

**THEORY IN WEBERIAN MARXISM:
PATTERNS OF CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY IN LUKÁCS AND HABERMAS***

Harry F. Dahms

ABSTRACT

For Weberian Marxists, the social theories of Max Weber and Karl Marx are complementary contributions to the analysis of modern capitalist society. Combining Weber's theory of rationalization with Marx's critique of commodity fetishism to develop his own critique of reification, Georg Lukács contended that the combination of Marx's and Weber's social theories is essential to envisioning socially transformative modes of praxis in advanced capitalist society. By comparing Lukács's theory of reification with Habermas's theory of communicative action as two theories in the tradition of Weberian Marxism, I show how the prevailing mode of "doing theory" has shifted from Marx's critique of economic determinism to Weber's idea of the inner logic of social value spheres. Today, Weberian Marxism can make an important contribution to theoretical sociology by reconstituting itself as a framework for critically examining prevailing societal definitions of the rationalization imperatives specific to purposive-rational social value spheres (the economy, the administrative state, etc.). In a second step, Weberian Marxists would explore how these value spheres relate to each other and to value spheres that are open to the type of communicative rationalization characteristic of the lifeworld level of social organization.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1920s, the function of theory in Western Marxism has undergone a major transformation.¹ So far manifesting itself as an increased willingness and ability in

modernist critical social theories to confront societal complexity, this change points toward a qualitatively different way of relating diverse social-theoretical projects to each other. Western Marxism is uniquely positioned to furnish a mechanism to bridge the rifts between various theoretical positions and camps, as between modernists and postmodernists, constructivists and deconstructionists, and across many other divides within social theory. By reducing the proliferation of intended and unintended misunderstandings that characterize the field of social theory across many divides, this qualitative change also promises to enhance our understanding of the social world.²

To identify the nature of this change within a context both specific enough to facilitate a pointed diagnosis and sufficiently general to allow for meaningful conclusions, I will limit my discussion to Weberian Marxism (see Löwy 1996). During the twentieth century, Marx's theory and Marxism fulfilled a variety of functions and needs, in many instances serving purposes not directly related to scientific endeavors. Marx designed his theory to systematically and critically examine the relationship between the "laws of motion" of nineteenth-century political economy and the necessary conditions for actualizing the avowed principles of bourgeois society (such as individual self-realization, collectively political decision-making, world peace, and so on). During Marx's lifetime, however, this theoretical core had already faded behind seemingly more concrete and practically relevant dimensions of his critique of political economy-his theories of revolution, of class struggle and exploitation, of surplus value, and of other aspects of the capitalist mode of production and bourgeois society. Depending on their theoretical and practical purposes, both proponents and opponents reduced Marx's theory

to distinct components of his work; as a result, awareness of his overarching systematic interest decreased.³

While claims that Marxian theories have outlived their social, political, and historic relevance are often presented in an unqualified manner, the picture becomes more complicated when we differentiate between particular versions of Marxian theory and specific problems they were (and are) designed to elucidate. Among the various social-theoretical traditions within Marxism, Western Marxism is one of the more widely recognized research programs, for reasons that are not all that surprising. The historical experience sparking Western Marxism was the realization, painful to many, that the first socialist revolution did not occur in the economically and politically advanced West, but in underdeveloped Russia. Also, to enhance the analysis of modern society, Western Marxists from Georg Lukács, via the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, to Jürgen Habermas have been willing to confront and integrate non-Marxist contributions to social theory into their frameworks. Finally, Western Marxists are willing to advocate and promote their critical analyses of the nature and logic of societal development in capitalism in scholarly debate. As Habermas put it, Western Marxists like Lukács, Ernst Bloch, and Antonio Gramsci re-Hegelianized Marxist thinking, "by leading it from political economy back to philosophical reflection ... [making] their way through human and social-scientific disciplines before the seed of speculative thought grows in the bed of social theory" ([1988] 1992:5).

These characterizations are especially pertinent with respect to Weberian Marxism. To identify its theoretical core, I will differentiate Western Marxism as a

social-scientific reference frame and as a program for radical societal transformation, concentrating on the "inner logic" of specific theoretical and practical challenges.⁴ To limit the scope of this inquiry, I contrast the work of one of the earliest theorists in the tradition of Weberian Marxism, Georg Lukács, with that of Jürgen Habermas as one of its latest, though not entirely unambivalent, representatives. My appraisal of the transformation that has occurred in this tradition centers around three themes: (1) how to combine Marx's critique of political economy and Weber's theory of rationalization, for purposes of developing a systematic concept of "reification"; (2) how to frame the problem of overcoming reification; and (3) how to mediate theory and practice toward overcoming reification in society.⁵

Lukács did not establish Weberian Marxism single-handedly, and Habermas may not be its most authentic representative today. Yet, for purposes of the argument, the comparison of Lukács's and Habermas's approaches to the problem of overcoming reification illustrates most distinctly the transformation of the function of theory in Western Marxism. What many perceive as the current predicament of this tradition may be of minor consequence when compared with the lessons we can learn by examining how contemporary Weberian Marxist theory is different from its earliest incarnation about how to "do theory" and how to relate different theoretical projects in sociology to each other. By releasing the process of theoretical production from political objectives and practical imperatives, while retaining its historical and normative presuppositions without abandoning the link to practical issues altogether, Weberian Marxism inadvertently may have opened the door to recognizing how social theory is not only an

activity about the social, but a highly social activity in its own right.

**WEBERIAN MARXISM:
TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF ADVANCED CAPITALISM**

Georg Lukács is commonly considered the founder of Weberian Marxism, and History and Class Consciousness ([1923] 1971; hereafter *HCC*) its founding text. In this collection of essays, Lukács attempted to update Marx's critique of bourgeois society to a later stage of social development. To achieve this objective, Lukács linked Marx's critique of political economy with Weber's theory of rationalization. As a result, he could reconstruct both the philosophical foundations of Marx's early work (which emphasized the critical importance of the analytical category of alienation) and his later critique of commodity fetishism as a social process as a theory of reification. As he viewed the emerging social sciences as reflections of the reified nature of bourgeois society—and when Marxist theory took an increasingly materialist turn, neglecting its philosophical underpinnings—Lukács's goal was to present a critique of capitalism that yielded a new mediation of theory and practice specifically designed to apply to the economically most advanced societies of the early twentieth century. It is important to note, however, that Lukács's inception of Weberian Marxism did not emerge from an immanent critique of theories of political economy, or from a direct and thorough examination of the capitalist process under conditions of corporate, bureaucratic capitalism. Instead, by combining Marx and Weber, he indirectly reflected the effects of the new mode and organization of

capitalist production on society in terms of reification.

Weberian Marxism thus emerged as a critique of capitalism that employed elements of both Marxist and non-Marxist social theories. Lukács integrated conceptual and theoretical components from Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Georg Simmel to facilitate the most sophisticated, critical understanding of the nature of capitalist society in the early twentieth century. Weberian Marxism in this sense emerged as a combination of three related theoretical and practical projects: first, to identify reification as the defining feature of advanced capitalist society within the context of large-scale social, economic, political, and cultural transformations; second, to expound the nature of reification as the dominant principle of processes "mediating" social, economic, political, and cultural production, reproduction, and exchange; and third, to formulate a strategy for proletarian practice geared toward overcoming the reifying capitalist order.

In the collection's most well-known essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (*HCC*:83-222), Lukács identified as the primary problem in modern capitalism the manner in which the capitalist mode of production "reifies" every individual and all aspects of social, political, and cultural life. Reification, as the German Verdinglichung is usually translated, is the process that coerces and conditions individuals to see and treat each other, and the social and natural environment, as "things" to be used for their personal purposes, to treat human beings and social relations in a reified and reifying manner. Human and social relations, qualities, capabilities, capacities, and modes of action are assimilated to the logic of capital accumulation and to the relations between things produced by human beings. In turn, these "things" and the

spheres of their production, distribution, and exchange are regarded and experienced by individuals as independent and objective forces that control their lives.

In this context, Lukács defined as the foremost challenge for the renewal of Marxism the need to provide the proletarian class with a theory about how to engage the successful, lasting proletarian revolution. Without such a theory, setting the stage for tackling and ultimately for overcoming the omnipresent reifying effects of the capitalist economy that permeate all aspects of society would not be possible. As long as this reifying capitalist process is in motion, attempts to reform or reconstruct society along socialist lines, and to create the conditions for the emergence of a society qualitatively superior to capitalism, will be futile. Accordingly, Lukács's criterion for "success" was not just the occurrence of the revolution, but also the practical establishment of a lasting socialist order.

While the most famous work in *HCC* is Lukács's critical theory of reification, the collection also contains elements of a theory of revolution and party organization intended to identify the mechanisms that will enable the party to arrive at the most appropriate practical political strategy. To supplement his critique of reification, Lukács developed this Marxist political theory for mediating theory and practice in the essays, "Class Consciousness" and "Toward a Methodology of Organization" (*HCC*:46-82, 295-342). Arguing against the dominant, increasingly materialist Marxist doctrine of the time, Lukács strove to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatic Marxism and its tendency to become insensitive to changing conditions for action.

While Lukács formulated his critical theory of reification and his contributions to

a Marxist political theory almost simultaneously, they were linked only indirectly. The theory of reification identifies the problem to overcome to set the stage for constructing a truly human society. The theory of revolutionary party organization identifies the mechanism that "guarantees" that the "best," most powerful theory informs the party leadership to prepare the possibility of such a society. The reification that results from the prevalence of the capitalist mode of production and limits society's ability to reorganize itself along more human lines is to be overcome by means of a theoretically informed political practice.

My criterion for determining whether or not a theorist works in the tradition of Weberian Marxism is whether s/he pursues the three objectives that characterized Weberian Marxism in Lukács: combining Marx and Weber, grasping reification, and thematizing the problem of mediating theory and practice in terms of the objective of overcoming reification. These objectives also were formative for the thrust of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School as represented above all by Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, and their reformulation of the critique of reification as a critique of instrumental reason (see Feenberg 1981). These objectives inspired the general direction of Habermas's version of critical theory as well, and his construction of The Theory of Communicative Action ([1981] 1984, [1981] 1987; hereafter *TCA I* and *TCA II*) as a critique of functionalist reason. As he put it, his

intentions and fundamental convictions were given their stamp by Western Marxism in the mid-fifties, through a coming to terms with Lukács, Korsch and Bloch, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and of course with

Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Everything else which I have made my own has only acquired its significance in connection with the project of a renewal of the theory of society grounded in this tradition (Habermas 1986:151-52).⁶

As Habermas continues to place his effort in the tradition of Western Marxism, however, he does so within the context of more general theoretical and philosophical concerns. Still, although Habermas "now rejects" historical materialism (including Weberian Marxism and its aporias) "as a means," as Tom Rockmore put it, "he continues to accept it as an end, more precisely as a goal of his own rival view" (1989: 169).⁷

HABERMAS ON LUKÁCS

Jürgen Habermas is currently the most widely read social theorist who draws explicitly on the work of Lukács. In his discussions of Lukács, Habermas is interested in how to reconstruct the theory of reification for purposes of a critical theory of late-twentieth-century society, in the nature of the Western Marxist problem of mediating theory and practice, and in how to reconcile different theoretical approaches for purposes of enhancing our understanding of a social phenomenon or problem. Contrary to Lukács, who justified the standards of his critique of capitalist society with the imminence of the proletarian revolution, Habermas's main work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, constitutes "the beginning of a social theory concerned to validate its own critical standards" (*TCA I:xxxix*), independent of specific political considerations, viewpoints,

and agendas. As a work addressed to those "who have a professional interest in the foundations of social theory" (*TCA I:xlii*), its primary purpose is to further the theoretical development of sociology as a systematic social science, not to address directly the mediation of theory and practice. At the same time, Habermas's project remains a critical theory with explicitly practical intent.

