

Women's Domination as Reification

A Socialist Feminist Critique of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action

by
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Abstract

This thesis endeavours to articulate a socialist feminist critique of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action through an examination of the conception of domination and the possibilities of emancipation elaborated in this theory. It argues that the example of women's domination in late modern societies reveals shortcomings that significantly challenge Habermas's conception of domination as the systemic and cultural reification of communicatively-structured contexts of everyday life. The thesis locates these lacunae in Habermas's reading of the concept of labour in Hegel and Marx, conducted within the terms of a distinction between labour and interaction. Utilizing the socialist feminist categories of the gender division of labour and of patriarchy, the theory of communicative action is demonstrated to be markedly ambivalent with respect to its capacity to systematically identify forms of women's oppression. Consequently, the notion of emancipatory practice as the communicative rationalization of everyday life is likewise constrained.

For all those engaged in social struggle

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This study was principally inspired by an engagement with Habermas's theory of communicative action, and to a lesser degree with Foucault's analytic of power, conducted in the context of graduate coursework in the department of Political Science at the University of Ottawa. In reading Habermas and Foucault from an epistemological and political perspective, I was struck by their focus on the problematic of modern domination and their turn to language as the medium through which domination operates. From my continuing interest in feminist critiques of modern political thought, I was also struck by the merely passing references to the problem of women's domination in their work.

The lack of substantial engagement with feminist thought on both Habermas's and Foucault's part led me to originally plan a comparative evaluation of the theory of communicative action and the analytic of power on the question of women's domination. However, due to constraints of time and resources and the complexity of Habermas's work in and of itself, I scaled down the project to a socialist feminist critique of the conception of domination as the reification of communicative interaction. Indeed, in carefully reconstructing Habermas's core arguments and the possible feminist responses to them, it became readily apparent to me that the implications of the theory of communicative action

for addressing women's domination have yet to be fully explored either by feminist scholars or by Habermas himself.

The project I present here is immensely indebted to the careful guidance of Koula Mellos. Over the course of numerous conversations about the intricacies of Habermas's arguments and potential feminist readings of them, her insightful critiques greatly contributed to my understanding of Habermas's efforts. I have gratefully appreciated her ongoing encouragement, patience, and support for the kind of work I have chosen to undertake in this thesis.

I must also express my gratitude to a dear circle of friends who have been unwavering in their faith in my ability to see this work to its conclusion. To Laurie Near and ki namaste, my heartfelt thanks. My fellow students in the Political Science M.A. Programme provided an all too rare sense of camaraderie, and I am glad to continue to benefit from the friendships of Mariellen Chisholm, Catherine Lappe, Nicolas Lévesque, Lucie Morgado, and Chris Paterson. Ruth Near provided very much appreciated hospitality and good company on numerous journeys to Ottawa, while Murray Krock and Henry Loosmore made sure to keep me focused during difficult times. Kirsty Jackson and Michael Dennis also warmly welcomed into their home in Ottawa. Finally, I reserve special thanks to John Fox, whose emotional and intellectual support contributed in no small measure to the successful completion of this work.

List of Abbreviations

For purposes of brevity and convenience, I have used the following abbreviations throughout the thesis to refer to Habermas's major texts.

<i>A&S</i>	<i>Autonomy and Solidarity - Interviews with Jürgen Habermas</i> . Peter Dews, ed. London: Verso, 1992.
<i>CES</i>	<i>Communication and the Evolution of Society</i> . trans. by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.
<i>KHI</i>	<i>Knowledge and Human Interests</i> . trans. by Jeremy Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.
<i>PDM</i>	<i>The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity</i> . trans. by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.
<i>T&P</i>	<i>Theory and Practice</i> . trans. by John Viertel. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.
<i>TCAI</i>	<i>The Theory of Communicative Action - Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society</i> . trans. by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
<i>TCAII</i>	<i>The Theory of Communicative Action - Volume II: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason</i> . trans. by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Introduction

The real social function of philosophy lies in its criticism of what is prevalent.¹

- Max Horkheimer

In 1994, 69% of all part-time workers in Canada were women.
In 1993, women working full-time [in Canada] earned on average 72% of what their male counterparts earned.²

[In 1993] more than half of all women in [Canada]...experienced at least one incident of violence, as defined under the *Criminal Code*, in their adult lives.³

Max Horkheimer's definition of the intent of philosophy aims to distinguish it from scientific modes of thought which concern themselves with empirical facts and give little or no attention to the social and political implications of their researches. For Horkheimer, philosophy has as its social function not only the critical assessment of social life, but also "the development of critical and dialectical thought."⁴ In this way philosophical thought possesses from the start a political, and ultimately practical, dimension that further

¹ Max Horkheimer, "The Social Function of Philosophy," in Horkheimer, *Critical Theory - Selected Essays*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1989), p 264.

² From *Women in Canada*. Status of Women Canada, Ottawa, c1994.

³ From *The Violence Against Women Survey*, in *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, November 18, 1993.

⁴ Horkheimer, "The Social Function of Philosophy," pp. 267-8.

demarcates philosophy as epistemologically distinct from science. The determination of 'what is prevalent', and how to address political and social action to such prevailing conditions, has always been a crucial component of any attempt to critically understand social reality.

For all of its diversity contemporary social theory is commonly animated by this notion of critical assessment of and intervention in the social world. Beyond general methodological similarities, the specific content of contemporary critical social theory begins with the notion that the salient characteristic of late modernity is the ongoing struggle between freedom and domination. Moreover, there is the sense in varying degrees that the multiple forces of social and political domination are already firmly entrenched in modernity, thereby rendering the project of freedom all the more urgent. This thematic emphasis on the problem of domination leads contemporary critical social theory to seriously reevaluate philosophy and its role in furnishing universal truth, reason, and objectivity about human existence. Through radical critiques of subjectivity and the epistemological status of theory, theoretical projects within this orientation focus on the elucidation of concrete structures and practices of domination. Although the search for grand metaphysical systems along the lines of those of Kant and Hegel are disavowed, critical social theory also refuses to wholeheartedly conceive of the practical in strictly Marxian materialist terms. This, in spite of the debt to the critical spirit of Marxism it inherits via Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School.

Marx set the stage for posing the illumination of characteristically modern (read: capitalist) forms of domination and potential emancipation as a problem. However, the

relationship between Marxism and critical social theory has become strained on both the theoretical and practical fronts. The overly scientific analysis characteristic of a line of Marxist thought, most recently culminating in the work of Althusser, is viewed as reductionistic and deficient in its understanding of the relationship between relations of production and social interaction. On the level of practice, the historical failure of the proletariat to assume its predestined role as the definitive revolutionary subject has called into question the very notion of a macro-subject of history. These theoretical and practical concerns are interpreted by contemporary critical social theory as signals of either the necessity of a new reformulation of the Marxist paradigm, or of the fundamental theoretical inability of Marxist thought to adequately account for modern socio-political realities.

By drawing attention to the embeddedness of philosophy and theoretical practice in socio-historical practice, critical social theory re-poses the problematic of domination not in terms of the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, but rather in terms of the interconnection of domination with a reason that appears in the world as positivist science or technical rationality, subsuming all aspects of human life to its instrumental imperatives. From this conception of the link between domination and reason springs two opposing theoretical programmes. The first, represented by Michel Foucault and post-structuralism, insists that reason as it has presented itself and been understood in the Western Enlightenment tradition must be seriously reevaluated, and if necessary, abandoned. The difficult and controversial challenge becomes finding new ways of thinking that avoid the entrenchment of new conduits or modes of domination. The second direction, best expressed in the figure of Jürgen Habermas, seeks to recuperate reason as the only legitimate ground

for securing real freedom, while at the same time remaining aware of the forms of domination in which reason has collaborated.

While a comparative evaluation of the formulation of the connection between reason and domination in Foucault and Habermas remains a highly valuable undertaking, this will not be my intention here.⁵ Rather, I should like to specifically examine Habermas's theory of communicative action as a highly original and compelling way of theorizing the social. One of the primary motifs in Habermas's effort to rehabilitate reason through the introduction of the concept of communicative reason is to elucidate the structures and forms of modern domination in terms of the systemic and cultural reification of everyday life. In order to evaluate the theoretical cogency of this model of domination and its congruency with actual phenomena of oppression, I undertake a reading of the theory of communicative action from a socialist feminist perspective. With this particular feminist approach, I aim to discern the applicability of Habermas's conception of domination for understanding women's oppression. No less importantly, I also want to discover what kinds of practical insights Habermas's work can furnish to women actively involved in struggling against domination.

At first glance the proposal to examine the theory of communicative action as critique and transcendence of domination from a socialist feminist perspective would seem an onerous undertaking. The richness, complexity, and far-reaching interdisciplinary character

⁵ The importance of this project is reflected in the ongoing publication of work that compares Foucault's and Habermas's social critiques. See for example, Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration - Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*. (London: Verso, 1990); Thomas McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Thinking*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power - Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*. trans. by Kenneth Baynes. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); and David Couzens Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory*. (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

of Habermas's thought and feminist scholarship in general raise complex philosophical, social, and political questions that cannot be dismissed nor answered easily. In spite of this, both share the broad concerns of contemporary social theory as previously outlined. On the philosophical level, Habermas and feminists critically address the question of universal truth and the status it can claim in an increasingly fragmented, 'post-modern' world. The philosophico-political connection centres on the role of reason as either a critique of or as complicit in forms of domination. As social critique, Habermas and feminism in general attempt to understand the dynamics of social interaction from both an individual and societal perspective. The underlying impetus for the investigation of these questions lies in the determination of the possibilities and forms of emancipatory political practice. The theoretical terrain upon which both conduct their inquiries is generally mapped out within the parameters of the modernity/post-modernity debate. I understand Habermas's theory of communicative action and feminist political philosophy, specifically in its socialist feminist incarnation, as two of the most important attempts to conceptually grasp the ensemble of problems confronting late twentieth-century Western society and critical social thought.

I have chosen to critique Habermas from a feminist perspective for a number of reasons. First of all, I see the emancipation of women as not only one of the most pressing concerns of the modern age, but also as a long overlooked or unthematized problem in the history of Western thought. Indeed, the ongoing endeavour to problematize women's subordination is an urgent task in light of the current historical and intellectual climate. The renewed conservative backlash against feminism and other emancipatory movements, conducted under the rhetorical terms of the 'preservation of family values' and 'freedom of speech'

versus an alleged New Left neo-fascism, threatens to seriously undermine the important gains such movements have won in the last few decades.⁶ Intellectually, the penetrating insights of feminist thought into the role of patriarchal structures in the organization of political, economic, and social life challenge contemporary critical social theory to incorporate an analysis of sex and gender into its theoretical framework. Given the importance of the question of modern forms of domination in Habermas's work, the problem of women's subordination represents a substantial test of his conceptual and practical understanding of this theme. Finally, the example of women's domination heuristically suggests further investigations regarding the applicability of Habermas's conception of domination as reification to other forms of oppressive relations, such as those predicated on race, class, and sexuality.

Although Habermas himself has always looked favourably upon the women's movement as the foremost example of new, emancipatory social movements arising in response to reificatory phenomena, I contend that the conception of domination as systemic and cultural reification articulated in the theory of communicative action is unable to systematically identify and explain women's oppression. Despite potentially providing women with a future vision of emancipation through the notion of critique as communicative rationalization, Habermas nonetheless is insensitive to the multiple forms in and through which women's domination is currently expressed. As a means for understanding how a post-emancipated society could non-violently maintain itself and resolve social conflict, the

⁶ See for instance, Susan Faludi, *Backlash - The Undeclared War Against American Women*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991).

theory of communicative action is formidably cogent.⁷ In terms of explaining how and why disparities in political, social, and economic power, especially those rooted in sexual difference, determine the material and symbolic conditions of life in contemporary Western societies, Habermas's work proves less than satisfying. The theory of communicative action rests on the notion of communicative reason as a modernity-redeeming bulwark to the ever-increasing encroachment and domination of instrumentalizing reason upon human life. While the philosophical arguments are impressive, Habermas's diremption between communicative and instrumental reason, expressed in the division between interaction and labour and transposed onto the terrain of the social through the concepts of lifeworld and system respectively, raises difficulties that limit the explanatory scope of the conception of domination bound up in the theory of communicative action.

Through the problematic of women's oppression, I intend to argue that Habermas's conception of domination as the colonization of the lifeworld by the system is inadequate in two significant ways. Firstly and most importantly, it cannot account for forms of oppression that are not directly attributable to systemic intrusions, but rather operate within the lifeworld itself. Since women experience domination within such lifeworld structures as the family, and from adherence to repressive social and cultural norms pertaining to gender roles, the communicatively-secured reproduction processes of the lifeworld are not

⁷ Habermas's most explicit formulation of the theory of communicative action is found in *TCAI* and *TCAII*. While my primary focus will be on the above work, I will also draw on such texts as the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and *Autonomy and Solidarity* for clarification of certain of Habermas's ideas. See Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). [hereafter *PDM*]; and Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity - Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, Peter Dews, ed. (London: Verso, 1992). [hereafter *A&S*]

entirely as benign as Habermas posits them. In other words Habermas does not fully appreciate how material and practical interests impinge upon the symbolic reproductive processes of the everyday lifeworld, grounded as they are in communicatively-secured intersubjective agreements that rarely approach the conditions of the ideal speech situation. I differ with Habermas as to the degree of social cohesion obtaining in the lifeworld; rather than taking communicative action as the norm, I want to explore how in many instances such cohesion is secured through subjects acting strategically in their own interests. Another aspect of this problem relates to the process by which aspects of the lifeworld come to be problematized, given the real, inferior social position of women and other social actors. While in theory all validity claims are always already open to rational critique, in a world marked by relations of gender inequality and power the issue of constraints on participation in communication is highly trenchant.

The second way in which the problematic of women's oppression challenges Habermas's conception of domination is through the phenomenon of the gender division of labour.⁸ Because Habermas relegates material reproduction and labour to the formally organized, norm-free domain of the system, and thereby deprives labour of any normative content, he is unable to provide a critique of the ways in which the variety of women's labouring activities are exploited in modern capitalism. The conceptual distinction between symbolic

⁸ Following Iris Young's usage, I will throughout this thesis employ the term "gender division of labour" as opposed to "sexual division of labour". As Young explains, "I have...come to the conclusion...that 'gender division of labour' better captures the phenomenon [of woman's place in the division of labour], because through the concept of 'gender' it focuses on the social meaning of the division, rather than a biological or 'natural' division." Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory," in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution - A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981), pp. 66-67, fn. 21.

and material reproduction fails to capture the specificity of women's domestic labour, especially the work involved in the reproduction and socialization of labour power. I argue that this insensitivity to this problem of women's labour is rooted in Habermas's reading of the Hegelian-Marxist conception of labour in terms of the strict separation of labour and interaction.

The aforementioned difficulties in identifying the features of women's domination are reflected in the conception of emancipation intimated by the theory of communicative action. The possibility of freedom is theorized as the capacity of the lifeworld to resist the colonizing tendencies of the system, accomplished through the building of new lifeworld institutions that foster the communicative rationalization of everyday life. Although Habermas's own logic also strongly suggests the communicative determination of everyday material life i.e. the organization of labour, I contend that his resistance to incorporating this possibility necessarily results in an one-sided emancipatory practice. For women this means that while communicative critique can be productively utilized, within limits and not without a certain risk, as a tool against the unrationalized force of tradition around gender norms, it cannot be similarly directed towards addressing the gender division of labour.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter I consists of an elaboration of the philosophical foundations and arguments of Habermas's theory of communicative action. Because this theory represents the most developed elaboration of the notion of communication as a socially organizing principle and contains the most explicit formulation of the concept of domination as systemic reification, I concentrate principally on the two-volume *Theory of Communicative Action*. I begin with the important distinction between

labour and interaction as the point of departure for the development of the complex concept of communicative action. Next, I trace Habermas's deployment of communicative action as social critique, accomplished through the complementary concepts of system and lifeworld. The chapter closes with a presentation of Habermas's conception of domination as systemic and cultural reification. To fully appreciate the philosophical background on which the theoretical and practical claims of the theory of communicative action are based requires an engagement with Habermas's readings of Hegel and Marx, especially around the question of labour and interaction. I concentrate on this task in Chapter II, drawing upon my earlier work on the problematic of self-consciousness in Habermas's thought.⁹ Habermas's understanding of labour is especially germane for evaluating the degree to which the problem of women's labour can be accommodated within the terms of the distinction between system and lifeworld. I devote Chapter III to a critical socialist feminist evaluation of Habermas's conception of domination in terms of its applicability for identifying the various forms of women's oppression, especially economic oppression as expressed in the gender division of labour, as well as the practicality of the notion of communicative critique as an emancipatory practice. To complete this introduction, I should like to briefly review the intellectual background in which Habermas's work can be situated, and also clarify the terms of the socialist feminist methodology I will use throughout the thesis.

⁹ See Michael Palamarek, "*Dico Ergo Sum: The Problem of Self-Consciousness in the Thought of Jürgen Habermas*," (unpublished manuscript, Dept. of Political Science, University of Ottawa, 1991). While I have substantially reformulated and extended the analyses from this work in Chapter II, I have also directly incorporated certain material.

Habermas and the Tradition of Critical Theory

Habermas stands as the most influential contemporary representative of a tradition of critical social thought arising out of the work of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, or Institute of Social Research, founded in Frankfurt in 1923.¹⁰ The ideas expressed in the work of such prominent Institute members as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse has collectively come to be known as the Frankfurt School of critical theory. The appointment of Horkheimer as Director in 1930 marked the beginning of the Institute's effort to formulate a comprehensive and critical theory of society. Horkheimer originally conceived the research programme of the Institute as a "multidisciplinary integration of philosophy with the sciences in the hope of providing a theoretical instrument for transforming politics, society, the economy, and everyday contemporary life."¹¹ This underlying methodological orientation is best expressed in two articles published in 1937: Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory" and Marcuse's "Philosophy and Critical Theory."¹² Both essays attempt to justify a critical, normative approach to social inquiry that incorporates empirical, scientific research, but also moves beyond the apolitical perspective of positivist social science.

¹⁰ For a concise introduction to the themes and intellectual development of the Institute, see Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); and Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner, "Introduction," in *Critical Theory and Society - A Reader*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-21. A more in-depth study is presented in Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

¹¹ Bronner and Kellner, "Introduction," p. 4.

¹² Horkheimer's essay is included in his *Critical Theory - Selected Essays*, pp. 188-243; Marcuse's article is reprinted in *Critical Theory and Society - A Reader*, pp. 58-74.

Heavily inspired by the method of historical materialism, members of the Institute sought to reinvigorate and rejustify the emancipatory spirit of Marx and Marxist thought in light of contemporary historical conditions. These included the failure of the proletariat to carry out successful revolutions in Western industrialized nations despite the worldwide economic crisis of 1929, the later rise of fascism in Europe, and the post-World War II establishment of welfare state capitalism. Although the research interests and body of knowledge generated by the various members of the Institute were quite heterogeneous in nature, their efforts were generally informed by the attempt to discern the possibilities of real emancipation in ever-changing capitalist social formations. Thus the themes of the relationship between the state and the economy and the individual and society were prominent. To account for the seemingly smooth installation of fascist regimes, and later, for the degree of stability exhibited by capitalist societies, investigations were undertaken along psychoanalytic lines. Analyses characteristic of this attempt to synthesize Marx and Freud included collaborative studies on the authoritarian personality, and Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*.¹³ As the possibility of a proletarian revolution seemed ever more remote in the post-Second World War period, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse focused their attention on explaining the establishment of a 'totally administered society', where "new forms of political, social, and especially cultural conformity were becoming institutionalized."¹⁴ The apparent overarching power of this new, technological organization

¹³ See for instance, Horkheimer's essay "Authority and the Family," in *Critical Theory - Selected Essays*, pp. 47-128, and Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

¹⁴ Bronner and Kellner, "Introduction," p. 9.

of society led Horkheimer and Adorno to develop a critique of mass culture, as well as a highly abstract, philosophical critique of instrumental reason. Ultimately, the power of technological-instrumental reason directed them to the pessimistic conclusion that the only real emancipatory impulse was to be found in relations of mimesis, especially in art, as the last refuge where a non-dominating relationship between subjectivity and nature could be established. In contrast, Marcuse still held to the possibility of liberation even as he also identified the tendencies towards a complete technological determination of human existence.

Habermas's relationship to the Frankfurt School of critical theory is more than simply an affinity with its fundamental philosophical and critical orientation. As a student of both Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as an assistant to Adorno from 1956-1961, Habermas was intimately connected with the history and guiding ideas of the School.¹⁵ His work as a whole takes up the task of developing a comprehensive theory of society directed towards the possibility of emancipation. In keeping with the interdisciplinary character of the original Frankfurt School programme, at various stages Habermas has engaged in substantial ways with a variety of philosophical and sociological traditions, including German idealism, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, hermeneutical phenomenology, and systems theory. The overall intention is to clearly articulate the epistemological and methodological divisions between philosophy and science in order to provide the elusive normative foundations for a critical social theory.

¹⁵ Habermas recounts his period at the Institute of Social Research, and the influence of Adorno on his intellectual formation, in a series of interviews in *A&S*, esp. pp. 211-222.

Although Habermas's efforts have varied considerably over time, the focus on developing consistent normative foundations has remained constant. Likewise, certain historical themes have remained at the forefront of his work. These include the rise and continuing stability of the social democratic welfare-state, the persistence of capitalism, and the emergence of new social movements that are not sharply drawn along class lines. Habermas's *oeuvre* can be roughly divided into three main phases, although there is considerable overlap from one phase to the next. First, Habermas engaged with Hegel and Marx in the attempt to reconstruct historical materialism in order to overcome the dogmatism of overly scientific versions of Marxism. The publication of *Knowledge and Human Interests* reflected a shift in Habermas's thinking. The project in this text consisted of the effort to ground social theory in a critique of epistemology, based on the connections between knowledge and interest as expressed in three distinct fields of inquiry. Thus Habermas distinguished between the technical interest in the control of nature expressed in the empirical-analytic sciences, the practical interest in intersubjective recognition characteristic of historico-hermeneutical sciences, and the emancipatory interest in freedom grounded in self-reflection.¹⁶ The programme to develop a critical social theory on the basis of the relationship between knowledge and interests was later abandoned. In its place Habermas focused on the elucidation of a theory of communication, culminating in the two-volume *Theory of Communicative Action*. This work represents the culmination of the development of the notion of communicative action that had already been scoped out in

¹⁶ See Habermas, *KHI*, esp. pp. 301-317.

Habermas's earlier phases. As I shall present in the first chapter, the theory of communicative action incorporates an enormous range of themes and theoretical problematics in order to arrive at a comprehensive theory of society. Unlike his critical theory predecessors, Habermas still holds to the potential for emancipatory social transformation, now seen to lie in the ongoing communicative rationalization of society.

Methodological Considerations on Feminism and Domination

In order to clarify the terms under which I will undertake a specifically socialist feminist critique of the theory of communicative action, I should like to round out this introduction with a presentation of a working definition of the concept of domination, as well as a discussion of the methodological issues informing socialist feminism. These considerations will be my point of departure for reading Habermas's conception of domination and evaluating its usefulness.

The problem of domination is essentially bound up with the modern problem of the practical realization of individual and collective freedom and autonomy. For the most part, modern freedom can be defined as the unimpeded ability to determine and transform the subjective and objective conditions of one's own existence. Inevitably, individual claims for free self-determination come into conflict with the claims of other individuals to do likewise; thus individual freedom can only be exercised within a social context. With this recognition of the intersubjective dimension of freedom and autonomy, self-determination must also be understood as intimately interdependent with the collective determination of conditions of existence. This problem of reconciling the particularity inherent in universal individual

freedom with the universality of the interests of the community forms one of the cornerstones of modern political thought, from Rousseau's *Social Contract*, through Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.¹⁷ With this basic definition of freedom as the mediation of individual and collective self-determination, we can posit a provisional definition of domination as precisely the opposite of freedom. Domination consists in the repression of individual and collective autonomy, impeding individuals and collectivities from freely transforming the conditions of their existence. In its practical operation, domination establishes and perpetuates inequalities through processes of marginalization, outright exclusion, and inclusion on coerced, conditional terms. Domination assumes its most insidious form through reifying ideology, which inculcates in individuals and collectivities an uncritical acceptance of inequality as natural and objective; concomitant with this process is the internalization of domination on the individual level in the form of a self-policing and self-repression. Reification at the level of community undermines and obscures possibilities for social transformation and the realization of more fulfilling forms of life.

While critical social theory in general is oriented towards understanding domination, feminist theory stands alone in focusing specifically on women's oppression. Given the multiplicity of forms that women's domination takes, it is impossible to exhaustively delineate one coherent body of feminist thought that encompasses the heterogeneity of

¹⁷ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and ed. by G. Cole, (London: Dent, 1983); G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); and Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, (New York: International Publishers, 1980), pp. 35-63.

feminist critique. However, all feminist theory begins with the notion that women suffer from social inequalities predicated on gender differences. The expression and account of the connection between gender and inequality differs according to the traditions of political philosophy from which various feminist analyses draw their inspiration. Although the methodological emphasis varies, feminist theory in general examines women's oppression at both the individual and societal levels. A conception of patriarchy is another key tool feminist utilize to systematically explain women's subordination. Finally, all feminist theory is informed by and addressed to practical struggles for women's liberation from domination.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to work from a socialist feminist perspective. This feminist approach endeavours to move beyond the problems of Marxist feminist analyses, while at the same time incorporating its major insights. As I shall outline below, the tensions between feminism and Marxism revolve around two interconnected issues. The first concerns the robustness of the Marxist understanding of labour to account for the organization of women's domestic and social labour. This difficulty in conceptually grasping the character of women's labour carries over to the theory of emancipation as revolution, where women's domination, and indeed all other forms of domination, will disappear with the overthrow of capitalism. Socialist feminism attempts to address these issues by focusing on both a Marxist- and feminist-inspired understanding of capitalism and the social relations pertaining to it. The key contemporary debate among socialist feminists concerns the conceptualization of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy,

conducted as either affirmations or rejections of 'dual systems' theory.¹⁸ At issue is the fruitfulness of theorizing capitalism and patriarchy as essentially separable, yet interconnected, systems, or alternately conceiving of patriarchy and capitalism as so intricately intertwined as to be indistinguishable.

Feminists who choose to work within a Marxist framework are faced with a double-edged sword. On the one hand the historical materialist method demonstrates how the organization of material production, as well as the social relations ensuing from it, are eminently historical and variable. Feminists can thus draw inspiration from Marx's historical analyses to show how the organization of the division of labour and the social relations between men and women are not naturally given and immutable, but rather are historical products of specific times and places. On the other hand it is not altogether clear how well the general category of labour can articulate two aspects of women's activity: the gender division of labour in the economy, where women predominate in certain low-paying sectors, and the unpaid domestic and child-rearing labour women perform in the home. Marxist feminists must therefore struggle with reconciling the economic and social analyses of Marx with more radical feminist insights regarding the differentials of power between men and women. This theoretical issue has repercussions for revolutionary practice, expressed in the questions as to whether or not the patriarchal organization of labour and social relations will

¹⁸ The contours of the dual systems debate among socialist feminists are concisely summarized in two articles, Heidi Hartmann's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," and Iris Young's response, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory," both found in Sargent, ed. *Women and Revolution*.

simply disappear with the overcoming of capitalism, or whether patriarchy will survive the transformation to a communist society and assume a new historical form.

