact that they do not aim to obtain a rationally motivated agreement with others; rather, they aim to exert a concrete influence over the (decisions of) the other that will favor the attainment of their own selfish objectives. To distinguish open strategic action mediated by the language of communicative action, Habermas has recourse once again to the mechanism of action coordination. While in strategic action, the action plans of participating actors are conceived in a monological fashion and coordinated through selfish calculations of success – thus, ultimately by the play of external influences and the concrete force of gratifications and sanctions – in communicative action the action plans of individual actors are coordinated by acts of reaching understanding. They are ultimately grounded in a rationally motivated agreement based solely on an intersubjective recognition of validity claims that are open to criticism.

The communicative rationalization of the lifeworld

Habermas (re)introduces the concept of the “lifeworld,” which replaces the concept of “socio-cultural system” and opens the way to a “two-level concept of society,” as a complement to the concept of communicative action. In communicative action participants in the interaction reach agreement on their plans of action on the basis of an understanding about the definition of the situation. These interpretative processes of the action situation would be impossible if they were not fed by the resources of more or less diffuse background beliefs, which are always already there in the pre-reflexive mode of something that is taken for granted. Following Husserl and Schutz, Habermas terms this background of inter-subjectively shared mutual understanding or the non-problematic totality that serves as a resource for defining situations, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*).

The lifeworld can never become problematic in its totality, but as soon as the elements of the lifeworld become relevant to the action situation, they can very well lose their evidential character and become the object of explicit debate. Background elements then come to the fore. Against the lifeworld experienced as a background resource (*a tergo*, Habermas says), it is necessary to distinguish those segments which the actors encounter head on (*a fronte* as Habermas puts it) and about which they seek agreement.

In accordance with the three types of validity demands, Habermas introduces a referential system that functions as a “sorter” (Kunneman, 1986), enabling actors to discuss each element they encounter in reality in terms of its cognitive, normative, or expressive aspect when they are negotiating a shared definition of the situation in order to coordinate their actions, placing it either in the objective world (facts), social world (norms) or subjective world (lived experience). As we shall see below, the fact that actors are able to adopt different attitudes (cognitive, normative, and expressive) towards the elements they encounter in reality (TCA I, 236) later became Habermas’ leitmotiv in explaining cultural rationalization, and the ensuing differentiation of spheres of values (science and technology, morals and law, art).

Yet, in so far as Habermas defines these world concepts formally, he is again faced with the ontological problem that he encountered in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. For if the three worlds are defined formally, in some senses representing crystallizations of the attitude adopted towards reality, then how is it possible to adopt a different attitude towards the same world? And even assuming for a moment that this were possible, we might ask the same question as McCarthy (1985: 227, n. 11): if social relations are objectified as facts, do they then become elements of the objective world or are they reified elements of the social world? This question is far from trivial, and in fact points to a real problem. For, if the adoption of the objectifying attitude towards social relations means that they thereby become elements of the objective world, then ontology becomes a mere “way of speaking,” and thus Habermas no longer has a real ontological basis for criticizing reification in terms of a generalized substitution of strategic action by communicative action.

To go beyond the “culturalist reduction” of the concept of the lifeworld that characterizes the phenomenological approach, it is important to note that in Habermas, norms and lived experiences appear not only as thematic elements, but also as lifeworld resources. “Society” and “personality” should be added as resources, or, to use Habermas’ expression, as “structural elements of the lifeworld,” alongside “culture”:

I use the term *culture* for the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world (TCA II, 138) . . . I call *society* . . . the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter into interpersonal relationships with one another (PDM, 343) . . . By *personality*, I understand the competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity.

(TCA II, 138)¹

If we now position ourselves in a strictly sociological perspective, by moving from the natural perspective of the participant to the theoretical perspective of the observed participant, in order to analyze both the function that the lifeworld fulfills for communicative action and the function that communicative action fulfills for the lifeworld, it is possible to understand the cultural reproduction of the lifeworld as a circular process in which culture, society, and personality appear as both the “medium” and “result” of interaction (Giddens, 1976: 120 sq). Indeed, cultural traditions, social solidarity, and personal skills not only feed communicative action, they are also simultaneously fed by it. “Action . . . presents itself as a circular process in which the actor is both the *initiator* of his accountable actions and the *product* of the traditions in which he stands, of the solidary groups to which he belongs, of socialization and learning processes to which he is exposed” (TCA II, 135).

This circular process, in which the lifeworld and daily communicative practice intersect, apparently fulfills the role of mediation that Marx and Western Marxism attributed to social *praxis*. It not only makes it possible to elegantly articulate the connection between the social micro- and macro-level, but, as we shall see, it also reveals the process of cultural reproduction of the lifeworld as a rationalization process. In fact, since communicative action activates the rationalizing potential of validity claims, the structural elements of the actual lifeworld must be seen as the sedimentation of previous communicative actions. Gradually, as rationalization progresses, we approach a totally rationalized lifeworld in which actual resources are exclusively the result of successive challenges to the validity claims made by previous statements.

In referring to the “communicative rationalization of the lifeworld,” Habermas means roughly the process of gradual realization of the rationality potential present in communicative action. In a rationalized lifeworld, the functions of cultural

reproduction, social integration, and socialization are assumed by language alone. Gradually, as the rationalization processes advances, the symbolic reproduction of the structural elements of the lifeworld are based less and less on a normatively implied agreement, endorsed by the authority of traditions that resist all criticism, and increasingly on a communicatively obtained agreement, in other words, on an uncertain agreement, since it is rationally motivated, achieved by participants themselves and ultimately based on the authority of the best argument. Analyzed from the perspective of development logic, the rationalization of the lifeworld appears as a process oriented by gradual “verbalization” whose vanishing point is constituted by the dawning of the “ideal communication community” (TCA II, 2).

Cultural rationalization, in other words, the rationalization of the structural element of the lifeworld that Habermas calls “culture” (not to be confused with the rationalization of the lifeworld in its entirety) can be analyzed in terms of an increasing “de-reification” of mythic, religious, and metaphysical conceptions of the world. The best point of entry for analyzing this process is the phenomenon of the “disenchantment of the world” (*Entzauberung*), studied by Weber and deplored by Horkheimer.

Mythic thought is characterized among other things by a categorical confusion between different domains of reality. Due to a lack of differentiation, the fundamental attitudes about the objective and social world (and *a fortiori* the subjective world), nature and culture, are projected onto the same level. Apart from this lack of differentiation, the mythic world image still reveals a lack of reflexivity. Mythic world interpretation is not aware of itself as interpretation. To show that the mythic explanation of the world identifies itself with the order of the world without noticing that it is simply a reading of reality, subject to error and critique, Habermas forms the fortuitous notion of “the reification of the linguistic worldview” (TCA I, 51).

The possibility of discursively honoring validity claims open to critique becomes a reality only with the shift from a reified vision of the world to a vision of a world that is both reflexive and fully decentered (in Piaget’s sense) – one which has the basic attitudes (objectifying, conforming to norms, expressive) and formal concepts of the world (objective, social, and subjective world) as well as the corresponding validity claims. This possibility opens the way to cultural rationalization, in other words, to the reflexive becoming of traditions and the autonomous differentiation of spheres of values of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The differentiation and autonomization of these spheres of values, each of which follows its own internal logic, leads to the emergence of specialized fields of knowledge that are related to only one validity requirement, such as in the experimental sciences, discursive ethics, and legal theories founded on principles, as well as in non-auratic modern art.

Habermas analyzes the rationalization of “society” – not to be confused with the rationalization of society in its entirety (system and the lifeworld) – in terms of a communicative revision of Durkheim’s theory of the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1986: Book 1). From this communicative perspective, rationalization appears as a “linguistification of the sacred”

(TCA II, 77): gradually, as the fundamental normative consensus ensured by rites crumbles away, the weight of social integration moves increasingly from a consensus rooted in religion to consensual processes linked to language. A result of this tendency to put the sacred into language is the vanishing point of a profoundly democratic “state in which legitimate orders are dependent upon formal procedures for positing and justifying norms” (TCA II, 146). In other words, in a rationalized society, social integration occurs through modern law. The constraining force of laws does not come primarily from their legality, but rather from their legitimacy, thus, ultimately from the fact that they are not in contradiction with the “democratic principle” (BFN, 110) – a principle that stipulates that only those juridical laws susceptible to receiving the rationally motivated assent of all concerned citizens in a counterfactual manner can claim legitimate validity. “In modern law, the law . . . owes its obligatory character, demanding recognition, to a legal system legitimated in the end by political will-formation” (TCA II, 82).

Personal rationalization, which Habermas analyzes through a return to G.H. Mead’s (1962) pragmatic theory of interaction, relates to the increasing processes of self-realization (individuation) and self-determination (autonomy) of subjects who are socialized and individualized by language. His central thesis in this regard is that individuation (the acquisition of the “I”) is simply the other side of socialization (the acquisition of the “me”). Indeed, in so far as Mead claims that socialization occurs through the mechanism of *Ego*’s taking the role of the *Other* and, at a higher level, of the “generalized other,” and in so far as this mechanism presupposes the reciprocal recognition of Self and Other that makes autonomy and individuation possible, the individual I and the social me both emerge out of the socialization process (ND, 187–241). The vanishing point of this tendency towards individuation by socialized subjects is a situation in which a post-conventional identity of the self is the object of a self-regulated and reflexive stabilization.

Even if Habermas does not state explicitly that the rationalization of the lifeworld has occurred already, it seems to me that here and there he presupposes it. In any case, his interpretation of the place of ideology and structural violence in modern societies suggests that this is the case. Projecting the logic of possible development on to the factual dynamic, Habermas moves more or less surreptitiously from evolution to history, after which he gives the impression that in the modern world the continuity of cultural traditions, the integrative force of institutions, and personal reflexive stability are maintained solely through communicative processes that have a rational foundation in principle.

Yet, even if the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld in fact occurs via the medium of language, this does not mean that it is solely ensured nowadays by the communicative use of language. As Foucault and Bourdieu have shown, and Habermas himself once demonstrated (Habermas, 1970a; VE, 226–270), the reproduction of the lifeworld also occurs to a considerable degree through a pseudo-communicative or perlocutionary use of language.² We saw earlier that in his clarification of the concept of communicative action, Habermas introduced the concept of communicatively masked strategic action to refer to any language acts that were not necessarily communicative, but, which later, he apparently

dropped, although it could have been used to critically analyze the repression of the rationalizing potential of language.

By re-introducing the concept of communicatively masked strategic action, I am not trying to erase the distinction between communication and manipulation – nor to return to the Frankfurt School's suspicion of generalized reification either. I simply wish to point out that the lifeworld is also reproduced through a perlocutionary use of language. If we accept this, then we must also accept the possibility that the lifeworld reproduces itself in a stable manner, by blocking any possibility of learning. By reproducing the symbolic violence that hides behind the pseudo-communication of the apparatuses of cultural reproduction, the lifeworld also reproduces ideologies, non-democratic institutions, and systematically distorted communications.

The uncoupling of system and lifeworld

Up to this point, we have only approached society from the perspective of the actor. From this internal perspective, which informs action theories, society is identified with the lifeworld. Society is thus seen as a network of communicative interactions embedded in a shared space of background resources. But if we wish to avoid becoming enmeshed in the fictions of a social-hermeneutic idealism that presupposes the autonomy of both actor and culture, as well as the transparency of communication (TCA II, 179–181), then we must move from the internal perspective of participants to the external perspective of observers. From the external perspective, which informs systems theory, society is identified with the social system (Luhmann, 1981). Society then appears as a set of self-regulated sub-systems that ensure their boundaries within a hyper-complex environment. But it is not enough to simply substitute one perspective with another. The basic problem for any theory of society is the question of how to connect two conceptual strategies – one that approaches society as the lifeworld, the other that sees it as a system – in a non-trivial manner and without reducing one to the other. Habermas resolves this problem by conceiving of society as both lifeworld and system, or, as he formulates it synthetically, as “systemically stabilized complexes of action” (TCA II, 201). In the following two sections I analyze the uncoupling of the lifeworld and system first from an analytical-methodological perspective, then from a historical-theoretical perspective.

The analytical-methodological perspective

Since Habermas accords methodological primacy to action theory, the reproduction of the lifeworld is the starting point of his attempt to connect the lifeworld paradigm to the system paradigm. Habermas argues that symbolic reproduction (cultural reproduction, social integration, socialization) is not enough to ensure the maintenance of the lifeworld; the material reproduction of the lifeworld (production and administration) is an equally necessary condition. The analytic distinction between two modes of reproduction of the lifeworld is important, since by

connecting it to the Parsonsian distinction Lockwood (1964) makes between “social integration” and “systemic integration,” Habermas reaches a point where the limits of action theory become clear and it becomes necessary to move to systems theory.

Initially, Habermas connects the distinction between the material and cultural reproduction of the lifeworld to the distinction between the communicative and teleological aspects of communicative action.

Whereas the aspect of social action most relevant to the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is that of *mutual understanding*, the aspect of *purposive activity* is important for material reproduction, which takes place through the medium of goal-directed interventions into the objective world (TCA II, 232) . . . on the other hand, the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld depends entirely on the activity of mutual understanding.

(EV, 602)

The distinction between material and symbolic reproduction obviously intersects with the old distinction between work and interaction. Habermas introduces it as an analytic distinction, but later gives it an empirical dimension, which presents both conceptual and ideological problems. Indeed, we might wonder whether in making the break between symbolic and material reproduction, Habermas has not committed the “economist’s error,” treating “the human economy as the equivalent of its market form” (Polanyi, 1977). In other words, we might ask, is Habermas too quick to exclude the possibility of developing a symbolic gift economy, the type of parallel social and informal economy that is still important today (Caillé, 1993)?

Subsequently Habermas connects the material and symbolic distinction to the distinction between social integration of the lifeworld and functional integration of the system:

The material reproduction of the lifeworld does not, even in limiting cases, shrink down to surveyable dimensions such that it might be represented as the intended outcome of collective cooperation. Normally it takes place as the fulfillment of latent functions *going beyond the action orientations* of those involved. . . . The latent functions of action call for the concept of a systemic interdependency that goes beyond the communicative intermeshing of action orientations. . . . This is what Parsons means by ‘functional’, in contrast to ‘social’, integration (TCA II, 232–233). . . . In one case the action system is integrated through consensus, whether normatively guaranteed or communicatively achieved; in the other case it is integrated through the nonnormative steering of individual decisions not subjectively coordinated.

(TCA II, 150)

Habermas’ direct equating of symbolic reproduction, social integration, and the lifeworld on the one hand, and material reproduction, systemic integration, and system on the other, has been criticized on several accounts by many people

(Honneth, 1989; Fraser, 1989; Bader, 1983; McCarthy, 1991; Berger, 1986). First of all, although it is clear that material reproduction cannot be seen as a “result sought via collective cooperation,” it is important to note that this is also the case for symbolic reproduction. After all, Luhmann and the conversation analysts showed precisely that discussion can very well be analyzed as a system. Second, the claim that systemic integration regulates the action system “in a non-normative manner” is problematic. Is market regulation, which Habermas views as the paradigmatic instance of functional integration, really “norm-free” (TCA II, 150) as he claims? Finally, and above all, by connecting the distinction between social integration and functional integration to the structural properties of social reality, Habermas again confers an empirical dimension to an analytic distinction. The result is the institution of a reifying dualism between lifeworld and system. From this perspective, the lifeworld looks like a peaceful, power-free communicative sphere while the system appears to be a mediatized sphere with no communication. I shall return to this point.