When asked for his most important intellectual and theoretical influences, in interviews conducted during the 1980s, Habermas regularly mentioned Georg Lukács: "Around [1953], I read Lukács's [*HCC*], which excited me a great deal" (Habermas 1986:77); "I read Lukács very early in the course of my studies, although that wasn't yet a standard thing at the time" (*ibid.*:95); "Lukács's [*HCC*] . . . made a strong impression on me" (*ibid.*: 150). Lukács became relevant for Habermas before his encounter with Horkheimer and Adorno's critical theory, the tradition that became decisive for his theoretical development: "I found [*HCC*] a marvelous book. But it was like a historical document for me-I felt, what a pity one can't take it up systematically" (*ibid.*: 192). Compared to the impact that Horkheimer and Adorno had on Habermas' s work, Lukács' s influence was of a more precursory nature. During the early 1950s, when Habermas began to sense that the young Hegelians and the young Marx

could be taken up in such a way that a systematic argument could be developed from it ... I realized with a certain sadness that it wouldn't work with Lukács. And then ... in 1955 I read Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. What fascinated me right away with those two was that they weren't engaged in a reception of Marx . . . they were

utilizing him. It was a great experience for me to see that one could relate systematically to the "Marxist tradition." . . . [T]hey were working out a theory of the dialectical development of present-day society, and in doing so they were proceeding from a tradition of Marxist thought. That was a tremendous thing for me. Of course I had been prepared for it on the basis of my reading of Lukács. At that point philosophical and political things began to come together for the first time (Habermas 1986:77).⁸

While Adorno and Horkheimer were reluctant to concede much weight to "bourgeois" (or mainstream) social science and theory, Habermas demonstrated from early on that he was not a mere extension of the first generation of the critical theorists, but much more open to the traditional mainstream contributions of the social sciences to the theoretical understanding of contemporary society.⁹ His *TCA* represents the most developed contemporary social theory that maintains diplomatic relations with Western Marxism, purports to advance its theoretical development, and systematically incorporates at least one element of Lukács's work. However, Habermas is not concerned whether his reading of Lukács's theory is in accordance with, or even recognizes, Lukács's own theoretical intentions. In an interview, Habermas described his approach to using other theorists' works as follows: "I think I make foreign tongues my own in a rather brutal manner, from a hermeneutic point of view. Even when I quote a good deal and take over other terminologies I am clearly aware that my use of them often has little to do with the authors' original meaning" (Habermas 1986:129). How did Habermas make Lukács's tongue his own? Did he do so in a "brutal manner"? Can we draw

conclusions from Habermas's critical appropriation of Lukács about differences in the logic of theory construction in general, and of critical theory in particular?

From the 1950s to the late 1970s Habermas discussed Lukács twice, on issues concerning the organization of the proletarian revolution and the theory of communist practice (Habermas 1957; [1971] 1973). In both instances, his discussion took the form of a "vehement rejection" of Lukács's *HCC* (Heller 1982:22). Yet when Habermas published *TCA* his tone toward Lukács had changed. In the context of his discussion of "rationalization as reification" at the end of the work's first volume, Habermas remained critical toward Lukács, but the firm stance he had taken against him in 1957 and 1971 now turned into a more constructive approach. Habermas's two earlier discussions of Lukács were critiques of two essays in *HCC*, "Class Consciousness" and "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization" (*HCC*:46-82, 295-342). In *TCA*, Habermas concentrated on the collection's most well-known essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (pp. 83-222). After his discussion of Lukács in *TCA*, Habermas returned to the pattern most characteristic of his treatment of Lukács, alluding to him as the representative of certain ideas, concepts, and claims, and a certain type of doing theory related to his theories of reification, organization, and revolution.¹⁰ Habermas thus explicitly discussed Lukács three times in his work, focusing on three essays in *HCC*.¹¹

In elaborating these issues, I will first sketch Habermas's early discussions of Lukács's theories of revolution and organization, and then turn to his later appropriation of Lukács's theory of reification, in each case with an emphasis on how Habermas sees

the relationship among philosophy, social theory, social science, and practice.

On the Philosophical Discussion of Marx and Marxism (1957)

Habermas first discussed Lukács in the context of his "Report on the Literature Concerning the Philosophical Discussion of Marx and Marxism" (1957:387-463), in a section on the relationship between "materialist dialectic" and the social sciences (pp. 443-45).¹² The problem with the non-dialectical social sciences is that they fail when confronted with the historicity of their subject matter: they are not able to grasp a societal situation in terms of its developmental tendencies toward what it objectively might become. "The sciences do not have a 'concept' [*Begriff*] of the situation that can be gained from its own contradictions" through systematic negation. As a result they lack the necessary measure for critical analysis that would unlock the historical dimension of social reality, in the sense of a "practical theory." To be sure, the latter depends on the social sciences as the provider of empirical data to be gained by means of objectivating methods, whose results are employed in philosophy (or practical theory) as the material to be interpreted in terms of what is apprehended as the goal of society. Yet this goal, which is to be realized in practice, must be falsifiable: "The theory remains refutable. In fact, the hiatus between philosophy and [social] science guarantees the continuum of rationality, since rationality takes on a different shape depending on whether it expresses the rationalization of natural objects, or of human beings and their interchange with each other" (p. 443). As Rockmore (1989:30) paraphrased Habermas, "the task of philosophy

[is] to sublimate the objectification of the nonobjectifiable in a whole in the Hegelian senses of the term 'sublation.'"

Turning to the Marxist claim that the "existing untruth of antagonistic society," alienation, ought to be and indeed can be practically overcome by means of the proletarian revolution, Habermas distinguishes two ways of reading this claim. First, it is correct in terms of social-scientific standards when the objective conditions for the possibility of overcoming alienation can be determined by historical-sociological means. According to philosophical standards, secondly, the claim is true when objective and "subjective" conditions come together and enable the revolutionary movement, after critical preparation, to practically overcome alienation as an effect of the reifying capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, whether the revolution is objectively impossible can be determined only according to the standards of social science.

Central to Habermas's discussion of Lukács's essay, "Class Consciousness" (*HCC* 46-82), is the concept of the "objective possibility of the revolution."¹³ Habermas is concerned with whether the occurrence of the revolution can be decided beforehand, and whether for the determination of the conditions of "objective possibility" a separation of philosophical and social-scientific aspects is possible when, as in Lukács, the occurrence of the revolution as such is treated as if beyond doubt. Habermas concludes that as long as the notion of "dialectic" is synonymous with the knowledge about the course of history, as in the case of Lukács, there is no need for differentiating philosophy and social science. Since "Lukács's category of objective possibility derives from the dialectic of [Hegelian] absolute consciousness, it implies the category of historical necessity."

Habermas concludes that

A historical failure is at the same time an irreversible verdict against that which [the theory] asserted. A practice that does not occur, or which is even wrong, must not come about, except at the expense of the theory proven to be untrue. Consequently, Lukács himself recognized the Soviet practice as the only legitimate practice of the communists, since it was successful. He submitted to [this practice], and still renounced it, for the sake of being consequential in terms of his theory. The innermost intention of his theory only could be satisfied by his recantation of it (Habermas 1957:444-45).

On the Relationship of Theory, Practice, and Organization (1973)

Habermas returned to Lukács's work fourteen years later, in the "Introduction to the New Edition" of Theory and Practice ([1971] 1973), which includes a section on the organizational implications of Marx's work as it pertains to the problem of mediating theory and practice. Before directly adumbrating Lukács's treatment of the role of the party organization in the revolutionary process, Habermas contends that in the Marxist tradition, the mediation of theory and practice must be clarified in terms of three functions, which are measured in terms of different criteria: the *formation and extension of critical theorems*, which can stand up to scientific discourse; the *organization of processes of enlightenment*, in

which such theorems are applied and can be tested in a unique manner by the initiation of processes of reflexion carried on within certain groups toward which these processes have been directed; and the *selection of appropriate strategies, the solution of tactical questions, and the conduct of the political struggle* (Habermas [1971] 1973:32; italics added).

These functions correspond to (1) true statements, (2) authentic insights, and (3) prudent decisions, respectively. Since, according to Marxist theory, these three functions had to be fulfilled by, and within, the party organization, their respective logics were conflated.

In traditional Marxism, the function of theory was to enlighten its addressees about their actual position and objective interests in an antagonistic society, against the prevailing bourgeois-capitalist ideology. Only when the groups recognize "themselves in the interpretations offered, do the analytically proposed interpretations become actual consciousness, and does the objectively attributed situation of interests become the real interest of a group capable of action" (ibid.). According to Marx the emergence of class consciousness would ensue from theoretically enlightened communists organizing the process of enlightenment in the context of oppressive working conditions. The theory legitimizes the enlightenment activity, and it can be corrected (if not refuted) when communication fails, i.e., when the addressees do not recognize themselves in the theory; yet the theory *cannot* directly legitimize strategic actions that involve potentially serious risks for the actors.

Decisions for the political struggle cannot at the outset be justified theoretically and then be carried out organizationally. The sole possible

justification at this level is consensus, aimed at in practical discourse, among the participants, who, in the consciousness of their common interests and their knowledge of the circumstances, of the predictable consequences and secondary consequences, are the only ones who can know what risks they are willing to undergo, and with what expectations. There can be no theory which at the outset can assure a world-historical mission in return for the potential sacrifices (Habermas [1971] 1973:33).

The members of the bourgeois parties and the ruling class are caught up in ideology, and thus incapable of clarifying practical questions in a rational manner. They act and react compulsively, without taking into consideration the broader implications and ramifications of their actions. By contrast, only a class that constitutes itself through a true self-critique in practical discourse can clarify to itself what it would mean to engage rationally in political action. According to Habermas, Marx should have presented this potential, and this potential only, as the unique promise of a solidaristic proletariat acting in unison.

The three functions of developing a theory, organizing the addressees' enlightenment, and selecting appropriate strategies must be fulfilled according to three clearly distinct principles. Those engaged in social-scientific work must be free to engage in theoretical discourses. Processes of enlightenment must be organized so that those who do the "enlightenment work" are totally committed to "the proper precautions" and that they "assure scope for communications on the model of the therapeutic 'discourses.'" Finally, "the political struggle can only be legitimately conducted under the

precondition that all decisions of consequence will depend on the practical discourse of the participants-here too, and especially here, there is no privileged access to truth" (ibid.:34).

Georg Lukács, however, not only conflated these three functions, he went well beyond Marx. In his essay, "Toward a Methodology for the Problem of Organization" (*HCC*:295-342), he presented a theory of the Party that purported to resolve the problem of mediating theory and practice exclusively in terms of "the imperatives of the conduct of the political struggle." As Lukács put it, "organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice" (ibid.:299). Habermas identifies three steps Lukács took in the process.

First, theory is only to be truly criticized from the point of view of organizational praxis. Without such a practical mediation, "theory itself can only be criticized with regard to its own internal contradictions" (*HCC*:301). To Lukács, the truth of a theory is intrinsically tied to organizational practice, and "any scope for scientific discourse within the Party is also prohibited" (Habermas [1971] 1973:35). "Pure theory" allows a plurality of diverse views and directions to exist peaceably side by side. Yet questions "present themselves in the sharpest manner which are mutually exclusive" (*HCC*:301) when they are given an organizational orientation. Theoretical indecision and deviations must be sanctioned immediately (and uncompromisingly).¹⁴

Second, the enlightenment of the workers also must be subordinated to the purposes of the Party leadership. Since the workers under capitalism have been conditioned into a state of "false consciousness," they must be guided into the struggle,

and the Party must act as the representative of the masses, independent of their potential for spontaneity.

Consequently, in Lukács's third step, "the theory is withdrawn from confirmation by the agreement of those whom it is to aid in the attainment of self-reflection" (Habermas [1971] 1973:36). To Lukács, the correct theory for the Party's organizational problem must embody the "highest objective form" of working class action, for which "correct theoretical insight," a function of organizational imperatives, is the "absolute precondition." Habermas concludes that

Organizational questions are not primary things. Between them and an objective philosophy of history Lukács has established a direct relationship. Stalinist practice has furnished the fatal proof that a Party organization which proceeds instrumentally and a Marxism which has degenerated into a science of apologetics complement each other only too well (Habermas [1971] 1973:36).

To Habermas the Lukácsian conflation of theoretical and practical challenges in the Party organization constitutes one of the most troublesome features of early Weberian Marxism. He argues that a theory can only fulfill specific functions and tasks pertaining to the mediation of theory and practice if its development is allowed to follow the specific "logic" of the task at hand. Relatively speaking, theory is more liberated from ideological and political motives and purposes in Habermas's version of Weberian Marxism than in Lukács's.