There is a sense in Marx that while capitalism shatters old forms of familial organization, it also at the same time "...creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relationship between the sexes."¹⁹ As Alison Jaggar discusses, this intimation of a more egalitarian familial form is tempered by other remarks in Marx's work relating to the 'natural' division of labour between the sexes in the family. She contends that "Marx and Engels clearly believe that the division of labour within the family is natural because it is biologically determined."²⁰ This natural difference between men's and women's capacities is reproduced in the sphere of social production and thus accounts for the gender division of labour to be found there. Even though the terms of women's participation in the labour force are qualitatively different than those of men's, Engels determined that "...the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry."²¹

Apart from the debate as to whether or not Marxism considers the differences between men and women to be biologically determined, it does hold that women's oppression under capitalism stems from the reduction of the family to merely a unit of economic production.

¹⁹ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. I. Frederick Engels, ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1984), p. 460, as quoted in Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 67.

²⁰ Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. p. 68. See also pp. 67-69.

²¹ Frederick Engels, "The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*. p. 510. Hartmann reiterates this point in her "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," p. 4: "For Engels, then, women's participation in the labour force was the key to their emancipation. Capitalism would abolish sex differences and treat all workers equally."

The main aspect of oppression for bourgeois wives is their economic dependence on their husbands. Because working class women are already involved in social production, they are seen to possess a relative measure of independence and equality in comparison to their bourgeois sisters, and are also in a better position to understand the class conflict at the root of oppression. In this way Marxists can interpret feminism as a bourgeois ideology that obscures the common interest in overthrowing capitalism among working class men and women.²² Since women's oppression is rooted in the dynamic of capitalist social relations, the key to ending such subordination is the elimination of capitalism.

Socialist feminism distinguishes itself from Marxist feminism in its focus on incorporating an analysis of the sexual division of labour in capitalism that includes women's social and reproductive labour. In keeping with the historical materialist method, the organization of both kinds of labour along gender lines is taken to be eminently historically and socially constructed, and therefore changeable. Following the insistence on the historical configuration of all social relations to its logical conclusion, Iris Young employs the term 'gender division of labour', rather than 'sexual division of labour', to fully capture the contingent character of women's labour.²³ Young intends the term gender division of labour "to refer to all structured gender differentiation of labour in a society;" this would include child-rearing activities, household management, and nurturing work.²⁴ There is some dissension among feminists as to the utility of Young's term. For instance, Jaggar, following

²² Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, pp. 66-67.

²³ Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage," p. 52.

²⁴ Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage," p. 52.

Nancy Hartsock, prefers to use 'sexual division of labour' because "the division of labour between men and women is not yet entirely a social affair (women and not men still bear children)."²⁵

By attempting to expand the Marxist category of labour to include the organization of both production and reproduction, socialist feminist analyses must address the operation and connection between patriarchy and capital in both the public and private spheres. Under the terms of the dual systems theory, Heidi Hartmann holds to a scientific reading of Marxism as a method that illuminates the functioning of capitalism. The capitalist organization of economic production is therefore logically indifferent as to whether or not a gender division of labour is integrated within it:

...the categories of marxist [sic] analysis, class, reserve army of labour, wage-labourer, do not explain why particular people fill particular places. They give no clues about why *women* are subordinate to *men* inside and outside the family and why it is not the other way around. *Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex-blind.*²⁶

Because patriarchal social relations predated capitalism, Hartmann argues that patriarchy must be conceptually separated from a Marxist analysis of economic production. She contends, however, that patriarchy and capitalism have been historically intertwined and have reinforced each other. Her point is that the contours of women's oppression inside and outside of the sphere of economic production only come into view when social phenomena are analyzed as specific, contingent relationships between patriarchy and capitalism.

²⁵ Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. p. 163, fn. 4.

²⁶ Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," pp. 10-11. (*italics in text*)

In contrast to the dual systems approach, Young emphasizes that patriarchy and capitalism are so interconnected that it is analytically and practically difficult to treat each as separable from one another. Even as patriarchy existed before the advent of capitalism, and that a non-patriarchal capitalism is theoretically possible, Young argues that the form capitalism assumed is inherently patriarchal: "...given an initial gender differentiation and a preexisting sexist ideology [in feudalism], a patriarchal capitalism in which women function as a secondary labour force is the only *historical* possibility."²⁷ Thus to understand women's domination for Young entails understanding the relationship between socio-historical phenomena and the gender division of labour at the core of patriarchal capitalism. On the level of practice, this approach need not separate the struggle against capitalism from the struggle against patriarchy; rather, it augurs for a political practice that focuses on women's economic and sexual domination as one and the same system. To hold to a separation of the two terms risks subsuming the struggle against patriarchy into the struggle against capitalism. Moreover, it also logically intimates the possibility that the elimination of capitalism will not mean the end of patriarchy, nor vice-versa.

The socialist feminist debate over the theoretical and practical merits of understanding the relationship of capitalism and patriarchy in either dual or single system terms remains unresolved. While both approaches incorporate an analysis of the gender division of labour as a means to render basic Marxist categories more robust and sensitive to women's domination, they differ as to how to conceptualize such a division of labour. This socialist

²⁷ Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage," p. 62. (*italics in text*).

feminist problematic will inform my reading of Habermas's conception of domination. With the turn to language as communication and the dual concept of society as both system and lifeworld, Habermas's work from the start seems analogous to the dual systems approach. Whether or not Habermas's particular conception of the relationship between system and lifeworld, or between the material and the symbolic, can offer a cogent resolution to the debate will be a principal theme throughout the thesis.

I

Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action as Critique of Modern Reason

Habermas's theory of communicative action represents a major synthetic achievement in the development of modern social theory.¹ Drawing from the seemingly disparate array of philosophy of language, systems theory, and the social theories of Weber, Durkheim, and Mead, among others, Habermas endeavours to complete the unfulfilled project of an emancipatory critical social theory that can justify its own normative foundations. Rick Roderick outlines Habermas's inheritance of this problematic from the early Frankfurt School theorists; like his critical theory predecessors, the task of normatively grounding critical social theory is seen to lie in a theory of rationality.² By reformulating reason as communicative rationality, Habermas intends to move beyond the aporias of Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of an overarching and irredeemable instrumental reason. The theory of communicative action, underpinned with the notion of communicative rationality,

¹ For the purposes of elucidating the main features of Habermas's theory of communicative action in this chapter, I will draw principally from *TCAI* and *TCAII*, with reference to earlier and later texts where appropriate. These two volumes remain Habermas's most developed presentation of the concept of communicative action as well as its applicability as social critique.

² Rick Roderick, *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 11, 21.

incorporates and extends Habermas's earlier work on a formal or universal pragmatics of speech, the distinction between labour and interaction, and an ontogenetic theory of individual and social evolution.³ Combining speech act theory and sociological theories of action with communicative rationality, Habermas arrives at the complex concept of communicative action. Communicative rationality serves as the counterweight to instrumental or technical reason and thus permits Habermas to more clearly identify the paradoxical rationalization tendencies in modernity. While the rationalization of communicative reason promises new and more fulfilling forms of life, and thereby rescues the Enlightenment idea of the positive rationalization of human life, it also inaugurates the rationalization of a technical reason that can only deform, rather than subsume, communicative rationality.

The goals that Habermas wants to achieve with his particular communication-theoretic approach are ambitious. First and foremost, communicative action is meant to reinterpret the rationalization processes of modernity as the rationalization of both symbolic, normative structures and of the systemically-organized interchange with external nature. As the outcome of these two processes of rationalization, the problematic of societal integration can now be recast as simultaneously social and systemic integration. With the introduction of the concepts of lifeworld as the site of symbolic reproduction and social integration, and the system as the locus of material reproduction and systemic integration, the theory of

³ The program of universal pragmatics is developed in Habermas's essay, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," in *CES*, pp. 1-68; the distinction between labour and interaction is best expressed in Habermas's reading of Hegel's Jena lectures, in *T&P*, pp. 142-169; the attempt to reconstruct social evolution along ontogenetic lines arises out of Habermas's engagement with historical materialism. See *CES*.

communicative action can reinterpret the problem of domination as the systemic reification and disruption of communicatively-structured lifeworld domains. Most significantly, Habermas seeks to fundamentally reorient the terms under which philosophy can assume the role of social theory and critique. Although he develops this theme more explicitly in the later *Philosophical Discourse on Modernity*, the theory of communicative action is a forceful argument in favour of a paradigm shift from the monological perspective of the philosophy of consciousness, with its categories of subject, object, and labour, to the philosophy of language as grounded in intersubjective communication. The aporias of modernity, as well as their potential resolution, can only be ascertained through a reorientation of critical thought towards communicative rationality as expressed in the linguistically-mediated, intersubjective attainment of consensus.

In what follows I shall reconstruct the key arguments and concepts Habermas employs in developing the theory of communicative action, and review how it is utilized as social critique. I begin with a presentation of the distinction between action types, and the way in which Habermas combines this with speech act theory to arrive at the complex concept of communicative action. The transposition of communicative action into social theory and critique, accomplished through the fundamental concepts of system and lifeworld, forms the middle part of the chapter. Finally, I outline Habermas's conception of domination as the colonization of the lifeworld by the system. The incredibly broad scope of Habermas's work has generated an enormous amount of response and criticism, both positive and negative. Throughout this chapter, I indicate some of the objections and praise that have been directed towards the project of communicative action. While I briefly outline the concept of

domination as systemic colonization of the lifeworld, I reserve a more extensive and specifically feminist engagement with this idea in Chapter III.

The Concept of Worldviews

In a provisional way, communicative action refers to the attainment of intersubjective understanding in language between speaking and acting subjects and simultaneously to the coordination of individual action on the basis of rational, linguistic agreement. Conceptually, communicative action is the most developed culmination of Habermas's notion of language as the primary form of human activity. For Habermas, "[o]ur first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus."⁴ Thus the underlying character of language is the reaching of understanding between two subjects with the aim of attaining agreement:

The goal of coming to an understanding {*Verständigung*} is to bring about an agreement {*Einverständnis*} that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another.⁵

Agreements are arrived at in language through the raising and redemption of validity claims. Claims to validity are to be decided by no other force but that of the better argument; that is, speakers and hearers must decide upon the claim to validity through the provision of good reasons.

⁴ Habermas made this comment in an inaugural lecture given in 1965. See Thomas McCarthy, "Introduction," in *CES*, p. xvii.

⁵ Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," p. 3.

The full realization of the potential bound up in communicative rationality presupposes a specific attitude on the part of actors to their world. Habermas explains this requirement through an examination of the differentiation of action systems that distinguish modern worldviews from 'mythico-magical' ones. Modern worldviews are unique in that the relations taken up by actors to their world are structurally differentiated. In contrast to mythical worldviews where the distinctions between actors and their external and internal worlds are blurred, if not altogether non-existent, modern actors assume three specific relations to the world depending on the kind of action they perform. Because modern actors orient their action to either the objective, social, or inner-subjective worlds, they lay down the structural foundation for the raising of differentiated validity claims presupposed in action oriented to mutual understanding. Unlike modern worldviews, mythical worldviews are unable to provide actors with the basic concepts they require in order to perform successful actions in the objective world, to criticize cultural traditions and norms, and to express their uniqueness as individuals. It is in this sense that Habermas refers to pre-modern worldviews as 'closed' and modern ones as 'open'; mythical ways of understanding the world do not admit criticism of themselves *as* worldviews, while modern worldviews generate the self-reflexive, rational interrogation of differentiated validity claims.⁶

There is a sense in which Habermas's comparison of mythical and modern understandings of the world can be read as a key component of the historical development of the human species. While a purely historical account of the evolution of communicative

⁶ *TCAI*, p. 66.

action is not the intention here - Habermas is more concerned with the structural differentiation of actor-world relations - the question of what triggers the development of the modern decentred understanding of the world is apparent. The answer to this question is found in Habermas's referral to Piaget's model of ontogenetic cognitive development, where the logical progression from lower stages to higher ones involves qualitatively and quantitatively expanded learning opportunities. Habermas suggests that

it might be a matter of something similar [to Piaget's stages of cognitive development] in the case of the emergence of new structures of worldviews. The caesurae between the mythical, religious-metaphysical, and modern modes of thought are characterized by changes in the system of basic concepts.⁷

If Piaget's model of ontogenetic development suffices as the quasi-universal structural logic of communicative evolution, then it is difficult to understand why mythico-magical societies continue to exist alongside modern ones. Habermas's employment of Piaget's ontogenetic model to account for individual and social evolution has aroused much controversy. I shall take up these points of contention further on in the context of Habermas's account of social evolution in terms of the developmental dynamics between lifeworld and system.

A Typology of Action

Habermas's presentation of the modern decentred understanding of the world prepares the way for an investigation of the specificity of communicative action in comparison with

⁷ *TCAI*, p. 68.

four standard sociological concepts of action. By virtue of performing an action, a subject necessarily takes up a relation to at least one of three worlds: the objective world (the world of external objects); the social world (the world of interpersonal relations); or the subjective world, namely the subject's own inner thoughts and desires to which only he or she has privileged access.⁸ Teleological action describes the subject-object, ends-means relation actors take up to something in the objective world; it is measured by the actor's success or failure in acting purposive-rationally to bring about a desired state of affairs. Strategic action, where "...at least two goal-directed acting subjects...achieve their ends by way of an orientation to, and influence on, the decisions of other actors,"⁹ is considered to be a variant of teleological action. For strategic actors, decision-making systems can form part of the objective world in a way analogous to objects. In this way "...strategic action remains, as regards its ontological presuppositions, a *one-world concept*."¹⁰ Normatively-regulated action encompasses those actions through which actors relate to social norms and cultural traditions in their interactions with others. Actors take up a relation to both the social and objective worlds in actions of this type, and their success is evaluated in terms of the degree of norm conformity exhibited. The public expression of an actor's subjective thoughts and desires falls under the realm of dramaturgical action. In this action type actors relate to their own subjective, inner world, as well as to the social world. The actor's subsequent behaviour is assessed in light of its conformity to the emotions and feelings expressed.

⁸ *TCAI*, p. 87-94.

⁹ *TCAI*, p. 87. Habermas takes this definition from S. Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*. (Cambridge, UK: 1958). (no publisher given). See *TCAI*, p. 410, fn. 22.

¹⁰ *TCAI*, p. 88. (*italics in text*)

For Habermas action oriented to mutual understanding differs from other action types in terms of its goal and the actor-world relations assumed by communicative participants. The goal of action oriented to reaching understanding is to achieve a rational agreement around which actors can coordinate action. While teleological, normatively-regulated, and dramaturgical action each connect up exclusively with at most two worlds, speakers acting communicatively refer simultaneously to something in the objective, social, and subjective worlds.¹¹ All agreements comprise a connection to the world of objects in that the agreed upon plan of action is capable of existential realization. Through the coordination of action with other participants, interpersonal relationships in the social world are established and renewed. The sincere and transparent participation of actors in reaching understanding requires each subject to relate to his or her own subjective world. In this manner communicative action opens the possibility that action oriented to mutual understanding can be rationalized, for it is only through providing good reasons and agreeing on them that communicative actors can coordinate their plans of action.

Speech Act and Validity

The next stage of the argument for communicative action involves the justification of language as an inherently rational enterprise, and the demonstration of the universal character of intersubjectively mediated agreements. By showing that communicative action is necessarily rational and universal, Habermas moves further ahead in his effort to justify

¹¹ *TCAI*, p. 95.

communicative rationality as one of the two rationality complexes operative in the progressive rationalization of modern societies. To further underscore the rationality potential inherent in language as communication, Habermas turns to the speech act theories of Austin and Searle. Habermas uses Austin's tripartite distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech acts to connect language with action, and to further support the notion "...that the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the *original mode* of language use..."¹² With locutionary speech acts, a speaker says something in expressing a state of affairs.¹³ Through illocutionary speech acts an action is performed by a speaker when he or she says something.¹⁴ Perlocutionary speech acts have the explicit aim of bringing about a desired state of affairs in the world through the action of speaking.¹⁵ Because all types of speech acts must convey meaning in order to be understood by both speaker and hearer, they necessarily contain an illocutionary component. Habermas is particularly interested in illocutionary speech acts because they have no other purpose but to convey meaning; as such they are oriented to reaching understanding in interaction, as opposed to achieving perlocutionary, strategic effects. As Ingram remarks, even to understand the intent of a perlocutionary speech act requires a prior ability on the part of the hearer: "Although social action is often coordinated through perlocutionary effects, Habermas insists that communicative, not strategic, action is the principal medium

¹² *TCAI*, p. 288. (italics in text)

¹³ *TCAI*, p. 288.

¹⁴ *TCAI*, p. 289.

¹⁵ *TCAI*, p. 289.

of cooperation, since perlocutionary effects depend on a prior trust based on communicative expectations."¹⁶ For these reasons Habermas takes illocutionary speech acts as the fundamental form of language use, with perlocutions understood as a derivative speech act type where "...illocutions are employed as means in teleological contexts of action."¹⁷

It is precisely the question of meaning and its connection to illocutionary speech acts and validity that Habermas wants to explore in the context of action oriented to mutual understanding. In acting communicatively, actors raise validity claims that correspond to the actor-world relations discussed previously. The intimate connection to truth and universality becomes clear here. In relating to the objective world, actors raise claims to truth about a given existential state of affairs or to the effectiveness of an intervention in the world of objects. Validity claims put forth in reference to the social world of interpersonal relations address the normative rightness or truth of a proposed action. The truth of a claim to validity in the subjective world rests in the way in which an actor's subsequent behaviour corresponds to the agreement reached about his or her personal state of affairs. Although claims to truth in the subjective world are unique in that their actual redemption is deferred to the future, they are still symmetrical with truth claims in the objective and social worlds. Similarly to the way in which action oriented to mutual understanding differs from other types, a communicative speech act always raises exactly three validity claims, although only one particular claim is usually thematized.¹⁸ All validity claims infer the following: that the

¹⁶ David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 39.

¹⁷ *TCAI*. p. 293.

¹⁸ *TCAI*. p. 307.

action can be carried out in the objective world, that the claim is in accord with legitimate norms, and that the speaker's intentions are subjectively true.

With the notion that understanding speech acts requires the adoption by speakers and hearers of a yes/no position *vis-à-vis* claims to validity, Habermas introduces the powerful idea that validity claims are inherently criticizable and universalizable. In addition, claims to validity possess a certain binding force that is exclusively dependent on reason:

a speaker owes the binding...force of his illocutionary act not to the validity of what is said but to *the coordinating effect of the warranty* that he offers; namely to redeem, if necessary, the validity claim raised with his speech act.¹⁹

Validity claims must be redeemed through the offering of reasons on which participants in action oriented to mutual understanding can take yes/no positions. For a claim to be accepted, communicative participants must agree that the reasons presented in favour or against the claim are acceptable. Because an outside observer who wishes to understand a communicative situation can only do so from the hermeneutic perspective of a *de facto* participant, such an observer cannot help but take his or her own yes/no positions on the reasons offered by the situation participants. It is precisely this necessity that gives validity claims both their universalizable character and their criticizability.

In an early response shortly after the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, McCarthy takes issue with the notion of the dependency of meaning on the necessary assumption of a yes/no position on the part of interaction participants or observers. He

¹⁹ *TCAI*. p. 302. (italics in text)

argues that "from the fact that we cannot understand reasons as reasons without relying on our own competence to judge validity, cogency, soundness and the like, it does not follow that we have to actually or implicitly 'take a position' on reasons in order to understand them."²⁰ McCarthy holds that it is entirely possible to understand symbolic expressions without being required to assess their validity. Furthermore, he contends that even if it is desirable that we judge validity claims, it is not necessary nor the only option: "an objectivating, hypothetical attitude in which judgment is simply bracketed out is a structural possibility as well. Rational interpretations, while possible, are not necessary."²¹

Communicative Action

From these investigations into action types, speech act theory, and meaning and validity, the concept of communicative action can now be reconstructed in all its complexity. Habermas offers a concise definition of communicative action in the context of counterpoising this action type with strategic action:

[Communicative action] is distinguished...by the fact that all participants pursue illocutionary aims without reservation in order to arrive at an agreement that will provide the basis for a consensual coordination of individually pursued plans of action.²²

²⁰ Thomas McCarthy, "Reflections on Rationalization in the *Theory of Communicative Action*," in Richard Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 184-185.

²¹ McCarthy, "Reflections on Rationalization," p. 185.

²² *TC.AI*, pp. 295-296.

By acting communicatively, participants presuppose that they intersubjectively share a modern, structurally differentiated lifeworld, or background against which actors relate to the objective, social, and subjective worlds. For the most part, participants in communication also presuppose that they hold the definition of the situation in which their interaction takes place in common. This common situation definition is the base requirement in order for further interaction to proceed. The 'without reservation' proviso emphasizes that the sanctioning force of the eventual agreement is neither claims to power on the part of individuals nor unquestioned social conventions, but rather the force of linguistically mediated reason. Reason is made operative for communicatively-secured agreement through the provision of validity claims connected to truth. The lifeworld background knowledge which participants utilize as a resource and as a source of themes for discussion is also continually renewed with each communicative act; in this manner communication is eminently a learning and knowledge generation process. Communicative actors must assume that each of the participants in the communicative situation is oriented to achieving understanding, as opposed to oriented towards realizing their own strategic ends:

In communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions.²³

The success or failure of communication ultimately rests with the execution of the intersubjectively mediated agreement by acting participants. While Habermas is well aware

²³ *TCAI*, p. 286.

that 'everyday communicative practice' deviates substantially from idealized communication, he nonetheless contends that the fundamental structures of communicative action not only always already underlie the conduct of human interaction, but also serve as a framework through which communicative pathologies can be identified.²⁴

Although Habermas takes great pains to differentiate action oriented to mutual understanding from action oriented to success, at the same time there is a sense in which communicative action is itself oriented to success - the successful attainment of coordinated action.²⁵ This teleological aspect, however, is neither the primary nor singular feature of communicative action:

In all cases [of action] the teleological structure of action is presupposed, inasmuch as the capacity for goal-setting and goal directed action is ascribed to actors, as well as an interest in carrying out their plans of action. But only the strategic model of action *rests content* with an explication of the features of action oriented directly to success; whereas the other models of action specify conditions under which the actor pursues his goals - conditions of legitimacy, of self-presentation, or of agreement arrived at in communication, under which alter can 'link up' his actions with those of ego.²⁶

Despite this difference between strategic and communicative action, there are occasions when a common definition of the situation requires the use of strategic action in order for communication to proceed. Although the contours of a speech act situation are presupposed

²⁴ *TCAI*, pp. 328-332.

²⁵ Douglas Moggach argues that the *telos* of successful goal-oriented action and of communicatively reaching agreement are simply two different 'types' of teleology. Although Habermas explicitly understands his project as transcending the philosophy of consciousness, Moggach underscores the origin of the concept of *telos* precisely in this philosophical tradition. See his "Habermas as Philosopher of Subjectivity," in Koula Mellos, ed., *Rationalité, Communication, Modernité*. (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1991), p. 73.

²⁶ *TCAI*, p. 101. (italics in text)

to be held in common by all speakers and hearers in everyday communicative practice, at times participants in communication are unable to presuppose a common situation definition. To remedy this initial disharmony, Habermas here permits the introduction of strategic action as a sometimes necessary first step in eventually arriving at intersubjective agreement:

If this commonality [of situation definition] cannot be presupposed, the actors have to draw upon the means of strategic action, with an orientation toward coming to a mutual understanding, so as to *bring about* a common definition of the situation or to negotiate one directly...²⁷

Alternately, Habermas also refers to this resolution of unaligned situation definitions as the incorporation of strategic 'elements' or the use of perlocutions within the context of communicative action.²⁸ To further confuse the situation, Habermas distinguishes strategic elements from strategic actions:

These strategic *elements* within a use of language oriented to reaching understanding can be distinguished from strategic *actions* through the fact that the entire sequence of a stretch of talk stands - on the part of all participants - under the presuppositions of communicative action.²⁹

Thus it is unclear as to what is entailed in this use of strategic action or strategic elements, nor as to whether or not the employment of either has any bearing on the subsequent intersubjective agreement. It appears that Habermas may be provisionally attempting to describe how communicative and strategic action can be discerned in actual everyday

²⁷ *TCAII*, p. 121. (my italics)

²⁸ *TCAI*, p. 331.

²⁹ *TCAI*, p. 331. (italics in text)

contexts. Ingram takes this confusion as to how to practically distinguish either kind of action type from the other to rest in the highly abstract way Habermas relates speech acts to social action:

The abstractness of [the relationship between speech acts and social action] raises serious doubts about its value for empirical research. Speech acts seldom occur in standard form; many are institutionally bound; actual conversations often combine strategic and communicative types.³⁰

Outhwaite also objects to the sharp distinction between communicative and strategic action, tracing this back to the analytical separation of illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts: "It remains deeply implausible that one could establish such a sharp separation as Habermas wants between illocutionary and perlocutionary effects."³¹ Finally, McCarthy expresses reservations as to whether the universal structures of communicative action should be reconstructed from an idealized communication situation, given the patent lack of empirical instances of pure communication in social life.³²

The discussion so far of communicative action has taken place on largely abstract grounds. In order to ground communicative action as a fundamental organizing principle and render it serviceable as a foundation for critical social theory, Habermas turns to the elucidation of the structure and dynamics of modern society. The approach he adopts is to

³⁰ Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*. p. 40.

³¹ William Outhwaite, *Habermas - A Critical Introduction*. (Cambridge and Oxford, U.K.: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 46-47, 110.

³² McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermeneutics," in John Thompson and David Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), p. 63.

conceive of society as both system and lifeworld.³³ From this dual perspective, the problematic of modern rationalization is redefined as both the rationalization of the lifeworld and the system, of both symbolic and material reproduction. Benhabib interprets Habermas's distinction between these two kinds of rationalization processes as a move that suggests "that the [lifeworld] contains processes and achievements whose normative potential we have not yet exhausted."³⁴ As a structural and practical resource, the lifeworld can potentially serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of instrumental reason and as a source for the creation of more emancipated forms of life.

The Problematic of Societal Integration

Habermas's analytical distinction between action oriented to mutual understanding and action oriented to success is retained and transposed into an analysis of modern societies through the concepts of system and lifeworld. The key problematic is that of how to account for the levels of societal integration characterizing modern life. As Benhabib and Jay both note, Habermas already distinguished between system and social integration in his earlier *Legitimation Crisis*.³⁵ Habermas contends that the two general sociological approaches to this question of integration, the systems-theoretic perspective of Talcott Parsons and the systems-functionalism of Niklas Luhmann on the one hand, on the other the action-theoretic

³³ *TCAII*, p. 118.

³⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 254.