Having reached the limits of action theory through counterintuitive systemic connections, Habermas proposes a “change of method and conceptual perspective.” He adopts the observers’ attitude, effects a “methodological reification of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1981: 187), and aligns himself with the conceptual apparatus of systems theory:

the change in attitude follows from our reflective awareness of the limits of applicability of the lifeworld concept . . . Functional integration cannot adequately be dealt with by way of the lifeworld analysis undertaken from an internal perspective; it only comes into view when the lifeworld is objectified, that is to say, represented in an objectivizing attitude as a boundary-maintaining system.

(TCA II, 233)

This final shift from action theory to systems theory is just as problematic as the previous moves (Mouzelis, 1991: 172–193; Bohnen, 1984; Joas, 1986). First of all, by reconnecting Parsons’ distinction between social and functional integration with Lockwood’s homonymic distinction, Habermas confuses Lockwood’s methodological distinction (the perspective of the participant *versus* the perspective of the observer) with Parsons’ analytic distinction, endowing the analytic distinction with an empirical dimension. Furthermore, action theory is not limited to analysis of the lifeworld. Although Merton, Parsons, and Habermas see the problem of the latent functions of action as a reason to switch to functional analysis, it is important not to forget that methodological individualists, from Popper to Boudon, have suggested that the problem of the “perverted effects” of action is an argument against functionalism. Furthermore, the need to move to systems theory cannot be deduced from the limits of action theory. Systems theory is only one macro-sociological approach amongst others. Besides, among the varieties of systems theory, why should Habermas choose Parsons and Luhmann over Maruyama, Buckley, or Morin?

In an important reply to his critics, Habermas recognizes that their objections are well-founded and he corrects himself: all the distinctions introduced must be conceived as analytic, rather than empirical, distinctions. These distinctions only grasp certain aspects of reality, rather than reality as such. “An approximate description can be given of all phenomena using *each* of the two aspects – although there is a difference in depth of field” (RII, 253). For example, even though functionalism is better suited to explaining the opaque processes of reproduction of the material substrate of a hypercomplex society, in so far as the system also has norms, there is nothing to prevent studying it from the internal perspective of the participant; conversely, although the rationalization of the lifeworld can only be adequately explained in terms of the developmental logic of consciousness structures, since the lifeworld also involves power, nothing prevents it from being described in terms of the stabilization of the limits of the system.

The historical-theoretical perspective

If we now move from the analytical-methodological perspective to the historical-theoretical perspective, the situation becomes more complicated, for as soon as the tendency of modern societies to empirically disconnect the system from the lifeworld is taken into account, the analytic distinction between the lifeworld and system is in effect transformed into an empirical distinction. Lifeworld and system, as aspects of society that were initially introduced only as “different perspectives adopted in observing the same phenomena,” then acquire “essentialist connotations,” referring to empirical spheres of action that are integrated differently (RII, 255).

Habermas views social evolution as a “second-order process of differentiation” (TCA II, 153): the lifeworld and system are not only differentiated as the lifeworld (rationalization) and system (complexification), they are also differentiated from each other (separation-uncoupling; in Luhmann’s terms, *Ausdifferenzierung*, Luhmann, 1981: ch. 1). In early tribal societies society is coextensive with the lifeworld. Social and systemic integration are still confused. They only separate with the constitution of a political force endowed with an administration and the means of legal sanction. However, this separation of system and the lifeworld that follows the move from tribal societies to state organized traditional societies is not yet an uncoupling. Habermas claims that the uncoupling only occurs with capitalism, when autonomous sub-systems regulated by media, which no longer need the support of the lifeworld to coordinate their actions, are established.

Habermas describes the uncoupling of system and the lifeworld in three stages:

- i) The economic system is uncoupled from the political system. The emergence of the economic system as a depoliticized and morally detached autonomous sub-system is only possible on the basis of the generalized institutionalization of money as the means of exchange regulating exchanges between the economic system and its non-economic environment, that is, the political and domestic spheres.

- ii) In return, the political system is coupled with the economic system. Money as an inter-systemic means of exchange has structuring effects on both the economic system and the political system. Once the state becomes the fiscal state guaranteeing the preconditions of economic production, it is forced to adapt its complexity to the complexity of the economic system through internal reorganization, which leads to the institutionalization of the steering medium of power and the autonomization of the political system in regard to the economic sub-system and the lifeworld.
- iii) The joint sub-systems of economy and state free themselves from the lifeworld contexts; systemic integration is disconnected from social integration.

Via the media of money and power, the subsystems of the economy and state are differentiated out of an institutional complex set within the horizon of the lifeworld, *formally organized domains of action* emerge that – in the final analysis – are no longer integrated through the mechanism of mutual understanding, that sheer off from lifeworld contexts and congeal into a kind of norm-free society (TCA II, 307) . . . The social is split up into spheres of action constituted as the lifeworld and spheres neutralized against the lifeworld. The former are communicatively structured, the latter formally organized.

(TCA II, 309)

This formulation of the uncoupling of system from the lifeworld is both clear and fundamentally problematic. Indeed, as Habermas asserts that the economic-administrative complex is structured through steering media and the lifeworld through communication, he reifies the analytic distinction between the modes of integration in empirical spheres of action once again, suggesting that in the lifeworld action only occurs in the communicative mode, while in the system action is solely teleological. In *A Reply to My Critics*, Habermas retracts this view, or rather, clarifies his argument. First, in regard to the fiction of a purely communicative lifeworld, he claims that the lifeworld spheres of action are “*primarily*” socially integrated (analytic distinction), and that they are “neither free of power nor free of strategic action” (RII, 258). In other words, he recognizes that the real lifeworld is traversed by power, dissension, and direct or communicative strategic manipulation, although he does not focus on this point. Although he recognizes that power practices play a dominant role in daily life, I believe that it is no exaggeration to say that this Foucauldian or Bourdieusian thematic does not really interest him; what he wants above all is to discuss the colonization of the lifeworld by the system.

Next, in regard to the fiction of a purely systemic system, Habermas claims that the spheres of action of sub-systems are “*primarily*” socially integrated (analytic distinction), and that there is obviously also communicative action in administration and business. However, “it is not binding (bonding) forces, but rather steering media that hold the economic and the administrative action system together” (RII, 257).

Finally, there is the unfortunate, but enduring expression, “norm-free sociality” (TCA II, 154, 171, 173, 307). The expression is unfortunate because it suggests that sub-systems can be entirely disconnected from the lifeworld, which is not the case. The uncoupling of the lifeworld and system should not cause us to forget the central thesis of renovated historical materialism, namely that as we have seen, the differentiation of sub-systems depends on the rationalization of normative structures of consciousness. Habermas insists that the steering media – money and power – which make the autonomization of sub-systems possible, must be anchored in the lifeworld; in fact, they must be institutionalized through private civil law and public administrative law, and this is only possible if the legal institutions incarnate “a moral consciousness on the conventional, and then post-conventional, levels” (TCA II, 174). But once the media come into the lifeworld through positive law, formally organized action systems acquire so much autonomy in relation to the lifeworld that they no longer need its resources to coordinate actions. This is the case since in formal organizations steering media replace language as the coordination mechanism of action. Habermas believes that this substitution of media for language is not necessarily negative since the media discharge the mutual understanding mechanism and amortize the cost of reaching understanding as well as the risks of dissension inherent to a rationalized lifeworld, thereby enabling “the inner logic of development of cultural modernity” (TCA II, 385).

Mediated action

In his analysis of formal organizations Habermas puts aside his previous reticence about Luhmann’s systems theory (the “supreme form of the technocratic consciousness”) and seduced by its conceptual equipment, adopts it in its entirety (McCarthy, 1991). Unlike Weber, Luhmann (1968) does not view formal organizations as “sub-systems of rational purposive activity,” but rather as complex systems that adapt to their environment by self-programming their ends. From this perspective, the rationality of the system can no longer be ensured by the fact that the actors in the system are acting rationally. As Luhmann says: “It can no longer be assumed that the end/means schema, as a model for the rationality of action, describes the rational structure of social systems in the same manner” (1971b: 92). “The concept of the end is conceived starting from individual action and is therefore insufficient for a theory of complex action systems” (Luhmann, 1968: 155). Formal organizations steered by media do not therefore embody a kind of large scale rationality in relation to an end, but rather a type of *sui generis* rationality, a “systemic rationality” (VE, 449; TCA II, 307).

Systemic rationality, which the observer theorist attributes to complex systems, is expressed through its ability to self-regulate, adapt to surrounding worlds, and maintain its boundaries. From this cybernetic perspective, purposeful rational action loses the central significance it had for Weber. With Luhmann, we move from the rationality of actors to the rationality of systems, and from strategic action to mediated action.

Following Luhmann, Habermas abandons Weber's conception of system and moves from strategic action to mediated action. The concept of mediated action (*mediengesteuerte Interaktion*) is no less important than the concept of communicative action, yet in the entire 1,200 pages of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, there is not a single paragraph developing the concept explicitly! This is simply incomprehensible, for just as the concept of communicative action is the complement of the concept of the lifeworld, the concept of mediated action is the complement to the concept of a system regulated by media – at least that is what Habermas claimed in an interview with T.H. Nielsen:

By means of functional integration mechanisms, and indeed through the steering media of money and power, I introduce the concept of recursively closed, systemically differentiated and self-regulated domains of action. At the level of social actions, these domains of action of course have their correlatives, namely, mediated interactions.

(KPS7, 135)

So what is a mediated interaction? As the term suggests, a mediated interaction is an interaction that occurs within the framework of an action system regulated by generalized symbolic media. The concept of “communicative media,” or more precisely “symbolic media generalized through communication (or exchange),” was introduced by Parsons (1968: Part 3) in various technical articles on money, power, and influence published in the 1960s. Driven by the logic of “functional sectorization,” Parsons eventually distinguished 64 different media. Habermas only discusses four of them: money, power, influence, and prestige. His main criticism of Parsons is that he confuses two sorts of media: those that “condense” mutual understanding (prestige and influence) and those that “replace” it (money and power). Habermas refers to the condensing media, which are related to the sphere of social integration, as “generalized forms of communication,” while he refers to replacement media, related to the sphere of systemic integration, as “steering media” (Habermas, 1980; TCA II, 179–185 and 256–282). In general, steering media enable actors to coordinate their actions, or rather the effects of their actions, without forming a shared interpretation of the situation, thus without mobilizing the resources of the lifeworld. This is possible because steering media, which replace language as an action coordination mechanism, are coded to offer a standard definition of the situation, enabling them to calculate the statistical probability of the consequences of the action through the preferential structure incorporated into certain specific situations (the market, business, administration).

Like strategic action, mediated action is not rationally motivated by reasons, but is empirically motivated by sanctions and gratifications. Nonetheless, despite the affinities between strategic and mediated action, they should not be confused. This is what Habermas says in the one place where he explains the concept of mediated action:

Normally, the strategic actor retains his/her lifeworld at least as a fallback even if this has lost its coordinating efficacy; switching over to media-steered interactions, however, is accompanied by a specific “de-worlding” effect which experienced in the form of an objectification of social relations. The acting subject is able to retain his/her success-oriented and – in borderline cases – purposive-rational stance, but only under conditions of an *objective inversion of the ends set and the means* chosen, for the medium itself is now the transmitter of the respective subsystem’s system maintaining imperatives . . . Media-guided interactions no longer embody an instrumental, but rather a functional form of reason.

(RII, 258)

The reifying effect of “de-worlding” itself and the inversion of means and ends characterizing mediated action manifests empirically in the fact that formal organizations are independent from the motivational arrangements of action and the concrete goals of their members. For example, even though the main goal of a capitalist business is to maximize profits, it does not necessarily follow that it requires that its members share this goal. They may be indifferent or even hostile to the goals of the business; what matters is that they complete their tasks and contribute, even unintentionally, to the goal of the enterprise. In the case of mediated action, the “objective meaning of an action” can thus diverge from the “subjective sense of acting” (TCA II, 311); the objective inversion of ends and means guarantees the realization of the business’ goals.

Reification as the colonization of the lifeworld by system

Before moving on to an analysis of the revised theory of reification within the communicative paradigm, I wish to recapitulate briefly so as to clarify my argument. In communicative action oriented towards validity claims actors mutually coordinate their plans of action through a rationally motivated agreement on the basis of a shared definition of the action situation. As a set of cultural, social, and individual resources, the lifeworld is both the medium and result of communicative action. Gradually, as the lifeworld is rationalized, the potential for rationality in communicative action is realized. This process of gradual realization of communicative reason is guided by linguistification and logically culminates in the ideal communication community. Even in an ideal world, society would not be reduced to the lifeworld, however. This is why, in order to avoid the pitfalls of hermeneutic idealism, society must be seen as both lifeworld and “action connections stabilized in a system,” while the internal perspective of action theory must be reconnected to the external perspective of systems theory. The latent effects of the material reproduction of the lifeworld which are systemically integrated cannot be grasped adequately from the perspective of the lifeworld; an objectification or methodological reification of the lifeworld is necessary. Consequently, the lifeworld no longer appears as a set of background resources, but instead as one system among others. With the dawning of capitalism and the legal institutionalization of

money and power as steering media, this methodological objectification becomes an empirical one. When the sub-systems of the economy and the state free themselves from the lifeworld contexts and become autonomous, the uncoupling of system and the lifeworld, which initially occurred from an analytical-methodological perspective, becomes a historical reality.

From that point on, according to Habermas' analysis, formally organized sub-systems no longer need the lifeworld to coordinate actions. Actions are systemically mediatized and are no longer coordinated by language; they are regulated by steering media. Habermas claims that this de-linguistification of action coordination, which was only possible on the basis of a rationalized lifeworld, is not necessarily negative. Given that normal language is a fairly immobile and limited mechanism for coordinating action, at a certain level of complexity in society, it is necessary to give it up and replace it with the impoverished, but specialized, "language" of money and power. In so far as the functions of material reproduction do not naturally require fulfillment by communicative action, they can very well be met by mediated actions without producing any pathological consequences.

However, this is not the case for the functions of symbolic reproduction. These functions can only be fulfilled naturally by communicative action – at least, so Habermas claims. If the steering media exceed the spheres of material reproduction and encroach upon the spheres of life whose reproduction depends entirely on action oriented towards mutual understanding, that is, if the integration of the system affects the forms of social integration, then the pathological effects of reification will emerge in the lifeworld. In other words, according to Habermas, the uncoupling of the lifeworld from the systems that mediatize it is not in itself, and is not yet, pathological. Unlike Marx, Weber, Lukács, and the members of the Frankfurt School, Habermas does not identify the autonomization of sub-systems with reification. Instead reification occurs for him only when the imperatives of autonomous sub-systems invade the lifeworld "like colonial masters coming into a tribal society" (TCA II, 355), thereby destroying the communicative infrastructures that make its rational reproduction possible. I note, in passing, that Habermas does not have a word to say about the issue of colonialism and the third world.

I now wish to contest Habermas' notion that the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld depends solely and entirely on communicative action. I shall then demonstrate, through an immanent critique, that the categorical distinction between the uncoupling of the lifeworld and its colonization does not hold.