The Theory of Communicative Action, and Rationalization as Reification (1981)

Habermas's final explicit discussion of Lukács's work to date centers on the concept of reification. In the fourth part of *TCA*, Habermas identifies the influence of Weber on Lukács's critique of reification and the early Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason, in terms of "rationalization as reification" (*TCA I*:339-99). Habermas wants to grasp the tension between the "reifying" effects of economic imperatives characteristic of advanced capitalism on social, political, and cultural life, and the lifeworld's potential for increasing openness to the communicative formation of norms and values that govern the way in which people interact, solve problems, and structure life in society.

Weber's theory of rationalization is a uniquely effective though one-sided means for comprehending the emergence of action systems; though Lukács's critique of reification cannot begin to replace Weber's theory, it highlights the problematic nature of the latter. In this part of *TCA* on the utility of "reification," Habermas introduces Weber as the theorist of social value spheres: "In Weber's view . . . the transition to modernity is characterized by a differentiation of spheres of value and structures of consciousness that makes possible a critical transformation of traditional knowledge in relation to specifically given validity claims" (*TCA I*:340). This transition prepares the institutionalization of the differentiated systems of knowledge and learning processes that corresponds to these value spheres. This includes, first, the "establishment of a scientific enterprise" (empirical-scientific problems are no longer subjected to and confined by theological doctrines as well as moral-practical questions, but addressed according to internal truth standards); second, "the institutionalization of an artistic enterprise" (artistic

production is released from "cultic-ecclesiastical and courtly-patronal bonds," and oriented toward a general audience and "mediated through professionalized aesthetic criticism"); and third, "the professional intellectual treatment of questions of ethics, political theory, and jurisprudence in schools of law, in the legal system, and in the legal public sphere" (ibid.).

Weber was interested in the rationalization of formally organized action systems like the modern market economy, the administrative state, and the legal system, and in the analysis of purposive rationalization processes. Though Weber provided a differentiated picture of how modern society must be understood as a complex network of diverse, purposively rational social value spheres, he did not distinguish between qualitatively different types of rationalization. More specifically, he did not conceive of the rationalization of everyday practice and communication on the lifeworld level that results from the above-mentioned "institutionalized production of knowledge ... specialized according to cognitive, normative, and aesthetic validity claims." Since knowledge produced in this manner replaces traditional knowledge as the organizing principle of interaction, Habermas argues, "there is a rationalization of everyday practice that is accessible only from the perspective of action oriented to reaching understanding." In such "a rationalized lifeworld the need for achieving understanding is met less and less by a reservoir of traditionally certified interpretations immune from criticism; at the level of a completely decentered understanding of the world, the need for consensus must be met more and more frequently by risky, because rationally motivated, agreement" ([1981] 1984:340).

In late-twentieth-century society, we can no longer presume any overarching theme, purpose, or challenge important enough to take precedence over all other concerns, patterns of solving problems, and institutional arrangements. In the absence of such an overarching principle, the seemingly irreducible simplicity of the capitalist economic system's self-sustaining impulse, devoid of any quest for meaning and in concert with the economic growth-oriented administrative state, serves to unify the increasingly "fragmented world of the social" (Honneth [1990] 1995). For this reason, we must differentiate between the respective inner logics of diverse value spheres and dimensions of social life. The category of the inner logic of social value spheres enables us to identify the patterning endemic to spheres that must minimize possibilities for raising issues relating to meaning—the economy, the administrative state (as opposed to the state as the product of a more or less democratic process), and bureaucracies on every level of social organization. In a second step, we can identify spheres whose ability to fulfill their function is contingent on the confrontation, and more or less tenuous resolution, of questions of meaning—political parties, universities, and the "public sphere" as thematized by Habermas ([1962] 1989).

The economy is just one system that evolves according to imperatives that reduce opportunities to question how, on the societal level, the system should fulfill its function in a modern society. Yet the integrity and vitality of the lifeworld depends on the possibility to address such questions within the social realm. As the domain where the parameters of social life can be determined through a process of more or less successful and unconstrained communicative interaction, the lifeworld's inner logic points toward

the possibility to orient actions, decision-making processes, and forms of social organization toward a form of rationality that cannot be reduced to any one "inner logic."

By contrast, the inner logic of the economy points toward a minimalist form of rationality that narrows the socially accessible options for solving socio-political and cultural problems and resolving conflicts to the type of rationality characteristic of the capitalist economic process. For Lukács, the powerful economy forces the less powerful lifeworld to assimilate its capacity to resolve socially pressing problems on the basis of communicative interaction to the economy's mode of "solving" problems: to reduce their complexity by defining them in a "manageable" manner, and then to proceed accordingly. Along the lines of Weber's concept, *Eigengesetzlichkeit* applied not only to the economy, but also, for instance, to the modern administrative state, which evolves according to a different inner logic.¹⁵ Habermas employs Parsons's systems-theoretic approach to contend that economic rationality substitutes communication with the steering medium of *money*, while in the administrative state, the medium is *power* (e.g., *TCA I:342*). The inner logics endemic to both economic and administrative decision-making processes "colonize" the inner logic of the lifeworld:

a progressively rationalized lifeworld is both uncoupled from and made dependent upon increasingly complex, formally organized domains of action.... This dependency, resulting from the *mediatization* of the lifeworld by systems imperatives [in terms of money and power], assumes the socio-pathological form of an *internal colonization* when critical disequilibria in material reproduction ... can be avoided only at the cost of

disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld—that is, of "subjectively" experienced, identity-threatening crises or pathologies (TCA II:305)

Reification is not of primary importance in terms of constraining social relations in general, but in terms of its restrictive effects on the lifeworld's capacity to communicatively problematize reifying effects and to tackle these effects and the origins of reification in society.

In this context, Habermas (TCA I:355-65) presents his fullest account of Lukács's theoretical contribution to his own work and to social theory in general. His discussion of Lukács concentrates on the most important essay in *HCC*, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat"; he is interested in the value of Lukács's analysis for understanding the tension between the increasingly differentiated capitalist economy and the administrative state, and the deformation of the lifeworld and the communicative capacity embedded within it. While Lukács used the concept of reification to separate "Weber's analysis of societal rationalization from its action-theoretic framework and relate it to anonymous processes of capital realization within the economic system" (TCA I:354), Habermas employs it to generalize Lukács's critique of anonymous processes of capital realization within the economic system to the rationalization of power in the economy and in the state, as a reification of communicative capacities. In elucidating this issue, Habermas touches upon the relationship between philosophy and theory.

Lukács's theory of reification rested on three propositions. First, the totality of the developmental stage of any society finds expression in a specific "form of objectivity"

that corresponds to a specific "form of existence or thought" (Dilthey); second, society evolves through a process of continually transforming "forms of objectivity" shaping the existence of human beings; and third, the relationship between human beings, and between human beings and nature, embodies objectified reason-though not always in reasonable form (Hegel). In capitalist society, the prevailing form of objectivity is the commodity form, which "prejudices the world-relations, the ways in which speaking and acting subjects can relate to things in the objective, the social, and their own subjective worlds." These worlds "are so lopsidedly coordinated that category mistakes are built into our understanding of interpersonal relationships and subjective experiences; we apprehend them under the form of things, as entities that belong to the objective world, although they are really elements of our common social world or of an individual subjective world" (*TCA I:355-56*). Once communicative patterns are exposed to such intrinsic misunderstandings, the lifeworld itself becomes reified, thus impeding modern society's ability to address issues of meaning explicitly and directly.

Habermas critically appropriates Lukács's theory of reification in three moves. He first discusses the reifying effect of wage labor on the life of the laboring individual, to show that the reification of individuals and social relations in the social labor process is the downside of the rationalization of action systems. He then sketches Lukács's critique of Weber's concept of "formal rationality" and his corresponding assertion that processes of rationalization derive from the specific type of purposive rationality characteristic of the value spheres' specific functions in and for society. Lukács contended that Weber analyzed manifestations of reification independent from their

origin in the economic process. Finally, Habermas shows how Lukács linked Weber's concept of formal rationality with the commodity form to revive Hegel's concept of totality in the context of the theory of knowledge. "In having recourse to this concept, Lukács implicitly denies Weber's central assertion ... that the metaphysically conceived unity of reason had fallen apart once and for all with the separation of cultural value spheres, each with its own inner logic; and that it couldn't be put back together again" (*TCA I:357*).

Drawing on Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, Lukács's achievement was to join Marx and Weber so that he could perceive the separation of the "sphere of social labor from lifeworld contexts simultaneously" under reification and rationalization (*TCA I:359*). Accordingly, Lukács regarded Marx's and Weber's analyses as closely related and supplementary.

Yet there is a decisive difference between Weber's perspective on rationalization, and Lukács's perspective on reification. To Weber, economic rationalization was merely an instance in the general process of rationalization; to Lukács, reification derived from economic rationalization based on exchange, with the commodity form as the corresponding form of objectivity. Consequently, Lukács traced all forms of Western rationalization to the reifying economic process.

Finally, while Marx argued the imminence of the revolution in terms of his theory of crisis, Lukács argued that there are immanent limits to the process of rationalization.¹⁶ Anticipating the dialectical critique of positivism, and drawing on Schiller and Hegel, Lukács asserted that the Kantian critiques of reason themselves reflect the reified

structures of consciousness in capitalism; they do not point beyond it. In Hegel, however, Lukács found the idea of a "totality of life-relations that 'has inwardly overcome, or is in the process of overcoming, the divisions in theory and practice, reason and sense, form and matter; for which the tendency to give form to itself does not mean an abstract rationality that ignores concrete contents; and for which freedom and necessity come together'" (*HCC*: 136-37; quoted in *TCA I*:362). Lukács presupposed that both theoretical and practical reason can be united conceptually at the level of absolute spirit. By contrast, Weber had seen the paradoxical nature of societal rationalization in the less-than-rational evolution of formal rationality, as it "is linked with learning processes that exclude a grounded resumption of metaphysical worldviews no less than they do a dialectical connection with objective reason" (*TCA I*:362).

According to Habermas, a return to these perspectives cannot be justified by means of rational argumentation. The concept of objective reason may be justifiable for analytical purposes, but the direct link to practice is not. Lukács's attempt to ground a truly forceful theory of societal transformation might have been more successful had he employed the concept of the "objective possibility" of the proletarian revolution as an analytical category for assessing and strategizing concrete working class action.

Lukács did not simply intend to restore Hegel's philosophy, but to give Hegel's speculative concept of reason a *practical turn*: Hegel's attempt to philosophically unify the differentiated moments of reason failed to reach the level of practical action. Lukács insisted that only at that level could the critical substance of philosophical insight hold its force. He concurs with Weber's assertion that objective reason cannot be reconstructed

on the level of philosophical thinking, not even in theory. Yet he inverts Weber's assertion by rejecting the notion that the impossibility of reconstructing a comprehensive understanding of the world implies the incompatibility of the differentiated moments of reason that are embodied in rationalized systems of action. In "theory," according to Marx, the possibility of reconciliation put forth in the idea of reason remains an illusion. Yet a formal link between the differentiated moments of reason does exist, in terms of "the procedural unity of argumentative grounding": "What now presents itself merely as a formal connection in 'theory'—at the level of cultural interpretive systems—can possibly be reached in 'practice'—in the lifeworld. Under the watchword of 'philosophy becoming practical,' Marx appropriates the perspective of the Young-Hegelian 'philosophy of the deed' " (*TCA I*:364).

Habermas locates Lukács's most decisive error in his attempt to turn the "becoming practical" onto "a theoretical plane and [represent] it as a philosophical actualization of philosophy." The theory that was repudiated for not being able to point the way toward reconciliation and reason is thus being reinstated as the ultimate instance-for precisely that purpose. The burden of proof that results for the "theory" (in Habermas's use), however, is simply too great. Now, "philosophy" (in Lukács's terminology) must not only think "the totality that is hypostatized as the world order, but the world-historical process as well—the historical development of this totality through the self-conscious practice of those who are enlightened by philosophy about their active role in the self-realization of reason" (*TCA II*:364).