³⁵ Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975). See also Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, p. 237; and Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 485.

approaches of Emile Durkheim and Weber, are both one-sided. A purely systems-oriented approach reduces the communicatively-structured lifeworld to one subsystem among many, and thereby loses the normative capacity to address problems of social integration. Exclusively action-theoretic approaches, while retaining a critical edge from the start, have difficulty recognizing the positive aspects of increasing systems differentiation and complexification. These perspectives misplace social integration problems through a negative critique of systems rationalization. Habermas endeavours to amalgamate the two approaches by conceiving of the lifeworld as the site of social integration, accomplished through action oriented to mutual understanding, and by viewing the system as the locus of systemic integration, accomplished through action oriented to success. This two-level approach also allows for two perspectives for understanding society: a hermeneutic one that permits analysis of the lifeworld, and an outside observer perspective that is appropriate for comprehending the operation of systems. The problem of disturbances in societal integration can now be addressed by examining the interchange relations between system and lifeworld, with particular attention to those relations where systemic imperatives overstep their structural bounds and deform lifeworld processes of social integration dependent on communicative action.

Lifeworld

To render the counterfactually-derived notion of communicative action useful as social critique, Habermas appropriates the concept of 'lifeworld' from hermeneutical traditions and from phenomenological philosophy, specifically that of Alfred Schutz. The lifeworld serves

as the necessary corollary to the concept of communicative action insofar as it is the invariant, unproblematical structural background against which action oriented to mutual understanding takes place, and the resource from which communication draws and at the same time replenishes. Habermas suggests that we think of the lifeworld "as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns,"³⁶ utilized by communicative actors to presuppose or problematize common situation definitions in the process of reaching agreement. This lifeworld background forms "...the horizon within which communicative actions are 'always already' moving."³⁷

As discussed above, in any communicative act actors take up relations to, and raise validity claims about, something in the objective, social, and subjective worlds simultaneously, even as only one validity claim referring to one particular world is generally thematized. These three worlds form the frame of reference within which a segment of the lifeworld is problematized. They also serve as the frame of reference that demarcates a lifeworld horizon - a horizon that shifts with a change in the thematized validity claim.³⁸ In this way segments of the lifeworld can be problematized, but the entire lifeworld itself can never be brought into question; actors cannot 'get behind' the lifeworld by adopting a position completely outside it. The lifeworld

forms the indirect context of what is said, discussed, addressed in a situation; it is, to be sure, in principle accessible, but it does not belong to the action situation's thematically delimited domain of relevance. The lifeworld is the

³⁶ *TCAII*, p. 124.

³⁷ *TCAII*, p. 119.

³⁸ *TCAII*, pp. 125, 132.

intuitively present, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid *or* invalid.³⁹

In order for communicative action to proceed, there must be at least an implicit presupposition that participants in interaction share a common situation definition. This commonality can be presumed on the part of participants because from their perspective "...the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in the cooperative process of interpretation."⁴⁰

Unlike the transcendental grounding of the universality of the lifeworld found in the phenomenological tradition,⁴¹ which Habermas endeavours to avoid due to its reliance on the philosophy of consciousness, a communications-theoretic approach renders the lifeworld universal and intersubjectively valid on the basis of its connection to communicative action. The lifeworld owes its unquestionable and universal character "...to a social a priori built into the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding in language;"⁴² thus "[t]he very medium of mutual understanding abides in a peculiar *half-transcendence*."⁴³ The problem of justifying the universality validity of the lifeworld is thereby shifted onto communicative action. Furthermore, following Mead, Habermas holds that communicative action is an

³⁹ *TCAII*, p. 131. Habermas references Searle in the second part of the citation. See *TCAII*, p. 415, fn. 21. (italics in text)

⁴⁰ *TCAII*, p. 124.

⁴¹ *TCAII*, p. 143.

⁴² *TCAII*, p. 131.

⁴³ *TCAII*, p. 125. (italics in text)

anthropological fundamental, and that interaction processes "determine the starting point of sociocultural development."⁴⁴

The concept of communicative action not only intimates and requires the concept of the lifeworld, but it also serves to maintain and reproduce processes of social integration. Indeed, Benhabib considers the introduction of the concept of the lifeworld as the correlate to communicative action, and the role that communication plays in symbolic reproduction, to be "the real methodological contribution[s] of the *Theory of Communicative Action*."⁴⁵ The reference to the three worlds taken up by actors in communicative interaction resonate with the lifeworld structures of society, culture, and personality.⁴⁶ These components of the lifeworld stand in a complementary and mutually reinforcing relation to each other:

In coming to an understanding with one another about their situation, participants in interaction stand in a cultural tradition that they at once use and renew; in coordinating their actions by way of intersubjectively recognizing criticizable validity claims, they are at once relying on membership in social groups and strengthening the integration of those same groups; through participating in interactions with competently acting reference persons, the growing child internalizes the value orientations of his social group and acquires generalized capacities for action.⁴⁷

Through the reproduction processes of cultural reproduction at the level of culture, social integration at the level of society, and socialization at the level of personality,

⁴⁴ *TCAII*, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁵ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, p. 237.

⁴⁶ *TCAII*, p. 133-34.

⁴⁷ *TCAII*, p. 137.

communicative action maintains and replenishes the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld.⁴⁸

Habermas has been criticized on grounds of inconsistency for his utilization of the concept of the lifeworld as either referring to quasi-transcendental background structures to communicative action, or as the storehouse of the communicative achievements of everyday interaction.⁴⁹ There appears to be a strong tension between the phenomenological conception of the lifeworld, traditionally grounded in the activity of a transcendental ego, and the hermeneutical formulation which rests on the communicative achievements of subjects in interaction. In attempting to avail himself of both models, it seems that Habermas wants to stake out the middle ground between an unjustifiable transcendentalism and the relativist tendencies of cultural hermeneutics. Benhabib argues that Habermas succeeds in this effort insofar as the quasi-transcendental structures of the lifeworld are not immutable, but rather reproduced over time and historically variable.⁵⁰ Communicative action dynamically fulfills the role of symbolic reproduction at the level of lifeworld structures, while at the same time depends on such structures as reference coordinates for action. Benhabib suggests that by understanding the constitution of the lifeworld as symbolic reproduction, rather than as the product of a transcendental ego, we can grasp that "the lifeworld is both constitutive of, and constituted by, communicative action."⁵¹

⁴⁸ A concise schematic of this relationship between lifeworld structures and reproduction processes is found in *TCAII*, p. 142, Fig. 21.

⁴⁹ See Outhwaite, *Habermas - A Critical Introduction*, pp. 113-114; and Moggach, "Habermas as Philosopher of Subjectivity," pp. 77-78, 83.

⁵⁰ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, p. 239.

⁵¹ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, p. 239.

When processes of communicative action are systematically distorted, disturbances in the symbolic reproduction processes of the lifeworld become manifest; Habermas refers to these disturbances as 'pathologies'. Conflicts in processes of reaching agreement show themselves in specific phenomena at the level of lifeworld structures. Interferences in cultural reproduction give rise to a loss of meaning among social subjects; the continuity of tradition and the coherence of knowledge are no longer wholly accessible by actors in their communicative practice.⁵² At the level of society, a distorted pattern of communication engenders anomie. Individuals have difficulty referring to legitimately ordered interpersonal relations, and group and social identities are threatened.⁵³ Finally, the competencies of actors for action are damaged when socialization processes are disturbed. This produces phenomena of individual alienation at the level of personality.⁵⁴ The analysis of the modern lifeworld as increasingly rationalized and structurally differentiated allows Habermas to understand the above conflicts as pathologies or deviations from a norm of social integration:

If we understand the conflicts that Durkheim attributed to social disintegration more generally...as disturbances of reproduction in structurally quite differentiated lifeworlds, 'organic solidarity' represents the normal form of societal integration in a rationalized lifeworld.⁵⁵

The important issue of the sources of such communicative distortions is to be found in the relationship between the lifeworld and system. Habermas accounts for interferences in the

⁵² *TCAII*, p. 140.

⁵³ *TCAII*, pp. 140-141.

⁵⁴ *TCAII*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ *TCAII*, p. 147.

symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld through a reconceptualization of the problematic of reification. I will briefly present what is entailed in this redefinition of domination in a review of the system-lifeworld relationship, saving a more detailed presentation and critique for Chapter III.

Before proceeding further to Habermas's presentation of the domain of material reproduction of symbolic lifeworlds, or the system, I would like to provisionally note an interesting distinction Habermas effects between everyday communicative practice and theoretical reflection, or in another way, between the adoption of a situation- versus theoretically-oriented attitude in communicative action. I want to look at this distinction in relation to the process of thematizing or problematizing lifeworld segments. My interest is not so much in the abstracted process, but in the way in which Habermas makes the distinction between an everyday practice that is communicatively coordinated, and the potential for the activation of the power of communicative critique that challenges seemingly unproblematic everyday consensus. At issue are the specific kinds of lifeworld contents that are put forth for communicative redemption in interaction. In principle, anything in the lifeworld may be addressed or thematized by communicative actors. In everyday communicative practice, however, participants generally refer to only those existential conditions, legitimate norms, and forms of authentic self-expression that are relevant for a given situation. Consequently, the possibilities for shifting the lifeworld horizon may remain unexplored. Habermas cites Schutz in explaining this peculiarity further:

[O]nly in theoretical reflection does the lived experience of the inadequacy of specific interpretations lead to an insight into the essential limitations of the lifeworldly stock of knowledge in general.⁵⁶

Habermas interprets this phenomenon in the following way:

As long as we do not free ourselves from the naïve, situation-oriented attitude of actors caught up in the communicative practice of everyday life, we cannot grasp the limitations of a lifeworld that is dependent upon, and changes along with, a cultural stock of knowledge that can be expanded at any time.⁵⁷

The place where the naïvety of everyday communicative practice is thought to be overcome is to be found in the specialized, professionalized cultural value spheres of modernity. Here actors adopt a theoretical attitude and investigate the limitations of the lifeworld stock of knowledge relating to objective truth, normative rightness, and forms of aesthetic and subjective expression. I would suggest that the potential for communicative critique is taken to be actualized in these spheres since the validity claims raised in these efforts are of a higher order, even though they may also be presented in everyday communication.⁵⁸ The question of how such theoretical knowledge becomes operative in the lifeworld is one that Habermas later addresses through the notion of the cultural reification of everyday practice.

⁵⁶ From A. Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Lifeworld*. (Evanston, 1973), as quoted in *TCAII*. pp. 133, 415, fn. 22. (no publisher given)

⁵⁷ *TCAII*. p. 133.

⁵⁸ Habermas explains: "When cultural systems of action like science, law, and art are differentiated out, arguments that are institutionally stabilized and professionally organized, carried out by experts, relate to such *higher-level validity claims* [concerning theoretical assumptions], which are not attached to individual communicative utterances but to cultural objectivations - to works of art, to moral and legal norms, to theories...Despite this difference in level...no validity claim appears at the level of cultural objectivations that would not *also* be contained in communicative utterances." See *TCAI*. p. 40. (italics in text)

I examine the operation of this type of reification and the practical issue of the actual problematization of validity claims more thoroughly in Chapter III.

Social Formations as Systems and Lifeworlds

Habermas continues the deployment of his dual conceptual strategy for understanding society all the more strongly in his discussion of the processes by which lifeworlds reproduce themselves materially through an engagement with objective reality. Following his primary distinction between labour and interaction, Habermas contends that this engagement with the material world is best articulated from the systemic perspective of purposive-rational action. An exclusive lifeworld perspective oriented to discerning communicatively-structured interactions is not sufficient for capturing the purposive-rational action orientations that actors adopt in their relation to the material world:

Problems of material reproduction are not simply filtered out of [the hermeneutic perspective of the lifeworld]; maintenance of the material substratum of the lifeworld is a necessary condition for maintaining its symbolic structures. But processes of material reproduction come into view only from the perspective of acting subjects who are dealing with situations in a goal-directed manner.⁵⁹

Although goal-directed actions still retain a connection to action oriented to mutual understanding, they are also coordinated "...through functional interconnections that are not intended by [members of a sociocultural lifeworld] and are usually not even perceived within

⁵⁹ *TCAII*, p. 151.

the horizon of everyday practice."⁶⁰ Habermas contends that the coordination of these unintended action consequences can only be grasped by conceptually switching over to a functionalist, systems perspective.

The problematic that immediately follows from this dual perspective consists of specifying the interrelationship between the lifeworld's processes of symbolic reproduction and the processes of material reproduction that sustain the lifeworld. All societies are characterized by the anchoring of systemically-organized material reproduction in lifeworld institutions.⁶¹ It is within this framework that a systems perspective complements a hermeneutic one to explain societal integration as simultaneously systemically and socially coordinated. Under the concept of 'developmental dynamics', Habermas recasts the historical evolution of human development as the mutually influential growth of a society's steering capacities in the domain of material reproduction, and as the differentiation of lifeworld structures that unleash the potential for systemic and communicative rationalization. The motor of history is thus no longer to be understood as Hegel's unfolding of *Geist* or as the overcoming of contradictions in the forces of production as in Marx. Rather, it is the interplay between structural possibilities for rationalization in the lifeworld and systemic problems of material reproduction:

[O]n the one hand, the dynamics of development are steered by imperatives issuing from problems of self-maintenance, that is, problems of materially

⁶⁰ *TCAII*, p. 150.

⁶¹ Habermas remarks: "...the lifeworld remains the subsystem that defines the pattern of the social system as a whole. Thus, systemic mechanisms need to be anchored in the lifeworld: they have to be institutionalized." *TCAII*, p. 154.

reproducing the lifeworld; but...on the other hand, this societal development draws upon structural *possibilities* and is subject to structural *limitations* that, with the rationalization of the lifeworld, undergo systematic change in dependence upon corresponding learning processes.⁶²

Habermas applies the system-lifeworld strategy as an account of social evolution through an examination of tribal, traditional, and modern societies. Primitive social formations are characterized by systems differentiation solely at the level of kinship systems in the lifeworld.⁶³ Processes of material reproduction are organized through relationships of kin that, owing to the mythico-magical, closed worldview pertaining to these types of societies, are rigidly structured. In this sense material and symbolic reproduction processes are so closely tied together so as to appear indistinguishable. In what Habermas refers to as 'traditional' societies, the differentiation of systemic coordinating mechanisms remains tightly connected to processes of social integration. The grounding of political power in law, rather than in kinship structures, leads to the formation of the state as a systemic institution in the lifeworld.⁶⁴ The concentration of political power and authority in the state is secured by means of the functional coordination of the political will of citizens. In traditional social formations, the nascent capitalist organization of material production is still connected to the state apparatus; it has yet to differentiate out as an autonomous subsystem. Thus in these

⁶² *TCAII*, p. 148. (italics in text)

⁶³ *TCAII*, p. 154.

⁶⁴ *TCAII*, p. 165.

types of societies the state is the systemic steering organization in which a collectivity's capacity for action is concentrated.⁶⁵

System and Lifeworld Differentiation in Modernity

While tribal and traditional social formations exhibit, in varying degrees, a close link between systemic and social integration processes, modern societies feature the complete uncoupling of system and lifeworld into autonomous action spheres. From the evolutionary perspective of developmental dynamics, this differentiation results from the interplay between problems of material reproduction and the structural possibilities for their resolution made available by the level of lifeworld rationalization. The modern worldview gives rise to the differentiation of validity claims expressed in communicative action, which sets in motion a corresponding structural differentiation of the lifeworld. Because reaching intersubjective agreement wholly depends on communicative reason, this lifeworld differentiation is at the same time the beginning of its rationalization. The evolutionary structural development of the lifeworld along the lines of ontogenesis establishes the conditions for higher and more complex levels of social and systemic integration, accomplished through the separation and internal differentiation of system and lifeworld.⁶⁶

The two key developments that provide the impetus for the separation of system from lifeworld are the establishment of a discrete sphere of normative value and its institutionalization in the lifeworld as formal law, as well as the formation of communicative

⁶⁵ *TCAII*, p. 171.

⁶⁶ *TCAII*, pp. 153-154.

media that relieve the pressure for consensus in increasingly rationalized action. While both morality and law function as second-order norms of action that regulate communicative action that has broken down, the modern differentiation of the normative value sphere is characterized by a separation of law from morality.⁶⁷ Incorporating Kohlberg's work on the ontogenetic development of moral consciousness, Habermas integrates the notion of 'post-conventional' moral consciousness with the development of the normative sphere to stress the importance of the role of rationalized law in modern societies: "[H]igher levels of integration cannot be established in social evolution until legal institutions develop in which moral consciousness on the conventional, and then postconventional, levels is embodied."⁶⁸ The rationalization of this particular value sphere means that legal decisions no longer depend on their congruency with traditional laws and customs, but rather begin to rely on their communicative redemption *as* norms through the provision of good reasons. This change, rooted in lifeworld processes of legitimation, allows the legal regulation of the economic sphere of success-oriented action and also the restoration of consensus through state mechanisms in cases of conflict.⁶⁹

The modern separation of law from morality, or what Habermas terms the 'generalization of values', reaches a point where "*abstract obedience to law* becomes the only

⁶⁷ Habermas explains, "[Morality and law] secure the next level of consensus to which we can have recourse when the mechanism of reaching understanding fails in the normatively regulated communication of everyday life, that is, when the coordination of actions anticipated in the normal case does not come to pass and the alternative of violent confrontation becomes a reality." *TCAII*, p. 173-174.

⁶⁸ *TCAII*, pp. 174-175. Habermas also notes this theme is developed in more detail in *CES*. See *TCAII*, p. 417, fn. 30. More recent work on the implications of communicative action for theories of morality, expressed in the notion of a communicative or 'discourse' ethics, can be found in Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Nicholsen. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

⁶⁹ *TCAII*, p. 178.

normative condition that actors have to meet in formally organized domains of action."⁷⁰ The increasing generalization of values, coupled with the increasing rationalization of the lifeworld, allows communicative action to play a more and more important role in societal integration. Although the potential for the rational redemption of action has been unleashed, the pressure for the constant attainment of communicative consensus grows unbearable:

The growing pressure for rationality that a problematic lifeworld exerts upon the mechanism of mutual understanding increases the need for achieved consensus, and this increases the expenditure of interpretive energies and the risk of dissensus.⁷¹

To help explain how this pressure for consensus is relieved, Habermas reworks Parsons' theory of steering media to arrive at the notion of communicative media. Instead of the continual securing of agreement as the mechanism for coordinating action, delinguistified steering media such as money and power take on this coordinating function in systemically organized action domains;⁷² media such as 'reputation' and 'value commitment' perform similarly in the lifeworld, although with important qualifications. I shall explain more clearly what Habermas means by this in what follows.

⁷⁰ *TCAII*, p. 180. (italics in text)

⁷¹ *TCAII*, p. 183.

⁷² Koula Mellos identifies significant epistemological implications for Habermas's concept of validity arising from this partial transference of communicative consensus over to functionalist steering media. She contends that as systemic action-coordinating mechanisms, steering media fulfil both a quantitative role in reducing the need for consensus, and a qualitative one due to their non-linguistic character. This is seen to introduce a specifically functionalist notion of validity, alongside and in contradistinction to a communicative grounding of validity. See her "Rationality, Validity, and Functionality in Habermas," in Mellos, ed., *Rationalité, Communication, Modernité*, pp. 13-39, esp. p. 34.

Habermas understands the formation of media to replace mutual understanding in language to be related to the growing need for coordination in normatively-free and communicative action. He explains the formation of communicative media with reference to the motivations of hearers to accept the speech act offers of speakers, or, in the terms Habermas uses here, 'the readiness of alter to take up ego's offer'.⁷³ Acceptance can depend on either the prestige pertaining to ego resulting from such criteria as physical strength, intellectual ability, and/or communicative responsibility, or on the influence that ego enjoys due to the authority accruing from his/her store of property or knowledge, for example.⁷⁴ When prestige and influence themselves become generalized, the 'readiness for consensus' attaching to prestige, and the 'willingness to follow' ensuing from influence, are no longer the sole motivations for action.⁷⁵ Instead, the increased and potentially dangerous pressure for communicative redemption of action is attenuated through the operation of prestige and influence as generalized media in two ways. First of all, communicatively-achieved consensus formation in language is funnelled off into specialized domains of validity with 'hierarchizing processes of agreement'.⁷⁶ Secondly, media such as influence detach consensus formation from action coordination, effectively neutralizing the possibility of communicative agreement and the risk of dissensus.⁷⁷ In spite of the similarities in the operation of communicative media, consensus formation in language is only attenuated or

⁷³ *TCAII*, pp. 180-181.

⁷⁴ *TCAII*, pp. 181-182.

⁷⁵ *TCAII*, p. 182.

⁷⁶ *TCAII*, p. 183.

⁷⁷ *TCAII*, p. 183.

condensed in the first instance. Since the achievement of intersubjective agreement in language always rests on rational redemption, as well as draws from and replenishes the lifeworld's stock of knowledge, communicative processes of consensus formation can never be replaced nor neutralized.

The establishment and operation of communicative media in modernity underpins the separation of the system from the lifeworld as well as their internal differentiation. On the system side, Habermas identifies the capitalist private enterprise and the state administration as the preeminent subsystems that are differentiated out in modernity. The lifeworld itself separates into communicatively-organized public and private spheres. As Habermas explains: "The transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from lifeworld contexts."⁷⁸ The detachment of interaction from the normative context of communication, made possible by the differentiation of action oriented to mutual understanding and action oriented to success, allows formally organized domains of normatively-free action to become established and intersystemically coordinated. Systemic organizations such as the capitalist enterprise and state bureaucracy are systemically integrated in their internal operations and with each other through the normatively-free steering media of money and power. Individuals voluntarily join such organizations in exchange for monetary compensation and status rewards, with the understood proviso that the decision-making procedures that operate there function with an orientation to organizational, strategic interests rather than to communicative consensus.

⁷⁸ *TCAII*, p. 183.

Even as Habermas distinguishes between systemic, norm-free domains of action and the communicatively-structured lifeworld, he is not prepared to utterly exclude consensus formation processes in systemic organizations. Instead, he explains that "[e]ven within formally organized domains of action, interactions are still connected via the mechanism of mutual understanding."⁷⁹ Organization members always have recourse to formal, legal regulations in cases of dispute, but "*communicative action forfeits its validity basis in the interior of organizations.*"⁸⁰ Although there is no requirement for communicative consensus to take place, with the consequence that "...members...act communicatively only *with reservation...*", the informal relationships supporting formal organizations remain tied to lifeworld contexts of communication.⁸¹ From the perspective of lifeworld members, the cleaving off of formally organized domains of action, or the system, appears as a 'technicizing' of the lifeworld.⁸²

Communicative media such as influence also permit the establishment of a public sphere in the lifeworld, distinct from the private sphere of the family and voluntary personal relationships and associations. Habermas remarks that "[t]he generalization of the influence that attaches to rationally motivated trust in the possession of knowledge..."⁸³ cannot function in the same way as the steering media of money and power. It always depends on the

⁷⁹ *TCAll.* p. 310. McCarthy again notes the empirical difficulties of the distinction between communicative and strategic action in attempting to analyze the action orientations of actors within systemic organizations. See his *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Thinking*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 152-180.

⁸⁰ *TCAll.* p. 310. (*italics in text*)

⁸¹ *TCAll.* p. 310-311. (*italics in text*)

⁸² *TCAll.* p. 183.

⁸³ *TCAll.* p. 183.

communicatively-structured processes of consensus formation already found in the lifeworld. The differentiation of the cultural value spheres of science, morality, and art generates specific kinds of media that contribute to the creation of networks of communication in specialized areas. A public sphere takes shape in the lifeworld when technologies of communication (i.e. mass media) appear that relieve pressure for, and suspend space and time restrictions on, consensus formation. Again, ever denser networks of communication take hold as a result. Although the pressure for communicatively-achieved consensus is relieved, it cannot be altogether removed; in the last instance, communication in the public sphere is dependent upon the communicative responsibility of actors to rationally take up criticizable validity claims.⁸⁴

Interchange Relations Between System and Lifeworld

Beyond offering higher levels of social and systemic integration, and therefore greater potentialities for the fulfilment of material needs and the expansion of communicative rationalization, the modern separation of system from lifeworld also qualitatively transforms previous modes of life. The commencement of the rationalization of the lifeworld, unleashing the cleaving off of the system, gives rise to an interconnected complex of relationships between subsystems and the public and private spheres of the lifeworld. In keeping with Parsons' systems theory, Habermas holds that subsystems such as the economy and the bureaucracy relate to the lifeworld as if the latter were merely another subsystem;

⁸⁴ *TCAII*, pp. 184-185.

that is, functional interconnections are coordinated through the media of money and power.⁸⁵ With his dual conceptual strategy for understanding society as both functional systems and communicatively-structured lifeworlds, Habermas differs from Parsons in that these system-lifeworld interconnections appear as specific, individual roles from the perspective of lifeworld members. The interchange relations between system and lifeworld take place in both the public and private spheres of the lifeworld, as well as on two qualitatively different orders.⁸⁶ The economic subsystem connects to the private sphere of the lifeworld insofar as individuals take on the role of 'employees' in supplying labour power in exchange for monetary compensation. The administrative subsystem relates to the public sphere of the lifeworld by providing lifeworld members, in their role as 'clients', with organizational achievements in return for taxes paid. Habermas understands the above set of interchange relations as wholly within the realm of formally organized, media-regulated domains of action: "[a]ctors who assume the roles of employees or of clients of public administration detach themselves from lifeworld contexts and adapt themselves to formally organized domains of action."⁸⁷ The other order of interchange relations refers to those connections that are not dependent on formally organized domains of action as described above, but rather only make reference to them.⁸⁸ In the role of 'consumers' in the private sphere, lifeworld members make demands for goods and services that are satisfied through economic

⁸⁵ *TCAII*, p. 319.

⁸⁶ A concise schematic of system-lifeworld interchange relations can be found in *TCAII*, p. 320, Figure 39.

⁸⁷ *TCAII*, p. 321.

⁸⁸ *TCAII*, p. 321.

production. These demands find their origin in cultural patterns of consumption that remain tied to the communicative lifeworld. The lifeworld connection is even clearer in the individual role of 'citizen': the bureaucracy executes political decisions on behalf of lifeworld members, decisions that in turn depend on the securing of mass loyalty. Since cultural patterns of consumption as well as political legitimation depend on the communicative consensus formation processes of the lifeworld, the roles of consumer and citizen cannot be reduced to the operation of steering media such as money and power, or 'mediatized', without serious consequences. It is precisely the attempt by systemic imperatives to mediatize such communicatively-structured relations, or in other words, the over-monetarization and -bureaucratization of everyday life, that Habermas identifies as the root cause of the specifically modern forms of conflicts and disruptions in social integration.

Habermas's account of the differentiation of system and lifeworld in terms of developmental dynamics represents an extension of his earlier use of the model of ontogenetic development to identify the growth in normative learning processes in symbolic interaction as distinct from, yet related to, the expansion of technical control over nature expressed in the ever-increasing complexity of systems.⁸⁹ Combined with the concept of worldviews discussed previously, Habermas, in a manner reminiscent of Hegel, can thus describe social evolution as a logical progression to ever higher and more complex stages.⁹⁰ Each developmental level contains the potential for new learning processes in the lifeworld

⁸⁹ See CES, pp. 95-129.

