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Structurally Bent on Self-Destruction: Paul Schrader and the Decomposition of Contemporary Society

Fabio Vighi

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Fabio Vighi[1]

Abstract: In this essay on Paul Schrader, I take seriously Theodor Adorno's claim that the film industry is internally antagonistic, thus containing the antidote to its own lie. I argue that Schrader's films are ideally placed, within contemporary mass-produced cinema, to reveal the inherent contradiction and self-sabotaging of the film commodity. Precisely on account of its formal tendency to endorse its commodity status, while attempting to subvert it from within, Schrader's auteurial cinema manages to produce symptomatic significations that reach beyond the director's conscious narrative control. As a rule, Schrader's mindful emphasis on subjective despair and self-destructiveness redoubles into the partially disavowed denotation of an increasingly substanceless socio-historical constellation seemingly destined to implosion. The focus of this essay rests on the dialectical claim that subjective negativity in Schrader's films is strictly correlated to the theme of the decomposition of contemporary society. Schrader's world is from the beginning populated by characters whose personal crises are rooted in the loss of symbolic efficiency of their social environment.

1   Fabio Vighi is Professor of Critical Theory and Italian at Cardiff University, UK. His recent publications include *Crisi di valore: Marx, Lacan e il crepuscolo della società del lavoro* (Mimesis, 2018), *Critical Theory and the Crisis of Contemporary Capitalism* (Bloomsbury 2015, with Heiko Fender), *Critical Theory and Film* (Continuum, 2012) and *On Zizek's Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation* (Continuum, 2010). His current research tackles capitalist crisis from a psychoanalytic perspective, focusing on Jacques Lacan's notion of discourse as a means to capture the negative ontology of the modern subject. Alongside psychoanalysis, he is interested in Hegelian dialectics as a mode of thinking crisis; film as a prominent form of dialectical thinking; and ideology critique as a way to address unconscious or disavowed attachments to social formations. He is co-director of the Centre for Ideology Critique and Žižek Studies at Cardiff University.

1. Adorno, critical theory and the film commodity

In his 1966 essay "Transparencies on Film", arguably his most consistent critical incursion into the seventh art, Theodor Adorno vied for a cinematic avant-garde not supported "by the power of capital, technological routine and highly trained specialists".[2] Such cinema would privilege anti-realistic awkwardness, improvisation,[3] and more generally a subjective representation of the world that would solicit unconscious conflicts and contradictions: "As the objectifying recreation of this type of experience, film may become art".[4] To exemplify his stance, Adorno mentioned Alexander Kluge, Michelangelo Antonioni, and experimental filmmaker/composer Mauricio Kagel.[5] However, despite the above recommendations, he concluded his essay on a (typically) pessimistic note, highlighting the impossibility for cinema to carry "purely aesthetic values" due to its *inherently objective character*: "The photographic process of film, primarily representational, places a higher intrinsic significance on the object, as foreign to subjectivity, than aesthetically autonomous tech-

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2   T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge), 2001, p. 178.

3   Adorno places his stakes in a "comparatively awkward and unprofessional cinema, uncertain of its effects" since there "is inscribed the hope that the so-called mass media might eventually become something qualitatively different." He adds that "works which have not completely mastered their technique, conveying as a result something consolingly uncontrolled and accidental, have a liberating quality." And again, liquidating realism: "Film [...] must search for other means of conveying immediacy: improvization which systematically surrenders itself to unguided chance should rank high among possible alternatives" (*Ibid.*, pp. 178-79).

4   *Ibid.*, p. 180.

5   In 'Transparencies on Film', Adorno first praised the un-cinematic aspects of Antonioni's *La notte* (1962) and then, returning to the central concern of his book with Hanns Eisler (*Composing for the Films*, first published in 1947), suggested how "film's most promising potential lies in its interaction with other media, themselves merging into film, such as certain kinds of music. One of the most powerful examples of such interaction is the television film *Antithese* by composer Mauricio Kagel" (*Ibid.*, p. 183).