To allow for the realization of the unity of the differentiated moments of reason,

Lukács supplements his theory of reification with a theory of class consciousness. In the end, Lukács not only reduced the complex level of understanding modern society achieved by Weber by reverting back to Marx; his philosophical reconstruction of Marxism constituted, in more respects than one, a return to objective idealism.

Lukács Deconstructed and Reconstructed

To the "early" Habermas the mediation of theory and practice toward "overcoming alienation" (and reification) might have been possible, though only on the basis of a clear distinction between philosophy in the sense of practical theory, and the social sciences based on the principle of empirical falsification; the productive tension between philosophy and social science on the basis of their respective inner logics prepared the possibility of a truly enlightening social theory.

To the "middle" Habermas (of, say, the "New Introduction" to *Theory and Practice*), the mediation of theory and practice, which is no longer directly tied to the issue of overcoming reification, must be further differentiated: the functions of developing an accurate and empowering theory, of enlightening the addressees, and of formulating effective strategies must be distinguished and fulfilled in distinct institutional settings allowing the inner logic of solving the respective problems to take their course.

The "mature" Habermas, finally, no longer struggles with or even contemplates the feasibility of projects directed toward a comprehensive mediation of theory and practice, intended to "overcome" the reifying effects of institutionalized systems of

formal rationality, which he considers impossible. Habermas tells us that we must first develop a theory of contemporary society able to systematically consider the interrelations between different social value spheres, and between different levels of societal integration. In his attempt to reconstruct historical materialism, Habermas had already written: "Among Hegelian Marxists like Lukács, Korsch, and Adorno, the concept of social totality *excludes a model of levels*. [Marx's] superstructure theorem ... posits a kind of concentric dependency of all social appearances on the economic structure, the latter being conceived dialectically as the essence that comes to existence in the observable appearances" ([1976] 1979:143; italics added). His discussions of Lukács imply that a theory that is up to the challenge of analyzing twentieth-century society must be allowed to evolve according to the "inner logic" of the specific analytic challenge at hand. Any theory that claims to address issues pertaining to society as a whole must avoid monocausal explanations of social change. In addition, it is imperative for the successful development of a theory of contemporary society that analytical challenges and practical considerations not be conflated. Before we can engage in attempts to mediate theory and practice toward any end, we must insure that each problem has been examined and pursued in terms of its inner logic. This is not to say that theoretical endeavors and practical objectives strictly must be kept apart, but that as long as we are not willing to detach the two tasks from each other (and further considerations and concerns), the likelihood of each individual challenge to be met effectively will be severely impaired. This differentiation does not preclude putting the pieces back together; instead, the latter is contingent on the former.

In concrete terms of mediating theory and practice within the reference frame of Weberian Marxism, we must heed the following requisite: Marx's critical analysis of capitalism must be counterbalanced by the realization, inspired by Weber, that the multitude of tasks to be fulfilled in a highly integrated society cannot be assimilated to imperatives that are incompatible with the inherent requirements of the specific tasks and necessary societal functions at hand. For instance, we must not assume from the outset that the imperatives of efficient economic decision making can be assimilated directly to the imperatives of democratic decision making, without a significant loss in economic efficiency, especially if we consider the nature of so-called democratic decision making in bureaucratized mass society. The "social subsystem" of the administrative state, especially in its welfare state version, and the rationalization processes it engenders on the basis of a different inner logic, further complicates strategies geared toward overcoming reification.

Though Habermas contends, with Weber and Parsons, that the economy and the administrative state evolve according to different inner logics, he cautions that the precise nature and extent of the difference in advanced capitalism is an empirical question. In order to establish how exactly the economy and the state relate in a particular society, which inner logic "weighs" more heavily regarding the manner of societal decision-making processes, and whether more or less far-reaching modifications are within the realm of practical (and viable) possibilities, we must engage in empirical social-scientific research: we cannot determine from the outset, and on the basis of theoretical categories, which of the two types of colonization is more consequential (economic or

administrative), how exactly they relate, and how they might relate, under specific socio-historic circumstances.

For this reason, it is not possible to directly infer appropriate remedies to the economy's colonization of the lifeworld and the reifying effects it exerts on the condition of communication in society. Habermas cautiously employs the related term "decolonization" to designate the direction that mediations of theory and practice leading to a socially and politically desirable result might take; in general terms, to be sure, the lifeworld must be decolonized in the sense that the reifying effects of the production and distribution process must be fully recognized, and their control over modern society's communicative capacity reduced.

To give the notion of "inner logic" further substance, I will next examine the theories of Lukács and Habermas by distinguishing their respective combinations of Marx and Weber, their proposed resolutions of the problem of mediating theory and practice, and their approaches to overcoming reification. Although Habermas's discussions of Lukács focused on a small set of related issues, they necessitated the identification of the basic patterns of their respective renditions of Weberian Marxism. Since the differences between their versions are of primary concern here in terms of how they constructed their theories, I will examine the manner in which Lukács and Habermas developed and presented their arguments, how they linked contributions of earlier theorists, identified critical standards, and legitimated theoretically informed courses of action.

**COMBINING MARX AND WEBER:
CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY IN LUKÁCS AND HABERMAS**

Despite the differences between Marx's and Weber's theories, Lukács saw a common core in their theoretical projects, and he saw their works as complementary: the analyses of the development of the modern economy as a rational and contradictory system of action characterized by an evolutionary dynamic all its own. Though both theorists provided divergent responses to the question of how to respond to the effects of the modern market economy on society, the importance of their respective contributions for the systematic analysis of the relationship of economy and society remains unmatched.

How did Lukács and Habermas integrate Marx and Weber? In elucidating this question, I must warn that neither Lukács's nor Habermas's theoretical projects can be adequately understood exclusively in terms of Weberian Marxism. Though Lukács was the founder of Weberian Marxism, he returned to a more traditional form of Marxist theory soon after the publication of *HCC*. Habermas, in turn, cannot be considered as the proponent of any particular theoretical tradition, including one as broad as Western Marxism, or even critical social theory in the Frankfurt School tradition. He harbors an ambivalent relationship to all his theoretical sources, and he resists reductions of complexity along the lines of any theoretical tradition preceding his own.

The following portrayals of Lukács's and Habermas's modernist critical theories highlight features that are central to the project of Weberian Marxism and to the challenges the two theorists set out to resolve. The emphasis is not on comprehensive

portrayals of Lukács's and Habermas's respective theories, but on what we can learn about how to do theory today, in a critical theoretical mode, by identifying the defining features of two central Weberian Marxists.

Lukács's Critique of Reification: A Beginning

Lukács did not start out as a theorist. In his early writings, he was primarily concerned with the existentialist problem of the "tragic nature of human existence in modern society"—the "problematic human being"—and how it found expression in literature (esp. Lukács [1911] 1974). This problem constituted the vantage point for Lukács's perspective on philosophical, theoretical, aesthetic, and political questions, and it played a central role in the writings of the "young Lukács" until the mid-1920s (Arato and Breines 1979:33-49; Congdon 1983; Kadarkay 1991). This period in Lukács's work includes his early Marxist writings. While the predicament of the modern individual was explicit in his earlier writings on art (Lukács [1911] 1974, [1920] 1971, 1974, 1975), it became more submerged in his philosophical-political writings, as his "romantic anti-capitalism" became more manifest (Lukács [1923] 1971:x; see also Löwy 1979, 1989; Feher 1977). The shift in his interests from problems of artistic production and interpretation, via ethical questions, to the theoretical grounding of practical Communist politics, reflects his successive attempts to resolve the problem of the tragic existence and its place in society.

When revisiting Lukács's work, and in examining his role as a theorist, it is

necessary to keep in mind that when he wrote *HCC*, social theories were not yet systematically differentiated. Philosophy, then as today, designated examinations of the nature of knowledge, truth, and meaning-including Marxist philosophy and its contention that philosophy's concerns are always related to specific, sociohistorical contexts. Sociology was a discipline in formation whose overall orientation, specific research interests, and methodological apparatus were just beginning to take shape. Arato and Breines (1979:113) place Lukács's theory of reification in a three-dimensional system of coordinates:

Within *HCC*, only the reification chapter ... represents a systematic attempt to formulate a dialectical social theory. Lukács leads up to this in three steps, producing a unique combination of sociology, philosophy of praxis, and social theory. The sociology attempts the synthesis of Weber's theory of rationalization and the historical sections of Das Kapital, which Lukács transposes into a conceptual movement based on Marx's fetishism of commodities. The philosophy of praxis ... represents Lukács's own reconstruction of the history of German classical philosophy, culminating in a Marxian reformulation of the concept of "identical-subject object" as the social subject of historical practice. The purpose of Lukács's history of philosophy is to derive from the works of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel in particular a "philosophy of praxis" that could become the regulative principle of social theory and could begin to mediate the seemingly frozen immediacy yielded by sociology. As a result, social theory can begin with

the results of the sociology, but under the mediation of the concepts of the philosophy of praxis.

Lukács was concerned with updating Marx's theory at a later stage of capitalist social development when capitalist reification had permeated noneconomic realms of society, such as politics and culture, so deeply that Marx's initial theory was no longer sufficient; it no longer spoke strongly and clearly enough to actors determined to establish a socialist society, partly because it had become dogma. On the basis of combining sociology, philosophy of practice, and social theory, Lukács conjectured that the "reified realm of objectifications" would turn into an "objective spirit" pointing toward conditions necessary for the "release of historical subjectivity." Lukács expected the seemingly universalized reification emanating from the capitalist economy to prepare the emergence of a form of intellectual and theoretical understanding of sociohistorical conditions of human existence that had not been reached before in history, and that could not be reached as long as society was not objectified. In order for truly transformative collective action to be possible, social, political, and cultural dimensions of social life had to be homogenized to the point where fully reified social relations both enabled and forced individuals to recognize societal conditions for what they objectively are, and each other as equals. With the self-objectification that reification forced on capitalist society, the structural preconditions for truly human agency and radical societal transformations emerged for the first time. However, at the end of the day, Lukács subverted the opportunity to turn his "systematic attempt" into an authentically new theory of society, because he was not able "to undertake the self-critique required by his own understanding

of the concepts of 'category' and 'mediation'" (Arato and Breines 1979:113).

When Lukács wrote *HCC*, he relied most strongly on the writings of Hegel, Marx, and Weber (as well as, to a lesser degree, Lenin and Simmel). To provide some indication as to how Lukács's "dialectical social theory" integrated elements of these different theories, I will briefly examine how he fused the different theories to grasp the nature of reification and the practical function of party organization. Since it will not be possible to do justice to the richness of Lukács's argument here, I will concentrate on the three guiding themes identified at the beginning: combining Marx and Weber, mediating theory and practice, and overcoming reification.

The Marxist tradition, as a systematic, critical continuation of Hegel's dialectic idealism, relies on a concept of universal rationality that is decisive for the possibility of its radical critique of capitalism: the assumption that modern society has the unique potential to resolve its crucial problems in a manner that not only guarantees its survival, but also makes it possible to strive toward achieving the greatest good for the largest number of men and women. Marxist theory cannot advance universal rationality as the vanishing point of its theory of societal transformation without a concept of totality (see Jay 1984). Although Marx implicitly relied upon Hegel's concept of totality in the construction of his critique of political economy, it was Lukács who first argued that "totality" was essential to Marxist theory. Referring to the early critical theory, Albrecht Wellmer ([1969] 1971:135) characterized this central motif as follows: "Critical social theory lives by the anticipation of a 'total social subject'; only on the basis of this anticipation is it able to conceive the apparent forms of a social disorder or 'unnatural

essence' of society; the validity of its findings is bound up with the efficacy of a liberating interest in cognition-in knowing." While such a reference to a "total social subject" opens up an array of possible critiques based on identifiable propositions, normative standards, and practical intentions, it does not lead directly to one specific type of critique or one strategy of radically transforming society. To Lukács, however, critiquing capitalism from the point of view of totality leads directly to a strategy designed to overcome this type of society.