If Lukács' theory of reification is viewed as the first synthesis (see ch. 4) of the theories of reification from Marx to Adorno, then the theory of the colonization of the lifeworld offers a second synthesis. Indeed, it is Habermas' version of the theory of reification. In presenting this theory, Habermas sought to reformulate the theory of reification within the communicative paradigm. Apart from the metatheoretical premises, Habermas' version differs from those that preceded it in that it does not identify reification with either the autonomization of sub-systems in relation to the lifeworld or rationalization as such. Overall, Habermas views

reification in terms of the unilateral rationalization of the lifeworld. The theory of the colonization of the lifeworld no longer explains this pathological phenomenon by recourse to the idea of the stifling of communication through technocratic ideology, as was still the case in *Technology and Science as "Ideology,"* but rather explains it through the subordination of the lifeworld to the systemic imperatives of material reproduction. The systematically integrated sub-systems of state and economy, specializing in material reproduction, hypertrophy to the point that they force their way into spheres of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. This intrusion of systems into spheres of action whose reproduction depends entirely on communicative action leads to a pathological deformation of the communicative structures of the lifeworld, putting its symbolic reproduction at risk. This is the case, for by imposing a conversion to the steering media of money and power, sub-systems repress the forms of action oriented towards validity claims, blocking the "intermodal transfer of validity claims" (RII, 343) and forcing actors to adopt an objectifying attitude towards themselves and others. The repression of the performative attitude in favor of the objectifying attitude signifies that social relations and lived experiences are systematically assimilated to things, i.e. objects that can be apprehended and manipulated. Instrumental action, either strategic or mediated by steering media, then becomes the one and only mode of action; everything it touches transforms into pseudo-nature. The thingifying predominance of cognitive-instrumental rationality and the corresponding strategic or mediated action, caused by the infiltration of steering media into the lifeworld, eventually reify daily communicative practices: "The lifeworld is delivered over to imperatives of independent sub-systems and reified along paths of one-sided rationalization" (R, 269). Although the theory of the colonization of the lifeworld is an advance in the theory of reification, it also has its own limitations. I mention three problems:

1 The thesis of internal colonization explains the social pathologies of modernity through the incursion of the systematic imperatives of the monetary-bureaucratic complex into spheres of action that cannot be substituted by mechanisms of systemic integration without generating pathological effects. In turn, the thesis that steering media cannot fulfill the functions of symbolic reproduction without producing pathological effects depends on the strong thesis that "the concept of media cannot be transposed on to the domains of cultural tradition, social integration, and socialization . . . these three functions can be fulfilled only via the medium of communicative action" (RII, 259).

I believe that the strong thesis, which establishes a tight relation between action oriented towards reaching understanding and the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, is untenable. It is based on an idealization of the lifeworld which has the effect of evacuating the power relations that accompany communicative actions and reproduces symbolic violence. Once again, Habermas ignores the importance of masked strategic action. He projects his counterfactual history onto real history and takes a mental experience, which serves as a critical standard for appreciating the effects of reification, for reality, thereby succumbing to the paralogism of the counterfactualization of reality.

The concrete result of this hypostasis of a methodological fiction destined to illuminate the gap between reality and possibility is that Habermas confuses the rationalization of the lifeworld and its symbolic reproduction. Indeed, although the rationalization of the lifeworld effectively and necessarily demands pure communicative action, this is clearly not the case for the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, which depends not only on action oriented towards mutual understanding, but also on masked strategic action. By asserting that symbolic reproduction depends only on processes of rational reaching understanding, and by thus reasserting that “the lifeworld can in turn reproduce itself only through communicative action, and that means through processes of reaching understanding that depend on the actors’ responding with yes or no to criticizable validity claims” (BFN, 324), Habermas not only misrecognizes the contribution of strategic action to the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, he also suggests that this contribution is the basis of the reification of the lifeworld.

2 Although I resist the idea that the functions of symbolic reproduction can only be fulfilled by communicative action, I do not contest the thesis that these functions cannot be fulfilled by mediated action without reifying effects. I take this position on the grounds that

structural incompatibilities first arise between media-guided interactions and the conditions under which symbolic structures of the lifeworld have to reproduce. . . . The function [of symbolic reproduction] can be fulfilled only via the medium of communicative action and not via the steering media of money and power: meaning can neither be bought nor coerced.

(RII, 259)

Although the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld cannot be associated with systemic mechanisms without producing pathological effects, Habermas believes that in so far as the functions of material reproduction do not naturally need to be fulfilled by communicative action, they can be abandoned to media-steered action systems, since even if this does not occur painlessly, at least it does not have any pathological effects. This thesis has significant implications, for through it Habermas simply abandons the premises of the Marxist theory of the alienation of labor and commodity fetishism. For Marx, the monetarization of work, which is only possible if the concrete labor force is transformed into an abstract labor force, that is, if it is appropriated as a commodity and alienated in regard to its lived context, inevitably produces the pathological effects of alienation and fetishism.

Arguing against Marx, Habermas asserts that neither the monetarization of the labor force, nor the autonomization of exchange value, are pathological in themselves. Impressed by the functional achievements of capitalist economy, Habermas emphasizes, against Marx and with Luhmann, the “development value” of the autonomization of the economic sub-system:

Marx conceives of capitalist society so strongly as a totality that he fails to recognize the *intrinsic* evolutionary *value* that media-steered subsystems possess. He

does not see that the differentiation of the state apparatus and the economy *also* represents a higher level of system differentiation . . . The significance of this level of integration goes beyond the institutionalization of a new class relationship.

(TCA II, 339)

Countering the revolutionary project of socialist de-differentiation, which seeks to re-embed the autonomized economic system within the horizon of the lifeworld, Habermas therefore insists on the developmental value of systemic mediatization by money. Thus, he gives up the hope for a transparent world that even he had cherished; but he has not a word to say about the possibility of moving towards a new organizational principle for society. Habermas believes that the alienating and fetishizing effects specific to the laboring classes, caused by the systemic subsumption of lived contexts in the form of commodity, can be eliminated even within capitalist production relations.

I agree with Habermas on this point, although I do not see why it is necessary to give up the project to decode “the systemic context of capital self-realization . . . as a process of reification of living labor” (TCA II, 374). Nor do I see why “the systematically integrated domains of action can no longer be transformed by an internal democratization” (VEP, 36). The call for a democratization of the spheres of work and administration, does not involve re-introducing the functional de-differentiation perspective of society, but rather of maintaining a heuristic and critical perspective.

3 Habermas certainly recognizes that the uncoupling of the lifeworld from system is not a “painless process” (TCA II, 321; RII, 260); but unlike Marx he refuses to equate uncoupling with reification. I would like to contest this distinction and show that, just as for symbolic reproduction, the material reproduction of the lifeworld cannot depend on steering media without pathological effects. Contrary to Habermas, I do not believe that there is a “threshold at which *the mediatization of the lifeworld turns into its colonization*” (TCA II, 318). The mediatization of the lifeworld necessarily also implies its reification.

But to demonstrate this, it is necessary to first clarify both the exchange relations between economic and political sub-systems and the corresponding institutional orders of the lifeworld. With the rise of capitalism, socially integrated spheres of action in the private and public sphere are formed in response to systemically integrated spheres of action in the economy and state. Once they are uncoupled, the exchange between sub-systems and spheres of the lifeworld occurs solely through the media of money and power. Four social roles crystallize around these exchange relations: considered from the private sphere, humans enter into contact with the economic sub-system as employees (exchange of labor force for salary) and consumers (offers of goods and services in exchange for consumer demands); considered from the public sphere, they relate to political sub-system as clients (offers of administrative benefits in return for taxes) and citizens (offers of political decisions in exchange for the loyalty of the masses). Given that exchange relations between sub-systems and the institutional orders of the lifeworld can only occur via steering media, their uncoupling is inseparable from the mediatization of the lifeworld.

This mediatization is painful, for in so far as the media of money and power can only regulate the exchange relations between system and the lifeworld if “the products of the lifeworld have been *abstracted, in a manner suitable to the medium in question*, into input factors for the corresponding subsystem” (TCA II, 322), it implies a violent abstraction of the contexts of the lifeworld. Marx referred to “real abstractions” in this regard, directly associating the mediatization of the lifeworld with its reification. Habermas contests this identification. The mediatization of the functions of material reproduction is certainly painful, but it is not pathological; mediatization does not become colonization except when the functions of symbolic reproduction are affected by monetarization and bureaucratization. But this distinction does not hold. Mediatization causes a reification of the lifeworld in all instances. The uncoupling is not only painful; it is also necessarily pathological (Kneer, 1990: ch. 5). The most surprising thing is that Habermas recognizes this himself:

Viewed historically, the monetarization and bureaucratization of labor power and government performance is by no means a painless process; its price is the destruction of traditional forms of life (TCA II, 321) . . . The plebianizing of the rural population and the proletarianizing of the labor force highly concentrated in cities became the first exemplary case of a systematically induced reification of everyday practice (PDM, 351) . . . a third level of functional interconnection arises in modern societies with interchange processes that operate via media . . . They congeal into the ‘second nature’ of a norm-free sociality that can appear as something in the objective world, as an *objectified* context in life. The uncoupling of system and lifeworld is experienced in modern society as a particular kind of objectification.

(TCA II, 173; PDM, 415)

The explicit recognition of the reifying nature of uncoupling does not indicate a reflexive return. Although Habermas recognizes the alienating and specifically classist effects of proletarianization and the imposition of taxation by the state, he still believes that this is a matter of the past. In advanced capitalism, the worker’s role has lost its pathological proletarian features. Habermas is interested in a new types of reification which is not directly class related and is associated with the role of consumer and client. Unlike the old reification, which dislocated the traditional lifeworld, the new reification destroys post-traditional lifeworlds (TCA II, 349). In Habermas’ thought, the reification of post-traditional life forms coincides with the rise of the state of social law. The creation of the welfare state to appease class conflict goes hand in hand with a displacement of conflicts centered on the role of the employee and taxpayer towards the roles of consumer and client.

In the welfare state, employees are in some senses compensated for the loss of possibilities for self-realization inevitably associated with the production process in formal organizations through a gradual increase in consumption levels. The role of the employee is thus “normalized” through the role of consumer, but this compensation for alienation does not necessarily imply an increase in the possibilities

for self-realization. Displaced from the production sphere, alienation reappears in the sphere of consumption. Needs are manipulated through all sorts of public perlocutionary techniques. Given that the interpretation of needs depends on communicative processes within the private sphere, the instrumentalization of the role of consumer is a threat to the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld. Habermas claims that the interpretation of needs cannot be subjected to the imperatives of the economic system without pathological effects: “unlike labor power [. . . needs] cannot be ‘bought’” (TCA II, 322).

The necessity for compensation is also manifested in the relation between the political sub-system and the public sphere. To compensate the loss of possibility of self-determination, inevitably associated with mass democracy, the welfare state offers its citizens providential services and social security. The role of the citizen is thus “normalized” by boosting the role of client. Just as the role of consumer does not increase the possibilities for self-realization, the role of client does not increase the possibilities for self-determination. On the contrary, the paternalist extension of the network of guarantees by the welfare state leads to the increasing dependency of its beneficiaries. The transformation of lived problems into “social cases” that can be subsumed under the law and treated by the “therapeuticracy” (TCA II, 363) goes hand in hand with a violent abstraction of social context and the lived history of the person concerned, and this has negative consequences for self-understanding.

Up to this point, I have presented the reification of traditional lifeworlds and the compensatory reification of post-traditional lifeworlds. However, apart from these two types of reification, caused by the hypertrophy of sub-systems regulated by media, Habermas also identifies a third type of reification, caused by the displacement of systemic crises towards the lifeworld. Here Habermas returns to the arguments of *Legitimation Crisis*: if the interventionist state fails to stabilize the disfunctioning of the market, the tendency towards economic crisis may involuntarily be transferred from the economic system to the political system. Although the economic and administrative benefits clearly remain below the level of supposed claims, these sub-systems can give rise to a loss of legitimacy or a lack of motivation in the lifeworld. In so far as these lifeworld reactions of resistance reflect an awareness of the crisis and demonstrate the intactness of the citizens’ ability to resist, they are perfectly healthy. It is only when the system amortizes regulation crises – that is, the difficulties in material reproduction – by recourse to the exploitation of the lifeworld resources that it causes pathologies which can be described as a reification of common communicative practices.

For Habermas, the colonization of the lifeworld, whether through the introduction of steering media into the sphere of material and symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, or through the “replacement of steering crises with lifeworld pathologies” (TCA II, 386), is ultimately due to the class structure characteristic of late capitalism: “In the advanced industrial societies of the West, containment of class conflict by the welfare state sets in motion the dynamics of a reification of communicatively structured areas of action” (TCA II, 302).

In vain we search for a defense of a functional alternative to capitalism, even when it is the contradiction between capital and labor that activates the system and propels it beyond material and symbolic reproduction. But Habermas in fact fears that the socialist project, which seeks to weaken the capitalist economy, will only reinforce the power of the state apparatus, while the neo-liberal project that seeks to weaken the state will only reinforce the power of the market. Consequently, he argues in favor of a “[reflexive] continuation” of the welfare state that is aware of its own paternalism and seeks to correct it (KPS6, 157).

Rather than laying his bet on the offensive strategy of alternative movements that aim to direct development along a non-capitalist pathway, Habermas supports the defensive strategy of the so-called new social movements that fight to protect the lifeworld against the colonizing incursion of systems. The new social conflicts that emerge at the “junction points between system and lifeworld” are not about distribution problems, but only about questions regarding the “grammar of forms of life” (TCA II, 392, 395). Pleading for a “social domestication” of sub-systems, new social movements erect barrages against the intrusion of systemically functional regulators in the domains of life structured by communication. The system’s reifying interference in the lifeworld must be stopped. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the reverse influence of the lifeworld on the system is not considered. This oversight was later corrected in *Between Facts and Norms*.

Fact and law, or the discursive state

Habermas’ major text on law, *Between Facts and Norms*, reads like an academic elaboration of his political writings and can be seen as a long political postface to *The Theory of Communicative Action*. This 630-page “blue dragon” is without doubt the most utopian book Habermas has yet written. Given his approach, which is far more normative than empirical, it might have been even more accurate to call it “Counter-facticity and Validity” (rather than “Facticity and Validity” as the German title suggests). Picking up the threads of *Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas defends the republican project of a radical, but self-limiting democratization of society, and calls for a general mobilization of the productive force of communication against the colonizing temptations of system. From this offensive perspective, the communicative power of civil society must be advanced as a democratic counter-institution against the autonomized administrative power of the state, exerting legitimation pressure on the state, with a view to ultimately establishing a new equilibrium between the integrating social resource of solidarity and the steering resources of money and power.

Aside from the fact that Habermas abandons the defensive posture he previously adopted in favor of a far more offensive position, the greatest novelty of *Between Facts and Norms* in regard to *The Theory of Communicative Action* is the introduction of law as a mixed action system that ensures the mediatization between system and the lifeworld. Although law is one of the social elements of the lifeworld (“society”), as an action system of integration it functions as a transformer that transmits the communicative impulses of the lifeworld towards the

system: “modern law [functions] as a transmission belt by which solidarity – the demanding structures of mutual recognition we know from face-to-face interaction – is transmitted in abstract but binding form to the anonymous and symmetrically mediated relationships of a complex society” (BFN, 76–77).

As a mediating institution that assumes both the functions of social integration of the lifeworld and the functional demands of a complex society, the law regulates the domains of strategic action in a communicatively mediated manner, that is, it institutionalizes the rules that free actors from achieving a coordination of action through an immediate rational agreement. By thus freeing strategic action from morals, the law nevertheless subjects them to the legislation of practical reason. Because it has a practical efficacy that moral judgments lack, it also simultaneously enables a resolution of the motivational problem of ethics.

As the title of the book indicates, law may be considered from both the perspective of “facticity” (the strategic actor’s view point) and validity (the communicative actor’s view point). From the cognitive view point of factual validity, the law appears as a system of constraining laws imposed by the state, limiting the margin of action of the person who acts in a purposively rational manner; while from the moral perspective of counterfactual validity, the law seems to be a set of legislative rules that are legitimate in so far as they are decreed on the basis of a rational legislation process guaranteeing that they would obtain the rational agreement of all citizens were a discussion to take place. The question of the validity of law is thus conceptually linked to the question of the legitimacy of legislation, in turn this is conceptually linked to the democratic idea of popular sovereignty: the only legitimate rules are those citizens impose on themselves counterfactually.