⁹⁰ McCarthy views Habermas's account of the progression of worldviews and social evolution as an effort to reconstruct Hegel's *Bildungsprozesse*, or self-formative processes of the individual and species. See McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermeneutics," p. 59.

to aid in the resolution of problems in symbolic reproduction. At the same time, the system also increases its complexity and adaptive capacity to resolve problems in material reproduction. In their ideal relationship of complementarity, advances in the functioning of the system and in the learning potentials of the lifeworld create the conditions for ever more fulfilling forms of life.

Habermas's reliance on theories of ontogenetic and cognitive development as models for the explanation of individual and especially social evolution has drawn criticism from several commentators. Anthony Giddens and Thomas McCarthy in particular have cautioned Habermas on the grounds that considering Western, modern societies as paradigmatic examples of the highest, most developed forms of reason and rationality verges on ethnocentrism.⁹¹ For her part, Benhabib voices criticism as to the usefulness of evolutionary models of development within critical social theory as evaluatory tools for assessing the present and future. Although an ontogenetic approach may be fruitful at the individual level, given that the transition from childhood to adulthood is an almost universal phase across cultures and that individual lives are necessarily finite, it is difficult to extend the same analysis to the always already open-ended historical development of societies : "The history of the species is so far unique, *sui generis*; we have no established model of development to compare it with."⁹² Giddens also finds the similarities between individual ontogenetic development and social evolution difficult to accept. He contends that to assume such an

⁹¹ Anthony Giddens, "Reason Without Revolution? Habermas's *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*," in Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity*, pp. 117-118; McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," p. 65.

⁹² Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, Utopia*, pp. 276-277.

homology between the two levels of development means that the internalization of norms and values in the individual, which permits social cooperation, are also taken to be operative in the social system. Significantly, he further argues that this position "inhibits the possibility of dealing adequately with questions of power, sectional group interest and struggle."⁹³

Domination as Lifeworld Colonization and Cultural Reification

With the presentation of the modern uncoupling of system and lifeworld, Habermas can now reconceptualize the problematic of reification as theorized by Weber, Lukács, and Horkheimer and Adorno. Habermas's conception of modern rationalization as both systemic and communicative gives him the tools to reinterpret and amend the pessimistic diagnoses of Weber and the Western Marxist tradition with respect to the modern ascendancy of purposive rationality, or instrumental reason, and its manifestation in such phenomena as bureaucratic and economic rationalization. The dynamics of rationalization in modernity are not wholly negative processes, but are better grasped as paradoxical. The rationalization of the lifeworld creates the conditions for the separation of autonomous systems of formally organized action domains that are able to force their imperatives back onto the communicatively-structured consensus formation processes of the lifeworld.⁹⁴ Habermas refers to this phenomenon as a 'colonization' of the lifeworld.⁹⁵ Lifeworld colonization,

⁹³ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction," in Thompson and Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates*. pp. 160-161.

⁹⁴ *TCAII*. p. 186.

⁹⁵ *TCAII*. p. 196.

together with the reification of everyday life, or cultural reification, comprise Habermas's definition of domination. Habermas's primary distinction between communicative and purposive rationality, transposed into the concepts of lifeworld and system respectively, further provides the foundation for a substantial contribution to the problematic of reification. Because the communicative structure of the lifeworld is logically incommensurate with the systemic organization of formal domains of action, communication cannot ever be wholly subsumed by systemic imperatives. The limits to the colonization of the lifeworld are found at exactly those points where systemic deformations of communication become intolerable, creating social conflicts and pathologies. With this framework Habermas can both identify the causes of modern social conflict as well as offer a vision of a future utopia based on communicative reason. In this way he advances beyond the theoretical impasse of an all-encompassing, unstoppable instrumental reason or purposive rationality.

The colonization of the lifeworld, or the turning back of the system upon the lifeworld, manifests itself in general terms as the monetarization and bureaucratization of everyday, communicative contexts of life. In place of the rational redemption of action through the achievement of mutual understanding in language, the media of money and power reduce interaction to a norm-free calculus of exchange and administrative efficiency:

[The colonization of the lifeworld] sets in when the destruction of traditional forms of life can no longer be offset by more effectively fulfilling the functions of society as a whole. The functional ties of money and power media become noticeable only to the degree that elements of a private way of life and a cultural-political form of life get split off from the symbolic structures of the lifeworld through the monetary redefinitions of goals,

relations and services, life-spaces and life-times, and through the bureaucratization of decisions, duties and rights, responsibilities and dependencies.⁹⁶

The overall consequence of the mediatization of the lifeworld is that "...moral-practical elements [are driven] out of private and public spheres of life."⁹⁷ Manifestations of the encroachment of system imperatives on the lifeworld are discernible in both the public and private sphere, as well as in disruptions in the lifeworld institutional structures of personality, society, and culture.

The deformation of communicatively-organized relationships in the public sphere leads to problems of legitimation.⁹⁸ The participation of public citizens in political decision-making processes is reduced to a minimum of casting votes in elections. Politics becomes a power play of strategic interests, rather than a consensual, collective, and rational discussion of possible alternatives. While Habermas does not outline the impact of monetarization of the mass media in the public sphere with specific reference to legitimation problems, a similar analysis would seem to lend itself. As mass media become increasingly reliant on the exchange of information for money and even power as status, there is every potential for the public networks of condensed communication to lose their legitimacy as stores of and forums for communicatively-redeemed consensus.

The imposition of systemic imperatives on the private sphere generates orientation problems at the levels of personality, society, and culture. By reducing the interchange

⁹⁶ *TC.II*, p. 322.

⁹⁷ *TC.II*, p. 325.

⁹⁸ *TC.III*, p. 324.

relation between individuals and the administrative bureaucracy to calculations of efficiency, the role of client becomes highly depersonalized. Coupled with the phenomenon of the juridification of the family, which I examine more closely in Chapter III, the mediatization of these particular interchange relationships engenders crises of identity. The pressure exerted by the economic system to completely monetarize the role of consumer shows up in the empty, communicatively-detached form of life expressed in rampant possessive individualism.⁹⁹ Cultural deformations occur when the contents of shared, common traditions are monetarized or bureaucratized; engagements with such traditions are shunted into the form of 'experiences' that are to be consumed or that convey status or power. Lifeworld members are therefore unable to relate as competent participants to their own background stock of commonly-shared knowledge and traditions. At the level of society, the redefinition of interpersonal relationships along money, power, and status lines generates a sense of individual disconnection and an inability to form meaningful personal bonds. As previously discussed above, and now specified in more detail, the imposition of systemic imperatives upon the lifeworld impair, but do not completely paralyze, the lifeworld's capacity to symbolically reproduce itself through communicative action.

Systemically-induced reification of lifeworld institutions occurs not only through the media of money and power, but also in a phenomenon Habermas refers to as 'juridification'. As a more concrete example of the effects of colonization, juridification relates to two aspects of modern law: an expansion of the rule of law as well as its increasing

⁹⁹ *TCM*, p. 325.

densification.¹⁰⁰ While law serves primarily to formally regulate interaction in the economic sphere, problems arise when it is over-utilized as a regulatory medium for the resolution of communicative conflict. The clearest examples Habermas provides here are those disputes involving families. When serious disagreements arise between husband and wife, or between parents and children, there is a tendency for legal intervention to be oriented more towards administrative concerns or monetary entitlements than to the reestablishment of harmony. The life histories of the individuals involved are severely abstracted in this process.¹⁰¹ Courts and the social welfare bureaucracy are less willing or less able to serve as forums for the constructive, reasoned resolution of conflict. The end result in these cases of juridification is a sharp penetration of systemic imperatives upon the communicatively-structured lifeworld institutions of the family, threatening processes of sociation.

Modern rationalization not only gives rise to the differentiation of system from lifeworld, and therefore creates the potential for the dynamics of colonization, but also generates the complementary phenomenon of cultural reification. The differentiation and professionalization of the three value spheres of science, art, and morality establishes an increasing distance between expert cultures and the broader public.¹⁰² Cultural knowledge and issues relating to culture become less accessible to everyday communicative practice. Such practice, relying as it does on an engagement with vital traditions, feels itself more and more cut off from cultural value spheres. This cultural impoverishment denies the possibility

¹⁰⁰ *TCAII*, p. 357.

¹⁰¹ *TCAII*, p. 363.

¹⁰² *TCAII*, p. 326.

of a rational, communicative redemption of everyday life, so that "...these [vital] traditions continue along on the basis of everyday hermeneutics as a kind of second nature that has lost its force."¹⁰³

While the interchange relations between system and lifeworld provide the conduits for systemic reification of the lifeworld, Habermas treats the relation between the economic sphere and individuals, in the role of employees, as a separate and particular case. The institutionalization of wage labour brought about by capitalism generates class-based inequalities that carry over into modern societies. For Habermas class conflict represented the foremost point of conflict in traditional societies. Modern societies, however, are singularly distinguished by their capacity to pacify class conflict through social welfare provisions administered by state bureaucracies.¹⁰⁴ As long as the state administration can secure political legitimacy in exchange for monetary entitlements, and at the same time not impede the operation of the economic system through overburdening its resources, then the potential social disruption rooted in class-based inequalities will continue to be attenuated.

For Habermas, reinterpreting the problematic of reification along the lines of systemic colonization of the lifeworld and well as cultural reification means that resistance to domination is no longer to be found exclusively or even principally in the dynamics of the class struggle around issues of redistribution; instead, flashpoints of conflict are generated around "...defending and restoring endangered ways of life."¹⁰⁵ Because of the modern

¹⁰³ *TCAH*, p. 327.

¹⁰⁴ *TCAH*, pp. 347-348.

¹⁰⁵ *TCAH*, p. 392.

pacification of class conflict the sources of resistance potential to domination are found among those social groups whose ways of life are most threatened by, on the one hand, monetarization and bureaucratization processes, or on the other, the increasing gap between everyday life and cultural institutions. These new social movements react to the reduction of their communicatively-structured forms of life to interactions mediated by money and power. Resistance to cultural reification expresses itself in groups that seek to establish separate and protected communities that "...[support] the search for personal and collective identity...[through] the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication."¹⁰⁶ As examples of resistance efforts, Habermas specifically cites the feminist and ecological movements, as well as conservative cultural reactions to changing traditions. While feminism and other movements aim towards emancipation and progressive social change, other social groups can be characterized as reacting against changes in the status quo or even as resisting and withdrawing from the rationalization of the lifeworld.

Freedom as Lifeworld Rationalization

The parameters of the relationship between system and lifeworld not only serve to articulate the dynamics of modern domination as reification, but also provide the framework for Habermas's definition of freedom as the individual and collective opportunities for self-expression and learning engendered by the communicative rationalization of the lifeworld. As interactions in the lifeworld become increasingly structured along the formal lines of

¹⁰⁶ *TCAII*, p. 395.

communicative action, the actual stock of lifeworld knowledge and traditions is subjected to rational redemption through the provisions of good reasons. In Habermas's words,

[T]he further the structural components of the lifeworld and the processes that contribute to maintaining them get differentiated, the more interaction contexts come under conditions of rationally motivated mutual understanding, that is, of consensus formation that rests *in the end* on the authority of the better argument.¹⁰⁷

In a communicatively rationalized lifeworld, action is no longer dependent on nor motivated by coercion, either subtle or overt, or by the blind force of unquestioned traditions and norms. Decisions and action come to rely on the interpretive accomplishments of individuals expressed through "the readiness of individuals to criticize and their ability to innovate."¹⁰⁸ With the formal differentiation of a rationalized lifeworld, individuals and collectivities are presented with the potential to create or explore new and highly variable lifeworld contexts.¹⁰⁹

Since the lifeworld is necessarily connected to systemic processes of material reproduction, the question remains as to what the optimal relationship between the system and lifeworld should be in order for freedom as unrestricted communication to be realized. Habermas is surprisingly unclear on this point. The modern differentiation of system and lifeworld allows the possibility of each to influence the other: "We cannot directly infer from the mere fact that system and social integration have been largely uncoupled to linear

¹⁰⁷ *TCAH*, p. 145. (italics in text)

¹⁰⁸ *TCAH*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁹ *TCAH*, p. 146.

dependency in one direction or the other. Both are conceivable."¹¹⁰ As we have seen, the encroachment of the system upon the lifeworld generates conflicts and pathologies due to the reduction of communicatively-organized interaction contexts to systemic imperatives. Although Habermas suggests the possibility that the lifeworld could assert its influence upon the system, this dynamic also finds its limits in situations where systemic complexity is threatened. The clearest example of this is the organization of material reproduction along the lines of a communicative, collective determination of the conditions, and the distribution of the products, of one's labour. For Habermas, this possibility is a 'dedifferentiation' of system and lifeworld, and constitutes a regression because it could not deliver the levels of systemic complexity necessary to maintaining the relatively high material standards of modern societies. For these reasons, it seems that the best relationship between system and lifeworld is one of symbiosis, whereby problems of symbolic and material reproduction are dealt with through mechanisms that ensure their resolution in the appropriate domain of action. In this way new and higher levels of satisfaction of material and symbolic needs of systems and lifeworlds, respectively, can be met, avoiding the undue interference of either upon the other. The practical task then becomes the establishment and maintenance of mechanisms and institutions, both in the system and the lifeworld, that can foster this arrangement.

¹¹⁰ *TCAH*, p. 185.

II

Habermas, Labour, and Intersubjectivity

Up to this point, I have reconstructed the main theoretical foundations upon which Habermas erects the theory of communicative action, and outlined its use as a critical theory of society. What is notably missing from Habermas's presentation in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and from my reconstruction of it thus far, is a substantive engagement with the problematic of labour in Hegel and especially in Marx. Against the Marxist tradition, the theory of communicative action is principally an explicit argument for the replacement of labour with language, expressed as communication, as the central category of critical social analysis. Despite this significant reorientation, Habermas still views his work as "carry[ing] on the Marxian tradition under considerably changed historical conditions."¹ These circumstances include the increasing interdependency between the modern state and capitalist economy, the general rise in the material standard of living, and the failure of the proletariat to assume its given role as the revolutionary macrosubject of history.²

¹ Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics," trans. by Thomas McCarthy, in John B. Thompson and David Held, eds. *Habermas: Critical Debates*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), p. 220.

² These historical conditions are concisely summarized by Habermas in *T&P*, pp. 195-196.

To appreciate the philosophical background on which Habermas argues for the primacy of communication over labour, it is fundamentally necessary to specify his points of contention *vis-à-vis* Hegel and Marx. Habermas's entire corpus, from his earliest essays to *Knowledge and Human Interests* on through to *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, is consistently marked by the epistemological and methodological separation of labour and interaction as communication. Reading Hegel and Marx in terms of this labour/interaction distinction, Habermas argues that Hegel sublimates both terms into the dialectical unfolding of Absolute Spirit; Marx's difficulty is seen to lie in the reduction of interaction to labour. On Habermas's view, the failure of Hegel and Marx to properly develop the distinction between labour and interaction, even as it is intimated at various points in their work, explains the shortcomings of the Marxist tradition in providing a solid normative justification for a critical social theory with emancipatory intent.

Habermas's critique of Hegel is based on an interpretation of the early Jena lectures, where Hegel is seen to have developed a model of the formative process of spirit that preserves the dialectics of labour, language, and morality without recourse to an identity theory of Absolute Spirit. Marx is understood to have identified the difference between labour and interaction in his attempt to explain social phenomena with the model of the dialectic of the forces of production and relations of production. His one-sided emphasis on labour to account for social relations, however, results in the conflation of interaction with labour.

Apart from clarifying the import of Habermas's work for the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, Habermas's understanding of labour is of course crucial from a socialist feminist perspective

as well. As I presented in the introduction, the adequacy of the concept of labour in Marxist thought to offer an analytical framework with which to understand women's labour, both public and domestic, has been the main source of confrontation between feminism and Marxism. Despite the utility and critical edge of Marxist analyses, its incorporation of women's oppression has been less than satisfactory. With these issues in mind, I ultimately want to see if Habermas's attempt to move Marxist thought in the direction of a communications-theoretic approach offers any kind of constructive resolution of the issues between Marxism and feminism. While in this chapter I concentrate principally on Habermas's engagement with the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, it is with a view to assessing this engagement from the perspective of women's labour. This is one of the principal tasks of Chapter III. For now, I should like to retrace the main points of divergence between Habermas and the Hegelian-Marxist tradition and elucidate the justification Habermas gives for abandoning a problematic of labour, seen by him to be irrevocably attached to the philosophy of consciousness, in favour of a problematic of communicative action rooted in the philosophy of language.

After a presentation of Habermas's reading of Hegel's Jena lectures, I critique the assertion that Hegel's later models of the interconnection between labour and interaction are deficient through a reconstruction of the dialectic of self-consciousness contained in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³ Against Habermas, I hold that Hegel formulates a theoretically and practically rich model of the relationship between labour and intersubjectivity in this text

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

and in the later *Philosophy of Right*.⁴ This is followed by a review of Habermas's discussion of the labour/interaction distinction in Marx, with a focus on the understanding of labour as monological, instrumental activity. I raise issues with what I see as Habermas's epistemological reading of labour, arguing that an ontological understanding is more theoretically useful. Finally, I review the implications of Habermas's own connections between labour and interaction as communication.

Labour and Interaction in Hegel

The terms of the distinction between labour and interaction find one of their first expressions in Habermas's interpretation of Hegel's Jena lectures.⁵ Habermas contends that Hegel's intention in this early work is to develop a tripartite dialectical complex that stands in contrast to, and was eventually replaced by, the singular dialectic of Absolute Spirit discovering itself through the medium of self-consciousness. From these Jena lectures, Habermas emphasizes that:

The dialectics of language, of labour, and of moral relations are each developed as a specific configuration of mediation...it is not the spirit in the absolute movement of reflecting on itself which manifests itself in, among other things, language, labour, and moral relationships, but rather, it is the dialectical interconnections between linguistic symbolization, labour, and interaction which determine the concept of spirit.⁶

⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁵ See *T&P*, pp. 142-169.

⁶ *T&P*, pp. 142-143.

The dialectic of language refers to that process whereby subjects represent objective nature in immediate symbols; this naming of objects is also an externalization of subjective consciousness to itself that is recognized as such by the subject. Labour refers here to the dialectical mediation of subjective and objective natures in the satisfaction of drives. Both the name assigned to objects and the instrument used to transform nature possess the character of permanence and generality "...against the ephemeral moments of the perceptions...[and] of desire," respectively.⁷ The main difference between these two dialectical mediations consists in the power of the subject in relation to nature. In language nature is subjected to self-generated symbols, whereas in labour the subject itself gives itself over to nature's power.⁸

Habermas equates the third dialectical pattern presented by Hegel, that of morality, with interaction as such. Already employing the strategy of reconstructing an implicitly assumed communicative background - a methodology used to its full effect in his later series of lectures on modernity - Habermas contends that Hegel intimates a concept of morality that refers to an undisturbed context of interaction among subjects who are at least in principle equal. This stands in contrast to the Kantian moral project, rooted as it is in solitary, monological reflection oriented to the concordance of practical reason with a transcendently universal morality. In a similar fashion, Habermas argues that Kant's transcendental morality can only take shape because it implicitly refers to an *a priori* intersubjective background based on reciprocal recognition. This background allows Kan:

⁷ *T&P*, p. 154.

⁸ *T&P*, p. 154.

to extrapolate a monological will that makes moral decisions: "The intersubjectivity of the recognition of moral laws accounted for *a priori* by practical reason permits the reduction of moral action to the monologic domain."⁹ Hegel himself does not in these Jena lectures specifically derive the dialectic of moral relations from an analysis of pure, abstract intersubjectivity, but instead develops it in the practical form of "love as the reconciliation of a preceding conflict."¹⁰ For Habermas this particular example can only be understood as referring to a prior, harmonious dialogic situation. As further evidence for this claim, Habermas analyzes Hegel's presentation of crime found in the *Spirit of Christianity*.¹¹ The criminal action of one subject against another severs a moral totality founded on reciprocal recognition expressed in dialogue; crime therefore engenders a relationship of alienation between the victim and the perpetrator, and between the criminal and the larger community. The criminal can only overcome alienation, experienced both as guilt and as 'the causality of destiny', when he/she realizes the shared interconnectedness with the other in the form of a dialogic relationship of mutual recognition.¹² Thus the dialectic of morality consists of the diremption and subsequent reconciliation of already established relations of intersubjective recognition based on unconstrained dialogue: "What is dialectical is not unconstrained intersubjectivity itself, but the history of its suppression and reconstitution."¹³

⁹ *T&P*, p. 151.

¹⁰ *T&P*, p. 147.

¹¹ *T&P*, pp. 148-149. This text can be found in English in Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* (trans. by J. W. Knox, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), pp. 182-301. Habermas repeatedly uses this example of crime in his discussions of Hegel and morality. See *KIII*, p. 56, and *PDM*, pp. 29-31.

¹² *T&P*, p. 148.

¹³ *T&P*, p. 148.

What Habermas finds instructive in this particular text of Hegel's is the heterogeneous character of the three dialectical patterns of language, labour, and morality. These three dialectical complexes express distinct processes in the self-formation of spirit. Rather than working through the derivation of any one of the mediations from a single, determining dialectic, the challenge Hegel sets out for himself is to conceptualize the dialectical interconnections that at once unite and preserve the specificity of each pattern. For Habermas is clear in his interpretation that the dialectics presented by Hegel here are irreducible to one another.

For the purposes at hand, I only wish to concentrate on Habermas's interpretation of Hegel's early and later formulations of the connection between labour and interaction. The reading of Hegel with regard to this issue already takes its cue from Habermas's strict separation between labour as monological, instrumental action, and interaction as intersubjective communication. Habermas is evidently referring to labour, both as an isolated relationship between subject and object and as social labour, when he declares that "instrumental action, at least when solitary, is monologic action."¹⁴ Furthermore, the implication of this division between labour and interaction on the level of epistemology is also intimated here:

the norms under which complementary action within the framework of a cultural tradition is first institutionalized and made to endure are independent of instrumental action. Technical rules, to be sure, are first elaborated under

¹⁴ *T&P*, p. 159.

the conditions of language communication, but they have nothing in common with the communicative rules of interaction.¹⁵

The technical knowledge generated in the labour process is thus of a qualitatively different kind than the norms of reciprocity which govern relations of intersubjectivity. Even at this relatively early stage in his work, and long before the more explicit elaboration of the concept of communicative action, Habermas suggests that labour, in the guise of instrumental action "is...embedded within a network of interactions, and therefore dependent on the communicative boundary conditions that underlie every possible cooperation." From these epistemological differences, Habermas concludes that "[a] reduction of interaction to labour or derivation of labour from interaction is not possible."¹⁷

On Habermas's view, Hegel's formulation of the interrelationship between labour and interaction found in the Jena lectures is the only one that properly respects the specificity of each dialectical pattern. The notion of legal contract presented in this context formalizes and institutionalizes the exchange of equivalents, in the form of products of labour, as models for reciprocal action. Habermas contends, however, that "the [legal] institutionalization of the reciprocity actualized in exchange is accomplished by virtue of the spoken word being accorded normative force."¹⁸ Hegel is thus seen to introduce a dialogic model of reciprocal action as a realm of exchange distinct from, yet connected to, labour. Habermas can then

¹⁵ *T&P*, p. 159.

¹⁶ *T&P*, p. 158.

¹⁷ *T&P*, p. 159.

¹⁸ *T&P*, p. 160.

claim that this particular notion of contract represents both a process of labour and a struggle for recognition grounded in language.

At this point in the argument one would expect a close comparison of this conception of contract with the one later developed by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*. While Habermas does discuss this text briefly, he holds that the interconnection between labour and interaction presented there subjects the dialectic of labour to the dialectic of morality. For Habermas this is due to the introduction of abstract right independently from, and outside of, social labour. In his effort to preserve the moment of universality against erosion by the particularity of civil society, and thereby allow the expression of ethical life in its totality, Hegel privileges the unfolding of Absolute Spirit as absolute morality over the moment of particularity:

[T]he interrelationship between labour and interaction to which abstract right owes its true dignity is dissolved; the Jena construction is given up, and abstract right is integrated into the self-reflection of spirit, conceived as absolute morality.¹⁹

Habermas acknowledges that Hegel also formulated a connection between labour and interaction in the presentation of the lord-bondsman relationship in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, the formulation in this text still falls short of the Jena model because it relies one-sidedly on labour to burst the asymmetrical relationship of domination:

¹⁹ *T&P*, p. 167. To clarify, Hegel uses the term '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*', or 'civil society', to refer specifically to the realm of particularistic economic relations. The term excludes the state and its institutions since they express the moment of universality.

The independent self-consciousness, in which both parties recognize that they recognize each other, is constituted by way of a reaction, which the *technical* success of an emancipation by means of labour exerts on the relationship of *political* dependency between master and servant.²⁰

In essence, Habermas argues in this context that Hegel's turn to an identity philosophy of spirit caused him to abandon the formulation of the relationship between labour and interaction found in the Jena lectures. According to Habermas, this move has significant repercussions. First of all, the dialectic of labour is subsumed within the self-reflective process of Absolute Spirit coming to know itself. Moreover, the dialectic of morality is conceived similarly on the model of Absolute Spirit as absolute morality, rather than on a model of reciprocal recognition in language as communication.

Habermas further develops his critique of Hegel in a chapter in the later *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. In the guise of identifying the points at which Hegel's philosophy suggests a turn to the development of communicative reason, Habermas concentrates on Hegel's efforts to re-establish the ethical moment in a modernity that appears to have substantially broken with any and all previous notions of an ethical totality. Although his earlier reading of Hegel already suggests the line of critique with respect to the dialectic of morality, Habermas here draws its strongest conclusion: for Habermas, Hegel's emphasis on the necessity of an universal ethical moment results in an unacceptable sublation of the moment of particularity and individuality by the universal. Because Hegel appropriates the notion of an ethical totality from classical Greek philosophy, and uncritically applies this in

²⁰ *T&P*, p. 161. (italics in text)

attempting to understand the relation between the state and civil society in modernity, he is led to conceptualize the state as the repository of the universal over and above civil society. By understanding Hegel in this manner, Habermas can assert that "[i]n itself it is not evident that the sphere of the ethical...should *concentrate* itself...only *in the state*."²¹ For Habermas, Hegel's formulation of the relationship between the state and civil society only makes sense within the terms of a philosophy of reflection predicated on a monological subject that relates solely to itself. As Habermas understands it, this presupposes a primacy of the universal over the particular: "In the concrete universal, the subject as universal maintains a primacy over the subject as individual."²²

What is noticeably absent from the critique of Hegel presented in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is any further reference to the problem of the relationship between labour and interaction outlined earlier. It is clear that Hegel's reliance on the philosophy of the subject to explain both labour and interaction is seen by Habermas to offer an unsatisfactory resolution to this problem. Before I address how Habermas understands the problematic of labour in Marx, I want to present a critique of Habermas's engagement with Hegel with the intention of illuminating some problems that carry over to Habermas's understanding of labour in Marx. Habermas's discussion of the relationship between labour and interaction as intersubjectivity in Hegel's philosophy is open to contestation. In contrast to Habermas's reading, the connections that Hegel theorizes between labour and

²¹ *PDM*, p. 39. (italics in text)

²² *PDM*, p. 40.

intersubjective relations in the *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy of Right* belie Habermas's assertions.