Lukács was not concerned that Marx's critique of capitalism was a "theory," not a philosophy, especially not a philosophy of life (which is not to say that Marx's theory does not contain elements from, and implications for, the latter). Accordingly, he did not consider the specific theoretical purpose of Marx's critique-the attempt to identify the necessary theoretical and social conditions for stimulating forms of radical social change that will not revert to previous forms of social, political, and economic organization. Instead, Lukács read Marx's critique as directly pointing toward strategies for radical social reconstruction. He did not consider the possibility that the validity of Marx's standards, claims, and especially his predictions may have been part of a specific reference frame, and that Marx's ideas had to be interpreted not just in terms of their application to practical endeavors at a specific stage of capitalist development, but also in terms of the more cautious tone he struck in his later writings.

As he linked elements of the social theories of Marx and Weber, Lukács developed the theory of reification as a tool to criticize capitalist processes of rationalization and structures of domination. Although he designed this theory as an

instrument for critically analyzing forms of power, with reification being the product of processes of rationalization in the economic sphere, he did not extend its application to other forms of power generating other forms of "reification." In capitalism, the process of rationalization typical of the economic sphere must be assumed to be related to processes of rationalization in the political sphere, but Lukács neither explicitly addressed this issue, nor did he specifically analyze the nature of politics in capitalism.

Presumably, he considered bourgeois politics a direct extension of processes of economic rationalization and reification. By contrast, Lukács posited that socialist politics follows a pattern of power accumulation different from bourgeois politics; while bourgeois parties squabble and indulge in indecision, the Communist Party organization is uniquely positioned to determine effective strategies for radical societal transformation prepared by objective social conditions.¹⁷ His theory certainly must be understood in terms of attaining a "philosophically" superior understanding of historical necessity and the imperatives of political action, rather than in terms of propounding, as a precursor to Habermas, the importance of the category of the inner logic of different value spheres for Western Marxist theory. Still, his manner of integrating different theorists warrants further clarification, as he was profoundly aware of the inner logic of one value sphere.

The process of rationalization Weber analyzed is all-embracing; there is no sphere in society that is spared. According to Weber, this is especially true where social domination manifests itself openly and concretely: in the economy and the administrative state. This is not to suggest, however, that the economic system and the political system are entirely distinct, as the formation of the modern political system

coincided with the rise of the capitalist market economy. As a result, economic and political forms of power can be distinguished analytically, but the concrete relationships between political and economic power in modern society must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

Habermas criticized Lukács for reducing the complex understanding of modern society that Weber had achieved to a mode of explanation based on one principle: the determination of the logic of societal processes to the logic of one of its spheres, the economy. This reduction of complexity enabled Lukács to read the process of rationalization that Weber characterized as all-embracing as an all-embracing process of reification, with reification emanating from the economic system to all forms of social, political, and cultural organization and existence. Lukács recognized reification, as it is based in the commodity form, as ubiquitous. Yet by concentrating on the specific logic of reification as characteristic of the economic system, he neglected to ask the more fundamental question: What would it take for the communist movement to engage in practical-political action without reproducing the pattern of capitalist reification permeating not only bourgeois political action, but also thinking about political action under conditions of bourgeois ideology? How could the communist movement have arrived at a conception of practice that did not reflect and replicate notions of power that were formed under the influence of the capitalist mode of production? Without rigorously distinguishing the nature of political power in capitalism and socialism, Lukács appears to have assumed that political power in capitalism is a direct extension of the reifying capitalist mode of production, while in the socialist movement, political power is the

means to overcome capitalist reification.

Lukács neglected Weber's analyses showing that the bureaucratic political system in capitalism is a sphere characterized by its own specific logic of evolution and reproduction, and endowed with a "reifying" capacity all its own. If political power derives from the economic social system, it is bound to solidify the reifying character of the economic sphere in all spheres of social life, especially if political power is enforced through the non-democratic mechanism of bureaucratic rules and regulations. On the other hand, given that in modern society political power is based, to a greater or lesser degree, on democratic processes of collective will formation, the possibility cannot be excluded that political power can turn against the reifying effects of a supposedly self-regulating capitalist market economy. Albrecht Wellmer has pointed out an additional reason for the failure of Lukács's analysis:

According to Lukács the progressive reification of consciousness reflects the universalization of the commodity form in capitalist society. This universalization of the commodity form, however, corresponds to the internal logic of the capital-labour relationship. Now it seems that at the time at which Lukács wrote [*HCC*] the conception of the autonomously developing economic "base" had already, strictly speaking, become obsolete. Because of the increase in state intervention and the growing interdependence of scientific research and technology, the particular constellation of economics and politics that had been characteristic for liberal capitalism had changed. No longer could the relationship between

the economic and the political system be simply regarded as that between "base" and "superstructure" (Wellmer 1976:242).

If Lukács had not limited his theory of reification to the kind of problem that was foreordained by his reading of Marx's analysis and perspective, and had he employed Weber's critique of the bureaucratization of the modern world in his own approach, he could have avoided some of the ambivalences in his thinking. Viewed in this context, Lukács's theory of reification indeed represents a step back for social theory. As in Marx's theory, the phenomenon of power and domination is reduced to economic power, and democracy is denounced as a bourgeois ideology.¹⁸ However, while Marx's claims must be understood in terms of his theoretical focus, and while the scope of his claims is "limited" in those terms, Lukács's claims do not seem to be contingent on such a specific focus. Marx's claim that social power and domination first must be critically examined in terms of economic power does not imply that in terms of empirical validity, it suffices to posit that forms of social power and domination "are" functions of economic power and structure in capitalist society. Lukács failed to recognize that even Marx's critique of political economy was a beginning, not a final product. As a result, he failed to recognize the true scope and application of his theory of reification, which extended to other value spheres in society and their respective potential for treating human beings as objects.

In this sense, Lukács's theory would not have been elevated to the level of universalist theories, but its contribution to social-scientific research might have been immense, enabling him to differentiate distinct types of reification emanating from different value spheres. It also might have enabled him to discern reifying effects

resulting from "solutions" to social problems that we are not able to fully assess without a more comprehensive theory of reification. The administrative system in society is the most obvious case in point, but not necessarily the only one. In the end, Lukács was insensitive, if not indifferent, to the Communist Party's potential for abuse of power, and to radical democracy's potential for reducing such abuse of power.

In attempting to mediate theory and practice, Lukács made assumptions about the dynamics *between* theory and practice—that is, about the relationship between theory and the conditions of practice in society—that he did not subject to scrutiny. Lukács assumed that only an organizationally oriented theory of practice would lead to the best possible mediation of theory and practice. In his view, the best outcome was a highly astute theory of the dynamics of social transformation. But Lukács's assumption limited rather than opened up possibilities for creative social action. To be sure, giving the question of mediating theory and practice an organizational twist was not, as such, a bad idea: it could have opened up a new social context for theoretical discourse leading to greater insight. But Lukács went too far by collapsing different functions in mediating theory and practice into one domain.

Although he repeatedly paid lip service to the importance of sociology as a social science, and despite the importance of Weber's (and Simmel's) works to his early intellectual development (see Liebersohn 1988:159-96), Lukács rarely questioned the validity of his assumptions about social dynamics in capitalism, and he did not utilize insights of the social sciences, and especially of sociology, that might have weakened his perspective, or strengthened it by forcing him to qualify his underlying theory of social

change. Indeed, Lukács did not allow for a social-scientific corrective to his social philosophy. A number of Marxian scholars have argued that philosophical, theoretical, and social-scientific components of Marx's work can be differentiated (Schumpeter 1942:1-58; Dahrendorf 1959:118-32), and those aspects that are of continued use for social research identified (see esp. Postone 1993; also Sayer 1987; Murray 1988; and Hazelrigg 1993). A similarly systematic differentiation of philosophical, theoretical, and social-scientific components in Lukács's early dialectical social theory, in *HCC*, is not possible. Marek Siemek (1986) was correct when he concluded his essay on Lukács's version of Marxism as a form of philosophy, by stating that Lukács's interest was not social-scientific. As Bertolt Brecht put it, "Lukács has a tendency to equate the world with the mind, and investigate life in the intellectual sphere."¹⁹

It appears that Lukács did conceive of the possibility that the process of overcoming reification and revolutionizing society could be furthered in other ways than in terms of his specific reading of Marx (and Lenin). He did recognize that by linking the problem of mediating theory and practice directly to the attainment of the "correct" theory of adequate practice on the basis of an organizational orientation, he deprived those involved of the freedom, autonomy, as well as sensitivity to be responsive of the social, political, and economic demands of the time. He acknowledged the importance of the classics' modern, emancipatory thought, which enabled him to develop his initial theory of the effects of the capitalist mode of production on all forms of social life. But as he assimilated theory to the ulterior logic of romantic anticapitalism, Lukács also deprived his earlier theory of its authenticity.

Indeed, Lukács's integration of Hegel, Marx, and Weber did not reveal sufficient sensitivity to the fact that their theories cannot be understood literally, but must be read in terms of their specifically designed, respective reference frames. As Moishe Postone points out in his "reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory" (1993), Lukács's "materialist appropriation of Hegel" is highly problematic: by "restricting [the] validity of [Hegel's theory] to social reality," Lukács rejected Hegel's contention that his work was above all a theory of consciousness geared towards attaining "absolute knowledge" philosophically, not practically.²⁰ Postone contends that "Lukács's attempt to reconceptualize capitalism is deeply inconsistent"; and though "his approach points beyond traditional Marxism, it remains bound to some of its basic theoretical presuppositions" (1993:72-73).²¹

Lukács was neither especially concerned with the compatibility of Hegel's, Marx's, and Weber's respective analytical and research interests and strategies, their stances on the possibility of overcoming capitalist reification and on mediating theory and practice, nor with problems associated with any attempt to combine elements of theories that do not belong to the same tradition of thinking. His interest was to employ these theories to advance the "ulterior" objective of the communist world revolution, to support his motives of delegitimizing capitalism, including democratic validity claims and individual rights, while legitimating socialism. By necessity, an array of theoretical inconsistencies resulted (see Kline 1987; Rockmore 1987). While Marx's characterization of the process of revolutionary transformation of capitalism can be interpreted in a number of ways if viewed in a long-term perspective, no such alternative

readings of Lukács are possible in *HCC*: as he himself later admitted, he had fallen prey to the "messianic utopianism" of those years (*HCC*:xviii).

The illogical "logic" that informed the strategy Lukács proposed for arriving at the correct and most apt theory, under the pressures of organizational decision making, is likely to have had the opposite result to what it was intended to achieve: a theory leading to failure. Ironically, while bourgeois capitalism could not impede the emergence of a theory oriented toward the radical transformation of this society, Lukács asserted that in order for socialism to succeed, it had to limit the possibility of creative and unimpeded systematic thinking. He did not consider that releasing theory from practical-political imperatives might have led to qualitatively different, and potentially superior, strategies for mediating theory and practice, as well as for overcoming reification.

Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind that the "reification" essay in *HCC*, as indeed Lukács's only "systematic attempt to formulate a dialectical social theory" (Arato and Breines 1979:113), also was, after all, just a beginning. The promise this beginning entailed was not only never realized, but was not even developed any further. As Liebersohn put it:

Lukács was almost immediately dissatisfied with the utopianism of *HCC* and turned toward resolute acceptance of the limits that fate, in the form of history, sets to human endeavor. His essays of the later twenties and his biography of the young Hegel affirmed the wisdom he himself had condemned just a few years before of learning to live within fixed historical conditions. After embracing one extreme possibility of the

sociological tradition, he rediscovered the other. Nor was this the end of his story. To the end of his life, he alternated between loyalty to the Soviet system and messianic belief in the imminence of authentic socialism (Liebersohn 1988:194).

To employ the category of the inner logic for theoretical purposes with respect to Lukács: over the long run, his work did not center around discerning the inner logic of any one theoretical or practical problem. In this sense too, Lukács was not primarily a theorist. Lukács's earliest writings had been tainted by an intellectual "uncertainty" that accompanied his thinking into old age. When he was forced by the Comintern in 1925 to recant *HCC*, he apparently submitted willingly; his relationship to Stalinism during its historical epoch and later is another case in point.²² This uncertainty appears above all as a lack of theoretical confidence and steadfastness with respect to his own insights, as soon as they came into conflict with the propagated interpretations and political priorities of the Communist Party hierarchy, and it is particularly evident with regard to Lukács's inclination to treat Lenin's thought as a kind of "higher authority" regarding crucial questions he was reluctant or unable to resolve on his own (see Lukács [1924] 1971). Uncertainty also appears to have been a basic element of Lukács's notorious dogmatism and "cryptoreligiosity" (Grondin 1988:87).