Nevertheless, against Rousseau and the potentially totalitarian republican idea of radical democracy, Habermas sides with Kant in insisting on the liberal idea of the defense of human rights and respect for individual freedom. From his perspective, the tension between the liberal idea of human rights and the republican idea of popular will can be overcome if the principle of democracy is connected to the discourse principle that stipulates that the only legitimate norms of action are those that would receive the agreement of everyone involved if a rational discussion were to take place. Following the procedural revision of the democratic principle, the legitimacy of decisions no longer depends on the fact that it represents the will of all, but rather on the fact that it is the result of deliberation by all. As a result the (liberal) idea of the self-determination of the subject and the (republican) idea of the self-realization of the people are no longer in opposition, but instead presuppose each other.

With the idea of the rule of law, we move from the issue of the legitimation of law to the question of its institutionalization in a state-run organization endowed with juridical, legislative, and executive powers. Habermas subscribes to the principle of the division of power and above all emphasizes the need to clearly separate the legislative and executive power. After all, politics is not a technical matter; it is a practical-moral affair. Just like the law, state power must be legitimated and controlled by public opinion.

Countering Luhmann's vision of an autopoietic, legally constituted political system, which would program itself by steering the behavior of the electors, pre-programming legislation and the government and functionalizing jurisdiction (Luhmann, 1969a, 1993: chs. 1, 2, and 4), Habermas draws on Arendt's vision of communicative power that is generated by public communication and democratically controls the political system (Arendt, 1968). Via the medium of law, communicative power can be transformed into legitimate administrative power: "Informal opinion-formation result in institutionalized election decisions and legislative decrees through which communicatively generated power is transformed into administratively utilizable power" (IO, 249).

By systematically returning to Arendt's concept of "communicative power," as a generative force emanating from civil society which authorizes the political system to use its administrative power in all legitimacy, Habermas corrects his previous vision of the uncoupling of the political system and the lifeworld. The anchoring of the political system through the legal institutionalization of the steering medium of power is no longer seen as a unique act that enables this uncoupling; from now on the administrative system must be continuously linked to the lifeworld through law. In short, "the uncoupling of political communication from the socioeconomic realm is necessary for the feedback relation that couples administrative power to the communicative power emerging from political opinion- and will-formation" (BFN, 269).

If we compare the old version, which emphasizes decoupling, with the new version, which focuses on re-coupling, we note that the novelty lies in the fact that the law is no longer simply constitutive of the medium of power regulating administrative processes; from now on, the law itself appears as a "medium for converting communicative power into [legitimate] administrative power" (BFN, 151–168). The primacy accorded to communicative power in decreeing and applying the law ensures, on the one hand, that law does not enter into conflict with morality and that politicians do not dissolve moral and ethical questions into strategic questions that can be resolved through compromise (risking the "suppression of universalisable interests"), and on the other hand that the administration does not intervene in the legislation process and that the experts, who are competent in regard to technical questions, do not paternalistically apply their knowledge to social problems (risking the "juridicalization" of the lifeworld). The proceduralization of the democratic principle of popular sovereignty is the hard core of the discursive theory of law. By synthesizing elements of the republican theory, which emphasizes the self-realization of the people's will, with the liberal theory, which emphasizes the autonomy of the individual, it understands the democratic rule of law in terms of the institutionalization of the principle of popular sovereignty. When all political power ultimately derives from the communicative power of citizens, the democratic rule of law prevails. In making this argument, Habermas calls for a radical democratization of society.

If we now move from political philosophy to sociology, the state appears as one sub-system amongst others. Society is "without a central organ" (Luhmann, 1997, II: 743 sq, 801 sq); it no longer has a central steering source. Since the whole of

society has moved to the modern regime of functional differentiation, it has decomposed into an acentric plurality of sub-systems that are self-regulated by systemic media. At the end of this differentiation process, the state appears as a functional sub-system surrounded by other sub-systems. From that point on, it is no longer possible to view it as the central regulator in which society concentrates its ability to organize itself.

Although Habermas adopts Luhmann's notion that functionally differentiated societies no longer have a central source of regulation, he is hesitant to follow him when he asserts that they no longer have a central source of reflection either (Luhmann, 1987: 67–73). Arguing against Luhmann, he introduces the public sphere as an example of how society represents itself in a reflexive manner. With public spheres as anarchic communicative networks in which information, ideas, and position-taking circulate freely, condensing in the form of public opinion, Habermas endows society with a system of identification of and discussion about the problems that the political system must confront. The public sphere captures, condenses, and dramatizes problems in the lifeworld, functioning as a “warning system with sensors that, though unspecialized, are sensitive throughout society” (BFN, 359).

Not only does the public sphere fulfill a warning function; in so far as it thematizes problems and proposes solutions that the legislator must take into account, it can also put the political system under pressure and exert an efficient influence on the state's steering mechanisms. This is the goal of the deliberative politics of associations and social movements of civil society which seek to sensitize the political system to public opinion forged in debate and to transform public opinion into a communicative power capable of indirectly influencing the political system by subjecting its legitimacy to considerable pressure.

The public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power cannot rule of itself but can only point the use of administrative power in specific directions (BFN, 300) . . . Communicative power is exercised in the manner of a siege. It influences the premises of judgment and decision making in the political system without intending to conquer the system itself. It thus aims to assert its imperatives in the only language the besieged fortress understands.

(BFN, 486–487)

In other words, the democratization project is radical, but self-limiting. Habermas believes that the anarchist utopia of a society reduced to a network of voluntary organizations is no longer defensible. Voluntary organizations are insufficiently complex to assume the functions of steering and organizing functionally differentiated societies. The utopia of radical democratization is blind to the complexity of autonomized systems. But to accept the inevitability of the structural complexity of modern societies does not imply that one also has to also accept the alienating autonomization of their sub-systems as an inevitability. Far from it: sub-systems must be tamed and the communicative power that generates democracy must be mobilized against the illegitimate autonomization of

social and administrative power. Self-steering systems must be subjected to a democratic counter-regulation that maintains the level of systemic complexity attained. The strategy Habermas proposes is offensive: test the limits of radical democratization attainable under the given conditions of functional differentiation.

Conclusion

Reading Habermas is a grueling experience. Not only did he write thousands of pages, but his texts are difficult, displaying a dismaying technicality reminiscent of Parsons' late texts. One often has the impression of being lost in a filing cabinet, however, when at last you find your way out, the effort is always worth it. Habermas' books are both instructive and educational. The reader may wish to contest his concepts and a good many of his theses; however, to be Habermassian does not mean that one accepts his theory, it only means that one openly discusses his validity claims. Habermas has a sixth sense: his theoretical and moral-practical intuitions allow him to avoid metatheoretical pitfalls and ideological traps. Thus, for instance, in developing his concept of communicative action, he exceeds the reifying reduction of action solely to its instrumental-strategic dimension; by enlarging the concept of reason, he overcomes the logocentrist reduction. In short, by reopening the metatheoretical space of possibilities after forty years of closure, he liquidates the metaphysical *a priori* of reification that sapped the previous critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Habermas' social theory is rigorously multidimensional. It survives all the tests of metacritique. Similarly, in terms of ideology, he has a nose for identifying paths that lead nowhere. Whether it is in his interpretation of Marx, Weber, Lukács, or Marcuse, to say nothing of Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, each and every time, he flushes out irrational strategies, senses latent dogmatism, and catches the slightest whiff of authoritarianism. In this sense, Habermas is a master, and a model. To be Habermassian does not mean that one adopts his theory, part and parcel. To be Habermassian is to avoid metatheoretical traps and cultivate a sense of ideological subterfuges; it is to be a liberal and democratic humanist. In a word, to be Habermassian, is first and foremost to share his moral-practical intuitions.

Before leaving Habermas, I would like to add one more word on the relation of sociology and philosophy. It is now more than a quarter of a century since *The Theory of Communicative Action* was published. In this work, the tendency towards the counter-factualization of reality was already clearly present, and it has been accentuated since then. Discursive ethics and the discursive theory of law that Habermas later developed are full of counterfactual presuppositions and heavy idealizations. The larger and heavier they become, the more strictly sociological considerations tend to disappear. Yet a critical sociology cannot be satisfied with analyzing reality: if it does not wish to adjust to the distressing observation of the present, it must be able to outline the main directions of a possible evolution. The opposite is equally as true: philosophy cannot be contented with a possible world. Just as sociology needs philosophical illumination, philosophy requires

sociological anchoring. Sociological research and philosophical presentation – *Forschung* and *Darstellung* to use Marx's classic distinction – must fertilize each other. From this perspective, one might, for example, envisage an intelligent collaboration between the advocates of Bourdieu, Foucault, and Habermas, for what is missing in one theorist can be found in others. Of course, Habermas himself may return to his career as a sociologist. After all, throughout the 1970s it seemed that he was lost for sociology, and then in 1981, he gave us a *summa sociologica*. All we need now is nothing less than a new theory of communicative action.

Conclusion

Towards a critical structurism

Now that we have come to the end of our grand sightseeing tour for intellectuals, exploring reification theories in German sociology from Marx to Habermas, I would like to return to the metatheoretical issues I raised at the end of the introduction. Readers will no doubt recall that I presented the metatheoretical underpinnings guiding my attempt to establish a systematic, logical, and metacritical reconstruction of the classic theories of reification. These foundations not only allow for a definition of reification in terms of the conjunction of a strategic concept of action and a materialist concept of social structure, but also, more importantly, enable a critique of one-sided theories of reification as a premature crystallization of the space of possibilities in sociology.

Equipped with these metatheoretical tools, in Part 1 we observed a gradual closing of metatheoretical space in classic German sociology from Marx to Lukács. Whether in Marx (alienation, exploitation, fetishism), Simmel (the tragedy of culture, structure, and the individual), Weber (formal rationalization, loss of meaning and freedom) or Lukács (reification), one way or another each of these thinkers was forced to theorize the alienated autonomization of social structures that characterizes the advent of modernity. Admittedly, their somewhat tragic analyses of the rise of reification were always accompanied by epistemological or ontological considerations that displayed a counter-movement and thereby made it possible, so to speak, to think with them, against them. Thus, in the case of Simmel and Weber, neo-Kantian subjectivism could be advanced against their most somber analyses, while in the case of Marx and Lukács a dialectical movement of reversal is perceptible. Yet despite these counter-movements, the general tendency of classic theory still moves clearly in the direction of a progressive closure of the space of possibilities.

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School, analyzed at length in Part 2, extended the tendency towards closure by radicalizing the critique of reason to the point that reification became both the focal point and blind spot of their disconcerting analysis of late modernity. Both Horkheimer and Adorno start with the same observation and thus come to the same conclusion: total domination, death of the individual, end of history. By radicalizing the Weberian-Nietzschean-Marxist critique of reason in this way, it becomes total and, hence, strictly speaking, aporetic. Habermas saw this clearly, and this is precisely what motivated him

to reopen the space of metatheoretical possibilities after a full forty years spent lamenting reification.

The metacritical premises of a critical theory of reification

A retrospective look

I shall not attempt to subject the various reification theories to a comparative analysis (Marx *versus* Weber *versus* Simmel, etc.), to produce a synthesis as grandiose as it would be illusory. Having learnt from the lessons of the metacriticism of the theories of reification, I prefer to work on developing the contours of a realist theory of society that would be critical in both the Kantian and Marxist sense of the word (Demmerling, 1994: 13 sq). This theory is critical in the Kantian sense in that it seeks to determine the metatheoretical conditions of possibility of a general theory of society and critical in the Marxist sense in that it is animated by what Habermas once called an “emancipatory interest in knowledge.”

The guiding intuition underlying my attempt to formulate the contours of this type of critical theory of society is that the composite concept of reification – better yet, the two concepts of social reification and methodological thingification – have a key place in sociology. Since the concept of reification sits half-way between the critical theory of society – driven by the macro-sociological critique of real abstractions (*Realabstraktionen*) – and the philosophy of the social sciences – directed by the micro-sociological critique of the abstractions of thought (*Denkabstraktionen*) – it is the natural meeting point – or rather, point of separation – between sociology of action and more structural sociology. In fact, I believe that a dialectical illumination of the reciprocity of the “paired concepts” of social reification and methodological thingification will, in principle, enable the identification of the respective limits of the two sociologies.

My thesis is that a critical sociology of reification can only meet its metatheoretical promises if it is able to think social reification without falling into the trap of methodological thingification. To think social reification is to privilege the macro-sociological point of view of the observer and to view society in its pseudo-natural objectivity as an alienated material structure that conditions the actions of individuals by limiting their margin of action. To avoid the trap of methodological thingification is to privilege the micro-sociological point of view of the participant and to defetishize the objectivist analyses of social reification, on the one hand by interpreting social structures as the objectifications of individuals (or as the products of their interactions) and on the other hand, by emphasizing the fact that the causal effectiveness of social structures is always mediated by social action. To think social reification while avoiding the trap of methodological thingification is to assume that the objectivist strategies of macro-sociology are corrected by the subjectivist strategies of micro-sociology, that society is conceived as a relatively autonomous set of emergent causal structures, which significantly limit the autonomy of actors but do not determine their actions, for the causal power of structures is always mediated by actors who realize it in given situations, usually without

knowing it. By emphasizing the fact that structural effects are always mediated by agency, I seek to trace out the contours of the paralogism of reification that transforms structures into subjects. Social structures certainly do have a causal power, but they do not act. Only actors act. In Aristotelian terms, one could say that actors are the only efficient causes of the social world.

The antinomy of action and structure

Ever since sociology formally freed itself from the tutelage of philosophy – since its double foundation by Auguste Comte and Wilhelm Dilthey – it has been confronted by the fundamental problem of the antinomy of action and structure or, to use the old terminology, individual and society. Since this problem, which is in fact a sociological variant of the philosophical antinomy of subject and object, is central, it is no surprise that almost all social theorists aware of the topical problems of sociology have sought to find a solution to it.

But although many have searched, few have found a solution. One has only to consider the post-Parsonian period to recognize this (Alexander, 1987; Alexander *et al.* 1987). In general, although some theorists managed to develop a fairly convincing theory of action – for instance in micro-sociology from Schutz and Blumer to Garfinkel and Sacks – they were unable to identify a satisfying theory of social structure. Conversely, although others managed to present a fairly convincing theory of social structure, in macro-sociology from Blau and Merton to Elias and Wallerstein, they failed to develop a convincing theory of action. The overall conclusion to be drawn from post-war sociology is thus that it is “*Weak on action theory, strong on institutional analysis (or vice versa)*” (Giddens, 1981: 162).

However, the intellectual climate appears to have changed somewhat since the early 1980s. Seeking to overcome the sterile opposition between individualism and holism, various attempts to integrate the sociology of action and sociology of structure, to synthesize micro-and macro-sociology, have appeared on the sociological scene (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981; Alexander *et al.* 1987; Eisenstadt and Helle, 1985). Among these initiatives, those that are inspired by or compatible with Marx’s famous phrase – “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, *18th Brumaire*) – seem to me to be the most fruitful and promising. I use the term “*structurist*” to refer to these attempts, all of which postulate the existence of a circular causal relation or, to put it in terms of the cybernetic paradigm of complexity thought, a “*recursive loop*” or “*tangled hierarchy*” of action and structure. I am thinking specifically of the work of Anthony Giddens, Roy Bhaskar, Margaret Archer, and Pierre Bourdieu.