niques; this is the retarding aspect of film in the historical process of art".[6]
Through these views, Adorno expressed his rejection of mimetic realism
and its presumed objectivity. Back in 1934, after visiting the Babelsberg
studios in Potsdam, he had written to Walter Benjamin that "reality is
always constructed with an infantile attachment to the mimetic and then
'photographed'".[7] For him, mimetic realism is in fact constitutive of the
filmic medium, while its exploitation by the film industry is responsible
for the weakening of subjective imagination, expressivity and the capaci-
ty to reflect, thereby contributing to cementing the dominant ideological
order. This diagnosis is echoed in a well-known passage of the *Dialectic
of Enlightenment*:

> "The more intensely and flawlessly [filmic] techniques dupli-
> cate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to
> prevail that the outside world is the straightforward contin-
> uation of that presented on screen. […] Real life is becoming
> indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far sur-
> passing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination
> or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to re-
> spond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its pre-
> cise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film
> forces its victims to equate it directly with reality."[8]

Against the defence of realism propsed by his friend Siegfried Kracau-
er (in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, first published
in 1960), Adorno argued that cinema by definition tends to 'confiscate

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6   *Ibid*., p. 181. Immediately after he claims: "That which is irreducible about the
    objects in film is itself a mark of society, prior to the aesthetic realization of an
    intention. By virtue of this relationship to the object, the aesthetics of film is
    thus inherently concerned with society. There can be no aesthetics of cinema,
    not even a purely technological one, which would not include the sociology
    of the cinema" (182).

7   T. Adorno and W. Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, edited by
    Henri Lonitz (Cambridge: Polity Press) 1999, p. 131.

8   T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London and New
    York: Verso), 1997, p. 126.

the imaginary'. With reference to crime films, for instance, he claimed that the representations of tragic or antisocial personalities contributed to assuaging or even eradicating rebellion within late-capitalist societies.[9] Similarly, he rejected *auteurial* tendencies within the film industry, arguing that they provide a liberal deviation *within* the norm, aimed at a devilish affirmation of the ideological message: "Whenever Orson Welles offends against the tricks of the trade, he is forgiven because his departures from the norm are regarded as calculated mutations which serve all the more strongly to confirm the validity of the system".[10] Along the same lines, in *Composing for the Films* he emphasised his dislike for "pretentious grade-A films" produced by the industry.[11]

It is worth recalling that already in 1926 Max Horkheimer had indicted technology (photography, telegraphy, and the radio) for desensitising people, thus reducing their reflexive capacity.[12] In fact, the critique of the ideological triumph of instrumental rationality, in a world increasingly saturated with technology, is arguably the central theme in traditional critical theory. In this respect, the ideological purpose of film in the age of technological reproduction was supposedly that of reconciling the masses with the status quo. As is well known, initially Walter Benjamin proposed a different take on technological reproduction,[13] believing in the subversive potential of cinema as a politicized art form capable of exerting a direct influence on the masses. In this and other respects, he followed Bertolt Brecht, who, despite his personal frustrations with the film industry,[14] was also sanguine about the subversive potential of cinema.

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9   See *Ibid*., pp. 151-56.

10   *Ibid*., p. 129.

11   T. Adorno and H. Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London and New York: Continuum), 2005, p. 16.

12   M. Horkheimer, *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969* (New York: Seabury Press), 1978, p. 19.

13   See W. Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana Press), 1992, pp. 211–44.

14   Brecht had been bitterly disappointed by Georg W. Pabst's 1931 film version of his *Threepenny Opera*, to the extent that the disagreement between the two had led to a lawsuit. For a comparison of play and film, see T. Elsaesser, *Wei-*

Adorno and Benjamin kept disagreeing on the role of film until less than two years prior to Benjamin's death, when Benjamin concurred with his younger friend that the advent of the talkies had stifled the revolutionary potential of silent cinema.[15]

While Adorno's analysis is theoretically sound and no doubt consistent with avant-garde filmmaking, it seems to me that it risks jettisoning the crucial dialectical issue concerning the inherently contradictory dimension of the film commodity. This is all the more surprising when, in "Transparencies on Film", we come across the following remark:

> "In its attempts to manipulate the masses the ideology of the culture industry itself becomes as internally antagonistic as the very society which it aims to control. The ideology of the culture industry contains the antidote to its own lie. No other plea could be made for its defence."[16]

This is no small plea. In its radical self-reflexivity, it is a point that deserves more sustained critical exploration than Adorno was prepared to grant it – predictably, he ended his piece by re-emphasising the reactionary nature of film within the culture industry, insofar as the latter "is not the art of the consumer but rather the projection of the will of those in control onto their victims."[17]

My overall argument in this essay is rooted precisely in the dialectical claim that the film industry is internally antagonistic and thus, to use Adorno's own words, it "contains the antidote to its own lie". If, paraphrasing Adorno, the aim of avant-garde cinema is to break away

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mar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (Oxford and New York: Routledge), 2004, pp. 311–29.