Consciousness and Intersubjectivity

Hegel's presentation of consciousness in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology* demonstrates a way in which intersubjectivity can be intimately tied to an engagement with objective nature through labour. Here the subject's engagement with the material world sets in motion the process of the attainment of self-consciousness. Initially, the objective world confronts the subject as something utterly alien and independent. This is what Hegel refers to as the phase of Sense Certainty. In attempting to assign a specific time and place to an object, the subject becomes aware of the concept of universality, and further realizes that this concept only comes from itself as subject. The object only exists "because I [as subject] know it."²³ However, the subject necessarily fails in its efforts to grasp the object in its particularity because it cannot comprehend the object as the repository of both universal and particular properties. It is only when the subject understands that the object's particular properties are at the same time a negation of opposite properties, that the next, higher level of Perception is attained.

Because the subject inevitably encounters contradictions when it tries to describe the object as both an unity and multiplicity of properties. Perception is necessarily limited. This limitation is overcome when consciousness as Perception realizes that "the object is *in one*

²³ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §100, p. 61. (italics in text)

and the same respect the opposite of itself...[and also that] *it is for itself, so far as it is for another.*"²⁴ With this realization, the subject moves into the realm of the Understanding. Although consciousness now understands that the object exists as a 'being-for-self' and as a 'being-for-another', it does not yet recognize its own identity in the object. Even as the subject comprehends what the object is, and knows that the object exists for it as subject, the object still confronts consciousness as something other. To overcome this impasse, Hegel introduces the notion of Force, or a relational process that preserves the unity of the object by repelling all other determinations.²⁵ Because it is conceived as a relation, force can only be ascertained in its outward manifestations; force only reveals itself to consciousness in the form of appearance. The realization that the essence of the object can be apprehended through its appearance marks the awareness of self-consciousness, for what the Understanding discovers when it goes behind the "so-called curtain [concealing] the inner world [of objects] is itself."²⁶

As self-consciousness, the subject understands its own identity as a being-for-self and as a being-for-another, and the connection of this identity with the being-for-self and the being-for-another of the world of objects. By positing itself as wholly other, and recuperating what it has externalized, consciousness recognizes both its affinity with and its power over the world of objects. Through labour, the subject is able to 'negate' the object and transform it into an expression of self-consciousness. But since the relation between:

²⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §128, p. 76. (italics in text)

²⁵ See Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution - Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 115.

²⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §165, p. 103.

consciousness and the object consists only of perpetual negation, the objects of labour can never truly express self-consciousness in its full manifestation. For self-consciousness to be completely identical with itself, it must interact with an entity that possesses the same power of negation that consciousness itself does; this entity can only be another self-consciousness. Consequently, Hegel concludes that "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."²⁷

Contra Habermas, Hegel's development of the attainment of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* through an engagement with the objective world, terminating as it does in the mutual recognition of self-consciousness with another self-consciousness, represents a fruitful model for theorizing intersubjectivity. However, at this point the model remains incomplete, for intersubjective recognition only occurs at the highly abstract level of phenomenological consciousness. Although it is grounded in the subject's confrontation with objective reality, and labour is incorporated as a moment in the process of coming-to-self-consciousness, the medium of intersubjectivity remains thought alone. What is left wanting is a medium of mutual recognition that is substantially connected to practical and material life. For it is true that labour at this point in Hegel's argument appears to be an isolated relationship between subject and object. Labour does give rise to interaction, but only insofar as it comprises a logical step, and only at the level of consciousness. If Hegel were never to have further expanded the role of labour in the struggle for mutual recognition, then we would have to concede to Habermas that interaction as communication offers a better

²⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §175, p. 110.

way in which to connect subjects with other subjects and to concrete practice. Of course, Hegel already addresses this question in the *Phenomenology* itself with the analysis of the lord-bondsmen relationship, and later with the more fully developed model of contract presented in the *Philosophy of Right*.

The asymmetrical relationship of domination that characterizes the lord-bondsman relation is intimately linked to labour. The one-sided determination by the lord of the conditions of labour of the bondsman results in a double alienation. To begin with, the mediation of the lord's relation to external reality through the bondsman's labour means that the lord does not exercise his power of negation over objectivity; he exists as a being-for-self, but not as a being-for-another. On the bondsman's side, the products of his labour exist apart from him and are appropriated for the exclusive enjoyment of the lord. Thus the bondsman is alienated from his own identity expressed in the fruits of his labour: he exists as a being-for-another, but not as a being-for-self. Consequently, both the lord and the bondsman are unable to fully realize themselves as self-conscious subjects.

This relationship of servitude and alienation is dissolved when the bondsman realizes his own self in the products of his labour. As Hegel describes, "through work, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is," namely a being-for-self and a being-for-another.²⁸ With his power of subjection broken, the lord now also recognizes himself as a being-for-another, as well as a being-for-self. The end result is that both the lord and bondsman can

²⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §195, p. 118.

intersubjectively recognize each other as full self-conscious subjects necessarily enmeshed in the externality of the material world.

With the introduction of labour as the process through which an asymmetrical intersubjectivity is recognized and resolved, Hegel interconnects labour and interaction in a relation of intimate interdependence. Mutual recognition cannot exist apart from labour, and thus from the material world, while labour presupposes relationships of reciprocity, even as these may not be fully actualized. In light of the preceding, it is useful to revisit Habermas's brief remarks on the lord-bondsman relationship. His contention that Hegel uncritically connects two separate dynamics, one of political dependency and another of technical success, does not do justice to Hegel's formulation. In reading this relationship in terms of a dichotomy of labour as a monological, technical relation to objectivity, and interaction as norm-governed intersubjectivity, Habermas leaves little theoretical room for any sort of connection between them.

Furthermore, the bondsman's struggle for liberation also has moral implications, even though Hegel does not explicitly frame it as such. Because the bondsman, and the lord for that matter, are impeded from realizing the full expression of their self-conscious subjectivity, their relationship of domination degrades the humanity of each. Thus not only has Hegel closely linked labour and interaction in a single dialectical complex, but morality as well. It was left to Marx to further develop the implications of this relationship of domination along materialist lines with the theory of alienated labour found in the *Economic*

and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.²⁹ As Marcuse points out, the germ of the notion of estranged labour can be located in this passage from the *Phenomenology*.³⁰

The model of the interrelationship between labour and intersubjectivity developed in the *Philosophy of Right* represents an even stronger connection between the world of objective nature and mutual recognition. Here autonomous wills externalize and incarnate their subjectivity in the products of their labour. The moment of intersubjective recognition occurs in the exchange of these products of labour as private property by equal and autonomous wills in legal contract. As opposed to mutual recognition grounded in abstract phenomenological consciousness, the introduction of contract construes labour as an integral grounding moment of intersubjectivity. The legally codified exchange of products between subjects forms the basis for the quasi-anarchic pursuit of particular interests in civil society. Habermas rightly points out that Hegel could not envision the emergence of any sort of universal interest from civil society, leading him to theorize a state apparatus as the repository of the universal, and thus preserve the notion of an ethical totality. For Habermas, as we have seen, this results in a prioritization of the universal over the particular. However, this is far from an uncontentious interpretation. Hartmann suggests that the problem with Hegel's conception of the state is rather that the moment of particularity is unaccounted for, and therefore Hegel shirks away from the radical implications of his own dialectical method; for the introduction of radical democracy at the level of the state can be viewed as

²⁹ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 106-119.

³⁰ See Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 115.

introducing the moment of particularity as the necessary dialectical counterpart to the moment of universality.³¹

Similarly to the interconnection of labour and interaction in the *Phenomenology*, the notion of contract in the *Philosophy of Right* also contains a moral moment. As Hegel himself noticed, and Marx even more clearly, the capitalist mode of production generates an entire social class whose sole possession is their own labour power. It follows thus that without property or without the possession of the fruits of their labour, subjects are unable to freely participate in contractual exchange as the precondition for their recognition as subjects by others. Yet again, the complex and intimately connected complex of labour, intersubjectivity, and morality in the *Philosophy of Right* defy attempts to analyze each as separable from one another.

Habermas's insistence on the distinction between labour and interaction leads him to interpret Hegel in a highly selective manner. The claim that Hegel's turn to an identity theory of spirit resulted in the abandonment of any further formulation of the relationship between labour and interaction ignores the rich dialectical complexes articulated in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*. This contention is already based on the presupposition that labour and interaction are in essence separable. Given the influence of Hegel on Marx, it is not surprising then that Habermas reads Marx in terms of this same presupposition. As I shall elaborate below, this reading of Marx presents its own set of problems.

³¹ See Klaus Hartmann, "Towards a new systematic reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in Z. Pelczynski, ed., *The State and Civil Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 114-136.

Labour and Interaction and Marx

To fully analyze the complex and varied relationship with Marx and Marxism that Habermas has sustained over the course of his career, largely conducted in terms of a critique of historical materialism, is beyond the scope of this section. From his earliest publications to at least the theory of modernity stage, Habermas has engaged with the Marxist tradition over a wide range of fundamental issues including the theories of social evolution, economic crisis, ideology, and the theory of value and its connection to labour. Tom Rockmore succinctly organizes Habermas's work on historical materialism into four phases: interpretation, critique, reconstruction, and rejection.³² The aim of the 'reconstructive' phase consisted of the attempt to more fully realize the goals that historical materialism had set for itself;³³ the full development of the theory of communicative action marked the abandonment of further efforts to rehabilitate historical materialism in favour of linguistically mediated intersubjectivity as the only critically viable philosophical paradigm.

In what follows, I will specifically carry through with the problematic of the connection between labour and interaction as applied to Marx's work. While Habermas varies his critical approaches to Marxism over time, the distinction between labour and interaction remains constant. Indeed, as I presented in Chapter I, I take the work/interaction separation to comprise the foundation for Habermas's dual conception of society as both system and lifeworld. Within the terms of the labour/interaction distinction, Habermas's overall

³² Tom Rockmore, *Habermas on Historical Materialism*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 169.

³³ *CES*, p. 95.

assessment can be described as follows: to the extent that Marx grounds his social analysis in the moment of labour, its moment of critique cannot be satisfactorily directed towards relations of intersubjectivity. Since for Habermas mutual relations between subjects form the appropriate context in which to theorize moral relations, domination, and emancipation, labour as monological, instrumental action is unable to wholly account for them. Moreover, Habermas generally holds that, despite himself, Marx never intended for labour to provide anything other than a way to understand the economic tendencies of the capitalist mode of production. In the same manner that interaction is reduced to labour, the critique of social relations that Marx advances through the notion of ideology and the base and superstructure relationship are seen to reduce social analyses to fundamentally economic ones.

Habermas carries over the problematic of the division between work and interaction in his engagement with Marx. In place of Hegel's model of the subsumption of work and intersubjectivity under the dialectic of Absolute Spirit, Habermas contends that Marx's emphasis on a materialist social analysis conflates interaction into labour. Since the basic presupposition that work and interaction are separable remains unmodified, with the exception of the substitution of the categories 'instrumental action' for the former and 'communicative action' for the latter, Habermas assesses Marx as follows:

...Marx had rediscovered that interconnection between labour and interaction in the dialectic of the forces of production and the relations of production...[He] does not actually explicate the interrelationship of interaction and labour, but instead, under the unspecific title of social praxis.

reduces the one to the other, namely: communicative action to instrumental action.³⁴

While this citation is from one of Habermas's earliest engagements with Marx, he remains consistent in his position that labour is monological, instrumental action that cannot adequately theorize relations of intersubjectivity; relations between subjects are understood to be the exclusive domain of communicative action.

For Habermas instrumental action refers to the transformation of external reality in accordance with subjective ends through the utilization of technical knowledge. At the same time, it is also capable of generating new knowledge about the objective world that can be put to later use in other instrumental activity. That Habermas equates labour with instrumental action is indisputable:

By 'work' or *purposive-rational action* I understand either instrumental action or rational choice or their conjunction. Instrumental action is governed by *technical rules* based on empirical knowledge.³⁵

what is decisive [concerning labour processes] is the sociological aspect of the goal-directed transformation of material according to *rules of instrumental action*.³⁶

Even social labour, which requires some level of interaction and cooperation between labouring subjects, simply reflects an aggregate of the purposive, goal-directed activities of

³⁴ *T&P*, pp. 168-169.

³⁵ Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society - Student Protest, Science and Politics*, trans. by Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 91-92. (italics in text) Habermas repeats this definition almost word for word in *CES*, p. 117.

³⁶ *CES*, p. 131. (italics in text)

individuals. The coordinating mechanism that ensures the successful coordination of activities is strategic action. In social labour:

[t]he instrumental actions of different individuals are coordinated in a purposive-rational way, that is, with a view to the goal of production. The *rules of strategic action*, in accord with which cooperation comes about, are a necessary component of the labour process.³⁷

Habermas already has in mind in this earlier text the coordination of purposive-rational actions on the basis of strategic action, a notion that he further develops in the theory of communicative action with the introduction of systems functionalism.³⁸ The subsequent concept of 'system' is viewed as the domain of the material reproduction of society, with labour as its foundation. Again, labour is taken to be equivalent to purposive-rational activity: "*Material reproduction* takes place through the medium of the purposive-activity with which sociated individuals intervene in the world to realize their aims."³⁹ Labour as purposive-rational action is not only instrumental, but also monological. The subject itself determines the goals of its activity as well as the manner in which they will be executed, independently of other subjects:

In purposive-rational action it is supposed only that each subject is following preferences and decision maxims that he has determined for himself - that is,

³⁷ CES, p. 132. (italics in text)

³⁸ The notion of social labour as an aggregate of individual, instrumental actions is explicit here: "The adaptive capacity of an action system is measured only by what the aggregate effects of actions contribute to maintaining a system in a given environment." *TCHH*, p. 160.

³⁹ *TCHH*, p. 138. (italics in text)

monologically, regardless of whether or not he agrees therein with other subjects.⁴⁰

Given labour's status as monological activity, it cannot account for contexts of intersubjectivity as interaction. It does not describe the presuppositions of reciprocity and mutual recognition of norms, grounded in communication, that inform relations between subjects. From the phenomenological perspective, labour cannot account for the dynamics of symbolic interaction.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is devoid of moral and normative content. Habermas argues that Marx can only impute a normative content to labour through an appropriation of the expressivist model of self-creativity borrowed from Romanticism and idealist philosophy, especially its Hegelian articulation.⁴² By viewing the products of labour as expressions of incarnated subjectivity, Marx can understand their private appropriation in capitalism as an alienation of the essential powers of the original worker. Rather than enjoying the product which he or she has created, the labourer is sundered from his/her own humanity as a self-creative and self-determining subject. The paradigmatic expression for Habermas of Marx's conception of labour is artistic, craft production; this model is seen to be wholly inappropriate for comprehending the high degree of systemic complexity in modern capitalism.⁴³ According to Habermas, the normative ideal of the recovery of the

⁴⁰ *CES*, p. 119.

⁴¹ *KIII*, p. 42.

⁴² *PDM*, p. 64.

⁴³ *PDM*, pp. 64, 76-77.

products of labour, by revolution or other means, is cogent only within the expressivist framework of externalization and reappropriation.

Habermas contends that Marx's identification of the crisis potentials in capitalism is at its root a systemic, economic analysis. The account of the division of labour, rather than explicating antagonistic social relations between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, is actually intended to describe the operation of a modern, functionalist, economic system:

Marx...attributed great significance to the category of the 'social division of labour'; by this he meant processes of system differentiation and of integration of functionally specified subsystems at a higher level, that is, processes that increase the internal complexity - and thereby the adaptive capacity - of a society.⁴⁴

Habermas reinterprets the accumulation problems of capital that Marx identifies as symptoms of systemic crises; rather than leading to the eventual self-destruction of capitalism, these problems are seen to have been successfully addressed with the rise of the modern interventionist state.

Habermas further argues that in his efforts to account for social phenomena through the category of labour, Marx unwittingly expresses the difference between labour and interaction. The development of the dialectic between the forces of production and the relations of production is explicitly intended to illuminate problems of domination. With the base/superstructure model and the concept of ideology, Marx transferred, and thereby reduced, problems of interaction into economic analyses of the antagonistic relationship

⁴⁴ CES, p. 141.

between capital and labour. The modern capitalist state, seen by Marx to form part of the superstructure, has become integrated to such an extent with the economic subsystem that it must be counted as an inseparably intertwined, functional subsystem itself; the relationship of base and superstructure no longer holds.⁴⁵

By construing labour as ends-means, purposive-instrumental action devoid of normative content, Habermas clears the way for the introduction of a systems functionalist perspective to account for the material reproduction of society. Since what Marx was really talking about was the quasi-empirical functioning of capitalism, systems functionalism is seen to offer a more sophisticated and historically congruent account of the modern intertwining of the state administration and the economy. Problems of inequalities in accumulation are therefore 'systemic', as opposed to moral, questions to be resolved by state intervention. However, Habermas's instrumental conception of labour has serious practical implications. Evaluated from the Hegelian-Marxist perspective of consciousness, a purely instrumentalized relation to external nature disconnects subjects from their own self-consciousness; labour as purposive-activity is merely a means to satisfy material requirements. The problem of the private appropriation of the products of labour cannot be adequately addressed since, from the functionalist perspective, the capitalist economy and welfare state represent the most highly rationalized complexes of material reproduction. To attempt to reorganize their operation along any other than purposive-rational lines would result in the impairment of their functioning.

⁴⁵ *T&P*, p. 195.

From the discussion in this chapter, it is evident that Habermas holds to a strict epistemological understanding of labour as purposive-rational action that generates exclusively technical knowledge; as such, labour needs to be distinguished from interaction. While Benhabib generally is in agreement with Habermas's interpretation of labour in Hegel and Marx, other commentators raise important questions as to how sharply labour can be separated from interaction. Benhabib conducts a parallel, epistemological reading of the process of coming-to-self-consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, arguing that the conception of consciousness as an externalization and subsequent reappropriation cannot account for contexts of intersubjectivity.⁴⁶ Significantly, she fails to analyze both the lord-bondsman relationship and the later model of intersubjectivity in the *Philosophy of Right*. Akin to Habermas, she carries over this epistemological reading to Marx's conception of alienated labour as an instrumental, technical process.

In the same way that the difference between communicative and strategic action is difficult to discern empirically, McCarthy and Giddens have raised doubts as to the substantive difference between labour and interaction. Both call attention to the fact that purposive-rational action is embedded in social contexts. McCarthy states that "one of the more obvious difficulties with this formulation is that purposive-rational action would seem (if the contrast [between labour and interaction] is to have a point) to be not governed by social norms, not grounded in intersubjectivity, not sanctioned by convention, in short not social."⁴⁷ He adds that this is clearly not the case. Giddens is more severe in declaring that

⁴⁶ See Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, Utopia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 44-69.

⁴⁷ Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), p. 26.

"none of these [types of action are] actually a type of action at all;" he notes that Habermas responds to this kind of criticism by referring to these action types as 'analytical elements of a complex', or 'idealized features of action'.⁴⁸ Habermas emphasizes, however, that he considers all concrete processes of labour to be social or involve interaction.⁴⁹ For Giddens, Habermas cannot use labour as both an analytical element of action *and* as denoting social labour. Neither can he legitimately employ 'interaction' "both as an analytical element and as a substantive type [of action]".⁵⁰ Giddens and McCarthy acknowledge that Habermas intends to distinguish the difference between action types analytically, rather than substantively. However, given the fundamental importance that Habermas's distinction between labour and interaction serves as the conceptual source of his engagement with Hegel and Marx, as well as the fount for the system-lifeworld dichotomy, their objections are noteworthy.

For Honneth, Habermas, like most twentieth-century strains of Marxism, fails to come to terms with the distinction between the highly rationalized, Tayloristic, and instrumental form of labour, and the holistic, integrated, subject-determined type of work characteristic of artisan and craft production.⁵¹ Honneth regards the tendency in critical social theory towards a strict instrumentalization of labour to be the result of an one-sided focus on the problematic of the increasing technical rationalization of production, to the detriment of the

⁴⁸ Anthony Giddens, "Labour and Interaction," in Thompson and Held, eds., *Habermas Critical Debates*, p. 156.

⁴⁹ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction," p. 156.

⁵⁰ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction," p. 156.

⁵¹ Axel Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action," in *New German Critique*, 26 (Spring-Summer 1982), pp. 52-53.

normative dimension of labour. If Habermas were to adopt Honneth's categorial distinction between labour as other-determined, and thereby instrumental, and labour as subjectively-determined, he would be forced to "recognize the existence of a type of practical and moral knowledge which is based not upon the consciousness of systematically distorted relations of communication, but upon the experience of the destruction of true acts of work in the course of the rationalization of production technique."⁵²

Lukács' alternative model of labour as furnishing the ontological ground for human activity offers a compelling analysis of the connection between objective conditions and social life.⁵³ As a model of an 'expressive totality', Lukács' work preserves an unity between objective and subjective life, or between labour and social relations. Although not explicitly referring to Lukács, Giddens concurs that an ontological interpretation of labour is theoretically more useful for Marxian critique as it retains an emphasis on labour as a social activity.⁵⁴ In spite of these possibilities Habermas remains unconvinced that an ontological reading of labour can account for contexts of intersubjectivity.

Labour and Communicative Action

If we accept Habermas's argument that labour and interaction are irreducible to one another, and further accept that despite themselves, Hegel and especially Marx delineated the separation between them, then the question becomes how labour and interaction are to

⁵² Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action," p. 53.

⁵³ See Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*, trans. by David Fernbach. (London: Merlin Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction," p. 157.

be interrelated. As has been presented, Hegel's subsumption of interaction under Absolute Spirit and Marx's conflation of interaction into labour do not properly respect the essential differences between these two kinds of activity. This does not negate, however, their efforts to theorize some sort of connection in order to conceive of society as an integrated totality. The implication of Habermas's critique of Hegel and Marx is that the theory of communicative action offers a more fruitful model for understanding labour and its relationship to interaction.

To the degree that Habermas asserts the primacy of communication over labour, he appears to provide an elegant and innovative resolution to the dilemma of the proper relationship between labour and interaction as communication: the communicatively-directed determination of the organization of labour. Along these lines, Heller posits that "genuine rationalization as humanization of society would mean the primacy of communicative rationality over goal-rationality - the actual primacy of practical reason over pragmatic-instrumental reason."⁵⁵ Recalling his critique of Hegel's Jena lectures, this arrangement would seem to *dialectically* connect labour and interaction in a way that preserves each complex in its specificity. Furthermore, this alternative would offer a theoretically important formulation of the unity of material and social activity. Unfortunately Habermas resists developing this implication to its logical conclusion, as he implies in a rhetorical response to the potential charge of idealism levelled at the concepts of communicative action:

⁵⁵ Agnes Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," in Thompson and Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates*, p. 33.

Does not a lifeworld that is supposed to be reproduced only via the medium of action oriented to mutual understanding get cut off from its material life processes? Naturally, the lifeworld is materially reproduced by way of the results and consequences of the goal-directed actions with which its members intervene in the world. But these instrumental actions are interlaced with communicative ones insofar as they represent the execution of plans that are linked to the plans of other interaction participants by way of common definitions of situations and processes of mutual understanding.⁵⁶

At the most he asserts that the "symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld and its material reproduction are internally independent."⁵⁷ Thus, there is no indication that Habermas intends for the relationship to be a dialectical nor substantially unified one.⁵⁸ There is the sense that labour as instrumental action cannot enter into the realm of communicative justification as anything other than an argument along empirical lines pertaining to the potential success or failure of a posited intervention in the objective world. On a philosophical level, then, it appears Habermas rejects the possibility of a communicative determination of the ends and means of labour.

The principal focus of this chapter has been an elaboration of Habermas's engagement with the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, especially around the question of labour and its connection to intersubjectivity. While Habermas at one point endeavoured to rehabilitate historical materialism, he has now decisively rejected the social critiques of both Hegel and Marx because of their reliance on the philosophy of the subject. As I have attempted to

⁵⁶ *PDM*, p. 321-322.

⁵⁷ *PDM*, p. 322.

⁵⁸ Heller holds that Habermas has completely given up any notion of totality in his work. Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," p. 22. Martin Jay believes Heller's criticism is too harsh on this point, contending that Habermas's version is simply a weaker one than traditional Marxist conceptions. See Jay, *Marxism and Totality*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 474. fn. 52.

demonstrate, however, Habermas's readings of Hegel and Marx on the issue of intersubjectivity are far from unassailable. The secondary reason I have worked through the problem of labour and interaction may appear to have been largely relegated to the background. As I indicated at the beginning, socialist feminists have also raised issues with the applicability of labour as the foundation of a social critique that explicates women's domination. If Habermas has succeeded in displacing labour with communication as the *force motrice* of critical thought, then the resolution of one of the principal socialist feminist issues with Marxism, namely women's domestic and social labour, has been achieved. According to the tenets of the theory of communicative action, domination needs to be conceived not in terms of the constraints on the free determination of the conditions of labour, but rather as a result of the improper influence of the system upon the lifeworld and the resultant deformation of symbolic reproduction processes. However, feminist thought in general also works with a concept of patriarchy to account for women's oppression. It will thus be the task of Chapter III to critically evaluate Habermas's understanding of domination with regard to the questions of women's labour and of patriarchy.

III

Habermas and Women's Domination - A Critical Evaluation

From the presentation of domination in Chapter I, it is clear that Habermas's intention is to conceptualize domination as the systematic distortion of communicative action. In his reinterpretation of the problematic of reification in terms of the deformation of communicative contexts of life, Habermas aims to productively move beyond the aporias of the critiques of reification advanced by Weber, Lukács, and Horkheimer and Adorno. I now want to turn to a critical evaluation of Habermas's conception of domination as systemic and cultural reification as it applies to explaining the particular forms of women's domination. I begin with a presentation of Habermas's assessment of the feminist movement and the nature of the emancipatory potential he attributes to it. Next, I explore how the phenomena of women's domination can be interpreted in terms of the systemic reification of the communicatively-structured lifeworld and also as the cultural reification of everyday communicative practice. From these points of departure I then identify other forms of domination that are logically intimated, but not adequately addressed, by the theory of communicative action. From the perspective of the lifeworld, these include the use of outright strategic action and violence as well as the blind force of unrationalized cultural traditions and norms relating to gender and gender roles. One of the primary issues here is

explaining what motivates actors to act strategically, rather than communicatively, in contexts of interaction. Adopting a systemic perspective, the inequalities generated by the gender division of labour must be understood as yet another form of domination. Through a discussion of the problem of women's labour, I examine the capacity of Habermas's distinction between material and symbolic reproduction to accommodate the varieties of women's labouring activities. I conclude with a critical socialist feminist assessment of Habermas's notion of emancipatory practice as the communicative rationalization of everyday life.