Starting from the thesis that the concept of social reification is a logically necessary category (in the Kantian sense) for any theory of society that wishes to be critical (in Marx’s sense), it is possible to charge that those theories that emphasize the duality of action and structure (such as Giddens’ theory of structuration) and commit the fallacy of “*central conflation*” (Archer, 1988, 1995) are not suitable for the task.¹

Even if social structures are the objectified result of actions, this does not mean that they can be reduced to one another. Although there are no structures without actions, there are no actions without structures either. Structures are the necessary condition of action, but the recurrence of actions produces unexpected effects which explain why structures may equally well appear as the consequences of action, imposing structural constraints that weigh on actors, either because they require a certain type of action (in this case, strategic action) or because they make another action improbable.

The task of critical theory is to reveal the arbitrariness behind necessity (domination) as well as the possibility of the improbable (emancipation). In this sense, emancipation and domination are two facets of a single dialectic. While a critical theory of society seeks to produce an emancipatory effect, it must be able to both account for the domination of the reified and reifying social forces that limit the margin of action of individuals by channeling them, for example, down the narrow paths of strategic action, as well as being able to identify the possible paths for a gradual de-reification by outlining the possible enlargement of the margins of action, which have shrunk through the focus on strategic action.

While in the preceding reflections it was primarily a matter of taking some distance from the reduction of the concept of action solely to its instrumental or strategic dimension, thereby opening the way to a multi-dimensional theory of society that is not caught up from the start in the dead-end of the meta-theoretical crystallization of the space of possibilities, in this concluding discussion, I seek to show that a critical theory of society must always presuppose a concept of reification. Without this concept, a theory of the social cannot meet its critical claims, for a critical theory of society is only possible if it is able to think social reification. Just like emancipation, reification is a methodological *a priori* of critical theory. If critical theory wishes to avoid falling prey to idealism, it must control its metatheoretical assumptions in a reflexive manner.

Revising the metatheoretical space of possibilities

Nominalism and realism

At the end of the introduction, I foregrounded methodological pluralism as the main criterion for the meta-criticism of social theories in general, particularly those concerned with reification. I argued that a general social theory is only acceptable if it is multi-dimensional. In order to refine and implement this meta-critical criterion, I then presented an outline of sociology's metatheoretical combinatorial, which I defined as the set of coexisting positions in the field of social theory. Starting from the fact that the two-fold onto-epistemological question – what is the nature of social reality and how can we know it? – is unavoidable (all social theory, consciously and willingly or not, must answer it, for in sociology, the alternative to philosophy is not the absence of philosophy, but a philosophy that fails to recognize itself and which is therefore mediocre), I distinguished two analytic axes that enable a classification of social theories, namely the ontological axis

(idealism-materialism) and the epistemological axis (elementarism-emergentism). By superimposing the first axis on the second, I outlined the metatheoretical space of possibilities that enables a critique of reification theories in terms of the crystallization of metatheoretical space. My conclusion was that one-dimensional social theories, which systematically reduce action exclusively to its strategic dimension and which consequently establish themselves on the assumption of reification, fall foul to the meta-criticism of reification.

Inspired by Roy Bhaskar's critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978, 1989), I would now like to introduce the old scholastic opposition between realism and nominalism, pointing out that this opposition cannot be reduced once again to the opposition between elementarism and emergentism. Indeed, in so far as an emergentist theory can be nominalist (Radcliffe-Brown is exemplary in this respect) or realist (Marx, and perhaps also Durkheim, are exemplary), the nominalism-realism axis must be seen as an irreducible, supplementary analytic axis. By nominalism, I mean the philosophical doctrine that recognizes only individual entities and simply denies the existence of universals (types, classes, laws). For nominalists such as William of Ockham, Hobbes, and Berkeley, for example, the general concepts ("the Franciscan order," "the self-regulating market" or "social class") used to describe and explain the social world, are at best conventional names referring to the particular entities of which the world is composed and at worst hypostatized fictions. On the other hand, by realism I mean the opposite doctrine, which asserts the existence of universals. Unlike nominalists, realists such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scot do not see general concepts as useful, conventional flags. Instead they claim that general concepts reveal a deeper level of reality and refer to real entities that explain individual events as universal instances, even though they are not immediately observable.

While a truly general social theory must be capable of synthetically integrating materialism and idealism, this cannot be the case for nominalism and realism since they are mutually exclusive. Just as universals are real or not, social facts, in Durkheim's sense, either do or do not exist. And since there is no third term, a social theory is either nominalist or realist.²

I wish to defend the realist thesis that a general social theory and, *a fortiori*, a critical theory of society is only possible if it assumes transcendently that general concepts are not simple *flati voci*, to use Roscelin de Compiègne's famous expression. A critical theory must assume that social facts really exist, and hence that the entities, relations, and social representations, which are relatively autonomous and thus relatively irreducible to psychological (or biological and other) facts, can be truly effective in regard to psychological (or biological and other) facts.

Although social facts necessarily assume agents (no agents: no social facts) and their efficiency is always mediated by actions rather than mechanical effects, I believe that it is extremely important to recognize the reality of social facts as well as their effectiveness, for the very possibility, if not of sociology, then at least of a critical theory of society, rests on the acknowledgement of social facts. Furthermore, this is why I wish to perfect the meta-criticism of reification theories by explicitly adding the realism criterion.

From this meta-critical perspective, a critical theory of society must not only be synthetic, taking the symbolic dimension of action into account – both at the phenomenological level of micro-understanding of the meaning intended and at the hermeneutic level of macro-understanding of meaningful structures – it must also be able to openly recognize the existence of objective material and ideal structures which condition the margin of action of individuals, although they elude empirical observation.

The new combinatory

In order to focus this presentation on ontological issues, I would like to replace the elementarism-emergentism axis of the metatheoretical space of possibilities with the nominalism-realism axis. This gives us the following (simplified) bi-dimensional space of possibilities (see Table 10.1).

Table 10.1

	<i>(Emergentism)</i>	<i>(Elementarism)</i>
	<i>Nominalism</i>	<i>Realism</i>
Materialism	[A] (empiricism)	[B] (substantialism)
Idealism	[C] (subjectivism)	[D] (rationalism)

Each of the metatheoretical quadrants represents a possible theoretical strategy. Let us examine each box individually.

(A) Empiricism (exemplary instance: positivist sociology)

Empiricist social theories combine materialism and nominalism. They therefore assume that only individual, empirically observable physical entities are real. To be logically consistent, this position must systematically reduce human action to observable behavior that is exo-determined by the observable material factors of the environment and the organism. Assuming that knowledge can only be obtained through the systematic observation of the content of sensory experience, empirical-positivist sociology believes that its primary task is to gather and record observed facts. Knowledge generally takes the typical form of probable generalizations about the statistical relations between observable entities (variables).

(B) Subjectivism (exemplary instance: phenomenological sociology)

Subjectivist social theories combine idealism and nominalism. They therefore assume that the social world is socially constructed and that it is the result of the noetic activities of individuals. Since social reality is no more than the locally

negotiated result of individual interpretations of the situation, the subjectivists' anti-reification lobby believes that the empiricists' factual reality is simply a myth. From this subjectivist perspective, the sociologist is one actor among others. Since the sociologist has no cognitive privilege, the task is to reproduce, or at least to systematize adequately, the subjective interpretations of actors who make up social reality.

(C) *Rationalism (exemplary instance: structuralist sociology)*

Rationalist theories combine idealism and realism. They assume that the social world is constituted by constraining and objective ideal structures. However, unlike subjectivism, rationalism does not conceive of objective ideas as the attributes of individuals. The structure of objective ideas is instead thought in a Kantian manner as a transcendental framework that conditions and limits the meaningful actions of individuals. In this idealist perspective, the task of sociology is to systematically identify the ideal structures and cultural codes underlying and ruling empirical manifestations.

(D) *Substantialism (exemplary instance: Marxism)*

Substantialist social theories combine materialism and realism. They therefore see the world as a constraining, objective structure of material relations. Like the ideal structure of idealists, the material structure of realists is not accessible via observation. In fact, that which can be observed must be explained with reference to the trans-empirical structure of material relations underlying and ruling empirical events. From the realist perspective, the task of sociology is to identify the objective structures of material relations through inference of their observable consequences.

Revised substantialism

Each of the metatheoretical quadrants represents an analytic possibility for social theory. However, the metatheoretical space of possibilities should not be seen simply as an analytic framing. Rather, it represents a field of dialectical tensions between different, mutually possible theoretical strategies. These dialectical tensions derive from the fact that each strategy represents and realizes only one permutation of the metatheoretical space. Each strategy therefore necessarily finds itself confronted by internal problems that sap its viability as an autonomous project and explain its instability as well as the inherent tendency to deviate towards adjacent permutations.

Given these deviating tendencies, I wish to propose a sociological variant of Bachelard's thesis of "enveloping movement" (Bachelard, 1988: 137), used to describe the development of the sciences. Deviations towards adjacent metatheoretical permutations are not arbitrary; they are systematic. If the immanent movement of concrete negation driving the logic of sociological theory is understood,

deviations can be presented as a dialectical enveloping movement which gradually resolves the internal problems of empiricism, subjectivism, and rationalism one after the other and eventually produces the synthetic, dialectical position of revised substantialism whose contours I shall now outline, and which, for lack of a better expression, I suggest we call “critical structurism.”

This dialectical enveloping movement is telic because it is driven by the pursuit of “epistemic gain” (Taylor, 1989: 72). To understand its direction, it is enough to grasp that: (i) the principle of observability characterizing empiricism excludes both the meaning that makes it possible to understand an action (deviation towards subjectivism) and the adequate formulation of a concept of social structure (deviation towards substantialism); (ii) although subjectivism takes the meaning of action fully into account, it is nevertheless incapable of explaining the fact that meaningful actions are both steered, if not constituted, by a system of rules (deviation towards rationalism) and conditioned by a structure of material relations (deviation towards realism); (iii) although rationalism explains the ideal structures conditioning action, it does not always account for the material constraints that weigh on it (deviation towards substantialism); and (iv) in so far as substantialism does not fixate on reification from the start (deviation towards empiricism), and not only manages to incorporate meaning and ideal structures, but also to take material structures into account, it is meta-theoretically superior, if only because by enveloping adjacent positions in the space of possibilities, it is able in principle to resolve the internal problems that confront them. In so far as revised substantialism, as an overarching meta-theory (overarching because it is informed by the metacriticism of reification theories), makes it possible to simultaneously think both reification and its sublation, in principle it can realize the promises of a critical theory of society. I am fully aware that a revised rationalism might do the job just as well, but the reason why I privilege revised substantialism epistemologically is because I believe that it is better to be ontologically bold, with all the risks of reification such boldness involves, than to be epistemologically prudent. Indeed, while a revised rationalism avoids the error of reification by having recourse to the neo-Kantian strategy of immunization of “everything happens as if,” this is at the cost of an inability to think through social reification adequately, which is deadly for a theory that wishes to be critical in the Marxist sense of the word (Vandenberghe, 1999b).

The theories of reification analyzed in the previous chapters are, for the most part, substantialist with a greater or lesser tendency to deviate towards empiricism (positivism and rational choice). From a metatheoretical perspective, the theories of reification block the dialectic of the telic enveloping movement whose principles I presented above. Rather than trying to incorporate the theoretical strategies of adjacent permutations in an over-arching and multi-dimensional metatheory that is able to both account for and take into account the multiple dimensions of social reality, it essentially absorbs them. Thus, instead of adopting the performative position of the participant, the subjectivist vision which helps explain the meaning the actor wishes to give an action, they view them externally from the start, as mere epiphenomena of the material structure, crudely reducing

intentional action to a simple exo-determined act of reproduction of the social structure.

In this way, the dialectic of agency and structure or individual and society, is systematically blocked. The active pole is over-determined by the passive pole and consequently the dialectical game of reciprocal conditioning ceases. The dialectical game is not just a theoretical game, since that which counts for theory also counts for society. Just as a theory that brakes the enveloping movement is a reified theory, a society that blocks the dialectic is a reified society. Theory and society must therefore both be thought dialectically. From this perspective, the task of a critical sociology is to think the institutional conditions able to sustain the dialectical game of mutual conditioning of action and structure, and to thereby maintain dialectical movement.

Postscript to the English translation

It has now been a decade since *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Aliénation et réification* was published in two volumes by La Découverte in Paris (Vandenberghe, 1997–1998). The book has been well received and although I was out of France for most of the time, I could sense that it had found an enthusiastic readership among sociologists – given the title, which was suggested for commercial reasons, unfortunately it did not land on the shelves of philosophers. Ten years is a long time, and since then I moved on from critical theory to phenomenology and hermeneutics, and from sociology to philosophy and anthropology. As I had to cut some three hundred pages and almost all the footnotes for the English translation, there was no way to revise and update the book. Instead of a revision I decided to write this postscript in which I recount my own intellectual trajectory. I hope the reader will forgive me for referencing myself.

Having just reread the English version for the sake of correction, I still stand by most of the ideas I developed in the book. I think the idea of a metacritique of critical theory, understood as a critique of the metatheoretical assumptions of social and sociological theory, is a good one, though, as I will explain below, I have now refined my understanding of metatheory and its relations to social and sociological theory. I also think that the idea of a critical theory that reflexively controls its own assumptions so as to avoid the pitfalls of a hypercritique that sublimates its moral indignation into a theoretical denunciation of domination is a sound one. Although and precisely because the current conjuncture does not leave much space for hope, it is important to maintain a bi-focal perspective that complements the analysis of the structures of domination with an analysis of the possibilities of emancipation. Prepare for the worst, hope for the best – this variation on Romain Rolland’s “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” – remains valid, but to put it effectively into action, some kind of self-critique and self-transformation is needed. To the extent that transformative social action presupposes a transformation of the self, critical theory is indeed a way of life. In this sense, I follow Ram Roy Bhaskar (2000: 68) when he invokes “the dialectic of *transformed* transformative praxis.”

I must confess that I have not kept up with the secondary literature on any of the authors that make up the bulk of the book. The idea of becoming a Marxologist, a Weberologist or a even Simmelologist never appealed to me, though I have

written a booklet on Georg Simmel (Vandenberghe, 2001). As the focus on reification was displaced by a systematic reconstruction that presented Simmel's thought as an idiosyncratic synthesis of neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*, the book corrected my interpretation of Simmel as a tragic thinker and restituted the ambivalence that marks his views on modernity. While the book foregrounded the principle of duality, my investigation of his writings on religion emphasized the principle of unity (Vandenberghe, 2002a, 2008c). Through a rediscovery of the soul as a space of symbolic transfiguration that gathers the contents of the world into a unified vision without fractures, the tragic vision of the world was finally displaced by a "weak mysticism." Compared with Simmel, Max Weber is more prosaic and less speculative. Apparently rejecting metaphysics, his whole work is, in fact, a struggle against Hegel and, as such, a reaction-formation against the enchantment of dialectics. I had some initial sympathy for Max Weber, but as I feel there is something profoundly perverse in his compulsion to tell the truth that there is no truth, I gradually distanced myself from his epistemic nominalism, his moral relativism and his political decisionism (Vandenberghe, 1999a, 2000b). With its fascination for power and powerful leaders (rather than moral exemplars), the seigniorial tenor of his work finds its logical complement in a Nietzschean contempt for the "last men" and, thus, for democracy. Faced with the advance of really existing capitalism and the final demise of communism, Marxism has regained some of its actuality and its appeal, though at the same time the reflexes of old school Marxism often obscure as much as they reveal. The Marxist gospel of work, for instance, has itself turned into an ideology of the industrial society that blocks the breakthrough of an alternative economy beyond the market and the state (Vandenberghe, 2002b). No doubt Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi are better guides for thinking about collective projects that seek to "re-embed" the market into society and point beyond the compulsions of the work society. To remain faithful to Marx and get to the "rational kernel" of his thought, we probably have to throw out 80 percent of his writings (the percentages are negotiable, though). Over the last years, I have reread Lukács on various occasions, but I still cannot quite make up my mind if my predilection for Hegelian dialectics compensates for my aversion for Marxist dogmatism. I definitely have more patience now for the philosophy of history and think that sociology should overcome its skepticism of collective subjectivities and look for avatars of the proletariat. I never returned to Adorno, Horkheimer or Marcuse, but I continue to read Habermas and his work remains a constant source of inspiration to me. Fortunately, to be a Habermasian does not mean that one accepts his theory lock, stock, and barrel. It means rather that one trusts in the power of dialogue and banks on universalism without apologies.