Lukács conflated theoretical claims presented by his predecessors with claims about empirical reality and practical possibilities: he read his predecessors in terms of claims that have clear practical implications, even if their claims were designed not to lead to concrete practical conclusions drawn from their diagnoses. Finally, there is a

certain irony in that Lukács remained oblivious to the fact that, despite profound differences between the theoretical reference frames of Hegel, Marx, and Weber, they have one common denominator. The writings of Hegel and Weber, and even the Marx of Capital and Grundrisse, were directed against the temptation to draw concrete conclusions from social-scientific diagnoses of the nature and logic of modern society. To Lukács, the distinguishing feature of dialectical theory was that it points toward concrete, practically relevant strategies. On the basis of this misunderstanding, the Lukács of *HCC* deprived himself of the critical self-reflexivity that might have enabled him to develop his analysis further, and to apply it to his own attempt at mediating theory and practice oriented toward overcoming reification.

Habermas's Critique of Functionalist Reason

The central proposition of Habermas's theoretical work is the assumption that whenever human beings participate in a communicative interaction, they implicitly are engaged in an attempt to reach mutual understanding; for example, of the situation in which they are acting, of a specific problem, or of a socially desirable objective. Habermas's communicative action paradigm is decisive not because it supplants earlier action paradigms that sociological theory was built upon, but because it enables us to grasp a dimension of social life that no other theory is equipped to identify and assess. It is our communicative capacity that is responsible for our ability, fleeting as it may be in concrete situations, to reshape the social and material foundations of our lives.

To follow Habermas's argument, the earlier action-theoretic foundations of sociological theory—teleological action, normatively-regulated action, and dramaturgical action—all fail when it comes to explaining the human effort to cooperatively create truly new conditions of living in society that are not expressions of instrumental rationality, of normatively sanctioned rules, conventions, and regulations, and of dramaturgically pursued objectives. His theory of communicative action presents an action paradigm that enables social scientists to grasp the potential capacity of social actors to redefine, and thus "recreate," the conditions of their lives through a *learning process*. It is for this reason that the communicative action paradigm is the first sociological paradigm to analyze forms of action that are socially relevant only in modern society. The preceding three action paradigms describe and analyze social action *in* modern society (as well as other types of society), not social action that is *of* modern society.

Habermas's *TCA* illustrates the kind of theory construction resulting from the assumption that contributions from sociological, social, and critical theories together must be assumed to approximate "truths" about specific social phenomena and dimensions of modern society that individual theories, taken separately and focusing on the inner logic of one specific value sphere, social problem, or analytical task, cannot apprehend.²³ His approach is symptomatic both of the degree of self-reflection that critical social theory has reached during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and of the level of differentiation that the division of labor in theoretical sociology has attained in recent years. For a variety of reasons, individual theories cannot facilitate a comprehensive understanding of any problem or phenomenon—because it was not part of

their explicit purpose or design to do so, or because at the time of their formulation, society had not yet evolved to the point where the issue at hand could be identified explicitly in theoretical terms.

If we relate diverse social theories to specific problems to be understood in terms of their inner logics, we gain access to a broad array of insights that are buried in social theories developed over the course of the last two centuries by searching for common denominators, for similarities in the way in which social reality is read, interpreted, and analyzed, and for insights which, for a variety of reasons, each individual theory was not able to discern.

Toward the end of *TCA*, Habermas identifies what he regards as the "tasks of a critical theory of society." The theory of communicative action produces a theory of capitalist modernization that follows the Marxian model and is critical both of the contemporary social sciences and the social reality that constitutes their subject matter:

It is critical of the reality of developed societies inasmuch as they do not make full use of the learning potential culturally available to them, but deliver themselves over to an uncontrolled growth of complexity.... [T]he theory is also critical of social-scientific approaches that are incapable of deciphering the paradoxes of societal rationalization because they make complex social systems their object only from one or another abstract point of view, without accounting for the historical constitution of their object domain. Critical social theory does not relate to established lines of research as a competitor; starting from its concept of the rise of modern societies, it attempts to explain the specific limitations and

the relative rights of those approaches (*TCA I:375*).

The project of *overcoming* reification that had been the guiding principle of Lukács's theory does not constitute the vanishing point of Habermas's version of Weberian Marxist theory, analytically or practically. The commodity form has become so much a part of modern society, so much "second nature" to us all, that it is no longer possible to seriously consider the possibility of eliminating the reifying effects of the capitalist mode of production on all aspects of society. In Habermas's view, the "self-regulating" capitalist market economy for now appears to constitute the most efficient, socially viable way of solving the problem of material production and reproduction. Therefore, the project of "overcoming" the capitalist economy (by subjugating it to the control of "the state" or "society," for instance) is not feasible at this time, partly because, in the most advanced societies, such a project does not inspire any powerful social movements. Consequently, the main purpose of critical social theory in the Weberian Marxist tradition poses itself differently in the latter part of the century. To say that reification no longer can be overcome is not to suggest that we must accept uncritically the claims put forth by those benefitting from "free market" capitalism—that the economy best be left alone, and that *any* regulatory interference will necessarily harm its operation. Instead, the challenge is to hold on to the insight that the current form of the capitalist mode of production is *both* an expression of the inner logic of a self-regulating market economy and the manifestation of relations of power that are historically and nationally specific. In the face of the seemingly overwhelming stranglehold of reification on modern society, Lukács's social theory must be readjusted so as to thematize the confinement of

communicative capacities; to identify alternative ways of thinking about economy, state, and society, rather than the need to *overcome* capitalism. To put it differently, the challenge is to prevent the current logic of rationalization characteristic of the advanced capitalist mode of production from further assimilating all other spheres in society to its own imperatives; to limit economic rationalization to the *economic sphere*. Any practice oriented toward *overcoming* capitalism is likely to fail at thematizing alternative forms of practice (and life) that correspond to the current stage of sociohistorical development. Such alternative forms of practice require a different paradigm of social action and sociological theory, along with a corresponding concept of social rationality and progress: the paradigm of communicative action.

Habermas "combined" the theories of Marx and Weber so that he could integrate elements of their works (as well as the works of Durkheim, Mead, Parsons, Schiitz, Goffman, and others—along with Lukács) without fundamentally contradicting their initial theories. Consistency is of central importance. While Habermas never denied that he does not always use social and sociological theories as they were supposed to be used according to the original theorists, he is also anxious not to distort the main thrust and meaning of their works. By integrating elements of different theories, he intends to uncover deeper insights and truths that go beyond the theories' initial objectives.

Following Weber, Habermas tries to distill an immanent logic that puts his theoretical cast of characters on the same wavelength. Habermas's use of the idea of the inner logic of value spheres is part of his larger claim that striving toward universalist validity claims is the hallmark of the modern age, although he does not conceive of it in

absolute terms. Rather, he stresses that if we do not strive toward universality-even if we cannot attain it in absolute terms-we will not be able to work together toward attaining socially desirable goals. Once we abandon the idea of universally applicable standards, the proposition that it is desirable and advantageous to aim for mutual understanding will no longer be justifiable. Should we reach that point, social theory will be in danger of turning into a set of discourses comprising a multitude of more or less systematic formulations of viewpoints that extrapolate alternative visions of social change and organization from a set of increasingly particularistic and idiosyncratic propositions.

In Habermas's *TCA*, elements of social, sociological, and critical theory are, ostensibly, in a balance: the nature, scope, and thrust of the critique reflects the systematic standards and insights about social order and change characteristic of social and sociological theory and necessary for determining the societal importance of the inner logic of communicative action. The main principle of his theory as a variation of his rational-reconstructive method ("the task of rendering what is a universal competence or implicit know-how into a set of explicit rules"²⁴) is differentiation and integration. The question of whether a specific "practice" advances a certain goal cannot be decided beforehand, within the context of even the most complex theory. Practice is not set first, determining the nature of theory; instead, theory informs the scope of viable forms of practice, enabling us to address the type(s) of practice likely to succeed given specific conditions of social existence, mode of production, and political system. As a result, theory's relative liberation from practical political questions appears to imply a more general retreat of social theorists from practical and political issues.

Critical theory's unique claim to fame is that it constitutes the only approach that tries to cut through the veil of ideology, to thematize what would constitute rational action oriented toward a concept of unabridged reason.²⁵ To be sure, Habermas does not posit reason substantively, but formally: it must be achieved procedurally. We have to specify precisely in what reference frame rational action is to be applied, what type of rationality we are referring to, and how it is to be implemented. Other political and theoretical approaches that uphold the notion of rational action, strategy, and solutions, do so within a narrowly defined and circumscribed framework that uses as its central focal point just one concept of rationality (see especially Coleman 1990). By contrast, in modern society, the possibility of rationally resolving social and societal problems must constitute critical theory's vanishing point.

Habermas does not want to set up a theory that can serve as a blueprint for an alternative, future society; his purpose is to elucidate the nature of situations in which people have the choice to redefine the rules and regulations by which they live-wherever, through social interaction, social reality is defined, produced, and reproduced. In order for Habermas's theory to be understood appropriately, it must not be read with the conventional attitude that a social theory is supposed to project a different type of societal organization to be built in, or for the future. Instead, its purpose is to make explicit a potential that already exists in contemporary society, and which, although it does not entail a new form of social organization, must be seized upon as a mode of more effectively confronting social problems of all kinds, a mode qualitatively superior to both traditional and functional approaches to social problems.

In Habermas's self-understanding, the task of critical theory in the late twentieth century is to theoretically identify the conditions that must be fulfilled for this potential to bear fruit, against conspicuously growing odds. Yet this task cannot be fulfilled by critical theory alone. Critical theory needs the correctives of social theory and sociological theory to make sure that its standards, objectives, and claims about the nature of societal change stand on solid ground.

**WEBERIAN MARXISM RECONSIDERED:
TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF THE INNER LOGIC OF VALUE
SPHERES**

The purpose of this article has been to bring out the increasingly apparent central pattern of theory in Weberian Marxism: to critically analyze the relationship between different social value spheres and their respective inner logics. In order to relate the multiplicity of social theories to each other in a meaningful manner, we must presume that each constitutes a legitimate endeavor to answer a specific set of questions that are closely related to both implicit methodological and political presuppositions, concerns, values and objectives. That the set of questions may include ulterior concerns is not as such problematic and does not necessarily render the theories ineffective, if the chosen strategy for answering the set of questions is not a direct function of the ulterior motives.

The category of the "inner logic" has important implications for the analytical and practical thrust of Weberian Marxism, as it enables us to examine how the differentiation

of social value spheres, of types of theory, and the formation of corresponding expert cultures have altered the "nature and logic" of Western Marxism itself. This applies especially in terms of the respective logics of sociological, social, and critical theories as distinct "value spheres" in their own right. In terms of the three issues central to Habermas's discussion of Lukács's work, the importance of the category of "inner logic" can be illustrated in terms of the continued importance of critiquing reification to Western Marxism; of the need to formulate viable mediations of theory and practice; and of the imperative to "overcome" (i.e., decrease the extent of) reification.

To Lukács, reification was the central problem; Marx and Weber were the primary theorists enabling him to determine the nature of reification as a necessary consequence of capitalism, and in turn, its impact on individual as well as social life in advanced capitalist societies. As we have seen, since Lukács posits the overcoming of reification as an "objective possibility," the challenge is to develop the strategy that will enable those social forces intent on overcoming reification to do so. To formulate the theory that identifies the correct course of action, a selection mechanism is needed that facilitates the determination of the correct theory. The political party organization is the locale in society where the conditions for determining such a theory exist: only in the party organization does the search for the theoretically informed, correct strategy attain the serious and inescapable urgency leading to a potentially successful practice. Once the party organization is recognized as the place where the necessary conditions for mediating theory and practice exist, determining the correct strategy for proletarian action is just a matter of time. Reification will not be "overcome" by means of the proletarian

revolution alone; but as long as the proletarian revolution has not occurred, it will remain impossible to reduce the grip of reification over society.