15 In a letter of 9 December 1938, Benjamin wrote to Adorno: "I see more and more clearly that the launching of the sound film must be regarded as an operation of the film industry designed to break the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, which had produced reactions that were difficult to control and hence dangerous politically" (T. Adorno and W. Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, p. 295).

16 T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 181.

17 *Ibid*., p. 185.

from the iron cage of commodified and thus ideologically-laden entertainment, one perhaps should also be aware that, in dialectical terms, the frontier separating 'ideological' and 'non-' or 'extra-ideological' is internal to ideology itself, not merely external. Precisely because linguistically structured, any symbolic and therefore ideological field by definition generates its own excess, or surplus of meaning, which it struggles to integrate or repress within its *dispositif*. If there is a lesson to be learned from dialectical thinking, it concerns the intrinsic self-sabotaging of any power mechanism. Adorno's rejection of the film industry often fails to confront the elementary principle of dialectics, namely the imperative to locate antagonism not only where it is fully embraced and solicited, but *especially* where it is muted.

In what follows, I consider the example of Paul Schrader's cinema in order to discuss how the film commodity today might be seen to engage with its self-generated contradiction. I contend that Schrader's films are ideally placed, within contemporary mass-produced cinema, to reveal the inherent self-sabotaging of the film commodity. This argument is premised on the assumption that Schrader is highly representative of that group of contemporary directors who have to negotiate the stifling commercial rationale of the film industry while also challenging it from within. The result are films that consciously explore, and expose, their own contradictory nature from within their commodity form. While they never really overcome their commercial imprimatur, they display a high degree of self-awareness, which lends them a distinctive *auteurial* and to an extent iconoclastic quality. As a film critic as well as a scriptwriter and director, Schrader is arguably the epitome of the self-conscious contemporary filmmaker, which is probably why his work has remained at the margins of the critical debate: in a way, his films already contain their own critique.

As a contemporary *auteur*, Schrader is certainly not alone, although one would be hard-pressed to find other filmmakers who are more obstinately conflictual in their relationship with the film industry.[18] The focus

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18 Schrader played a significant role within the so-called 'New Hollywood' or 'American New Wave' (late 1970s and early 1980s), which included also

of this essay, however, lies in the claim that to get more 'critical joy' out of Schrader's *auteurial* stance, the emphasis should be placed less on the consciously recalcitrant side of his filmmaking than on his partly dis-avowed allegiance with mainstream cinema. Precisely on account of its formal tendency to accept its status as a filmic commodity, Schrader's cinema produces symptomatic significations that challenge the director's aesthetic and narrative control of the films. I claim that what is antago-nistic in Schrader's work is best explained by reference to the elementary Hegelian dialectic of *subject* and *substance*.[19] If as a rule Schrader explicitly immerses his characters in an atmosphere of existential despair that they are unable to transcend, this *subjective* condition redoubles into the rep-resentation of an increasingly *substanceless* socio-historical microcosm, seemingly destined to self-annihilation. Thus, the mindful emphasis on subjective negativity tends to obfuscate this cinema's denotation of the 'self-contraction of substance' – the increasing loss of symbolic efficiency of our world.

Perhaps the clearest example of this logic can be observed in the final sequence of *Affliction* (1997), generally regarded as one of Schrader's un-disputed masterpieces. A hybrid between a neo-noir and a family drama, this film focuses on Wade Whitehouse's (Nick Nolte) journey of self-de-

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Robert Altman, Brian De Palma, Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola. Today the list of Hollywood *auteurs* could be extended to the Coen Brothers, David Fincher, Steven Soderbergh, Christopher Nolan and Quentin Taranti-no. For the overlap between 'New Hollywood' and mainstream commercial cinema see Jon Lewis' "The Perfect Money Machine(s): George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and Auteurism in the New Hollywood", *Film International*, 1 (1), 2003, 12-26.