Habermas and Feminism

Habermas understands the feminist movement as one of the social groups that presents the most promising, emancipatory challenges to the intrusion of the systemic imperatives of economic and administrative growth upon the lifeworld. He identifies the feminist movement as "[standing] in the tradition of bourgeois-socialist liberation movements."¹ The resistance potential that feminism offers lies in its pressure for the practical implementation of the notion of universal equality that is already taken to be rationalized in modern universalistic law:

The struggle against patriarchal oppression and for the redemption of a promise that has long been anchored in the acknowledged universalistic

¹ *TCAII*, p. 393. In an interview entitled "Conservatism and Capitalist Crisis," originally published in 1978. Habermas already positively appraised the women's movement along these lines, viewing it as worthy of being "...counted amongst those great mass movements which take up universal principles of equality." See *A&S*, p. 66.

foundations of morality and law gives feminism the impetus of an offensive movement...²

Through its struggle to "...[overturn] concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies,"³ feminism aims at a future emancipation that creates the conditions for women to transcend the limitations of stereotyped gender roles. Unlike resistance movements that struggle for the re-establishment of traditions that are perceived to be in the process of erosion, feminism does not seek to revivify the practices of the past, but rather looks towards the emancipatory possibilities of new forms of life. For Habermas, this gives the women's movement an *a priori* critical potential.⁴

Even as Habermas seems to acknowledge that gender roles are a creation of economic and historical conditions, he does not present an engagement with the ways in which these roles have been used historically to justify women's subordination. Instead, he views the characteristics that have historically been attributed to women as sources for exploring new forms of life:

...the historical legacy of the sexual division of labour to which women were subjected in the bourgeois nuclear family has given them access to contrasting virtues, to a register of values complementary to those of the male world and opposed to a one-sidedly rationalized everyday practice.⁵

² *TCAII*, p. 393.

³ *TCAII*, p. 393.

⁴ *A&S*, p. 67.

⁵ *TCAII*, pp. 393-394.

In an earlier context, Habermas briefly suggests that the emancipatory impetus of feminism lies in women's distance from the reliance on vocational roles as a primary source of ego identity:

...[F]eminism is an example of an emancipatory movement that (under the catchword of self-realization) searches for paradigmatic solutions to the problem of stabilizing ego identity under conditions that render problematic - especially for women - recourse to the vocational role as the crystallizing nucleus of life history.⁶

The implication is that women rely on relationships other than their connection to labour roles, such as those with life partners, children and extended family, as a means for the construction of self-identity. This somehow places women in a better position to arrive at the development of more fulfilling, ego-stabilizing relationships along what one would assume, following Habermas, to be egalitarian, communicative lines. In one sense there is a congruency between Habermas's analysis and feminism's focus on the one-sided, wholly other-focused character of women's social relationships. On the other hand, the deformed sense of ego identity that attaches to women's generalized role of caregiver and nurturer already places her in a subordinate position that renders it difficult to change the nature of relationships of inequality. Thus it is not immediately evident how women are to practically implement the emancipatory impulse that Habermas understands feminism to represent.

Both of the previous examples are notable for the way in which they seem to intimate a connection between women's position in the gender division of labour and an emancipatory

⁶ CES, p. 110.

potential. In spite of this, the phenomenon of the gender division of labour is more complex and requires a more extensive analysis than Habermas offers anywhere in his corpus. The gender division of labour is only briefly mentioned in the context of pre-modern social formations and the modern nuclear family; the division of labour along gender lines found in economic and bureaucratic systems organizations, and how this relates to the current organization of labour in the family, is not addressed. In a positive vein, Habermas seems to imply that the success of feminist demands for cooperative and egalitarian sharing of domestic labour, determined communicatively, could generate the conditions necessary for men to reevaluate their traditional tendencies to pursue their own strategic interests in both the public and private spheres of the lifeworld. However, all feminists also seek to provide women with the means to achieve economic independence by addressing issues relating to the conditions of women's access to and participation in labour outside of the family. Given Habermas's analysis above, these kinds of efforts would appear to have more negative implications. As bourgeois women become increasingly incorporated into systems organizations as employees, as men largely are, it would seem to follow that the 'register of values' which Habermas attributes to women would be in danger of being replaced by the values attaching to the pursuit of strategic self-interest. Following this line of argument, one would have to conclude that the demand for bourgeois women's equal inclusion in social labour could be potentially construed as a counter-productive one. In addition, the focus on bourgeois women ignores the large numbers of working class women who have always been involved in social labour. As to the question of the values to which they have access, Habermas does not say.

Habermas's positive analysis of feminism in terms of its critical and emancipatory role immediately suggests the theoretical task of reconstructing exactly how the problematic of domination as the reification of communicative action specifically impacts women and generates the kind of resistance characteristic of the women's movement. What are the actual phenomena and dynamics of domination as systemic reification against which feminism reacts and challenges? Despite his references to the emancipatory potential of the women's movement, Habermas has yet to present a developed analysis of the relation between modern emancipatory movements and the phenomena of reification. In what follows I shall attempt to work with the logic of systemic and cultural reification in order to specify the extent to which women's domination can be understood within the terms of Habermas's lifeworld colonization thesis.

Women's Domination as Systemic Reification

For Habermas, effects of domination in modernity are attributable to the intrusion of systemic imperatives upon the lifeworld. The imposition of the logic of purposive-rational action upon the lifeworld's communicatively-structured domains of action leads to distortions in the reproduction processes of the lifeworld - at the levels of personality, society, and culture - that are necessary for maintaining high levels of social integration. Systemic reification assumes the form of either an over-bureaucratization or an over-monetarization of those spheres of life that rely on the attainment and coordination of consensual, intersubjective agreement. In many instances the two forms overlap and reinforce each other; capitalist enterprises possess their own bureaucratic forms, while state administrations

utilize monetary disbursements to implement policy objectives. Relations between the system and lifeworld assume the form of a front along which systemic organizations and lifeworld institutions interact. From the lifeworld perspective, the points of contact coalesce into the social roles of employee, consumer, client, and citizen. The ideal state of these interchange relations is one of equilibrium, where the figures mentioned above provide the channel through which personal sacrifices are provided in exchange for money and status rewards. The colonization of the lifeworld describes the dynamic whereby forces of economic and bureaucratic rationalization penetrate the core institutions of the lifeworld, particularly the family, deforming the roles of consumer and client, and the communicative public sphere, affecting the identities of lifeworld members in their roles of employee and citizen.

Nancy Fraser takes issue with what she sees as Habermas's gender-neutral formulation of the social roles mediating the interchange between system and lifeworld. While she appreciates Habermas's sophisticated analysis of the relationship between individuals and institutions in modern capitalism, she nonetheless holds that these roles express a gender subtext.⁷ The roles of worker/employee and citizen are taken to be paradigmatically male ones insofar as they are tightly connected to masculine identity. Men attach a strong degree of self-identity to their role as family breadwinner, while women's relationship to the world of paid labour is on markedly different terms. As the locus of debate among free and equal citizens, the public sphere has been historically constituted on the basis of the exclusion of

⁷ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 122-124.

women. Fraser further contends that the roles of bureaucratic client and consumer are paradigmatically female ones. Passive dependence on the state for even nominal support undermines the masculine ethos of independence and self-sufficiency. As the connection between the private household and the economy, the consumer role largely devolves to women as part of their responsibility for household maintenance. From these analyses, Fraser proposes that the interchange roles between system and lifeworld are mediated not only by money and power, but also through the medium of gender identity.⁸ Following the broad outlines of Fraser's approach, I will specifically concentrate on the roles of bureaucratic client and citizen. I do not engage directly with the analysis of the consumer role, and discuss the role of employee within the larger context of women's labour.

To begin to analyze how the logic of systemic reification helps to explain women's domination, I first want to address the ways in which the imposition of systemic imperatives impinges upon the lifeworld institution of the family. This example is important for a number of reasons. First of all, the family is understood by Habermas to be a key site for the communicative socialization of lifeworld members. Secondly, Habermas presents the phenomenon of the juridification of the family, whereby communicative relationships in the family become subjected to bureaucratic intervention through the use of law as a medium, as a clear example of systemic reification of lifeworld processes.⁹ Lastly, and most importantly, Habermas connects the rise of the women's movement to the incursion of economic imperatives into the familial realm.

⁸ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. p. 124, also pp. 124-128.

⁹ *TCAII*. p. 368-369.

Habermas understands the family exclusively as a site of communicative socialization; the economic function that the family once fulfilled in pre- and nascent capitalist societies has been increasingly assumed by the private capitalist enterprise, to the point where the family unit no longer remains tied to economic production.¹⁰ In its fundamental socializing role for children, the family creates the conditions for the transmission of cultural knowledge and tradition, the internalization of social values and norms, and the formation of personal identity.¹¹ Disruptions in these elements of communicative socialization lead to the formation of individuals who, in essence, have difficulty acting as responsible, communicative lifeworld members.

The phenomenon of the juridification of the family refers specifically to the process whereby familial interactions become increasingly legally regulated and bureaucratized. Rather than law serving merely as a complementary arbiter in cases where communication has broken down, its use as a regulatory medium of interaction results in the legal codification of family relationships. Duties and responsibilities on the part of parents towards their children, as well as husbands and wives to each other, become part of the overall framework of legal norms. While there is the sense that Habermas views positively the "[dismantlement] of the authoritarian position of the paterfamilias...in favour of a more equal distribution of the competencies and entitlements of other family members,"¹² at the

¹⁰ "The institutional core of the private sphere [of the lifeworld] is the nuclear family, relieved of productive functions and specialized in tasks of socialization." See *TCAII*, p. 319.

¹¹ These components of the symbolic reproduction process at the levels of culture, society, and personality, respectively, are found in *TCAII*, p. 144.

¹² *TCAII*, p. 368.

same time he emphasizes that the family is in no way a formally organized sphere of action easily susceptible to this type of legal regulation without serious consequences:

The formalization of relationships in family...means, for those concerned, an objectivization and *removal from the lifeworld* of (now) formally regulated social interaction in family.¹³

While Habermas is clear that the juridification of the family has a negative impact upon its members, he does not offer any alternatives as to how the patriarchal familial form could be organized along more egalitarian lines without recourse to law.

The family is also subject to the imposition of systemic, economic imperatives that Habermas views as influential in creating the resistance potential found in the women's movement. Recalling traditional Marxist and socialist analyses of women's oppression, Habermas comments that:

The social conflict which lies behind the women's movement is linked to the fact that capitalist economic development is now violating the hitherto relatively protected preserve of the bourgeois family in Western society, particularly among the middle classes. Women are beginning to form part of the reserve army of labour; moreover, this change, until recently largely confined to the working class, is now affecting more and more bourgeois strata.¹⁴

It is not entirely evident how bourgeois women's inclusion in social labour is connected to feminist resistance, especially since feminists in general have seen this phenomenon as positive in the sense of granting women some measure of economic independence. and

¹³ *TCAII*, p. 369. (italics in text)

¹⁴ *A&S*, pp. 66-67.

because one of the early demands of feminism was giving women the opportunity to choose between domestic and social labour. The issues that remain, of course, are the terms of women's participation in the labour force and the continuing responsibility of women for domestic labour.

The difficulties in utilizing bureaucratic and economic intrusions upon the family for understanding women's domination, expressed in juridification phenomena and the increasing incorporation of women in social labour, stem from the assumption that familial relationships are already communicatively rationalized. On the one hand Habermas recognizes that the family is generally organized along traditional, patriarchal lines. Unless one assumes that this particular familial form is a result of mutual intersubjective agreement, which even Habermas does not seem to imply, then we are presented with the case of a domain of communicative action that is also a domain of coercive power rooted in gender. Feminist political activism has historically been oriented towards improving women's legal status in the matrimonial relation, precisely because of the gender inequalities that were legally codified. From a feminist perspective, the juridification of the relationship between husbands and wives may not be an ideal solution, but the gains in women's equality and independence have been substantial.¹⁵

¹⁵ Marie Fleming acknowledges Habermas's account of the juridification of the family as a compelling one for the explanation of contemporary family dysfunctionality. At the same time she adds: "But [Habermas's account] is also conservative insofar as it works as an argument for resistance to fundamental change at the level of family structures." See her article "Women and the 'Public Use of Reason'," in Johanna Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 132.

Women and the Reification of the Public Sphere

The theory of communicative action also predicts reification effects that impinge upon communicative processes in the public sphere of the lifeworld, deforming the interchange relationships between lifeworld members and the state administration incarnated in the roles of citizen and client. The ever-expanding networks of public communication, freed from constraints of time and space through technological innovations in mass media, become deformed to the extent that they are subjected to the strategic normalization of public opinion.¹⁶ The consequences of such disturbances take the form of a narrowing or outright repression of the terms and themes of public debate. Moral-practical concerns are reduced to the interplay of strategic interests, while political questions are framed in terms of their administrative resolution. Over-monetarization, or commodification in another (read: Marxist) register, further directs communication in the public sphere away from rational discussion and mutual interchange and realigns it in accordance with economic exigencies. In place of the informed citizen ready, willing, and able to participate in democratic discussion, political participation at both the individual and collective levels becomes reduced to the periodic casting of ballots and the passive, technologically-mediated reception of moral-political debate as quasi-entertainment.

¹⁶ In an earlier context Habermas already addressed the closing off of public debate from questions of harnessing technical and scientific progress for communicatively-determined social goals. In place of a public substantially involved in these kinds of social questions, Habermas identified the one-sided influence of 'experts' over the decision-making capabilities of 'politicians'. This trend is later more explicitly identified as a reification effect of the imposition of purposive-instrumental, administrative rationality upon the intersubjective, communicative discussion of social goals and the means to practically realize them. See Habermas, "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion," in Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 62-80.

The deformation of public discourse due to systemic reification offers a partial, yet insufficiently complex, explanation of women's political domination.¹⁷ While the reification of public opinion hypothesis illuminates a dynamic that contributes to the marginalization of women's political claims, it is constrained to offer any rationale as to why it is these kinds of claims in particular, and not others, that are excluded or confined to the margins. Furthermore, Habermas's conception of the operation of the public sphere fails to account for the historical exclusion of women and other disenfranchised social groups. When politics in the public sphere is reduced to the brutal interplay of strategic interests, women's claims for equality are manipulated under the rubric of 'special interest groups', a label reinforced to varying degrees in the mass media. Even as the terms of liberal democracy would suggest that women's numbers would warrant a more influential political voice, the realities of modern politics in late capitalist societies underscores women's lack of real political power. The underlying impetus of the women's movement as a call for the redemption of liberalism's promise of equality and freedom for all is cynically and conveniently utilized for political gain, rather than serving as a direction for positive social change.

Even as the deformation of the public sphere affects the conditions of women's political involvement as democratic citizens, the more fundamental issue is the historical problem of women's exclusion from participation in the public sphere. Given that the liberal-bourgeois split between private and public realms informing political philosophy historically has long

¹⁷ I use the term 'political' here to refer to women's relationship to formal political institutions and associations as well as the informal political activities outside of such organizations. As is well known, one of the theoretical innovations of feminist thought is an expansion of what is understood as 'political' to include activities and dynamics that do not traditionally fall under inquiry into 'politics'. This feminist sensibility becomes clear in the ways in which I discuss other forms of women's domination below.

been criticized by feminists, it is not surprising that in addition to Habermas's analysis of the family the other current point of engagement between feminism and Habermas has been oriented around the question of his conception of the public sphere.¹⁸ The assignment of women to the private sphere of the familial household, held to be the proper domain of women's place, has historically been used to tautologically justify women's exclusion from the public sphere.

How does Habermas account for the exclusion or limited access of certain social groups and subjects from the public sphere? In a recent reevaluation of his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas acknowledges the influence of feminist scholarship and its critique of the patriarchal and exclusionary character of the public sphere.¹⁹ His response is that the communicative impetus that gave rise to the bourgeois public sphere, even as it was constituted by a dominant social group, also engendered the formation of other public spheres along class and subcultural lines.²⁰ Explicitly referring to Foucault and his notion of hegemonic, determining discourses, Habermas argues that in place

¹⁸ Habermas's conception of the public sphere in *TCAI&II* finds its roots in his earlier *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. (Neuweid, 1962) (no publisher given). In this study, Habermas undertakes an historical investigation into the formation and operation of the bourgeois public sphere. The publication of the English translation of this work sparked a renewed and widespread interest in the relationship between Habermas's earlier and later thought, as well as the utility of Habermas's observations for understanding the public sphere in late capitalism. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. by T. Burger and F. Lawrence. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). For a collection of responses to this work, see Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993). For a survey of feminist readings of Habermas's conception of the public sphere, see Fleming, "Women and the 'Public Use of Reason'," in Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas*, pp. 117-138; and Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in Calhoun, pp. 259-288.

¹⁹ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," trans. by Thomas Burger, in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 427. This text is a translation of Habermas's Foreword to the 1990 German reprint of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

²⁰ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," p. 425.

of the complete lack of communication between these different publics, the open, self-referential character of the bourgeois public sphere allows an engagement between them along communicative lines. Because the bourgeois public sphere was at least nominally constituted with reference to universal ideals of equality and access, Habermas holds that it has the potential for self-transformation, especially in response to claims issuing from other, non-dominant public spheres.²¹ The problem with this analysis is that it gives no justification, other than the compelling force of reason, as to why a hegemonic, exclusionary public sphere should permit the entrance of social groups and subjects that challenge such hegemony. The operation of power differentials along the axes of gender and class, for example, continue to sustain a hegemonic public sphere that has no interest, other than the compelling force of reason, to share its influence and decision-making power through the rational discussion of claims issuing from other, non-dominant public spheres.

Habermas also seems to undervalue the role of commodification in the establishment and growth of the mass media that accompanied, and continues to shape, the formation of the modern public sphere.²² As Daniel Hallin notes, the formation of the American public sphere was intimately connected from its very inception to early mass media that were

²¹ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," p. 429.

²² The Internet is the most recent example of this process of mass media commodification. Although at their inception and throughout their early development computer networks appeared to usher in a qualitative expansion of communicative possibilities, participation in this technically innovative communicative form almost always requires the private ownership of a computer, purchases of software and on-line time, and the acquisition of computer hardware upgrades. The commodification of computer networks takes on a new dimension with on-line advertising and electronic shopping 'opportunities'. Information itself, or the very content of communication, is transformed into commodities through the growing establishment of fee-for-access sites and networks.

subject to the imperatives of revenue generation from advertising.²³ The tremendous financial strain under which women's and alternative presses function demonstrates the role that market forces play in controlling the dissemination of viewpoints and arguments that challenge mainstream political debate.²⁴ Habermas's underestimation of this form of reification lies, I believe, in his prioritization of the dynamics of a one-sided, bureaucratic rationalization of the public sphere over the economics of the mass media and the logic of profit maximization to which it is beholden. With this emphasis Habermas is able to retain the concept of a public sphere that is fundamentally structured along the lines of uncoerced communication. As I have briefly demonstrated, the commodification of the technological means of communication is as equally threatening as bureaucratic rationalization.

Responding to new analyses of his early *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas more explicitly acknowledges the role that commodified mass media play in one-sidedly forming public opinion:

The public sphere, simultaneously prestructured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible.²⁵

²³ See Daniel Hallin, "The American News Media: A Critical Theory Approach," in John Forester, ed., *Critical Theory and Public Life*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 121-146.

²⁴ Noam Chomsky's empirico-political writings provide numerous examples of the power that various amalgamations of business, bureaucratic, and political elites wield in determining the kinds as well as parameters of topics presented in the public sphere. See for example his *Manufacturing Consent*. (Montreal, New York: Black Rose Books, 1994).

²⁵ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," p. 437.

Even as Habermas is well aware of the power of commodified mass media, he interprets the strategic management of public discourse as 'extractive intrusions' into the public sphere that run up against a public communication generated from and rooted in the lifeworld;²⁶ he can thus retain the concept of a formal, non-coercive public sphere of communication as a bulwark against colonizing tendencies, even as this free realm of discourse may only exist weakly and utopically in the form of various public *spheres* that arise in response to the dominant bourgeois sphere. Even as the commodification of mass media was instrumental, and continues to be so, in the establishment of spheres of public communication, Habermas refuses to abandon the notion of communicative public spheres that are untainted by this process.

The systemic reification of political will-formation offers an insightful explanation of the current limitations to the full expression of involved citizenship, but it does little to help explain why it is specifically women or other subjugated groups that are politically marginalized and dominated. Again, this instance of systemic reification can be utilized to illuminate the differential effects according to gender of political inequalities, but these gendered practical effects in themselves suggest the possibility that gender differentiation is fundamental to the formation and operation of reifying processes from the outset.

²⁶ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," p. 427.

Woman as Bureaucratic Client

While Habermas provides the example of the juridification of the family as a specific instance of systemic reification, it is in the operation of the role of bureaucratic client that he finds the clearest model of the lifeworld colonization thesis.²⁷ Moving beyond the attenuation of class conflict rooted in economic inequalities - an attenuation to whose problematic character I have already touched upon - the historical expansion of social welfare programs in late capitalist societies has introduced state control and regulation into previously untouched areas of the lifeworld. The one-way, asymmetrical interaction between individuals and the state reduces bureaucratic clients to passive recipients of administrative imperatives and cash outlays, undermining the ability of individuals to adopt a communicative, participatory role in resolving their particular life situations.

Habermas's analysis of the 'clientization' of lifeworld members is a particularly trenchant one for women, given that women not only access state social welfare systems in significantly different ways than men, but also because standard programs such as welfare, maternity leave, and daycare have in varying degrees given women a modicum of economic independence. Recognizing the improvements in women's lives that state intervention can deliver, feminist activists continue to press for measures such as pay equity legislation and increased funding of services for battered women. At the same time, the involvement of the state in rectifying aspects of women's subjugation entails the very kind of loss of control and over-bureaucratization of women's lives that Habermas addresses.

²⁷ *TCIII*, p. 322.

Fraser draws attention to the underlying presuppositions regarding gender that inform the organization of social welfare in modern capitalist societies, and how these assumptions are rooted in a gender division of labour.²⁸ She makes an important distinction between what she terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' social welfare subsystems.²⁹ In the masculine subsystem subjects are positioned as individual, rights-bearing beneficiaries, entitled to benefits by virtue of having earned compensation through gainful employment. Social programs typically geared towards a presumed male subject include unemployment insurance schemes, workers' compensation plans, and pension entitlements. The 'feminine' subsystem relates to its subjects as dependent clients, where benefits are distributed according to demonstrated or assessed need and rely much more heavily on the vagaries of government funding. Fraser holds that the basic unit of programs directed at female subjects, such as welfare and public housing, is the household, seen to be deficient due to its lack of a male breadwinner.³⁰ This gender division resonates throughout the social welfare system from its organization to its mode of operation and program delivery; moreover, it is rooted in and reflective of the gender division of labour, where men's labour in social production confers certain rights and privileges while women's unremunerated domestic labour does not.

Seen through the lens of gender, Habermas's identification of the bureaucratic client as a prime example of systemic colonization emphasizes the roles of economic dependency

²⁸ See Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. esp. pp. 144-187. Although Fraser investigates the operation of the social welfare system in the United States, her insights are broadly applicable to the type of social welfare bureaucracies found in Western late capitalist societies.

²⁹ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. p. 153.

³⁰ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. pp. 149-150.

historically assigned to women either in the family or now in the modern state. But the colonization thesis accomplishes this insight almost despite itself, for Habermas makes no distinction, as Fraser does, between the disparate ways in which women's and men's life situations are 'clientized'. With reference to Habermas's assertion that social welfare attenuates economic inequalities generated by capitalism, one could argue that the 'masculine' social welfare subsystem is exactly the sort of acceptable tradeoff that modern systemic rationalization delivers. In exchange for delivering up their labour power to the exigencies of the market, workers are provided with an income in periods of temporary unemployment. Individuals who are unable to secure viable employment end up in dependent client social programs like welfare. Working women also benefit from social programs directly linked to employment, but their conditions of access and eligibility are markedly different. Since women in general earn less than men, are largely confined to part-time employment, and have less job security, and therefore may not even be eligible for benefits, the 'masculine' social welfare subsystem is less able to provide an acceptable exchange of benefits for women's social labour. In addition, women, whether working or otherwise, continue to bear the brunt of responsibility for domestic labour. The combination of economic inequalities rooted in the gender division of labour and women's traditional responsibility for domestic labour, including childraising, means that women are much more susceptible to falling into a relationship of dependent bureaucratic client than men.

Yet again, an analysis of gender leads to the important question of why it is particularly women as a social group who disproportionately suffer from the kind of over-bureaucratization personified by the figure of the social welfare client. Utilizing a

communications-theoretic approach to reconstruct the typical pattern that leads from the traditional, self-supporting family to a female-headed household dependent on the state, we can concisely illustrate the shortfalls in Habermas's analyses. Along with Habermas we first assume that relationships in the family are inherently communicative. He contends that disturbances in the family stem from the intrusion of economic imperatives on the one side, and bureaucratic interference on the other, even as the organization of the patriarchal family along gender-rooted power differentials seems to suggest otherwise. Instances of severe or even violent disagreement result in the separation of husband and wife; given that women are still largely responsible for the care of children, the household is now female-headed. The combination of the gender division of labour and responsibility for domestic labour translates into restricted options for a female-headed, single-parent family in terms of economic self-sufficiency. Without state support, which is becoming increasingly meagre in late capitalist societies due to putative economic exigencies, this type of family risks having no means of sustenance. While the position of bureaucratic dependent client is a disempowering one, as Habermas rightly points out, for many female-headed households it is a necessary last resort.

An analysis along the lines of bureaucratic reification, while useful for describing the manner in which women are more prone to interact with the state administration as dependent clients, does not sufficiently explain why this is so. Although Habermas acknowledges the patriarchal organization of the family, there is no way to reconcile the power differentials obtaining therein with the notion of the family as inherently communicative. To do so would require the introduction of an analysis of the power

differentials related to gender inhering, or more extremely, *determining*, the conditions of intersubjective relations. This of course challenges the whole approach of societal integration and moves Habermas's work into the undesirable territory of starting from a perspective of social conflict.

Cultural Reification and the Unrationalized Force of Tradition

For Habermas, systemic reification of the lifeworld explains only one half of the dynamic of domination in modernity. In keeping with his general research programme of reinterpreting both Weber's loss of freedom and loss of meaning theses, Habermas supplements the colonization thesis with a notion of cultural reification. The analysis of reification effects of this type has a double purpose. Habermas wants to describe what he calls the 'impoverishment' of modern culture in terms of a 'fragmentation' of everyday communicative consciousness without solely attributing this phenomenon, in contrast to Weber, to the imposition of purposive-instrumental rationality. By framing the problem in this way, Habermas also aims to surpass both traditional Marxist critiques of ideology and Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of instrumental reason. Once I present the key elements that make up the concept of cultural reification, I will assess its utility for accounting for the oppression of women. More productively than the dynamic of systemic reification, the notion of cultural reification appears to come closer to addressing one of, if not *the*, root cause of women's domination, namely the force exerted by unrationalized traditions around gender norms, behaviour, and stereotypical roles in everyday communicative practice. As I demonstrate, however, Habermas's replacement of ideology with the notion of forms of

understanding does not surpass the explanatory and analytical power of a conception of patriarchal ideology.