To Habermas, by contrast, reification is important in terms of the limitations it imposes on modern society's capacity to cope with its problems in a comprehensively rational manner, and he seizes on the potential for truly productive communicative action. The purpose of Habermas' *TCA* is to demonstrate just how much of what Marx's theory tried to assert in terms of the socially mediated human potential for conscious individual and collective self-determination is the uniquely human capacity to communicatively determine the conditions of our existence. To Habermas, the problem with reification is not that it fosters "false consciousness,"²⁶ but that the structural and institutional boundaries characteristic of functionally organized social systems confining social life in advanced capitalism impede modern human beings' ability to engage in undistorted communicative action.

For Habermas, there is no "royal path" to mediating theory and practice. Instead, mediations that foster effective strategies are contingent on recognizing that different tasks correspond to different levels of social organization. A truly effective mediation can be achieved only on the basis of separate steps specifically designed to resolve particular challenges linked to the overall objective. In other words, we ought to think of society as a complex network of social value spheres characterized by different "inner logics." Analogously, when the formation of different types of social theory is assimilated to political and ideological purposes, theory loses the unique power to facilitate greater understanding of the complexity and contradictory nature of modern

social reality. This differentiation of tasks and challenges applies to the objective of overcoming reification.

In Habermas's view, reification cannot be reduced directly, partly because once society is permeated by it to the present extent, the capitalist mode of production structurally inhibits our ability to conceive of other ways of solving the "economic problem," especially as the sociohistoric specificity of capitalist production and distribution becomes ever more difficult to discern. Because the reifying effects of capitalist production are so closely entwined with modern society's growing inability to separate those elements of the capitalist economic process essential to its continued functioning (and the social costs that go along with it) from those that are not (and social costs that need not necessarily be "paid"), reification "immunizes" itself against society's ability to limit its reach. Accordingly, before reification's reign can be tackled directly, modern society's communicative capacity must be liberated from the shackles of reification. In order to achieve this, critical theorists must simultaneously support those forces in society more or less consciously determined to limit the scope of reification, and also develop strategies geared toward improving the conditions under which reification can be reduced-without endangering the very integrity and stability of highly integrated and interrelated social systems. In other words, society's capacity to express dimensions of social, political, cultural, and economic reality beyond the current economic regime must be forcefully enhanced and continuously fostered.

In terms of the "inner logic," the difference between Lukács and Habermas appears in a striking, though not necessarily irreconcilable, light. To prepare the

possibility of "overcoming reification," the entire reference frame of thinking about the relationship between theory and practice must be readjusted. To Lukács's theoretization of capitalism and its overcoming, reification constitutes the central problem. To Habermas, we must first acknowledge the nature of reification with respect to communication before its grip on society can be altered. In Lukács's theory, reification appears as the consequence of the primacy of one specific logic—the logic of capitalist accumulation and decision-making processes, and its compulsion to suppress all that might impede its expansion. By contrast, Habermas's theory points toward the recognition of the multiplicity of logics that correspond to different spheres of life: we cannot reasonably draw conclusions about any viable course of collective action as long as we try to explain "the world with one thesis" (Habermas [1993] 1994:113).

To assess the problems of critical social theory today, we must recognize that the inner logics of social and sociological theory progressively have become more important; that social, sociological, and critical-theoretical elements of theory must be distinguished; and that insights gained in theoretical sociology about social, political, cultural, and economic processes and conditions of existence in advanced capitalist society circumscribe how Western Marxists like Habermas conceive of the scope of effective political action. As the twentieth century aged, non-Marxist social theories began to play an increasingly important role in the determination of the general scope and specific goals of socialist political action, as well as in the analytical reference frame of Western Marxism—both with respect to the foundations of its critique of capitalism, and to the kind of questions Western Marxist theorists considered essential. A reversal thus occurred in

the relationship between critical and social and sociological theory in Habermas's version of Weberian Marxism. The early-twentieth-century Marxist critique incorporated sociological insights toward a more refined understanding of capitalist reification (and, in a second step, toward overcoming capitalism). Over the course of the century, the standards and practical orientation of critical theory became increasingly a function of social-theoretical and sociological standards and representations of social reality, and increasingly sensitive to the difficulties and impediments that come with efforts to engage in transformative political action.

Attempts to resolve the three tasks central to our discussion—combining Marx and Weber, mediating theory and practice, and overcoming reification—will be successful only if they cross-fertilize each other once they have followed their own respective logics and fulfilled their specific tasks. Such cross-fertilization is necessary for any comprehensive consideration of viable mediations of theory and practice, and it enables us to envision the possibility of what Lukács called practical theory: the formulation of socially desirable goals, the informed identification of strategies that promise to advance political goals more or less directly (by means of more or less mediated practices), and the development and selection of concrete courses of action that apply at various levels of social organization and symbolic production.

The category of the "inner logic" helps us to clarify the question: How relevant are radically modern critical theories in the Marxist tradition to the analysis of late-twentieth-century society? To confront this question in a manner both systematic and critical, we must identify the specific purposes of distinct theories as theories, and

examine the historic and sociogeographic context of their formulation in a strictly dialectical manner. In other words, we need to differentiate among elements of the theory that are (intended to be) formal, substantive, and/or critical, that is, among the respective projects (and activities) of social, sociological, and critical theories.

The category of inner logic is promising because it provides a reference frame for systematically examining how the effects of different forms of structural power relate to each other: from the capitalist mode of production, via bureaucratic modes of managing political will-formation in mass democracies, to first-order Enlightenment scientific thinking, technology, and truth, to gendered ways of structuring the world that are not "natural" but socially constructed. At the same time, however, the category of the inner logic of value spheres is not only a tool for analyzing the effects of reification, but also a manifestation of it: as it enables us to differentiate the multiplicity of value spheres, it also forces us to conceive of them as distinct realms evolving according to their specific function in society. In this sense, the category pushes first-order Enlightenment thinking, as it emerged out of dualistic thinking, to the limit. In terms of this category, the modernization process appears as a "working out" of the diverse spheres of life, making them ever more distinguishable. As a result, society is compelled to recognize that existing constellations between different value spheres can be modified. At the same time, the category of the inner logic is also a tool that requires that we consider the contingent nature of divisional thinking. In this sense, the category of the inner logic indirectly points beyond the status quo, as it allows us to conceive of future social orders constituting alternative constellations of the different spheres of life. We would then be

able to address the question of whether Weber's disjunctive characterization of the diverse value spheres was specific to the state of affairs in twentieth-century advanced capitalism, or whether it grasped an inalterable fact of life in post-traditional societies. Clearly, in terms of Habermas's appropriation of the category of the "inner logic," a more conciliatory relationship between the spheres of life is an "objective possibility," but it will stay out of reach as long as the communicative potential embedded in modern society remains confined to the present degree.

Before we can tackle these issues, critical theory first has to work toward diminishing the proliferation of misunderstandings, contortions, and distortions that characterize most theoretical debates not confined to one specific tradition of theory. Indeed, as we confront this challenge, critical theory is better positioned to contribute to theoretical sociology than any other individual theory or theoretical tradition. To do so, and to remain a vital force in contemporary societies at the same time, critical theory has to reassert the practical orientation that was integral to its initial design, but which has become ever more submerged as a result of the orientation toward abstract theory.

At this stage of capitalist development, a conscious collective effort to overcome the prevalence of reification is not likely. The sociopolitical, cultural, and economic conditions certainly do not exist that would allow for the implementation of practical steps necessary to truly "overcome" reification on all levels of social, political, and corporate-industrial organization. But if we reorient our focus on reification, we may be able to identify practical strategies that are not based on linear models of causality. The task and the challenge may not be to eliminate all reification in society, but to confine it

to spheres where its effects are considered socially "necessary," acceptable, and advantageous (see Dahms 1998). Such a step would be contingent on our willingness to cut the direct link between theoretical and practical questions characteristic of Western Marxist theory.

To engage a practical turn in critical social theory, we must distinguish between theoretical issues and their inner logics, and practical issues and their inner logics. Just as we should not impose practical needs on theoretical endeavors, so too should we not project theoretical solutions onto practical problems. Only when we recognize their respective autonomy can we reflect upon possibilities for mediating between the two sets of challenges. While theories are oriented toward consistency, synthesis, and logic, any effective practice is contingent on the existence of alliances that are not concerned with purity, but with effectiveness. Modernity cannot sustain itself without social and political forces able to perceive the nature of the challenges they face. While they need theory's support, they must make their own contingent choices. While the active support from theorists in the end may not enable these forces to engage in consequential practice (because the existing societal conditions at this time "objectively" do not allow for qualitative transformation, or because the interpretations provided by theorists remain flawed), without the support from social (and socially responsible) theorists, their efforts will likely be doomed.

In the meantime, we would be well advised to put on hold the search that inspired Lukács, among others, for a theory enabling us to confront a multitude of analytical and practical challenges more effectively than do any of the theories developed over the last

two-hundred years. Since such a theory presumes the actuality of a socially unifying interpretation of the world in which live, and since the social foundations for such a unifying "reading of the world" do not appear to exist in any developed society, we probably could do little to consciously foster its development at this time. We remain situated in modernity and the social, political, and cultural struggles that are its defining features. Since the relationship between different value spheres depends on shifting power constellations in society, future relationships cannot be anticipated by means of abstract theories; among other factors, they will depend on the course that the struggle between progressive and regressive forces will take.

We should concentrate our efforts, therefore, on renewing the collaborative and interdisciplinary project of critical social theory, on consciously transcending the effects of reification in our theories of society, and on recapturing a sense of the possibilities for social transformation the future may hold. If theory, especially critical theory, wants to remain socially relevant, it has to resist the trend toward ever greater fragmentation in our understanding of society: we have to theorize in a way that remains open to, and does not exclude, the possibility of considering additional, as well as alternative, readings and interpretations of the social world. We also must resist the temptation to discard theories before we have had the opportunity to determine their analytical and practical value.

Finally, we must keep in mind that most theories, by far, are merely a starting point for rigorous sociological research, including Habermas's theory of communicative action. Only when critical theory is supported by conceptual and analytical tools

compatible with sociological theory, and a sophisticated, non-reductionistic social theory of the present, can we effectively address the issue of theory and practice. While we should not assume that reification as a general phenomenon can be overcome, we must reexamine the possibilities and conditions for problematizing the limitations reification imposes on the ability of modern society to begin to resolve a variety of social problems. To do so, we must turn our attention to critical analyses of the current form of the capitalist mode of production, and its implications for our ability to understand the society built upon it. Still, without recognizing the importance of creating the conditions for unrestrained communication, we will not be able to thematize reification and, in a socially meaningful manner, to reveal its petrifying face, to transcend it theoretically, in order to take practical steps toward subverting its control over human civilization, without endangering the integrity of Western societies at the brink of a new century. In this endeavor, Lukács's fervor may serve as an inspiration, while Habermas's rigor enables us to approach the arduous task with cautious confidence.

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ENDNOTES

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1. Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, and Ernst Bloch generally are considered the "founders" of this tradition. See Merleau-Ponty ([1955] 1973) for the first use of the designation, Western Marxism; for a comprehensive survey of the various traditions within Western Marxism, from its beginning to the late 1970s, see Agger (1979); also Anderson (1976); Stedman Jones et al. (1977); and Therborn (1996).
 2. On the contemporary relevance and direction of Frankfurt School critical social theory, see Wellmer ([1986] 1993). For an excellent and comprehensive discussion of the variety of types of critical theories, including modernist, postmodernist, and feminist versions, see Calhoun (1995).
 3. On the importance of reading Marx's work as a theory, and of recognizing that many of his particular "theories" (and concepts)—such as the labor theory of value, class theory, exploitation theory, etc.—were designed to analyze nineteenth-century capitalism and are thus historically specific, see Moishe Postone's (1993) superb "reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory."
 4. Throughout this paper, I will refer to, and employ the concept of, "inner logic," which has its roots in Max Weber's idea of Eigengesetzlichkeit: the notion that different social value spheres (like the economy and the administrative state) evolve according to a specific developmental logic all their own. It is only in modern society that these spheres are allowed to evolve, at an accelerating pace, according to their inner logics. Grasping the nature of this unique tendency for all social spheres, particularly as it plays itself out for the modern economy and the nation state, and how they relate to each other in

specific social contexts, is key to understanding how modern society is different from other types of society. At critical points below, this Weberian concept and its contemporary significance for how to do theory will be elucidated further.