19 I am referring to the famous passage of the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where Hegel claims that 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phe-nomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1977, p. 10), insofar as 'what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject' (21). By affirming the speculative identity of substance and subject, Hegel argues that the subject is by definition included within substance as its constitutive gap, its radical inconsistency, the empty kernel around which any socio-symbolic, substantial meaning or sense is erected.

struction in a small and stagnant New Hampshire town, his profound sense of worthlessness being explicitly associated with the abuse suffered as a child from his alcoholic father Glen (James Coburn). Following a recurrent theme in Schrader's works, masculine violence in *Affliction* is linked to feelings of deep inadequacy, which here have a precise cause: an unresolved oedipal conflict, which is what triggers Wade's personal *via crucis*. The film's narrator Rolfe (Wade's brother, played by Willem Defoe), whose voiceover opens and ends the story, makes this link explicit in the final sequence:

> "Our stories, Wade's and mine, describe the lives of boys and men for thousands of years, boys who were beaten by their fathers, whose capacity for love and trust was crippled almost at birth and whose best hope, if any, for connection with other human beings lay in an elegiac detachment, as if life were over".

By privileging the oedipalisation of a fairly conventional subjective drama (the legacy of violence passed on from father to son), Schrader here de-emphasises the socio-symbolic 'substance' in the background. I am referring to the claustrophobic microcosm of a bleak, financially destitute North American small town caught in a (metaphorical) winter freeze, where 'new money' from Boston is mysteriously manipulated to serve the interests of a few powerful people. While Wade's subjective despair takes on almost universal value, as in a Greek tragedy, the disintegration of the small community, where human relations are literally frozen by the abstract and invisible rationale of economic value, is powerfully affirmed but in a disavowed mode. It is this crucial symptomatic dimension of Schrader's cinema that I intend to examine in this essay. Given the limited scope at my disposal, in what follows I have chosen to focus primarily on one Schrader's latest works, *Dog Eat Dog* (2016), a film underrated by critics and seemingly belittled by the director himself.[20]

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20 The title of the interview to Paul Schrader appeared on *The Guardian* on No-

2. The decomposing body of contemporary society

Three quarters into *Dog Eat Dog*, when Diesel (Christopher Matthew Cook) and Mad Dog (Willem Dafoe) are about to leave Mike Brennan's (Louis Perez) dead body in an abandoned military base, which already hosts two more bodies in a state of putrefaction, the loquacious, coke-addict Mad Dog says to his slightly nauseated partner in crime: "Aw, shit, bro, haven't you ever done sanitation? It's a fuckin' fact in forensic science that when things begin to rot, they're at their least toxic for you because they are structurally bent on their own self-destruction". This seemingly inconsequential line presents us with the key to access the partly unconscious dimension of Paul Schrader's mercurial crime-caper, a deranged, claustrophobic thriller almost entirely focussed on three psychopathic oddballs who would feature comfortably in a Tarantino film, were they not totally wanting in coolness and dexterity. The central point is that Schrader works, as he has done throughout his filmic career, with a *decomposing body*, which I claim speaks, ultimately, for the *decomposing body of contemporary society*. Of course, the body under scrutiny in *Dog Eat Dog* is also, metaphorically speaking, cinema itself, inasmuch as Schrader is aware that technological innovation has ushered in what he calls, in filmmaking terms, "the post-rules generation".[21] Yet, his lucid meta-cinematic awareness, always displayed throughout his filmmaking career, does not obscure the underlying existential and, to a different degree, political concerns that his film exudes. The point is that the three ex-cons in *Dog*

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vember 13, 2016 reported the following quotation from the director: "I've made some important films. *Dog Eat Dog* is not one of them".

21 See interview in https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/may/27/paul-schrader-willem-dafoe-dog-eat-dog, where he further comments: "You can do most anything now," he says. "You can shoot a scene in black and white, one in colour, one tinted and the audience will say, 'Hey, cool.' Animation. Stop–motion. We have a generation of viewers that have been rewired and re-educated on multimedia technology. Their brains fire at a different rate. When they see those movies from the 70s they think, 'Oh my God, that's a slow movie.'"