With the differentiation of validity spheres made possible by the modern worldview, lifeworld institutions are formed that specialize in the investigation of either cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, or aesthetic-expressive validity claims and knowledge. These take the shape of scientific, moral-legal, and artistic enterprises whose practitioners become professionalized as experts. Even as the production of knowledge in each of these institutionalized spheres must necessarily flow back into the lifeworld's stock of meanings and traditions, "[w]hat accrues to a culture by virtue of specialized work and reflection does not come *as a matter of course* into the possession of everyday practice."³¹ This gap between expert cultures and everyday practice results in the fragmentation of everyday consciousness, where actors cannot adopt an integrated, performative attitude in communicative action in their relation to the cultural contents and traditions of their lifeworld; they are impaired in their ability to relate simultaneously to the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and expressive-aesthetic aspects of a differentiated lifeworld.³² With their consciousness fragmented in this way, individuals make their way blindly in an habitual, everyday practice that is only rationalized one-sidedly under one aspect of validity, if rationalized at all. From a societal perspective the knowledge generated by each of the cultural value spheres is at best unable to be harnessed for, nor directed to, social goals. At worst such knowledge functions

³¹ *TCAII*, p. 326. (italics in text)

³² *TCAII*, p. 355.

in the service of economic and bureaucratic imperatives, thereby advancing the systemic reification of the lifeworld.

Habermas contends that Marxist-inspired critiques of ideology, such as those of Lukács and Horkheimer and Adorno, cannot adequately grasp the causes of cultural reification because they ultimately cannot get beyond the theorization of an all-encompassing instrumental reason. Moreover, he holds that the Marxist theory of class consciousness, and the notion of ideology and false consciousness bound up with it, no longer has an empirical reference with the pacification of class conflict through the welfare state.³³ In other words, the attenuation of class struggle in welfare state democracy no longer requires the ideological role that cultural institutions in early modernity once performed. Although bourgeois cultural institutions at one point served ideology, they also inaugurated the communicative rationalization of culture insofar as the spheres of science, art, and morality ceased to rely on the authority of tradition.³⁴ Unlike the operation of sacred cultural institutions characteristic of religious-metaphysical worldviews which suppressed and resisted claims to validity and knowledge issuing from everyday practice,

...the [modern] form of understanding, now differentiated in its validity basis, becomes so transparent that the communicative practice of everyday life no longer affords any niches for the structural violence of ideologies.³⁵

³³ *TCAII*, p. 352.

³⁴ *TCAII*, p. 352.

³⁵ *TCAII*, p. 354.

For these reasons, Habermas argues that symptoms of modern cultural impoverishment must be connected to an one-sided, reificatory rationalization of the lifeworld which impairs the formation of an integrated, everyday communicative consciousness.

Following the premises of cultural reification, the notion that women's domination is related to the blind adherence to tradition obtaining in a fragmented everyday cultural practice certainly appears to contain explanatory potential. Validity claims contesting gender norms that integrate all three aspects of validity, or that even thematize gender at all, are difficult to raise in a lifeworld whose communication is in the first place deformed by systemic reification, in the second cut off from the higher-level knowledge and theoretical work generated in cultural institutions and stored in the lifeworld. Furthermore, there is the sense in Habermas's presentation of cultural reification that the production of institutional knowledge is oriented to addressing systemic imperatives, so that argumentation and validity claims that challenge gender norms are not even investigated in cultural spheres, and therefore cannot form part of the stock of lifeworld meanings.

The notion that communicative realization has attained a level of differentiation that renders ideological claims transparent, and thus eminently criticizable, offers an utopic vision of an everyday practice that can resist the colonizing tendencies of systemic reification and the uncritical corrosion of traditions resulting from the imposition of expert cultures. A feminist-inspired practice of this sort, informed by and historically drawing its inspiration from the normative claims to universality and equality made available with bourgeois cultural rationalization, would seek to rationally contest gender presuppositions inhering at both the levels of cultural institutions and everyday life. This would seem to be Habermas's

ideal model for the reintegration of everyday consciousness and its smooth connection to specialized institutional practice. Such everyday practice would be able to draw upon a stock of lifeworld knowledge generated and maintained by the work of cultural institutions in order to rationally critique its own traditions and cultural norms. In order to realize this vision, however, the notion of cultural reification must be able to improve upon critiques of patriarchal, or even patriarchal-capitalist, ideology.

The power of norms around gender, rooted in and drawing their sanctioning authority from tradition, structure and perpetuate relationships of inequality and domination between men and women. They infuse every aspect of society, from everyday communication to the formation and operation of cultural institutions and the organization of the division of labour. Under the presuppositions of communicative action, such norms are always already open to rational critique; the fact that they continue to structure social reality strongly suggests that they remain largely unthematized and therefore unrationalized. In addition men and women internalize presuppositions around appropriate gender roles and behaviour to such a degree that even in relatively uncoercive communication an appeal to tradition can carry a justificatory force over appeals to normative equality. Examples of this false consciousness would be found in situations where women agree to follow their husbands in cases of securing employment in a new location. In the rational interest of preserving the family unit and reinforcing their husband's traditional role as bread-winner, women often willingly sacrifice their own, perhaps even more lucrative, career development. A particularly extreme example of this kind of false consciousness can be discerned among female victims of

domestic abuse, where the option of staying with an abusive partner is sincerely believed to be rationally justifiable due to economic and child-rearing considerations.

The force of unrationalized norms concerning gender not only operates at the level of everyday practice, but also in the formation and operation of the cultural spheres of science, moral-legal theory, and art. Indeed, the higher-level investigation of validity claims and the production of knowledge that occur here both reinforce and extend the power of tradition to determine gender relations. Feminist critiques of the scientific enterprise, especially its biological and medical disciplines, focus on the ways in which science has produced knowledge that seeks to rationally justify power differentials in biological sex differences.³⁶ Moral-legal theory remains resistant to the reconceptualization of a moral and legal subject that includes women. Artistic criticism devalues women's craft production while artistic production represents women as sexualized objects, reinforcing traditional norms around sexual roles. Finally, in all three of these spheres, processes of exclusion and marginalization operate to restrict the access of women to the ranks of practitioners of cultural enterprises.

Reactions on the part of cultural institutions to the raising of validity claims around gender inequalities attest to the patriarchal ideological investments obtaining therein. Under the accusation of an irrational and unacceptable politicization of knowledge, cultural enterprises condemn feminist efforts to raise validity claims around gender as ideological in themselves. It is also significant that such challenges to cultural authority generally issue

³⁶ The emerging discipline of sociobiology is only the latest manifestation in this vein. One can add to this list the ongoing pathologization of women's bodies through the medicalization of pregnancy as another example.

from a grassroots, everyday practice set in motion by feminist consciousness-raising and educational work outside of institutional structures. This dynamic closely parallels Habermas's description of the model ideological functioning of religious institutions in feudal societies.³⁷ Given the rationality differential between sacred institutions and everyday practice in this social formation, cultural institutions repressed those claims to validity issuing from everyday life that threatened the coherency of religious-metaphysical worldviews.

The authority that gives cultural institutions their influence has its basis not only in the force of unrationalized tradition, but also in the communicative medium of prestige. Habermas contends that the differentiation of the modern public sphere and the concomitant splitting off of cultural value spheres is made possible through a generalization of the medium of prestige. Prestige attaches to individuals by virtue of "...physical strength,...intellectual abilities,...and the responsibility of a communicatively acting subject" and thereby generates a 'rationally motivated trust' in communicative action.³⁸ This medium becomes generalized as the mode by which more integrated and complex communicative networks take shape. Although the operation of this medium facilitates the wider circulation of already rationally legitimated, condensed consensus, it can never replace the communicative consensus at the foundation of and required by both the public and private spheres of the lifeworld. Nevertheless, when one observes that the public sphere and cultural institutions are dominated by males, it is difficult not to wonder why prestige appears to

³⁷ *TCAII*, pp. 188-189.

³⁸ *TCAII*, pp. 181-182.

remain singularly attached to male subjects. In this way we can further connect the authority accruing to cultural institutions to the operation of prestige as communicative medium and as conduit of patriarchal ideology.

Habermas qualifies his remarks on the connection between authority as prestige and the motivation to accept validity claims with the proviso that he does not "mean to raise a systematic claim with this schema."³⁹ Rather, his intention is to further describe the formation of communicative and systemic networks through the operation of the communicative media of prestige and influence, respectively. However, to suggest that the acceptance of validity claims has even a remote connection to authority leaves Habermas open to the same critique he advances against Gadamer's hermeneutics in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.⁴⁰ Habermas specifically criticized Gadamer for linking hermeneutic reflection too closely with the authority of tradition. Because Gadamer focuses on the legitimacy of prejudices validated by tradition, he does not sufficiently recognize how the moment of hermeneutic reflection renders such prejudices open to rational, communicative critique.⁴¹ Habermas thus concludes:

Authority and knowledge do not converge. Certainly, knowledge is rooted in actual tradition; it remains bound to contingent conditions. But reflection does not wear itself out on the facticity of traditional norms without leaving a trace.⁴²

³⁹ *TCAII*, p. 181.

⁴⁰ Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry Stark. (Cambridge and Oxford, U.K.: Polity Press and Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 143-170.

⁴¹ Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, pp. 169-170.

⁴² Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 170.

In the context of this critique of Gadamer, the later introduction of the idea of prestige as a communicative medium is surprising. For while Habermas wants to preserve and legitimate the authority of cultural tradition and knowledge on the basis of rational communication as opposed to blind adherence or the threat of sanction, he surely leaves open the practical possibility of the misuse of authority. As I discussed above, the claim to knowledgeable authority has often been used ideologically to reinforce women's oppression.

With the foregoing examples, it is clear that a conception of patriarchal ideology and an analysis of the false consciousness it generates in both male and female subjects is eminently useful. It is more robust in terms of explaining the ways in which communication is hindered by the lingering power and authority of tradition than Habermas's notion of a fragmented everyday consciousness. But if I have demonstrated that a critique along ideological lines is still productive for understanding women's oppression, then what does this mean for Habermas's contention that at least capitalist ideology is no longer required? From a socialist feminist perspective, a concept of patriarchal ideology must also include an analysis of how such an ideology obscures and reifies the organization of the gender division of labour. I address exactly this issue in a discussion of women's labour below.

Women's Oppression as Strategic Action

Up to this point, I have worked with the terms of Habermas's conception of domination as systemic and cultural reification to evaluate its adequacy for understanding women's domination. The overall critique that comes to light from this exercise is that although systemic and cultural reification can be useful as a general schema for discerning some

features of domination specific to women, they miss others that are crucial to a comprehensive analysis of domination. To address these inadequacies, I now want to move further in the direction of using gender to specify forms and dynamics of domination that are only suggested, or are not brought to light at all, in Habermas's analyses.

Violence against women in the form of wife battering, sexual assault, and harassment constitutes the most overt manifestation of women's domination. It is evident that one of the underlying motivations of Habermas's entire project is to replace the violent resolution of conflict and disagreement with recourse to reason grounded in mutual communication; he emphasizes that modern societies have attained the means to non-violently resolve conflict. The modern institutionalization of law has provided a means by which conflict that is in danger of becoming violent can be resolved. However, in Canada at least, ongoing disputes regarding the legal codification of sexual assault laws, as well as the difficulties in protecting women from abusive partners, would seem to suggest that either the moral-legal sphere has not attained a sufficient level of rationalization to adequately deal with these instances of complete communicative breakdown - in other words, the power of tradition continues to compete with reason within legal institutions - or that these issues are in essence not legally resolvable. How can Habermas account for this? On the one hand, the notion of law as inherently rational provides the possibility for rectifying these kinds of situations; but Habermas also relies on law as one of the motor forces that permits the rationalization of the lifeworld and the system. Without recourse to law, there are few alternatives for women in violent situations.

Outright violence is only the most extreme expression of the use of coercion; such force can also take more subtle forms ranging from thinly veiled threats to sanctions on any number of levels. Habermas's concept of strategic action is intended to describe precisely this range of interaction, as well as to especially distinguish it from communicative interaction, where the sole authoritative force is that of the better argument. While the use of strategic action has its place in the operation of systemic organizations, both on an individual and systemic level, it nevertheless cannot be used as a basis for effectively coordinating action that is inherently grounded in mutual understanding in language. In the context of women's domination, we can attempt to understand the conflicts that arise between men and women as instances of the inappropriate, coercive use of strategic action on the part of men to influence or control women.

The question that immediately comes to the fore is what motivates men to interact strategically? I now want to work through a few provisional answers to this question. Following Habermas's appropriation of Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories of ontogenetic development, we know that communicative competence, or the capacity to intuitively orient oneself to mutual understanding in language, is a learning process characteristic of the modern worldview. This capacity to communicate is developed in the transition from childhood to adulthood, accomplished through the communicative socialization that occurs in the family. Thus it would be logical to postulate *pace* Habermas that disturbances in socialization processes, due to the intrusion of systemic forces, result in the formation of male adults who are impaired in adopting a communicative versus strategic attitude in their interactions with other subjects, especially with women.

Habermas also provides another possibility for the confusion on the part of actors between behaving communicatively or strategically that can further illuminate our original question. In their relation to bureaucratic and economic organizations, subjects necessarily utilize action oriented to success to ensure the smooth functioning of these entities. Individuals must be able to 'switch' smoothly from a communicative action orientation to a strategic one in the context of formally organized domains of action:

...[P]ersons must already be able to act autonomously within the scopes for contingency marked out by abstractly and generally normed spheres of action, so that they can switch from morally defined contexts of action oriented to mutual understanding over to legally organized spheres of action without endangering their own identities.⁴³

It would seem that part of what communicative competence means is that subjects are able to intuitively adopt or change their action behaviours depending on whether they find themselves in either a system or lifeworld context. In this way we can suggest that men are not particularly competent in switching their action orientations so that they are appropriate in a given interaction situation.

Furthermore, Habermas also suggests that at times subjects may unconsciously act strategically in communicative contexts. He treats this as an instance of systematically distorted communication, where

⁴³ *TC.III*, pp. 317-318. In another context Habermas also refers to the possible need for "switching stations" to aid individuals in adopting the proper attitude in their relation to cultural institutional orders i.e. objectivating, norm-conformative, or expressive attitudes towards the spheres of science, culture, and art, respectively. See *TC.II*, p. 250.

...at least one of the parties [in communication] is deceiving himself [sic] about the fact that he is acting with an attitude oriented to success and is only keeping up the appearance of communicative action.⁴⁴

It is noteworthy that Habermas takes the consequences of such unconscious strategic action to be disturbances at the intrapsychic and interpersonal level.⁴⁵ Rather than considering this unintentional use of action oriented to success as a common, empirical feature of everyday communication, which might suggest an investigation along the lines of ideology, patriarchal or otherwise, Habermas contends that the inappropriate use of strategic action is a serious personal pathology.

The attempt to attribute women's domination to the inappropriate use of strategic action on the part of men, as promising as it may sound, is limited in its explanatory potential by the basic postulates of the theory of communicative action itself. While men's use of strategic action may explain extreme cases of violence against women, it cannot be extended to generally account for the power differentials between men and women without undercutting Habermas's guiding idea that communicative competency is a fundamental trait shared by all modern, adult speakers. Moreover, to suggest that communicative socialization in general produces male individuals who have not acquired basic communicative skills challenges the logic of evolutionary ontogenetic development. To view the family unit as a site of strategic interaction between men and women is incongruent with Habermas's understanding of the family as a communicatively-structured, core lifeworld institution. The

⁴⁴ *TCAI*, p. 332-333.

⁴⁵ *TCAI*, p. 332. For the psychiatric literature to which Habermas refers, see *TCAI*, p. 445, fn. 87.

most plausible suggestion seems to be that men's use of action oriented to success in their interaction with women is learned from and reinforced in unrationalized cultural patterns and norms concerning gender behaviour.

In a rather more polemical vein, Heller contends simply that Habermas cannot account for the motivation on the part of actors to act strategically. She remarks: "The question of whether, and, if so, how, distortion of communication is motivated cannot be answered by Habermas; nor can he answer the question of what would motivate us to get rid of the distortion."⁴⁶ Although Heller acknowledges that the interest in rational consensus would appear to be the reason for refraining from acting strategically, she is not convinced that Habermas can justify this position. For her, "the *will* to achieve consensus is the problem in question."⁴⁷

We are further left with another pressing question that resonates throughout this discussion: why do certain interactions, for example between men and women, seem to be more prone to break down in conflict than others? It is evidently impossible to list all the reasons a dialogue does not proceed to mutual agreement, but it appears that some communicative relationships are more difficult to establish than others. This query is again cut off by the inability of the theory of communicative action to consider claims to power in the lifeworld as anything other than deviations from a conflict-free norm.

⁴⁶ Agnes Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," in John Thompson and David Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), p. 25.

⁴⁷ Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," p. 25. (*italics in text*)

The Problem of Women's Labour

Thus far I have endeavoured to uncover the dynamic of women's domination within the framework of the colonization thesis, and further identified the ways in which the unrationalized force of patriarchal norms and traditions within the lifeworld itself contributes to this dynamic. I should now like to turn my attention to the problem of women's economic oppression, focusing on how the question of the gender division of labour can be accommodated within Habermas's overall understanding of labour. As I reviewed in Chapter II, Habermas's conceptual separation of labour and interaction underpins the contention that labour is in and of itself devoid of normative content. With the adoption of a systems functionalist perspective that views social labour in modernity as a realm separated off from the lifeworld, Habermas can interpret conflicts arising out of the distribution of social wealth as systems problems amenable to resolution through state intervention. Against this, I contend that the example of the gender division of labour illustrates even more clearly the shortcomings of Habermas's understanding of labour. In what follows I aim to demonstrate this critique in three parts. First, I present a review of the position occupied by the gender division of labour in Habermas's account of the historical development of social formations. Next, I analyze the scope and effectiveness of state intervention as a means to address women's unequal share of social wealth as a systems problem. Finally, I attempt to interpret women's labouring activities in terms of the distinction between symbolic and material reproduction.

In the course of his presentation of the transition from primitive to modern social formations, culminating in the differentiation of system from lifeworld, Habermas remarks

that one of ways in which primitive societies divided up the labour associated with material reproduction was according to sex.⁴⁸ As norm-free, formally organized domains of action become highly rationalized in modernity, the empirical knowledge accumulated in purposive-rational action becomes transmissible in the form of technology. Consequently, Habermas claims "purposive activity gets detached from unspecific age and sex roles."⁴⁹ The division of labour according to gender operative in modernity seriously challenges this claim. When such phenomena as women's continuing occupational ghettoization, wage differentials between men and women, the preponderance of women in part-time employment, women's comparatively less job security, and women's general responsibility for domestic labour are considered, I believe we can assume, against Habermas, that in modernity gender remains a strong determinant of one's place in social labour. If we adopt a functionalist, norm-free approach, then we are led to conclude that the gender division of labour in the modern capitalist economy is not normatively analyzable. Even more poignantly than the discussion of labour in general, this approach potentially ignores one of the primary modes of women's oppression.

Habermas contends that the welfare state has for the most part successfully attenuated problems related to the distribution of social wealth, now understood as systemic crises, that formerly expressed themselves in what Marx identified as symptoms of class conflict. However, the example of women's position in social labour and the gendered organization of the social welfare programs meant to address women's unequal share of social wealth

⁴⁸ *TCAII*. p. 159.

⁴⁹ *TCAII*. p. 195.

render the welfare state-economy dynamic even less convincing. As I presented above, working women either do not benefit to the same degree as men from welfare state provisions, or, due to their assigned responsibilities for domestic labour and childraising, are more likely to be shunted into the role of dependent bureaucratic client. It is telling that state efforts to ameliorate women's inferior economic status through new and improved welfare state entitlements are often met with strong opposition on the grounds that such measures impede the efficient operation of the economy.⁵⁰

It would be tempting to draw on Habermas's account of social formations as both systems and lifeworlds to argue that the exploitation of women's labour is founded on the power of unrationalized gender norms. We could then suggest that traditions around gender roles have carried over from primitive societies into modern ones, and continue to influence the organization of material reproduction. This would be expressed in such phenomena as women's responsibility for the raising of children, and in the ideological pressure directed to women to reproduce. This line of analysis must be discounted, however, when we consider that for Habermas one of the signal features of the modern economic system is that it is rationalized purposive-instrumentally. This means that unlike primitive social formations, material reproduction in the system is neither tied to nor directed by imperatives of tradition or culture, but rather attains its high level of systemic integration and efficiency precisely because it has jettisoned these.

⁵⁰ An example of this dynamic can be found in the introduction of legislation to reevaluate the value of women's labour and to provide compensation, if appropriate. Interestingly, resistance to these initiatives on the part of employers often coalesces around issues of profitability and the unwanted intrusion of government regulation.

One of the key aspects of the gender division of labour concerns the work that women perform in the home, or domestic labour. The responsibility for activities such as housekeeping, shopping, meal preparation and service, and most especially childraising and care of extended family members has historically devolved to women family members or female domestic labourers. Unlike labour in the public domain, this kind of labour, with the exception of poorly paying domestic work, typically falls outside of the wage-labour relationship. Indeed, one of the major points of confrontation between feminism and Marxism has been the applicability of the waged labour model for comprehending domestic labour. To assess whether or not Habermas can offer any insights on this question, we have to return to his conception of the family as a site of affective, personal relationships and communicative socialization, outside of the public domain of social labour.

As we have seen, Habermas seems to relegate labour in general to the realm of the system as the site of the material reproduction processes that sustain the lifeworld. For its part, the lifeworld reproduces itself symbolically through the continuous communicative achievements of its members. Although this distinction between material and symbolic reproduction supports Habermas's insightful conception of domination as the systemic colonization of the lifeworld, it is nonetheless challenged by the problematic of women's domestic labour both in the family and in the public domain. Are activities associated with domestic work instances of symbolic or material reproduction, or both? Considering domestic labour solely under the terms of labour as purposive-instrumental, ends-means activity would seem to augur for the logical inclusion of the family in the realm of systemic organizations. Then again, as Nancy Fraser notes, viewing domestic work as exclusively

communicative socialization seems to altogether miss the physical exertion and work involved, for example, in the care of infants and preparation of meals.⁵¹

The conceptual confusion between material and symbolic reproduction exemplified by the example of domestic labour in the family suggests, as Fraser does, that we view such activity as an instance of both symbolic *and* material reproduction.⁵² This tack on the question is immediately suggestive of Habermas's comparisons of tribal and modern social formations, distinguished from each other by their levels of system-lifeworld differentiation. It is again tempting to see the family as a microcosm of primitive societies, where the organization of labour in the modern family and pre-modern societies is closely tied to traditions and culture related to gender differences. As enticing as this line of thinking appears, it rests on a number of assumptions that contradict Habermas's logic. The family in its role as site of communicative socialization is one of the foundational institutions of the modern, internally differentiated lifeworld; for the family to be internally undifferentiated analogous to early social formations would render it highly and illogically anachronistic in a modern world differentiated into system and lifeworld. This is a point with which many feminists would not disagree, but this assumes that the family requires and itself performs the reproduction of its material existence. As we have seen, this is a direction that is unable to be accommodated within the terms of Habermas's analysis.

⁵¹ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. pp. 115-116.

⁵² Borrowing from Martin Schwab, Fraser suggests the term "dual aspect activity" to refer to work involved in childrearing. She further notes that social labour in the system is far from devoid of symbolic meaning. See Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. p. 116, also p. 139, fn. 6.

Another significant aspect of the problematic of women's labour that is directly relevant to my purposes here has to do with the reproduction of labour power. This question is doubly important. In the first place, as Althusser reminds us, societies not only have to reproduce themselves materially through labour, but they must also replace and replenish the labour power that renders material production possible at all.⁵³ Secondly, the gender division of labour further determines how this reproduction of labour power is organized, as it is generally women who are responsible for bearing, raising, and socializing children in preparation for their roles in the labour force. Habermas is hard-pressed to provide a response to the first question due to the same problem we just outlined above: is the reproduction of labour power an example of material or symbolic reproduction? The socialization of subjects, either communicative or ideological, is no doubt important for the creation and maintenance of a pool of labour adapted to the exigencies of a capitalist organization of production. At the same time, the only conceptual option Habermas provides for analyzing the actual labour involved in such socialization processes, specifically in the family, is that of purposive-instrumental action related to material reproduction. Because of the difficulty in addressing the first question, the issue of the actual organization of the reproduction of labour power along gender lines becomes even more opaque. If we comprehend the family along strictly communicative lines, then we might consider the force of unrationalized tradition to be operative in assigning the responsibility for socialization of

⁵³ Althusser additionally emphasizes the important role of the educational system in this process of reproducing labour power. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Althusser, *Levin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster. (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121-173, esp. pp. 125-129.

children to women. However, this leaves no conceptual room for engaging with the labour involved in such activity. To consider domestic labour entirely along purposive-instrumental lines, which verges on problematic, we fall into the general problem raised previously of conceptualizing the division of labour, gender or otherwise, as merely a functional requirement of the highly-rationalized modern economic system.

In her feminist analysis of the theory of communicative action, Fraser attempts to sort out the confusion between symbolic and material reproduction. Her work is instructive in that she investigates Habermas's conceptual distinctions between "systemically integrated action contexts" and "socially integrated action contexts", and between system and lifeworld. to grasp the ways in which these divisions are both useful or potentially ideological.⁵⁴ She proposes two general readings depending on whether or not these separations are taken to be absolute or differences of degree. The distinction between material and symbolic reproduction may similarly be considered as a difference of natural kinds or interpreted pragmatically according to the context under analysis.⁵⁵ While Fraser sees the distinction between unreflective, unrationalized consensus and rationalized, communicative agreement as an important critical tool, her analyses continually return to the manner in which Habermas's acute analytical distinctions obscure, rather than clarify, the complexities of women's domination.

Even without engaging with the problematic of women's domestic labour, Habermas's understanding of the family as purged of its direct economic function, and thus wholly within

⁵⁴ See Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. pp. 116-117.

⁵⁵ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. pp. 115, 117.

the lifeworld, is contentious in other respects. Benhabib comments that considering the family as threatened from welfare-state bureaucratic imperatives ignores the historical connection of the family to administrative systems in early capitalism through child labour legislation and public concerns over, or more extremely, control of, women's health and reproduction. To overlook such phenomena engenders an obliviousness "to the fact that the monogamous nuclear family historically has been the arena for the oppression of women."⁵⁶ While it is true that the family unit no longer plays the direct role in economic production that it once did, at the same time the family in modern capitalist societies has been transformed into a relatively stable unit of consumption congruent with the evolution of late capitalism from primary to tertiary or service production.⁵⁷ From a socialist feminist perspective, a patriarchal organization of the family is essential and necessary for the operation of the capitalist economy. This perspective, made visible through an analysis of women's labour, is at odds with Habermas's conception of society as system and lifeworld.

Women's Emancipation Through Communicative Rationalization

I now want to turn to a more explicit engagement with the practice of emancipation that follows from the postulates of the domination as reification thesis. The intent is to describe

⁵⁶ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 251-252.

⁵⁷ This change is of course generally confined to Western late capitalist societies, and I do not intend to imply that manufacturing production does not continue to play a significant role. However, given the contemporary trend towards globalization of the world economy, much manufacturing production has been transferred to traditional societies in economic transition while late capitalist societies attempt to focus on the production of 'high-value' goods and services. It is entirely significant that women in traditional societies typically perform the low-skilled, low-paying labour involved in certain industrial sectors such as textiles. This global economic perspective, and Habermas's theoretical responses to it, warrants a more detailed analysis than I can offer here.

how the critical potential of communicative critique can be actualized in everyday practice. The secondary aim to see how this notion of practice through communication may be used to comprehend and assess the utility of actual feminist political demands and struggles.