Since I finished the book, I have moved away from a strictly disciplinary view of sociology. Although I still insist that I am merely a sociologist and not a philosopher, I have accepted that philosophers consider me as one of them, but I steadfastly refuse the epithet when it comes from sociologists. All too often sociologists, especially American ones, have too narrow a conception of sociology and mistrust the speculative constructions of social theory. If we were to apply their limited vision of sociology, neither Marx (a Hegelian) nor Weber (a Nietzschean) nor

Durkheim (a Kantian) – not to mention Simmel (a Bergsonian) or Tarde (a Leibnizian) – would qualify as proper sociologists. Undisciplined, I like to approach authors and texts through a chiasmatic hermeneutics. When I read sociologists I look for their philosophy and when I read philosophers I look for their sociology. Sometimes in vain. My project to develop a theory of affective action grounded in the moral sentiment of sympathy did not materialize. To confirm my intuition that universal solidarity is grounded in a spontaneous and silent act of intersubjective recognition of common humanity that precedes communication, I plunged into the phenomenology of Husserl, especially into his interminable descriptions of *Einfühlung*, whereas I should really have started with the hermeneutics of Dilthey. In any case, I got seriously lost in the forest of the Husserliana and started to despair that I would ever get out of my state of transcendental loneliness. As I delved deeper and deeper into Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity, I came to realize that a transcendental sociology was a nonstarter and a contradiction in terms. Sociology simply has to presuppose the existence of the other. The other is encountered, as Sartre said, not constituted as an *alter ego*.

I needed a few years to overcome my *phobia phenomenologica* and, as a matter of fact, it is only via Max Scheler that I recently succeeded in resuming my project to found sociology in philosophical anthropology (Vandenbergh, 2006b, 2008a). Returning “to the things themselves” the debate with Latour led me to an engagement with economic anthropology (Latour, 2001, Vandenbergh, 2006a). Society may be kept together by things, as Latour pointed out in his theory of reification without alienation, but things are also kept together by people who encounter humans and non humans in their environment and endow them with meaning. While commodities depersonalize the relations between people, gifts personalize relations between things, and to know whether objects are more important than subjects, one needs a realist theory of social formations that is able to distinguish between the moral economy of the gift and the political economy of commodities. Provided that one properly enters into the thicket of material, technological, social, and personal relations that constitute things as gifts, commodities or technologies, one can analyze them as condensations of society at large. As things are complexes of relations, one can as it were, by following humans and non humans across space, pull the whole of society out of a concrete object, which is at the same time social, symbolic, economic, aesthetic, juridical, and religious. As a kind of homage to Marcel Mauss, it would be worthwhile to develop the concept of the “global total social fact,” but obviously this can not be done here.

The preceding remarks suffice to indicate that I am more drawn to the speculative than to the empirical side of the sociological continuum that connects the transcendental to the factual. Convinced that all good empirical research presupposes solid fieldwork in philosophy, I would now like to articulate the cascading relations of implication between meta-, social, and sociological theory. Like in the Indian story of the turtles, theory goes down all the way. Explicit philosophical visions become metatheoretical presuppositions of social theory, which, in turn, become presuppositions of sociological theory, which, in turn, inform research. The young Althusser (1968: 186–197) was on good grounds when, within

theoretical praxis, he distinguished between Generalities I (facts, which are always already overdetermined by theory), Generalities II (the conceptual framework, i.e. a set of metatheoretical assumptions and foundational concepts) and Generalities III (substantive theory, i.e. a set of statements about particular socio-historical formations that dialectically integrates the data into a complex representation of reality). When Generalities II (like dialectics, for instance) are made to work on Generalities I (empirical observations and other research materials), the latter are transformed into knowledge of Generalities III (such as, the theory of the “laws” of capitalism, for instance). The distinction between conceptual framework and substantive theory, between social theory and sociological theory, is not watertight, but the suggestion that theory should explicitly focus on the nexus between Generalities II and III seems useful to me. Moreover, it justifies the existence of social theory as a relatively autonomous subfield of sociology.

To add analytical precision to the framework, I’d like to fine-tune the discussion and distinguish between metatheory, social theory, and sociological theory.

Metatheory

Metatheory is theory about social and sociological theory and, as such, it usually proceeds through commentary and critique of the classics. A good deal of metatheory involves reflection about what makes “exemplars” of sociology paradigmatic. It can be quite arcane, almost scholastic with scholars discussing in earnest, say, Bhaskar’s critique of Althusser’s (Spinozian) interpretation of Marx’s (Feuerbachian) reading of Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie*. At its most simple, metatheory consists in a mapping exercise of the general presuppositions and assumptions (*Weltanschauungen*, world hypotheses, paradigms, knowledge interests, prejudgments, etc.) of social and sociological theory. For teaching purposes, sociologists distinguish different principles of vision and division within the history of sociology and classify them in terms of polarities: individualism vs. holism, action vs. structure, micro vs. macro, idealism vs. materialism, functionalism vs. dialectics, consensus vs. change, etc. Although these pairs of oppositions are only too well known to deserve further attention, it may be worth noting that the history of the discipline is periodically rewritten in textbooks that tend to privilege one pair of oppositions over the other. The canonical version of the present is hugely indebted to Alexander (1987) and Giddens (1976). It typically foregrounds the agency-structure debate as foreplay to the “new theoretical movement” of the 1980s (Alexander, 1988). The highly ritualized invocation of the usual suspects (Bourdieu, Giddens, Habermas, sometimes Luhmann and R. Collins are considered as well) makes one wonder if it would not be worthwhile resurrecting other, older polarities, such as functionalism or structuralism vs. dialectics, for instance, in order to rewrite and overcome the staleness of the recent historiography of social and sociological theory.

The mapping exercise is not an end in itself, however, but a prolegomenon to theory construction. The aim and ambition is to develop a general, synthetic and

encompassing social theory that is in continuous dialogue with the sociological tradition, covers all its angles and incorporates its fundamental insights in a coherent framework of interrelated concepts. If we continuously return to the classics and revisit the various traditions of theorizing, it is because we sense that together they offer a comprehensive vision of the social world that avoids the unilateralism of each of them taken separately. Durkheim, Weber, and Marx form a “canonical set.” By this I not only mean to say that the founding fathers are canonized and that their works are almost ritually invoked as a badge of allegiance to the discipline, but also that the positions, and the permutations of the positions they represent, form a coherent system of possibilities that defines the metatheoretical space of social theory. Weber corrects the holism of Durkheim with an action theory and the materialism of Marx with a theory of culture; Durkheim overcomes the nihilism of Weber with his Kantian view of republicanism and Marx with his insistence on consensus and the collective consciousness; Marx allows for a dialectical integration of Weber’s action theory and Durkheim’s view of social facts, and so on and so forth. In the book at hand I have presented a metacritique and worked out a negative formulation of the principle of multi-dimensionality: theories that reduce the concept of action to its instrumental and strategic dimension will end up with a deterministic vision of society that leaves hardly any space for transformative action and progressive social change. A more positive formulation has been offered by Jeffrey Alexander in his systematic reconstruction of the theories of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons (Alexander, 1982–1983). Following Parsons’s *Structure*, he argues that theories should overcome the limitations of deterministic materialism and of idealistic emanationism, while integrating their insights into a general theory of action that spells out the relations between material conditions, ends/means, and ultimate values in a complex theory of systems. Although one may doubt if Alexander’s “cultural sociology” satisfies the criteria he set himself out at the start of his career (Vandenbergh, 2008b), the fact remains that by interconnecting the problems of action and order, his treatise has successfully captured and formalized the metatheoretical logic that animates general sociological theory. What remains unclear, however, is where the transcendental presuppositions of sociology come from in the first place. They come from philosophy and to further systematize the metatheory of sociology, I would like to distinguish ontological, epistemological, ideological, and anthropological assumptions.

Ontological assumptions

Ontological assumptions have to do with postulations regarding the constitution of the world. Either the world is ultimately made up of ideas (idealism) or stuff (materialism), though obviously the whole point of philosophizing is to propose a worldview that interrelates both in a dynamic scheme. In the social sciences, the perpetual debate between idealism and materialism takes the form of a disputation on how to conceive of action, and how to link agency and structure, Weber’s acts and Durkheim’s facts, into a non-reductive coherent framework. As regards the

nature of action, my position is clear: if one is to avoid determinism, one should always take culture (symbols, ideas, norms, values) into account and aim for an interpretative approach to action. Hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, ordinary language philosophy, even psycho-analysis will do, but not rational choice. Everything I said in the book was directed against the rats. If I did not go into rational choice, it is because I think it is hardly worth the discussion. This may not be the most rational position – I am indeed inspired by values – but with regard to rational choice, my strategy has always been the siege: encircle the fortress, undermine its fortifications, weaken its positions and force it to surrender.

My stand regarding the concept of action entails a definite conception of order. The first decision in theory construction, namely to opt for a synthetic position that overcomes the idealism-materialism divide with a conception of action that acknowledges the non rational dimension of human behavior, necessarily implies a reference to a symbolic rather than a biotic order of determination. And as the symbolic order always precedes, predates and predetermines agency, my position is necessarily a holistic one. Even more, what distinguishes sociology *qua* sociology and differentiates it from both economics and politics, is precisely its holism. This holism expresses itself paradoxically in the defense of moral individualism. Sociology is anti-utilitarian in principle. It represents a definite choice against Mandeville and Hobbes, though via the Marxist and Weberian legacies that stress the material constraints on action, the strategic side of social life is brought back to the fore.

All social theories necessarily imply a reference to social structures, cultural structures, and agency. Social structures refer to systems of relations between material positions; cultural structures refer to systems of relations between symbols, ideas, and values; while agency is nothing else but the concrete implication of both. If the integration of hermeneutics and phenomenology points to a synthetic concept of action, it does not yet resolve the opposition between agency and structure. Although some strands within social theory, like rational choice and world systems theory, for instance, still go for the extremes, there seems to be a strong consensus that the way has to cut through the middle and mediate the extremes. One way or another, the most sophisticated approaches are the dialectical ones that favor an ontology of praxis. Giddens's theory of structuration and Bourdieu's generative structuralism are currently the best-known examples of such praxeological theories that try to integrate structuralism and ordinary language philosophy (Giddens) or Marxism and existential phenomenology (Bourdieu), but anyone who has struggled his way through Hegel or dabbled in Marxism, has proposed his or her own variation on the ontology of praxis. Limiting myself to French theory, I could mention the theories of Sartre, Goldmann, Gurvitch, Castoriadis, Freitag, Morin, Balandier or Dupuy as examples of dialectic synthesizers.

Epistemological assumptions

While ontological assumptions predefine the contours of the world, epistemological postulates circumscribe the limits of knowledge. In philosophy, the old opposition

between empiricism and rationalism is an epistemological divide. In the social sciences, the fundamental debate concerns the possibility of naturalism. In other words, can one transpose the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences or does the ontological structure of the world preclude such a move? Personally, I am convinced that there are strong ontological, epistemological, and moral reasons to resist naturalism. In the same way as I oppose rational choice, I combat positivism with all possible means. As a matter of fact, with their combination of materialism and empiricism, statistics and choice, the two converge in a deterministic worldview that leaves hardly any space for freedom. The protestations to the contrary of methodological individualism should not be taken at face value. If action is reduced to rational choice and the material conditions of action are known, the rational course of action can be determined almost automatically. All one needs are some logarithms and the optimal course of action can be calculated (being merely analytic, I wonder if rational choice has anything to say about real action). Trained as a mainstream sociologist by empirico-positivists who mistake correlations for demonstrations and go into regression analysis without ever believing in former lives, I was always looking for the philosophical hammer that would smash their toys. And with critical realism I finally found it. If positivism does not hold water in the natural sciences, why would it be valid in the human sciences? The human sciences are, by nature, moral sciences (to use the consecrated translation of Dilthey's *Geisteswissenschaften*) and need, therefore, to be "exhumed" so as to develop their own philosophies, theories, concepts, methods, and techniques of explanation and interpretation. If the social sciences belong to the human sciences, the reverse is not necessarily true. The social sciences have to go beyond the humanities and reckon with the unintended consequences of human action that crystallize into social systems that have their own momentum and follow their own laws. Giddens was right on this point, but his insistence on the "theorem of duality" and the consequent exclusion of "emergence" from the theory of structuration meant that he could not satisfactorily account for the existing dualism of agency and structures, or better, systems that are generated by cultural structures that produce practices that reproduce or transform enduring social institutions (Archer, 1988 and 1995). Giddens offers a good theory of the circular relation between agency and culture, but not between agency and social structures. As he cannot handle dualism, he cannot handle the phenomenon of reification either. The alienating autonomization of social systems is not an illusion, but a genuine impediment that blocks the dialectical interplay between agency and systems. To properly theorize the phenomenon of reification, one needs at least a solid conception of social structures as systems of internal relations. I think that Bourdieu's concept of fields, which is heavily indebted to Ernst Cassirer's early formulation of structuralist logic, offers a good lead, provided it is properly grounded in realist assumptions (Vandenbergh, 1999b). Thanks to its theorization of emergent effects, relational structures and generative causal mechanisms, critical realism is able to overcome the limitations of structuration theory, while integrating its emphasis on the necessity to build a theory of action into a theory of structures (no action: no structures). If critical realism offers the scaffolding of a good theory

of material structures, it needs, however, still to be supplemented by a hermeneutic theory of symbolic structures, a phenomenological theory of action that connects symbolic structures to common sense, and a realist theory of collective subjectivities.

Now that I have presented the onto-epistemological scaffolding which I believe necessary for a general theory of society, I want to bring in the micro-macro dimension as a continuum that refers to levels of reality at which collective subjectivities can operate (Vandenberghe, 2007a). The mic/mac distinction should not be confounded with or collapsed into the one between agency and structure. Simply speaking, it refers to size – “ranging from Small to XXL,” as Latour (2005: 31) nicely puts it – and size is, by definition, relative. Agency and structure operate at all levels of reality (micro-, meso- and macro, with “loose couplings” and “multiple entanglements” between them; the macro is in the micro, the micro in the macro, etc.). At the micro-level, we find situated actions and interactions; groups and organizations exist at the meso-level; while social movements, societies and world-systems operate at the macro-level. In accord with the foregoing considerations, all social entities at all levels have to be theorized synthetically, i.e. taking into account both the material and the ideal dimensions of reality, incorporating realism with hermeneutics and phenomenology.