Eat Dog, brutalised by life in prison, inept and utterly unredeemable, are unable to relate to anyone outside 'the joint', including, ultimately, each other. They are unable, in other words, to normalise their lives for the simple reason that normality itself is nowhere to be found in the outside world, i.e. among the cold, flashy, disconnected, and deadly microcosm of strip malls and dive bars in post-crash Cleveland – which is where Schrader transposes the original setting (Los Angeles) of Edward Bunker's 1995 novel of the same title. These characters' *individuality* is reduced to its etymological root: an indivisible, atomistic self-concern with no room for any social relation. They are, then, contemporary versions of Leibniz's monad: windowless and self-contained bundles of uncoordinated libidinal drives. Their infantile regression leads them back to the state of "polymorphous perversity" of which Freud spoke.[22]

Schrader's film, and his cinema as a whole, seems to me a particularly powerful example of how cultural commodities today – including seemingly less accomplished films endorsing the hyper-fragmentary post-rules scenario – are able to evoke reflections on questions that our postmodern sensibility was hoping to have evicted forever from the arena of intellectual discussion. I am referring to a type of critique that, feigning compliance with the relativistic blackmail of our times, stubbornly holds on to the old Hegelian insight that socio-historical formations possess a dialectical substantiality, or essence, whose pervasiveness extends to all aspects of social life. In this respect, the dialectic should be restored to its original signification within Hegelian critical theory: not the postmodern declension of a systematic theory aiming at recomposing a whole out of its original fragmentation, but a modality of thought acknowledging, and tarrying with, contradiction as the essential correlative feature of the unity of opposites. Against this understanding, postmodernism qua logic of late-capitalism (Fredric Jameson) – and, closer to us, of hypermodernity (Gilles Lipovetsky) – thrives on a staunchly anti-dialecti-

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22 S. Freud, 'An Outline of Psycho-Analysis', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol. XXIII (1937-1939) (London: The Hogarth Press), 1964.

cal narrative, upholding irreducible individuality and the production of subjectivities in the name of a compulsive "desire to differ" that provides a perfect fit for our ideological regime of flexible production, market research and hyper-individualised consumption. If postmodern thought and sensibility focus at best on power relations and their constructions or deconstructions, thus (unwittingly) re-substantialising the bourgeois notion of the individual qua self-entrenched, privileged observer, a film like Schrader's *Dog Eat Dog* unwittingly unravels for us the dialectical co-dependency of subject and 'external' substance, their unity being sanctioned by their overlapping inconsistency in a historical context traversed, saturated and finally emptied by the mythologeme of economic value.

Here we should recall that Marx considered the main contradiction of the capitalist mode of production to reside neither in the conflict between capital and workers, nor in the competition among capitalists. Rather, for him the key impasse concerns the relation between the social power of capital and society as a material entity:

> "Capital shows itself more and more to be a social power, with the capitalist as its functionary – a power that no longer stands in any possible kind of relationship to what the work of one particular individual can create, but an alienated social power which has gained an autonomous position and confronts society as a thing, and as the power that the capitalist has through this thing."[23]

Our historical constellation in disarray gives us the opportunity to reformulate what is worth saving in Karl Marx's work: the centrepiece of his *critique* of the political economy, namely the analysis of the value-form (*Wertform*) assumed by our individual and collective existence in modern societies. The value-form is more than just money. As understood by Marx, it is a social totality larger than its empirical quantifica-

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23 K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* vol. 3 (New York: Vintage Books), 1981, p. 373.

tion, an invisible and intangible network of forces and effects that plays a constitutive role in the formation of our subjectivity and related social bond. Value, then – inasmuch as it is objectively embodied in each individual commodity – designates the historically specific *form* that our social being takes in modernity. It originates from human labour (work) and manifests itself as money (price) and money-generating money (capital). As such, it constitutes the formal condition through which modern societies reproduce themselves.[24] In Hegelian parlance, we would say that the value-form is the subterranean Spirit (*Geist*) of our times, insofar as it weaves itself silently into anything we do or think, sparing nothing. However, precisely as a manifestation of what Hegel called Spirit, we should insist on the inwardly self-destructive character of the value-form: its 'mission' is not merely to substantialise itself qua social formation, but also, conversely, to cause its own collapse by undermining the invisible foundations of the social structure that carries its weight. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the "silent, ceaseless weaving of the Spirit in the simple inwardness of its substance" as inextricably linked with Spirit's self-relating negativity, as in the following passage where he quotes Diderot's *Nephew of Rameau*:

> "Rather, being now an invisible and imperceptible Spirit, it infiltrates the noble parts through and through and soon has taken complete possession of all the vitals and members of the unconscious idol; then 'one fine morning it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, and bang! crash! the idol lies on the floor'. On 'one fine morning' whose noon is bloodless if the infection has penetrated to every organ of spiritual life. Memory alone then still preserves the dead form of the Spirit's previous shape as a vanished history, vanished one knows not how. And the new serpent of wisdom raised on high for adoration has in this way painlessly cast merely a withered skin."[25]

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24 For a detailed analysis of this, see Feldner and Vighi, 2015.

25 G. F. W. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 332.

Contemporary capitalism's vanishing capacity to produce economic value – an issue I will briefly address later in the essay – is today's counterpart to Hegel's description of the vanishing of Spirit in its specific historical form. Dialectically speaking, the vanishing coincides with the power of its own self-causation out of nothing, since there is no outside to Spirit and therefore no guarantee of its ontological consistency. It is this vanishing as radical self-contraction of the value-form of capital that contemporary cinema has a chance to reflect on by way of its specific capacity to mediate the real, that is to say its particular modality of aesthetic sublimation.

3. Subject is Substance: a common destiny

It might not seem particularly revealing that the dissolution of the social bond in Schrader's *Dog Eat Dog* is represented through what is often regarded as the overarching feature of contemporary American cinema: graphic violence. However, unlike much of the spectacularisation of screen violence that began to characterise mainstream Hollywood since 1968 – the year the last vestiges of the Production Code were abolished – Schrader's representation of 'ultraviolence' works *explicitly* as a cinematic metonymy for the self-destructiveness of the social link. In this respect, it is not only *Dog Eat Dog*'s graphic violence that matters but also its unencumbered and unapologetic nastiness, which is particularly palpable in its display of racism and sexism. Reflected in the film's hallucinated and fragmented aesthetics, the display of unmitigated viciousness would seem to incarnate today's version of what Jacques Lacan called *jouissance*, the unconstrained, painful yet untranscendable pulsation of a libidinal affect that pertains to the register of the Real and, as such, defies symbolisation. It is in relation to its own *jouissance* that *Dog Eat Dog* provides an exemplification of the Hegelian theme of the speculative identity of *subject* and *substance*: the 'world' whose substance is the acephalous drive of capitalist accumulation, coincides with the psychopathic subject whose life is increasingly ruled by the stolid pursuit of commodified, *ersatz* enjoyment. 'Subject' and 'substance' coalesce around the *identical*

compulsion to repeat an unmediated gesture whose only aim is to perpetuate its senseless loop. It is no surprise that, at one point, the three hapless criminals in *Dog Eat Dog* comment somewhat nostalgically about life in prison and its code of honour: once released back into the 'community', they sense that their compulsion to 'enjoy life' constitutes an even stricter form of captivity masqueraded as freedom.

Schrader's most accomplished cinematic characters are by definition caught in the loop of *jouissance*, which, however, far from exhausting itself in subjective excess, dialectically illuminates the crumpling monolith of our socio-symbolic life-space inasmuch as it is entirely given over to the self-referential and destructive flow of capital. In this sense, the cinematic subject that Schrader presents on screen is always 'identical' to the imploding social bond in which s/he dwells. We would be hard pressed to find other directors whose cinematic inspiration is so pervasively dominated by this foundering dialectical link. From this angle, his most accomplished and intriguing characters are all variations of the paradigmatic figure of his cinema, namely Travis Bickle (*Taxi Driver*, 1976), the very incarnation of the implosion of the Hegelian dialectical figure of the subject-substance: the subject unable and obstinately unwilling to create enduring liaisons within 'a world at the end of the world', whose structuring principle is itself fundamentally psychopathic. Critics are generally aware of the death-driven character of Schrader's heroes,[26] but as a rule fail to grasp the speculative identity with social substance.