While Habermas is not explicit with respect to the actual practical forms such an emancipatory practice would assume, it would follow from the logic of communicative action that this practice would operate on two fronts. First of all, there is the engagement with the intrusion of systemic imperatives. This form would involve measures to combat the increasing bureaucratization and monetarization of women's lives. The second direction consists of an ongoing communicative rationalization of those lifeworld segments in which male domination is rooted. In general these efforts would consist of constantly challenging traditions and cultural norms around gender roles through the ongoing rationalization of everyday communicative practice. After I present Habermas's conception of emancipatory practice, I will more fully explore the utility of these two forms of emancipatory practice for feminist struggles.

Emancipatory political practice for Habermas assumes both a productive form and a defensive posture. He suggests that overcoming domination lies in

...building institutions of freedom that protect communicatively structured areas of the private and public spheres against the reifying inner dynamics of the economic and administrative systems, and reconnecting modern culture to an everyday practice that, while dependent on meaning-bestowing traditions, has been impoverished with traditionalist left-overs.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *TCAII*, p. 328.

Liberating practice is creative in terms of seeking to establish structures that reflect and encourage the increasing communicative rationalization and differentiation of the lifeworld. Its defensive aspect lies in identifying and addressing the communication-dependent areas of life that have become subjected to systemic imperatives and thereby deformed. The struggle to overcome domination must also work towards the reconnection of everyday practice to the normative potentials of equality and universality made available with modern cultural rationalization, in order for such resources to be realized practically. Critical reflection on traditions in the form of communicative critique frees subjects from the hold exerted by unrationalized consensus. In Habermas's words, "...the lifeworld loses its prejudgmental power over everyday communicative practice to the degree that actors owe their mutual understanding to *their own* interpretative performances."⁵⁹ Relying on and wholly participating in transparent processes of communication empowers individuals to create new forms of life that radically depend only on the force of reason. In this way the emancipatory project that follows from the postulates of the theory of communicative action entails the social reconstruction of everyday life through rational critique, as well as the formation of institutions that safeguard this effort from systemic reification.

Habermas notes that the practical aims of new social movements, especially the women's movement, centre on the creation of new forms of life not beholden to unrationalized tradition. He is much less explicit as to the form that freedom-guaranteeing

⁵⁹ *TCAII*, p. 133. (italics in text)

institutions should take and the way in which they will resist reifying incursions.⁶⁰ Furthermore, unless one advocates the radical, anarcho-separatist alternative of a minimal organization of authority and material reproduction, such institutions must logically be connected to state and economic subsystems.⁶¹ This raises questions around whether or not the interchange roles of employee, consumer, client, and citizen are able to be immunized against reifying dynamics, or if heretofore unknown lifeworld identities need to be formulated.

The historical and contemporary objectives of the women's movement can be generally categorized as both the critique and transformation of an everyday practice infused with traditions around gender roles, and the appeal for legislative reform to remedy legal and economic injustices. Whether a feminist-inspired everyday consciousness oriented to rational critique rises up to the task of providing a higher-level, holistically integrated everyday practice that is able to orient itself appropriately to the complex of validity expressed in communicative action is open to debate. Habermas suggests that despite its emancipatory orientation to universal ideals, "there is an element of particularism that connects feminism with [resistance and withdrawal] movements."⁶² However, feminism also transcends mere particularism because its analyses of the power differentials inhering in the

⁶⁰ Jean Cohen criticizes both Habermas's early and later work for inadequately theorizing the potential of new social movements to generate radical institutional reform. See her "Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas," in Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas*. pp. 60-62.

⁶¹ Even attempts on the part of women's separatist movements to create communities free of domination, patriarchal or otherwise, have had to grapple with the inescapability of relating to formal bureaucratic and economic systems. For a discussion of the theoretical and practical issues involved in such separatist practice, please consult the essays collected in *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, eds. (London: Onlywomen Press, 1991).

⁶² *TCAII*. p. 393.

relations between men and women are applicable to the analysis of power claims attaching to social relations *in general*. In order to develop this broader perspective, feminist theory and practice constantly struggles to incorporate the dimensions of class, race, and sexuality within its framework.⁶³

From the perspective of repelling systemic intrusions upon the lifeworld, feminist initiatives aimed at socially progressive changes in the economic and state administrative spheres have to be characterized as ambivalent with regard to their emancipatory potential. Demands for the establishment of a system of state-subsidized or even privately-funded daycare can be understood as encouraging the penetration of systemic imperatives into one of the core institutions of the lifeworld i.e. the family, thereby threatening the socialization processes that occur there. Addressing the issue of remuneration for women's unpaid domestic labour in the form of tax credits or similar measures likewise introduces administrative and economic imperatives into the family unit. Although the measures described above are intended to improve women's lives, significantly through opportunities for economic self-sufficiency, Habermas's colonization thesis reads these efforts as abetting the systemic reification of communicatively-structured lifeworld contexts. For these reasons, Fraser contends that Habermas's conception of domination potentially could be used ideologically to justify the denial of the kinds of measures outlined above.⁶⁴

⁶³ For an overview of some of the difficulties as well as the promise of feminist projects of this type, see Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through - Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995).

⁶⁴ Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. pp. 121-122.

The Problem of Problematization of Validity Claims

Communicative action as an emancipatory practice must necessarily be actualized in a real, concrete world marked by inequalitarian social relations and power. In what follows I put forth the claim that the rational challenging of validity claims in everyday practice, if not in general, may entail the assumption of substantial risk on the part of those who do so from a real position of inequality. To illustrate, I work through two hypothetical examples to demonstrate the ways in which the powerful potential of rational, communicative critique may be bound by power differentials expressed through sanctions, and, in the more extreme case, may be neutralized altogether by the power of ideology. I explore this issue within the context of Habermas's presentation of the problematization or thematization of validity claims. His aim is to demonstrate the connection between communicative action and the commonly-held, quasi-transcendental lifeworld which it simultaneously presupposes and renews. Working closely with Habermas, I will briefly reconstruct how this takes place.

Although participants in communicative action thematically stress only one particular validity claim relating to either the objective, social, or subjective worlds, they also accept the implicit validity claims commensurate with the other two worlds contained in the thematized claim.⁶⁵ As a general prerequisite to communicative action, all participants in the interaction need to share a common situation definition in order to ensure that all are clear about the particular lifeworld segment being thematized:

⁶⁵ *TCAII*, pp. 120-121.

The background of a communicative utterance is thus formed by situation definitions that, as measured against the need for actual mutual understanding, have to overlap to a sufficient extent.⁶⁶

In cases where the commonality of the situation definition cannot be presupposed,

...the actors have to draw upon the means of strategic action, with an orientation to coming to a mutual understanding, so as to bring about a common definition of the situation or to negotiate one directly.⁶⁷

In thematizing a particular claim, participants throw a specific segment of the lifeworld into relief. The theme of the interaction can be changed at any time, meaning that a new, previously unproblematic segment of the lifeworld can be introduced into the interaction for discussion. A lifeworld segment only becomes problematizable, and therefore open to communicative critique, when it becomes relevant, or is deemed to be relevant, by the interaction participants:

It is only in becoming relevant to a situation that a segment of the lifeworld comes into view as something that is taken for granted culturally, that rests on interpretation, and that, now that it can be thematized, has lost this mode of unquestionable givenness.⁶⁸

The first example I want to analyze is one that Habermas himself presents as an illustration of the way in which communicative action connects to the lifeworld. It concerns a group of construction workers who need to procure some beer at the time of their mid-

⁶⁶ *TCAII*, p. 121.

⁶⁷ *TCAII*, p. 121. As I pointed out in Chapter I, Habermas also refers to the use of strategic elements in coming to an understanding about a situation. See *TCAI*, p. 331, and Chapter II, p. 44.

⁶⁸ *TCAII*, p. 132.

morning break. To this end, "one of the older workers comes up with the *plan* to send the 'new guy', who, given his status, cannot easily get around this request."⁶⁹ Now, in their understandings of the situation all participants presuppose a common situation definition. If this is not indeed the case, then a discussion or negotiation has to occur in order to align each participant's situation definitions and thus for communication to proceed. Habermas does not explain whether this discussion is a communicative one, if it depends on a decision in light of the perceived need for reaching understanding, or if it is a negotiation of subjective strategic interests. Instead, he simply notes that:

We can imagine continuations of this conversation [related to arriving at a common situation definition] indicating that one or other of the parties changes his initial definition of the situation and brings it into accord with the situation definitions of the others.⁷⁰

In keeping with the conception of the lifeworld as a horizon that provides the frame of reference for communication, the communicative interaction can only problematize a small segment of the lifeworld - the entire lifeworld itself cannot be brought into question. In the context of the example of fetching beer for the mid-morning break, Habermas elaborates this idea as follows: "The facts that a single-family house is going up here, *that the newcomer is a foreign 'guest worker' with no social security*...are circumstances irrelevant to the given situation."⁷¹ Habermas's point is that these circumstances are not immediately relevant, but only become so if and when the theme of the situation is changed.

⁶⁹ *TCAII*, p. 121. (italics in text)

⁷⁰ *TCAII*, p. 122.

⁷¹ *TCAII*, p. 123. (italics mine)

Let us say that the 'new guy' who has been asked to perform the beer-fetching task is in fact a 'guest worker' or *Gastarbeiter* ineligible for social security benefits.⁷² Given the presuppositions of communicative action, all claims to validity are in principle rationally criticizable. As the interaction proceeds, the guest worker questions the request made of him, changing the theme of the interaction by suggesting that the reason it is he who is asked is due to his status as a guest worker. He further puts forth that his low position in the group of workers is also because of this status. In critiquing the request through an appeal to universal equality, the guest worker challenges the other workers to rationally justify the rightness of the collective norm that would lead them to suggest the request of him in the first place.

The interaction can have a number of possible outcomes. The group of workers can agree that it is unfair to assume that the 'low man on the pole' should automatically be tasked with the request, and that yes, it is also unjust that guest workers often occupy inferior positions because of attitudes towards them as a social group. Consequently, the workers consensually decide that in future the task of fetching beer for the mid-morning break will be equally shared among all members of the group. Due to the interaction, they may also have begun to rationally question their own uncritical assumptions regarding guest workers.

On the other hand the group of workers may disagree that the request is unfair; neither side may be convinced by the arguments of the other and, given the time constraints of the

⁷² The term 'guest worker' or *Gastarbeiter* refers to members of the pool of comparatively inexpensive immigrant labour found in predominantly Western European countries. While dependent on this labour, Western European states continue to wrestle with the issue of granting full citizenship to such workers. As I have previously alluded, the historical international division of labour and its contemporary expression in the globalization of the world economy need to be addressed in Habermas's understanding of the operation of capitalism in modern societies.

work break, communication may break down or be deferred to a later time. So the end result may be that consensus is not reached and the older worker goes and buys the beer himself. Although the lifeworld depends on it, there is no guarantee that communicative action will always be successful. But the repercussions for the guest worker could be considerable. In raising the issue of his status and its possible correlation to his position in the group of workers, he may be branded as a troublemaker, may from then on be ostracized from the group, and may even eventually lose his job due to his outspokenness. Differences in power mean discrepancies in the power to sanction and the ability to respond to it.

The second example has to do with an interaction that is more directly connected to feminist emancipatory practice. Consider the following utterance:

Honey, please iron my shirt.

Without even first spelling out a concrete context, and even though there are numerous other practical interpretations, most speakers would likely and quickly reconstruct the situation intimated by the utterance in the following way: namely, that the situation concerns a husband's workday morning preparations which include wearing a pressed shirt in order to meet white collar workplace norms regarding personal grooming. The theme of the situation is that the husband has to get to work on time, the goal is to have an ironed shirt, while the plan is to ask his wife to do the work. The thematized validity claim raised assumes that ironing the shirt is existentially possible insofar as the equipment and skills to accomplish the task are accessible. In making the request of his wife, the husband also appeals to its normative rightness - the request is in keeping with collective social norms regarding gender

roles. Finally, the husband claims subjective sincerity in that the expression of the need for an ironed shirt is an honest one and not a desire to manipulate.

Similarly to the guest worker, the wife can challenge the complex of validity claims raised by her husband on any number of fronts. She may argue that it is unfair that it is always she who does the ironing and that one of the reasons this happens is because her husband has never learned how, or she may claim that always asking her to do the ironing is in fact a means by which her husband reinforces his dominant status over her. These issues can be rationally addressed, and various agreements can be reached. The wife will iron the shirt this time, rendering the communicative interaction successful, but since her husband has been rationally convinced of the unfairness of the division of labour within the household reflected in this task, he agrees in future to learn how to iron and perhaps take on other domestic duties. He could further agree that yes, his requests of her reflect his uncritical acceptance of gender roles and are an expression of the power differentials related to such roles. With this outcome, consensus around the plan is achieved and the critical potential of communicative critique has been actualized.

On the other hand mutual understanding around the request may not be reached, and the task goes unfulfilled. Or, even if communicative action was successful, the husband may feel usurped and potentially resentful. In future these outcomes may lead him in turn to question his wife's commitment to him, or to reassert his authority and status as head of the household in any number of ways. The wife could potentially find herself subject to a range of sanctions stemming from gender inequalities and her attempt to rationally address them.

If the wife, and the guest worker from the first example, agree to the requests made of them, then of course the examples count as instances of the attainment of communicative consensus. However, if the requests are generated in the first place from an unreflective and unconscious internalization of unrationalized norms around gender and status on the part of the workers and the husband, and accepted uncritically by the wife and the guest worker, then these can only be understood as instances of the power of ideology to influence or even determine interaction. Even as the power of rational, communicative critique can bring the unrationalized character of norms into view and expose their ideological basis, this potential can remain unutilized as critique. Communicative action as coordination of action is necessary for the lifeworld and its members; communicative action as rational critique of domination is only a potential that is contained within communication, but does not necessarily become realized in actual practice.

Benhabib's discussion of the transposition of communicative ethics into everyday life addresses some of the issues I have outlined above. First of all, she is sensitive to the influence that unequal social relations and power may express in dialogue:

In conditions of asymmetrical dialogue roles, it is clear that the potential exists for the achieved consensus to be neither rational nor genuine...The presence of power relations between the parties casts doubt on whether they were motivated by the force of the better argument alone.⁷³

In addition she suggests that differences in status may create situations where reciprocal recognition does not exist, and communication is not plausible. From this, she wonders

⁷³ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. p. 285.

whether “social conflicts, [and] also familial and erotic ones, may resist being cast into the discourse model of conflict resolution.”⁷⁴ The decision to engage in or refrain from communication, trenchant for the examples I raised above, is interestingly cast by Benhabib as sometimes involving the use of ‘strategic-political cleverness’; she suggests that “both moral sagacity and strategic-politic savvy would be involved in the application of communicative ethics to life contexts.”⁷⁵ The potential for self-transformation and moral learning in communication is also identified by Benhabib: “If participants in a discourse have conflicting interests, then they could reach consensual agreement either by foregoing some of these interests or by changing the life forms that generate them.”⁷⁶

My point in analyzing the examples of the *Gastarbeiter* and the wife in such detail is to attempt to show the real, practical obstacles that subjects encounter in addressing domination through communicative critique. Just as in formally organized, systemic domains of action, the potential threat of sanction due to power differentials inhering in social relations often causes individuals to pursue communicative action oriented to a critique of domination with reservation. As I have tried to demonstrate throughout this chapter with the example of women's oppression, Habermas's attribution of domination to systemic forces outside the lifeworld renders it difficult to adequately bring out lifeworld conflicts rooted in differences of power in social relations. The emancipatory practice that

⁷⁴ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. p. 321.

⁷⁵ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. pp. 321-322.

⁷⁶ Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. p. 311.

ensues from the theory of communicative action is likewise constrained by its insufficient attention to these conflicts of power.

The Problem of Labour Revisited

Overall the emancipatory project envisioned by the theory of communicative action logically points to the rational, communicative determination of the totality of human life. In this way reason as communication can practically actualize the potentiality for freedom and equality only abstractly conceptualized in modern thought, thus moving beyond the one-sided formulation of reason as exclusively reification or instrumental reason. The communicative project points to the creation of new institutions within the lifeworld that establish the conditions for the rationalization of everyday culture and tradition, thereby overcoming their force and the uncritical acceptance of norms. It also suggests the formation of new, radically democratic institutions that establish and nurture engaged political participation through communication. If necessary and appropriate, communicatively-achieved democratic decisions are translated into administrative objectives to be realized by the most efficient means available.

So far this emancipatory vision remains faithful to the Enlightenment ideals of equality and freedom through reason - ideals which are likewise at the root of Marxist and socialist projects. However, in keeping with the communicative project of emancipation as rendering freedom concretely real in practice, this vision must logically include the communicative determination of the conditions of material reproduction and of the labour involved therein. In the terminology of the theory of communicative action this would entail the establishment

of the hegemony of the lifeworld over the system, where the lifeworld democratically determines the conditions of its own material reproduction. As I presented in Chapter II, Habermas is clearly averse to the inclusion of the communicative determination of labour as an emancipatory goal. Throughout his whole corpus he consistently rejects the rule of the lifeworld over the system because of the 'de-differentiation of hypercomplex conditions of life' this would entail, resulting in an unacceptable regression from the high levels of functionalization, specialization and integration that deliver the high material standards of modern life.⁷⁷ Habermas continues to hold to the inapplicability of a radical democratic model that seeks to determine the ends of systemic organizations:

From that time on [since the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*] I have considered state apparatus and economy to be systemically integrated action fields that can no longer be transformed democratically from within, that is, be switched over to a political mode of integration, without damage to their proper systemic logic and therewith their ability to function.⁷⁸

For Habermas, the Marxist-inspired vision of freedom from domination through the collective determination of material reproduction is a nostalgic leftover from the days of early capitalism; it is neither a theoretically nor practically tenable alternative in a modern society characterized by the high degree of functional and intersystemic complexity found in the state administration and capitalist economy.

⁷⁷ *PDM*, p. 67.

⁷⁸ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," p. 444.

For women, this means that the question of women's labour cannot be addressed as part of emancipation through communication. We can envision the paradoxical situation where women would become engaged democratic citizens, but would *still* be responsible for domestic labour in the home and would *still* continue to perform labour in the public domain under conditions determined by the gender division of labour. Both of these aspects of women's labour would not, and indeed, could not, be communicatively resolved without leading to undesirable deformations in the operation of the system. For women, Habermas's position ultimately presents an inverse to Marx. Instead of women ridding themselves of oppression as labourers, yet still subjugated as women, Habermas gives us women free of gender oppression rooted in unrationalized tradition, yet still oppressed as either poorly paid or unremunerated labourers. The emancipatory project intimated by the theory of communicative action is unable to comprehend women's domination as a totality comprising the gender division of labour and patriarchal social relations.

Conclusion

The theory of communicative action represents Habermas's most developed attempt to date to construct a critical social theory with emancipatory intent. Insofar as it presents a sustained and forceful argument for the rejuvenation of the positive potential of reason - an effort that had been given up for lost by Horkheimer and Adorno - it substantially advances the project of critical theory and of modernity. The elaboration of a concept of communicative reason that, in stark contrast to an instrumentalizing reason, engenders rather than stifles liberation recovers the moment of hope for a better future. The grounding of critique in linguistically-mediated intersubjectivity not only provides its own normative justification, but also argues for a wholesale shift in critical social thought from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language. Habermas's incorporation of a wide variety of disciplines within the theory of communicative action recasts the relationship between philosophy and science in a theoretically productive way, and thus fulfills the original interdisciplinary programme of early critical theory.

Despite these significant achievements, the real proof of the value of the theory of communicative action, as with any theory that claims to address itself to the problem of domination and emancipation, must lie in its congruency with actual social struggles. Nancy Fraser, quoting a letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge, believes that Marx's definition of critical

theory as "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" has yet to be surpassed.¹ It is with this orientation in mind that I endeavoured in the work I present here to utilize Habermas's conception of domination as systemic and cultural reification to identify and account for women's domination.

As I have hoped to demonstrate, however, the results of the examination of the lifeworld colonization thesis in terms of its applicability to women's domination are at best ambivalent, at worst, inadequate. These reservations are useful in that they underscore larger difficulties with the theory of communicative action. On the positive side, the notion of cultural reification seems to capture that force of unrationalized tradition around gender norms that so strongly informs women's everyday life. Even as Habermas appears to assign more emphasis and explanatory weight to systemic intrusions upon the lifeworld, the potential for the dialogical, rational redemption of unreflectively internalized gender norms and roles offers women an avenue for addressing patriarchal social relations. The notion of systemic reification for its part also focuses attention on the ways in which instrumental reason, or purposive-rationality, deforms women's lives through the over-monetarization and -bureaucratization of communicatively-structured, intersubjective contexts. At the level of practice, feminist demands for state intervention to redress gender inequalities can be shown to be double-edged; while such measures have no doubt improved many women's lives, the role of asymmetrical dependency personified in the bureaucratic client may actually prevent

¹ Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 113. Marx's letter, "Letter to A. Ruge, September 1843," is collected in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*. L. Colletti, ed., trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

women from realizing the goal of full social equality. Finally, Habermas's attempt to render the modern normative ideals of universal equality and justice not only as foundational presuppositions of communication, but also operative in communicative practice, represents a powerful potential for women's emancipation.

On the less positive side, the ensemble of concepts contained within the theory of communicative action prove to be unwieldy and at times contradictory when used to account for the power differentials inhering in relations between men and women. Attempting to account for men's use of strategic action as the result of deformed socialization processes leading to the impairment of communicative competence is contradicted by the logic of ontogenetic development that Habermas uses to conceive of such competence in the first place. In its deployment as the logic of social evolution, ontogenesis again undermines the possibility of accounting for the gender division of domestic labour in the family in terms of the conflation of material and symbolic reproduction. As Fraser rightly points out, much of women's activities are strongly suggestive of both material and symbolic reproduction processes.

The most significant, and ultimately intractable, problem with Habermas's account of domination is found in the marked inability of either systems functionalism or communicative action to address women's economic domination. Women's specific position in social production and their primary role in reproduction, especially the socialization of labour power, resists conceptualization as either norm-free, purposive-rational action or as communicatively-structured. In order to capture this economic dimension of women's oppression, I purposely selected a socialist feminist perspective as

my critical frame of reference. The attention to the gender division of labour, to both women's social and domestic labour, seems to me to be imperative if a complete account of women's domination is to be developed. As we saw with Habermas's reading of labour in Hegel and Marx, because Habermas decidedly considers labour to be exclusively a monological and epistemological category, locating normative and moral questions exclusively in the realm of interaction as communication, the problem of the gender division of labour finds little, if any, theoretical room. Even as the system-lifeworld distinction is immediately analogous to and offers support for a dual systems approach to women's oppression, its inability to locate the problem of women's labour severely restricts its utility for a socialist feminist project that aims to restructure the division of labour along more egalitarian lines.

Thus there is little the theory of communicative action can contribute to advancing socialist feminism beyond the methodological impasse of the dual systems debate. If one is willing to accept Fraser's account of the gender subtext operative in the interchange relations between system and lifeworld, Habermas may even have unwittingly underlined the unity of patriarchy and capitalism; for Fraser is clear that reading gender into Habermas's account of the interchange relations between system and lifeworld

reveals that male dominance is intrinsic rather than accidental to classical capitalism, for the institutional structure of this social formation is actualized by means of gendered roles. It follows that the forms of male dominance at issue here are not properly understood as lingering forms of premodern status inequality.²

² Fraser, *Unruly Practices*. p. 128.

As theory and practice must be related, it is not surprising then that the theoretical difficulties of the theory of communicative action in accounting for women's domination generate problems at the level of an emancipatory practice. Habermas's methodological emphasis on a problematic of societal integration, as opposed to one of social conflict, renders it difficult to discern the practical risks involved in activating communicative critique and rationalization as emancipation. Moreover, the high degree of harmony, consensus, and coordination among social subjects in the lifeworld raises the question as to the basis on which discord could come about. A common theme among Habermas interpreters is precisely this sense that the task of emancipation has already come to fruition. In Benhabib's words:

If the problem with early critical theory seemed to be that their conception of utopian reason was so esoteric as not to allow embodiment in the present, the difficulty with Habermas's concept is that it seems like such a natural outcome of the present that it is difficult to see what would constitute an emancipatory break with the present if communicative rationality were fulfilled.³

For his part, Honneth posits that "the basic concepts [of communications theory] are laid out from the beginning as though the process of liberation from alienated work relations, which Marx had in mind, were already historically complete."⁴

Of course, Habermas's is not the only argument in favour of a paradigm shift to language and discourse as the focus of critical social theory. As alternative discursive

³ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 277.

⁴ Axel Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action," in *New German Critique*. 26 (Spring-Summer 1982), p. 54.

conceptions of domination, various post-structuralist theories, notably Foucault's, incisively identify multiple manifestations of power constellations operative in modern society, even as they ultimately may be unable to logically justify their own normative critique. Curiously analogous to these accounts of domination as anonymous configurations of power, Habermas's conception of reification desubjectifies - Honneth contends that it eliminates - both the target of oppression and the addressee of emancipation.⁵ The similarity between systemically distorted communication and Foucault's analysis of discourses has been noted by Habermas himself.⁶ The pronounced element of desubjectification in these alternative accounts, as well as the lack of sustainable normative foundations, pose problems as models of women's domination. As Dews emphasizes with specific reference to Foucault, it is inconceivable for domination to make any sense without a coherent articulation of that which some force or entity 'subdues' or 'crushes'.⁷ Without a subject to which domination refers a feminist critique on the basis of gender verges on problematic; with weak concepts of normative critique, feminist analyses may encounter difficulties in distinguishing women's specific oppression from other forms.

⁵ Agnes Heller strongly articulates this issue in her essay, "Habermas and Marxism," in John Thompson and David Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates*. (Cambridge, Mass : MIT Press, 1983), pp. 21-41; See also Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action," pp. 46-47.

⁶ Habermas remarks that similarly to Foucault "I too think that relations of power are incorporated in the least ostensive forms of communication, and that analysis of systemically distorted communication yields results analogous to Foucault's analysis of discourses." *A&S*. p. 74; Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato additionally note the way in which Habermas's conceptions of reification and juridification integrate Foucault's critique of modern disciplinary techniques. See their "Politics and the Reconstruction of the Concept of Civil Society," in Axel Honneth, et al, eds., *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*. trans. by Barbara Fultner. (Cambridge, Mass., and London, U.K.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 133-134.

⁷ Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*. (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 145, 162.

In closing, it appears that the linguistic turn in contemporary critical social theory has mixed possibilities for furnishing a comprehensive account of women's domination that emphasizes, or at least substantially includes, the problem of women's labour. Arising in response to these ambivalent theoretical potentials, the emerging programmatic approach of materialist feminism seems to offer some promise.⁸ Reacting to the perceived uncritical appropriations of discursive constructions of the subject among some feminist thinkers, materialist feminism aims to work towards an amalgamation of socialist feminist emphases on the problem of the gender division of labour with a notion of the discursive construction of subjectivity. Although this approach contains some exciting theoretical potential, the viability of a materialist feminist project remains to be seen. Short of considerable reconstruction, the theory of communicative action and its current alternatives seem hard pressed to offer a theory of domination that includes a comprehensive articulation of women's domination.

⁸ An excellent survey of the concerns and potential of materialist feminism can be found in Rosemary Hennessy's *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

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