5. The concept of reification has all but vanished from current debates in critical theory, even in Weberian Marxist critical theory; Habermas's appropriation of Lukács's conceptualization in *TCA* was the last notable innovative effort to introduce the concept into sociological theory. On possible uses of "reification" for purposes of sociological research, and why we must not abandon it, see Dahms (1998).

6. See Habermas (1991 b) for a recent statement on why the project of socialism remains viable, both theoretically and practically. See also Love (1995).

7. He continues, "[A]ccording to Habermas, the theory of communicative action is intended to function as an alternative paradigm which will better achieve the purposes of the old philosophy of history, and perhaps of the entire post-Kantian philosophical tradition" (Rockmore 1989:169).

8. See also Habermas's (1991 a:51) recent affirmation of Herbert Schnädelbach's (1983:13) contention that "our contemporary philosophizing [is] determined to a significant measure by the impulses emanating at the time from Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus [1921], Georg Lukács's History and Class Consciousness [1923] and Martin Heidegger's Being and Time [1927]."

9. "I get annoyed with people who persist in talking about 'bourgeois science', as if they had commandeered a sweeping insight. Theories can in any case no longer be sorted out

according to such criteria" (Habermas 1986:128).

10. See, e.g., Habermas (1987), pp. 17, 53, 62, 127, 155, 255, 268, 413, 418, 426, 464; and Habermas ([1985] 1987), pp. 48, 53, 66, 75, 192, 223. In the latter work, Lukács is briefly summoned to expose the "striking" parallels between his theory of reification and Georges Bataille's theory of sovereignty, which can be understood as related counterparts (pp. 223-25). In his more recent writings, Habermas mentions Lukács rarely (1983:15; [1988] 1992:5; [1991] 1993:170), if at all ([1992] 1996), excepting one paragraph on Lukács's contribution to sociology in the Weimar Republic (1991a:196-97; see also p. 164).

11. In fact, Habermas had little (if any) interest in Lukács as a social philosopher whose work continued to evolve well into the second half of this century. There are only a few occasions where Habermas refers to any of Lukács's writings after *HCC* (see, e.g., Habermas [1962] 1989:277n2).

12. This "report" was first published in Philosophische Rundschau V (3/4) 1957:165-235, and later included in the 1971 edition of Theorie und Praxis. To my knowledge, this text has not been translated into English. See Rockmore (1989:18-31) for a discussion of this report, which proceeds "from Marx to Marxism, and from a reading of the Paris Manuscripts as a form of philosophy to the issues that such reading raises, with special attention to three areas: the existentialist approach to Marx, the way in which historical materialism supposedly answers the question of the meaning of history, and a series of critical observations about historical materialism" (p. 20). After reading this report, Horkheimer had recommended that Habermas be removed from the Institute of Social

Research in Frankfurt. See Wiggershaus (1986:615) and Winkler (1996).

13. At the end of the essay, Lukács (*HCC*:80) wrote that the "revolutionary workers' council ... is one of the forms which the conspicuousness of the proletariat has striven to create ever since its inception The workers' council spells the political and economic defeat of reification. In the period following the dictatorship it will eliminate the bourgeois separation of legislature, administration and judiciary [I]t must overcome the fragmentation of the proletariat in time and space, and ... it has to bring economics and politics together into a true synthesis of proletarian praxis. In this way it will help to reconcile the dialectical conflict between immediate interests and ultimate goalThe proletariat only perfects itself by annihilating and transcending itself, by creating the classless society through the successful conclusion of its own class struggle."

14. Lukács did not consider the categorical possibility that it may not be possible to identify a theory with viable practical implications at all times, either because of socially based or constructed barriers to our cognitive capacities, or because, under certain circumstances, the constellation of social institutions and established practices may not allow for viable revolutionary practice. He wrote, "The ability of organization to mediate between theory and practice is seen most clearly by the way in which it manifests a much greater, finer and more confident sensitivity towards divergent trends than any other sector of political thought and action. On the level of pure theory the most disparate views and tendencies are able to co-exist peacefully, antagonisms are only expressed in the form of discussions which can be contained within the framework of one and the same organization without disrupting it. But no sooner are these same questions given

organisational form than they turn out to be sharply opposed and even incompatible.

Every 'theoretical' tendency or clash of views must immediately develop an organisational arm if it is to rise above the level of pure theory and abstract opinion, that is to say, if it really intends to point the way to its fulfillment in practice" (HCC:299).

15. In the index of the German original of Weber's Economy and Society ([1922] 1980), the term Eigengesetzlichkeit, as one of the basic concepts of his theory of rationalization, is referenced twenty-two times—as it applies to the market process, the development of law, "the religious," and other "extra" or non-economic phenomena and processes, including artistic production. In the work's English version edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich ([1922] 1978), which was translated over the course of several decades by altogether ten scholars, there is no consistent translation for Eigengesetzlichkeit; accordingly, the concept is not referenced in the index. It is translated, for instance, as "independence" (p. 650), "their own laws" (p. 1309), and "own autonomous tendencies" (p. 636). The latter instance is most instructive regarding the concept's substance: "Where the market is allowed to follow its own autonomous tendencies, its participants do not look toward the persons of each other but only toward the commodity; there are no obligations of brotherliness or reverence, and none of those spontaneous human relations that are sustained by personal unions. They all would just obstruct the free development of the bare market relationship, and its specific interests serve, in their turn, to weaken the sentiments on which these obstructions rest." See also Weber (1946). By contrast, in translations of Habermas's writings and other critical theorists, Eigengesetzlichkeit is translated, with near-absolute consistency, as "inner logic," with such variations as

"internal logic." For pertinent passages in Habermas, see *TCA I*:160-68 and 176-185. See also Schluchter (1981:25-39; 1989:120-27; 1996:273-78).

16. At the beginning of the second section of his discussion of rationalization as reification in *TCA I*, Habermas returns once more to Lukács, briefly addressing his assertion that there is "some reservation within the subjective nature of human beings that is resistant to reification" (*TCA I*:366-68). Yet he does so only to set the stage for his discussion of Horkheimer and Adorno, whose critique of instrumental reason started out from their concern that in fact there may not be any inherent limits to reification (pp. 366-99).

17. It should be remembered that Lukács engaged in political action himself; in the following statement, he vividly described an incident that occurred during his six-week tenure as a political commissar in the Hungarian Socialist Republic during the war with Romania in 1919 ([1980] 1983:65): "I was political commissar attached to the Fifth Division. When the Czech-Romanian offensive was launched in April, the Council of People's Commissars resolved, if my memory serves me right, that half the people's commissars should join the larger army units as political leaders [T]he communists joined a whole series of units as political commissars. I volunteered for this job and was sent to Tiszafüred, where we found ourselves on the defensive. The defence of Tiszafüred had been grossly mismanaged because the Budapest Red Army units ran away without firing a shot. The two other battalions, who would have been willing to defend Tiszafüred, were thus unable to maintain their positions, so that the Romanians

penetrated their lines and Tiszafüred fell. I set about restoring order as energetically as I could. That is to say, when we crossed the river to Poroszló, I set up a court-martial and had eight men belonging to the battalion that had run away in panic shot in the market-place. By these means I more or less managed to restore order. Later, I was Political Commissar for the whole of the Fifth Division. Together we advanced to Rimaszombat against the Czechs, and I was present when we took the town. I was then ordered back to Budapest. That was the end of my activities with the Red Army."

18. For Lukács's ambivalent attitude towards democracy, see Lukács (1991), as well as Levine (1991).

19. Quoted in Kadarkay (1991:331).

20. Postone's work is a most subtly and convincingly argued critical-theoretical reinterpretation of Marx's theory that fundamentally alters the understanding of his theory on the whole, and of the basic concepts that we have entertained for some time. To take into consideration the implications of Postone's work for my discussion of Habermas's discussion of Lukács's reading of Marx and Hegel as it pertains to the role of theory in Western Marxism, and the liberation of theory's inner logic from practical-political considerations, would explode the confines of this essay.

21. In Postone's use, "traditional Marxism" designates forms of analysis that conceptualize capitalism in terms of the historically specific theoretical devices that Marx developed to analyze nineteenth-century bourgeois society and its corresponding mode of production. In traditional Marxism, then, these historically specific devices are being transposed to the analysis of later stages of capitalist development, thus not only

generating a distorted depiction of this society, but also contorting the thrust of Marx's critical theory. As a result, the formal character of such "basic conceptual tools as mode of production, forces and relations of production," is not recognized, and the historicity of Marx's "fully developed substantive theory on the genesis and basic 'laws of motion' of the capitalist mode of production" ignored (Mouzelis 1995:3). By contrast, Postone conceptualizes "capitalism in terms of a historically specific form of social interdependence with an impersonal and seemingly objective character. This form of interdependence is effected by historically unique forms of social relations that are constituted by determinate forms of social practice and, yet, become quasi-independent of the people engaged in these practices. The result is a new, increasingly abstract form of social domination-one that subjects people to impersonal structural imperatives and constraints that cannot be adequately grasped in terms of concrete domination (e.g., personal or group domination), and that generates an ongoing historical dynamic. ... This reinterpretation treats Marx's theory of capitalism less as a theory of forms of exploitation and domination within modern society, and more as a critical social theory of the nature of modernity itself" (Postone 1993:3-4).

22. See Kadarkay (1991:310-13, 331-32).

23. In *TCA*, Habermas implicitly confirms what has been stated by theorists like Nicos Mouzelis: before we can judge the value of any theory for analyzing contemporary society, we first must distinguish the respective objectives of the three types of theory in sociology: sociological theory, social theory, and critical theory. Mouzelis (1995:3-8) suggests that we must determine whether these theories are to provide (1) analytical and

heuristic devices (or "tools") developed to examine a phenomenon (or question); (2) socio historically descriptive representations of society at a certain stage of its development; or (3) critical standards for determining which tools and representations are most adequate for understanding the significance of a phenomenon, action paradigm, or historical reference frame in the overall scheme of things. In more general terms, we can distinguish the three types of theory as follows: *Sociological theory* stands for the construction of "basic conceptual tools" for purposes of heuristic utility; while they cannot be "verified" empirically, they are intended to promote the formation of systematic analytical frameworks designed to frame and make compatible types of research that contribute to the analysis of modern society at various levels of complexity. In sociological theory, the critical impulse is directed at what should constitute the best general formal framework for sociology as discipline with a specific subject domain and a corresponding catalogue of methods for attaining sociological knowledge. Sociological theory is not concerned with concrete socio-historical conditions and societal formations; it has its model in economic theory and its successful establishment of a widely accepted conceptual and methodological reference frame. By contrast, *social theories* constitute historically specific, substantive theories of broad societal transformations that manifest themselves more or less clearly in societies of the same type, which are empirically verifiable and reveal universalistic tendencies more or less clearly. Often, social theories are presented as global interpretations based on selective categories that are presumed to be decisive features of the society at hand. Accordingly, in this case the critical impulse is directed at the identification of the dimensions most important to our understanding of

the society's evolutionary trajectory. *Critical theory*, finally, cuts through the veil of power and ideology that both social and sociological theories often reflect or perpetuate, on the basis of a normative perspective that provides critical standards, to evaluate the relative utility of different theoretical (and methodological) approaches, as well as their shortcomings. While many social theorists apply critical categories to what methods are best suited to the study of a specific social formation, critical theorists endeavor to develop a theory facilitating the study of contemporary society without implicitly reproducing its most decisive, yet contingent features. In this sense, critical theorists are critical both of the methods and the subject matter, and the relationship between the two.

24. White (1988:28ff.).

25. Habermas (1984:605): "Die Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns [stellt sich] die Aufgabe, die in die kommunikative Alltagspraxis eingelassene Vernunft aufzusuchen und aus der Geltungspraxis der Rede einen unverkiirzten Begriff der Vernunft zu rekonstruieren." ("The task of the theory of communicative action is to search for the reason embedded in the communicative practice of everyday life, and to reconstruct an unabridged concept of reason from the practice of validity claims in speech acts." My translation)

26. For a concise discussion of the concept of "false consciousness" in Marxist theory, see Merton (1968: 530-37).