In order to properly conceptualize dialectical interchanges between agency and structure (if one starts with a more individualistic approach) or between structure and agency (if one starts with a more collectivist approach), it is important not to lose sight of collective subjectivities. Elsewhere, I have proposed a realist theory of collective subjectivities that tracks its constitution all the way from dyads to humanity as such (Vandenberghe, 2007b). The question that animated my quest was how individuals and groups can be interconnected into networked collective actors that can act with will and consciousness, and, thanks to the action of spokespersons who legitimately speak in the name of the larger collective, defend their interests, identities, and ideals. Collective subjectivities, of which social movements are only a specific, but important subtype, intervene in society. As a matter of fact, and in spite of the inertia that characterizes societies and world-systems, these are, ultimately, sedimentations of collective actions, and, as such, materializations of collective intentions to reproduce or transform the world in accord with the interests, ideas, and ideals of the collective. Through unending sequences of creation and sedimentation, de-sedimentation and recreation, reproduction and transformation the social world comes into existence as a complex of intended and unintended consequences of collective action. With regard to the struggle against alienating sedimentations of former actions, collective subjectivities play a pivotal role. Intervening at the hinge between structure and agency, reification and creation, sedimentation and transformation, they are the agents of social change who, confronted with social blockages and fuelled by a mixture of ideologies and utopias, coordinate their actions at all levels of the social and call for action to make the world move in a different direction.

Ideological assumptions

Ontological and epistemological presuppositions determine the foundational concepts and strategies of social theory. As the metatheoretical decisions cannot be completely separated from the political ones, it is important to explicitly introduce the ideological dimension into the framework. Successive generations in the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of science have called for a “sociology of sociology.” The task of a reflexive sociology is to reconnect the metatheoretical to the political, and the political to the personal, so as to articulate scholarship and commitment into a critical theory of intellectuals. Inspired by the work of Mannheim, Gouldner and Bourdieu, I’d like to stress that the social scientist is not only a professional, but also an intellectual. Analyzing society from within society, working within “the subsystem of sociology, which is itself a subsystem of science which is, in turn, a subsystem of society” (Luhmann, 1981: 34), the social scientist must be aware of his or her own position – and not just of the position of his or her own opponents! – within the various fields and subfields of society. The various positions and permutations within the metatheoretical space of possibilities do not vary randomly, but are linked, one way are another, to the crosscutting linkages and cleavages that are associated with the various positions one occupies within the social world and the academic fields, not to mention the countries, regions and continents to which one happens to belong. In their respective analyses of the “German ideology,” both Karl Mannheim (1964: 408–508) and Louis Dumont (1991) have shown that the holistic option expresses a rather conservative worldview that is linked to the decline of the propertied classes. A similar analysis of the “American ideology” would probably allow one to show that the utilitarian worldview of rational choice or the mechanistic worldview of the positivists expresses the *Weltanschauung* of respectively the upwardly and downwardly mobile lower middle classes.

Anthropological assumptions

Be that as it may, I have now arrived at the conviction that the whole range of possible positions within the metatheoretical space of possibilities is, in the last instance, determined by philosophical anthropology. By philosophical anthropology, I mean to refer to the various answers, explicit or not, that have been given to the question: What kind of animal is the human being? The reference to the animal realm is essential, because the human being is defined by contrast to animals and Gods. Half angel, half beast, Man (generically understood as *der Mensch* and in spite of the clumsy translation emphatically NOT as *der Mann*) has traditionally been conceived of as a dual being (*homo duplex*). Following the collapse of the Christian *ordo*, the place of the human being within the cosmos has become problematic. Man has become a problem to himself, and knows that he is the problem. Within the German tradition, the reflections about human nature have been systematized in the 1920s by Scheler, Gehlen and Plessner. This tradition has been discontinued, but the questions they have asked remain fundamental for the social sciences.

The question of human nature is as unbearably problematic as it is unavoidable. Any social theory necessarily presupposes an image of Man. Innumerable adjectives have been used to define the human animal – from *animal rationale* (a translation of Aristotle’s definition of man as a *zoon echon logon*, i.e. as a speaking animal) to *homo cyberneticus*, but, at the end of the day, I think that the dividing line falls between humanists and anti-humanists. Whereas the former tend to conceive of the human as a fallen angel, the latter only see a dangerous biped without feathers. If humanists detranscendentalize God in order to upgrade the human (*homo homini Deus*), anti-humanists downgrade the human (*homo homini lupus*), and warn against his *hubris*. While the former secularize the Spirit into culture, anti-humanists will typically insist on nature, drives, and passions. Either man is good and can be trusted, or he is bad and has to be disciplined and domesticated. Rousseau or Hobbes, all options seem to boil down to these two. What holds for theories of the state (Schmitt, 1991: 59 ff.) also holds for theories of society. Either one distrusts Man and, therefore, entrusts him to the state or society, or one trusts Man and believes that social life will spontaneously be harmonious and, therefore, does not need any external regulation other than the one they have tacitly subscribed to in the unwritten social contract that keeps them together. Everything depends on how the state of nature is conceived. I know this is a terrible simplification – as Rabindranath Tagore (2002: 51) said: “Men are cruel, but Man is kind”; it nevertheless helps to clarify the metatheoretical options. To the extent that all ontological, epistemological, and ideological choices seem predetermined by the stance one takes towards the human, philosophical anthropology is the metascience *par excellence*.

Social theory

Whereas metatheory maps the possible positions within the field without prescribing a particular combination, social theory starts from a well defined metatheoretical position, associated with a certain tradition (e.g. neo-Marxism, functionalism, pragmatism, etc.), and tries to work its way up to a general theory of society. Theory construction is guided by the logic of complementarities and oppositions. The social theorist – let’s assume she’s a phenomenologist –, starts from a theory of intentional action. Exploring concomitant complementarities, she spontaneously drifts towards hermeneutics. From the position of hermeneutically informed theory of intentional action, she can then either refuse to engage with behaviorist theories of action (rational choice) and neo-Marxist theories of structure, or compromise with them and try out a variant of phenomenological Marxism (as Marcuse, Sartre, Koscic, Paci and Tran Duc-Thao did). Alternatively, if she becomes a fan of Elias’s figuration theory, she will avoid Parsons as well as Berger and Luckmann. There are good chances, however, that she will run into the work of Bourdieu, discover his concept of habitus and try to bring in some reflexivity to loosen up the reproductive tendencies of genetic structuralism. Whatever the variations and permutations are, whatever position one drifts to or shies away from, we know already more or less what the options are, though, of course, we

cannot exclude genuine innovations and creations (but they are rare, and as they will also recombine former ideas, they are relatively predictable).

At two different occasions, at the end of the 1930s with Talcott Parsons and at the end of the 1970s with Anthony Giddens, social theory has emerged as a relatively autonomous field within sociology. As a substitute to philosophy for those who do not master the philosophical tradition, social theory is based on common references. Parsons, Bourdieu, Mannheim, Castoriadis, or Laclau are generally accepted references, with Brandom, Hadot or Höhle falling beyond the purview of your social theorist. Colleagues and students will no doubt have noticed that Bourdieu has now become a dominant name in the field to which any self-respecting sociologist occasionally will pay due homage. Given his stature, this is only fair enough. His position can perhaps be compared to the one Parsons occupied after the Second World War. Aiming to transcend the fragmentation of the field of sociology by opening up to neighboring disciplines, social theories propose a series of integrated fundamental concepts (such as field, habitus, and capital; communicative action, life-world, and system; or actant, association and socio-technical network) that can be universally applied to all situations or, at least, allow one to analyze them from a certain angle, by throwing light on certain aspects, while obscuring others. In spite of their universal pretensions, no social theory has ever attained full hegemony. As social theory is always a child of its age and highly susceptible to passing fads, social theories always come in the plural. Although social theory is usually practiced by professional sociologists, it is not their prerogative.

Unlike sociological theory, social theory encompasses issues that are the concern of all the social sciences. While some disciplines (like social and cultural geography) import their concepts, others (like philosophy, sociology, and anthropology) export them. The issues that occupy social theorists are many – questions of multi-paradigmatism, the unity of sociology and its relation to the human sciences; naturalism, positivism, hermeneutics, realism; the nature and forms of action, institutions and social structure; relation between individual and society, agency and structure, order and conflict; the problem of social order, society and globalization; post-modernism, deconstruction, identity, etc. But better follow Joas and Knöbl (2004: 37–38) when they suggest that social theory can be understood as an ongoing search for answers to three questions: “What is action?”, “What is social order?”; “What determines social change?” The relations between the three questions are implicative ones. Action is not contingent, but always already caught up in determinate social orders, and these social orders vary historically. With the theme of historical variation, we are already on the threshold of sociological theory. Social theory is more abstract, but one only has to scratch the surface to find that every social theory is only an ontology of the present in disguise. Consequently, it is no wonder that the descriptions of social theory often have prescriptive, diagnostic and remedial functions.

Sociological theory

Sociological theory, the third and last concept of the triad, deals with ‘big structures, large processes, huge comparisons’ (Tilly, 1984). It is not only more

disciplinary, but also more historical than social theory. As a reflexive analysis of sociology that ties the discipline back to its context of emergence, sociological theory is inherently linked to modernity and its transformations (Vandenberghe, 2003). Sociology emerged with modernity and it may very well disappear with it – like anthropology, which overtaken by cultural, post-colonial and science studies, seems to be on the verge of self-abolishment. It is now generally accepted that *homo sapiens* originated in the African Savannah some 200,000 years ago. Sociology, however, only deals with the last two centuries (or, at most, with the last five), leaving the remainder to historians and anthropologists. This is no coincidence. As a socio-analysis of modern times, sociology emerged as a relatively autonomous discipline in the nineteenth century in the wake of the scientific, political, and industrial revolutions that sparked the epochal transition to modernity. What distinguishes modernity from all preceding epochs is the institutionalization of social change – the social change of social change as it were. Colonialism, capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, the nation-state, secularism, and individualism are the hallmarks of modernity. The separation of the modern from the traditional world went together with a disciplinary fracture within the social sciences. Henceforth, sociology would investigate the West, anthropology the rest. The separation from anthropology coincided with sociology's differentiation from politics and economics – via its opposition to utilitarianism, sociology succeeded, however, in maintaining its vital connection with anthropology. The discovery of society as a relatively autonomous formation, differentiated from the state and the market, that follows its own laws, founds sociology as a discipline. The functional differentiation of society, its emergence from a life-world in which it was embedded in traditional societies, is not only something that sociology registers as a sign of modernity, but also something that it presupposes in its own constitution.

Classical sociological theory emerged in the nineteenth century in Europe as a child of its time. While humanity enters the third millennium, sociology enters its second century. Periodizations are always somewhat arbitrary, but I find the one proposed by Peter Wagner (1994) quite convenient. He distinguishes three phases of modernity: liberal, organized, and flexible modernity. The first phase goes roughly from 1789 to 1914, and is characterized by political and economic liberalism. It finds its organizing principle in the market. This classic modernity entered into a crisis when it was confronted with the social question. The second phase of modernity, which goes roughly from 1914 till 1973, overhauled the individualist parameters and put in place a welfare state to pacify and include the masses as citizens into society. Heavy infrastructure with large-scale technological systems, welfare economics, and planning, Fordist organization of production, mass media, mass parties, and trade unions, these are some of the characteristics of organized modernity. Owing to its lack of flexibility, modernity hit its second crisis in the 1970s. Since that time, the ideological hegemony has shifted from the left to the right, from the state back to the market, and from solidarity to competition. Market principles have been introduced in all spheres of life – from economics, politics and the military to education, culture, and private life. By the 1980s, sociology started to feel the effects of the reflux of utopian energies and

entered into a crisis. Transposing debates about representation from the arts and philosophy, post-modernism questioned the very idea of a systematic sociological theory and intimated that modernity and sociology had reached an endpoint – end of an epoch, end of grand narratives, end of society. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that post-modernism was itself only a symptom of a more general “cultural turn” within capitalism. The debate about “late modernity,” led by Giddens, Beck, Bauman, Touraine, and Castells was more serious. Proposing a sociology of post-modernism, decoding the latter as the cultural logic of late capitalism, it analyzed the changes in the economy and society, culture and identity which post-modernism had merely registered, and demonstrated that a sociology of post-modernity was not to be identified with a post-modern sociology. By the 1990’s, the fad of post-modernism was over and the debate took a distinctive spatial turn. Globalization became the central topic of sociological theory. In spite of the fact that sociology had a lot to contribute to the “great globalization debate,” it was quickly outflanked by international relations, international political economy, comparative politics, area studies, and anthropology with multi-sited ethnographies. By the time global studies had emerged as an interdiscipline with its own specialized literature, sociology entered once again into a serious crisis, this time for its alleged “methodological nationalism” which surreptitiously identifies society with the nation-state.

Globalization is a container term. Although it predominantly refers to a global “change of scale” that is arguably triggered by the restructurations of the economic realm, it is important not to reduce globalization to its economic dimension and to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that is able to take into account the economic as well as the social, cultural, political, technological, ecological, and legal dimensions of the accelerated “time-space compression” we are witnessing today. As a catchword of our time, globalization not only refers to economic transformations across the globe, but to the conjunction and integration of the economic, digital, and biotechnological revolutions in a single revolution that is triggering an epochal civilization shift. Together, those three simultaneous revolutions are radically transforming the parameters of human existence and, uncontrolled, they may even put the survival of humanity at risk.

Capitalism was global from the very beginning, but today it functions as a single unit in real time on a planetary scale. The unification of capital markets, the liberalization of world trade, the internationalization of the division of labor, the global diffusion of consumerism, the culture of entrepreneurialism and, within the firm, decentralization, delocalization, vertical disintegration, networking, subcontracting, franchizing, and flexibilization of the labor force are global trends that one can witness locally, in the global cities in the center and the periphery. If post-Fordism focuses on the changes within the mode of production, post-industrialism stresses the changes in the forces of production and analyzes social change by foregrounding technology, especially information technology. Computers are relatively recent. It is only in the mid-eighties that they started to invade plants, offices, and private homes. We all do the same work: we sit in front of a screen and we frenetically type on a keyboard. Individually, we produce a text; collectively, we produce

text – a single, infinite text that is continuously produced and altered and of which get glimpses on our screen. The computer connects bodies to machines, machines to minds, as well as other machines. Interconnected through the worldwide web, computers form a global network in which any node can be connected to another one which is part of the network. All spheres of life are progressively integrated into the cyberworld. One after the other, economy, finance, commerce, culture, science, education, communication, leisure, and pleasure go virtual. Since the code of DNA was “cracked” by Watson and Crick in 1953, molecular biology has also entered the informational age. The human genome is a complex string of information that can be decoded, recoded, and recombined. IVF, stem cell technology and therapeutic cloning indicate that the biological sciences are no longer pure sciences. In conjunction with the bio-medical industry which promises cures for all kinds of illnesses, genomics has now reached the techno-scientific stage of industrial-medical application. Genomics is an anthropic technology of communication. The human body has become the frontier of advancing capitalism.

In my book on post-humanism I have tried to update the theory of reification (Vandenberghe, 2006a). The techno-capitalist revolutions of today bring into being new reifications that neither Marx nor Lukács nor the Frankfurt School had been able to foresee. The old concept of reification was forged to analyze the transformation of labor power into a commodity. As capitalism advances, it commodifies culture, nature and the self. Following the digital revolution, the commercialization of culture has progressed to the point that the cultural industry has now become an experience industry. Human experience has become the consummate commodity of the new capitalist economy. Whether it is music, games or films, cuisine, travel or theme parks, sports or gambling, what one pays for and what is marketed are not so much the goods and the services as the cultural experiences one consumes. By connecting the mind to the market and selling lived experiences, capitalism has colonized consciousness. Capitalism not only produces objects, but also subjects and subjectivities. It does not crush aspirations, but acknowledges and adjusts itself to them, while instrumentalizing and utilizing them for its own objectives. Translating and displacing the aspirations of autonomy, freedom, initiative, creativity, spontaneity, originality, and responsibility of the individual into a political program that aims to roll back the state, neo-liberalism has succeeded in turning the critique of alienation, domination, and bureaucracy to the advantage of the market. Having colonized the life-world, capitalism turns its attention to nature and invades life itself to modify and commodify it. The old reification transformed humans into things. The new one is more radical and simply scrambles the old ontological distinctions between the human, the animal, and the thing. The analysis of current developments in the bio-medical industry do not make one cheerful. In the name of health, all the taboos concerning human nature are lifted. Eugenics is coming back, but under a liberal and pastoral guise. The theories of the Frankfurt School were depressing, but in spite of all their metatheoretical shortcomings, they seem to have offered a brilliant anticipation of what was to come.

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Notes

Introduction: the adventures of reification

- 1 The autonomy of society in regard to individuals is relative for the simple reason that even if society is effectively independent in relation to any particular individual, it is not, and clearly can never be, in relation to all. Durkheim (1970: 86) said precisely this when he claimed in his inaugural lecture that “a whole is not the same as the sum of its parts, although without them, it would be nothing.” However trivial this comment might seem, the problem of the relative autonomy of society (or the relative irreducibility of social facts) hides a host of extremely complicated metaphysical problems that underlie many of the controversies between reductionists and emergentists, nominalists and realists.
- 2 This is a rough classification that reflects only the predominant tendencies of the authors. Although Lukács is classed in the first category, his early texts are full of tragic pathos; and Horkheimer is placed in the second category even though in his youth he clearly tended towards a revolutionary ultra-leftist position. Furthermore, since Habermas breaks with the Marxist model of revolution and counter-revolution, these categories require further refinement according to whether they refer to revolutionary activism or radical reformism. On nostalgia in German sociology, see Lenk (1987: 57–75), Connerton (1980: 120–131) and Stauth and Turner (1988: 27–59).
- 3 It is worth mentioning in passing that the word *Verdinglichung* is also used by Husserl in various texts (Husserl, 1952, I: 927, II: 190–191; 1954: 234) and by Heidegger (1993: 46, 420, 437) in *Sein und Zeit*. For a comparative analysis of the concept of reification in Heidegger and Lukács, cf. Goldmann, (1973).
- 4 In philosophical terms, the concept of *res*, used to translate the Greek word *pragma* and the Arabic *say*, is obscure (Courtine, 1992: 892–901). It refers simultaneously to a concrete thing that is empirically observable (*ens*) and an abstract, undetermined thing (*etwas überhaupt, aliquid, ti*), or a mental thing (*ens rationis*) and a real thing (*ens reale*). In Sahratani this ambiguity leads to the impossible question of deciding whether or not that which is non-existent is a thing. Furthermore, it should be noted that the translation of *res* by ‘thing’ is already a reification. In Roman law *res* does not refer to the thing, but to the cause, to that which is in litigation: “The primitive meaning of *res* oscillates between the ideas of litigation, the litigious situation, and the object that gives rise to contention. . . . Fundamentally, the ‘thing’ is the ‘cause’ If *res* is the object, it is first and foremost a debated object, subject to a difference of opinion, a common object that brings together two opposing protagonists into a single relation” (Thomas, 1980: 416–417). The reduction of the cause (*res*) to the thing (*ens*), and the thing to the value, arose already at the beginning of the third century BC. A similar shift from a relation to a thing occurs in German, where Thing is *Ding* or *Sache*. *Ding*, like the English Thing, comes from the old high-German *Dinc* or *Ting*, but *Dinc* means the assembly gathered together to discuss a point of dispute or litigation concerning those present (Vullierme, 1979: 44–45)

- 5 Despite the clear affinities between individualism and nominalism, on the one hand, and collectivism and realism on the other, they are not the same. The proof is that we can identify two variants of collectivist theories: they may be either realist (Marx is the exemplary instance) or empiricist (the exemplary case here is Radcliffe-Brown).

PART 1 Classic German sociology: First intermediate reflections

- 1 This interpretation is indebted to Habermas' "three sources" of reification (personal discussion with Habermas in Frankfurt, February 1994).

1 Karl Marx: critique of the triple inversion of subject and object. Alienation, exploitation, and commodity fetishism

- 1 All references, except where indicated, refer to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975). The first figure refers to the volume, the second to the page.
- 2 For a general introduction to the concept of alienation, from the Old Testament to contemporary sociology, see Ludz, 1973; Israel, 1979, and Schacht, 1971. For an introduction to the Marxist concept of alienation, see Avineri, 1970; Ollman 1971; Mészáros 1972a; and Torrance, 1977. For a specialized bibliography of alienation studies with 7074 references, see Van Reden, 1980.
- 3 Marx explicitly critiqued the theory of alienation Hegel developed in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, despite his critique Marx was heavily influenced by the section on the master and slave dialectic (Hegel, 1970: 145ff.) as well as the section on the self-alienation of the spirit 'Spirit Alienated from Self' (*idem.*, 359ff.).
- 4 Ludwig Feuerbach developed his theory of theology as alienated anthropology in *The Essence of Christianity* (Harper, New York: 1957a). His 'sensitive' critique of Hegelian idealism appears in 'Principles of the Philosophy of the Future' (1957b, 32 sq).
- 5 Habermas' work is built on a meta-theoretical distinction between "labor" (rational activity related to an end) and "interaction" (communicative activity). This distinction is fundamental for any social theory. However, since it is Habermas, rather than Marx, who reduces labor to an instrumental activity by removing its expressive and normative aspects, the distinction is problematic. I return to this point in Part 3, in the chapter on Habermas' theory of communicative action.
- 6 The Spinozian interpretation of Marxism is rationalist, in that it combines realism and idealism. Rationalism is a "theoretical deviation" that confuses "the real object" (which is material) and "the object of knowledge." The fact that Althusser defends a rationalist conception of the real is shown clearly in a brief, almost trivial, phrase, very similar to one of Derrida's famous expressions: "We never escape the concept" (Althusser, 1970, II: 67; cf. also 20 ff.).

2 Georg Simmel: between Marx and Weber. The dialectics of modernity

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: FA: *Fragmente und Aufsätze*; GSG: *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* (first figure refers to volume, second to page); IF: *Das Individuum und die Freiheit*; ISF: *On Individuality and Social Forms*; K: *Kant*; L: *Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel*; PM: *The Philosophy of Money*; R: *Die Religion*; SC: *Simmel on Culture*; SD: *Über Soziale Differenzierung*; SN: *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*; SS, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German; English titles refer to published English translations of Simmel's work included in the bibliography. For a general introduction to Simmel's thought, cf. Mamelet, 1914; Becher, 1971; Levine, 1971; Dahme, 1981; Léger, 1989 and the articles in Frisby, 1994.

3 Max Weber: formal rationality and capitalism in the west. An analysis of the genesis and structure of reification

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: CS: *Critique of Stammer*; E&S, *Economy and Society*; FMW: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*; GARS: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. I; GARS II: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. II; GASS: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*; GEH: *General Economic History*; GPS, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*; LP: *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics*; MSS: *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*; PE *The Protestant Ethic*; PE II: *Die protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken*; RI: *Religion of India*; WL, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German; English titles refer to published English translations of Weber's work included in the bibliography.

4 The young Lukács: Reification and redemption (first synthesis)

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: G&K: *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*; HCC: *History and Class Consciousness*; SD: *Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas*; SF: *Soul and Form*; SIP: *Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik*; SL: *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie*; TN: *The Theory of the Novel*. Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German; English titles refer to published English translations of Lukács' work included in the bibliography. On Lukács' life, see Kadarkay, 1991. The best interpretations of Lukács are Löwy 1976; Arato and Breines, 1979; Feenberg, 1986; and Habermas, 1981, I, ch. 4.

PART 2 The critical theory of the Frankfurt school: Second intermediate reflections

- 1 The original French version of this book also includes a chapter on Marcuse. Cf. Vandenberghe, 1998: 105–167.

5 Max Horkheimer: From the pseudo-natural organicity of society to total reification

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: CT: *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*; DD: *Dawn and Decline. Notes 1926–1936 and 1950–1969*; DE: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; ER: *Eclipse of Reason*; FSR: *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*; GS: *Gesammelte Schriften*; PB: *Les débuts de la philosophie bourgeoise de l'histoire*; PS: *Between Philosophy and Social Science*; TT: *Théorie traditionnelle et théorie critique*. Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German or French; English titles refer to published English translations of Horkheimer's work included in the bibliography. For an introduction to Horkheimer, cf. Stirke, 1992 and Schmidt, 1974.

6 Theodor W. Adorno: Anti-system and reification

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: AEM: *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*; AP: *The Authoritarian Personality*; AS: *Aspects of Sociology*; AT: *Aesthetic theory*; CM: *Critical Models*; DE: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; H: *Hegel. Three studies*; ISM: *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*; MM: *Minima Moralia*; ND: *Negative Dialectics*; NL: *Notes on Literature*, Vols. I and II; P: *Prisms*; PMM: *Philosophy of Modern Music*; POS: *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*; QF: *Quasi una fantasia*. All German references, with the exception of VES: *Vorlesung zur Einleitung in die Soziologie*, are to GS: *Gesammelte Schriften*. GS1: *Philosophische Frühschriften*; GS5: *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*; GS8: *Soziologische Schriften I*; GS 9.2: *Soziologische Schriften II*; GS 10.1: *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica*; GS 11: *Noten zur Literatur*; GS14: "Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik"; GS17: "Über Jazz"; GS18: "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der

Musik.” Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German; English titles refer to published English translations of Adorno’s work included in the bibliography. For a good introduction to Adorno, see Rose, 1978; Jay, 1984b; Jameson, 1990.

PART 3 The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas: Third intermediate reflections

- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: AEF: *Arbeit, Erkenntnis, Fortschritt*; BFN: *Between Facts and Norms*; CE: *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; D: *Autonomy and Solidarity. Interviews*, in Dews (1986); ED: *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik*; IO: *The Inclusion of the Other*; KHI: *Knowledge and Human Interests*; KK: *Kultur und Kritik*; KPS: *Kleine politische Schriften (KPSI-IV)*; KPS5: *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit (KPS V)*; KPS6: *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung (KPS VI)*; KPS7: *Die nachholende revolution (KPS VII)*; KPS8: *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik (KPS VIII)*; LC: *Legitimation Crisis*; LS: *Logic of the Social Sciences*; MC: *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*; ND: *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*; P: *Philosophical-Political Profiles*; PDM: *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; POS: *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*; PS: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; PSI: *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*; R: “A Reply to my Critics” in Thompson and Held (1982); RII: “A Reply” in Honneth and Joas (1986); RhM: *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*; TCA: *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I and II; TG: *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie*; TK: *Texte und Kontexte*; TP: *Theory and Practice*; TPf: *Théorie et Pratique* (some essays appear in the French translation but not in the English translation, notably Vol II ch. 9 – *Conséquences pratiques du progrès scientifique et technique*); TRS: *Towards a Rational Society*; TWI: *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie*; VE: *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*; VEP: “Vorwort zur Neuauflage 1990 [from *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*].” Translations are mine wherever the titles are in German; English titles refer to published English translations of Habermas’ work included in the bibliography. The literature on Habermas is vast. For a good introduction, see Bernstein, 1985: 3–21; McCarthy, 1984; Held, 1980: Part 2; Keulartz, 1995.

7 Towards a synthesis of the philosophies of consciousness and emancipation

- 1 For the sake of simplicity, the dates given for the publication of Habermas’ works refer to the original German publication, not to the English translation whose titles are used to refer to them here.

8 The procedural-linguistic turn to action (1972–1981)

- 1 Habermas developed universal pragmatics in various texts, including “On Systematically Distorted Communication”; “Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence”; “*Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz*” (TG, 101–122); “*Vorlesungen zu einer sprachtheoretischen Grundlegung der Soziologie*” (VE, 59–104) and, especially, “What is Universal Pragmatics?” (SI, 21–103 or CE 1–68). For an introduction to universal pragmatics, see McCarthy, 1973 and Thompson, 1981: 86–101.
- 2 Habermas developed his consensual theory of truth in several essays: “*Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz*” (TG, 123–141); “*Vorlesungen zu einer sprachtheoretischen Grundlegung der Soziologie*” (PSI, 85–103) and, especially, “*Wahrheitstheorien*” (VE, 127–186). For an excellent overview of these critiques, see Ferrara, 1987.
- 3 The ideal speech situation defines the ideal conditions of emancipation. It says absolutely nothing about the practical and temporal conditions of emancipation, which is problematic. In his systematic reconstruction of the discussion, Luhmann (TG, 328–341) drew

out the unreality of the ideal speech situation presuppositions. First of all, any effective discussion is limited by the number of contributing participants. Next, it presupposes that the participants are focusing on a particular subject. Since this type of concentration requires a minimum normative regulation and sanctioning power, it follows that there is no discussion without domination. Furthermore, in a discussion there are always participants who are quicker, more skilled, and better informed than others. The discussion itself thus generates domination. Finally, as the discussion develops, it becomes increasingly complex and it is increasingly difficult to have an overarching perspective. The conclusion is that a theory of language that goes “from phonetics to phronetics” grasps all, and therefore loses all.

- 4 Although the notion of discourse ethics was already present in the 1970s, particularly in “Theories of Truth” (VE, 127–187) and still more clearly in *Legitimation Crisis* (LC, 102–110), it was only fully developed in 1983 in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, in the chapter entitled “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification” (MC, 43–115). Discourse ethics was also developed by Karl-Otto Apel, but on a transcendental basis, rather than a universal basis, as is the case in Habermas. For the transcendental foundation program, see Apel, 1981, II: 358–436.

9 The theory of communicative action

- 1 In an attempt to untangle the conceptual confusion that results from the fact that the notion of “culture” is used by Habermas both as a “synonym of language and general background assumptions” and as the “designation of one of the elements of lifeworld”, and that it then decomposes into three sub-elements, namely science, morals, and art, the basic structure of lifeworld can be represented schematically as in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1

<i>Culture</i> (reserves of knowledge)	<i>Society</i> (legitimate orders)	<i>Person</i> (interaction skills)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science • Morals (discourse ethics) • Art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (...)

- 2 It is worth noting that Foucault and Habermas both emphasize consensus, although they analyze it from opposite points of view: for Habermas, the ideal speech situation is characterized by an orientation towards consensus, while for Foucault power is characterized by the lack of this type of orientation. The same type of contrast also appears in regard to Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, power comes first, and the political task is the creation of an equal social universe that would enable discussion without symbolic constraints (discussion as end), while for Habermas, the ideal speech situation is in some ways always already given, and the task of politics is to institutionalize it within a democratic system (discussion as origin).

Conclusion: Towards a critical structurism

- 1 In the original French version of this book, I proposed an analytical comparison of the theories of Giddens, Bhaskar, Archer, and Bourdieu. The conclusion was that the theory of structuration is insufficient for thinking through reification because it fails to take into account emerging effects (cf. Vandenberghe, 1997–1998: II, 308–339).
- 2 From this point of view, any attempt to combine the uncombinable can only be the result of a confusion between the metatheoretical level and the epistemological level. Of course, realism (the materialist aspect of the epistemological position) can be combined

with constructivism (the idealist aspect of the metatheoretical position) – as I am trying to do here – or rationalism (the idealist aspect of the epistemological position) can be combined with materialism (the materialist aspect of the metatheoretical position) – as Bourdieu tries to do – but to combine realism and nominalism by seeking to develop a sort of “nominalist realism” strikes me as being as incoherent as drawing a “square circle” or “round square.”

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