Let us take Julian Kay (Richard Gere) and his hustler's underworld in Schrader's *American Gigolo* (1980). The hero's cool self-assurance within his Beverly Hills boutique microcosm captures a subjectivity entirely defined by the value-form, down to its innermost intimacy. As a sexual service that can be bought and sold, Julian embodies to perfection the

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26 For instance, back in 1981 Bill Nichols wrote: "Whether in *The Yazuka*, *Hard Core*, *Taxi Driver*, *Blue Collar*, *Obsession*, *Rolling Thunder*, *American Gigolo* or *Raging Bull* the central character's idée fixe pushes him toward a point perilously close to the bounds of sanity, a point well beyond the limits within which most of us choose to live" (B. Nichols, '*American Gigolo:* Transcendental Style and Narrative Form', *Film Quarterly* 34 (4), 1981, pp. 8-13).

psychopathic ideology of the 1980s brave new world of neoliberal in-dividualism, where discipline and self-control became key attributes of a self-made man with no time for empathy with community members. With Julian, in fact, it is not merely that sexuality is reduced to a business transaction, but more importantly that such equivalence is deliberately rendered as an illusion of individual freedom and even emancipation. The film's dénouement clearly indicates that this illusion is nothing but the obverse of the obscure and fundamentally self-destructive trajectory of the value-form in our specific historical constellation. Despite the film's transcendental finale, where redemption from the tyranny of compulsive self-valorisation is linked to the possibility of love – to be intended, how-ever, in Lacanian and therefore strictly anti-Hollywood terms, i.e. as an encounter between two radically inconsistent human beings –[27] the nar-rative remains defined by negativity, that is to say by the speculative co-incidence of the subject's downward spiralling trajectory and the gradual vanishing of the socio-symbolic substance. Although in *American Gigolo* Schrader would seem to explicitly endorse the transcendental pattern in-herited from his models Jasujiro Ozu, Carl Theodor Dreyer and Robert Bresson,[28] famously quoting the final scene and line of Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959),[29] his film is conceived in an entirely different context, and remains largely conditioned, also stylistically, by the contradictory nature of the value-form, which infiltrates every pore of its narrative. What remains central to *American Gigolo*, in line with Schrader's filmography as a whole, is the theme of *subjective self-empting*, which mirrors the self-contraction of the socio-historical substance. Only after his self-damaging journey (Ju-lian's eventual debasement and psychological annihilation) can redemp-

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27 Julian is framed for a murder he did not commit and ends up in jail. However, in the final scene he is paid a visit by his lover Michelle (Lauren Hutton), wife to a powerful politician, who tells him she has provided him with an alibi, sacrificing her marriage and wealth to save him.

28 See his *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer* (New York: Da Capo Press), 1988.

29 Similarly to the endings of Schrader's later films *Patty Hearst* (1988) and *Light Sleeper* (1992).

tion be entertained as a Christian alternative to the self-assertive, merciless logic of a world totalised by economic valorisation.

Schrader's vision stages a psychopathic world, as such increasingly deprived of that protective layer of virtual density (the invisible socio-linguistic 'cover' framing our existence) that Lacan called 'the big Other'. In other words, it stages the *loss of a world*: the progressive depotentiation and dissolution of the socio-ontological processes that accompany the capitalist dynamic. The dominant theme is thus our civilisation's progressive loss of 'symbolic cover' in the face of the shattering force of the economic drive over traditional religious, political or more generally ideological narratives (the phenomenon famously described by Karl Polanyi as "disembedding").[30] It is a cinema whose trajectory goes hand in hand with the valorisation crisis that accompanies the global triumph of contemporary capitalism – a crisis that originates precisely in the 1970s. To put it in Jeremy Rifkin's words: "What's undermining the capitalist system is the dramatic success of the very operating assumptions that govern it. At the heart of capitalism there lies a contradiction in the driving mechanism that has propelled it ever upwards to commanding heights, but now is speeding it to its death. [...] Capitalism's operating logic is designed to fail by succeeding."[31]

In this respect, the transcendental character of Schrader's cinema can only be posited as the outcome of the self-destructive socio-economic dynamic in its contemporary context. Transcendence is strictly correlative to an instance of embedded negativity; it is the painful cipher of this cinema's *impotence* in directly aspiring to an alternative social model. Qua impotence, transcendence registers the historical aporia of the valorisation dogma: on the one hand, this dogma misfires in practice, miserably failing to deliver the promised goods; on the other hand, it continues to

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30 See K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (London: Beacon Press), 2001 [1944].

31 J. Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society. The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014, p. 2. While I do not share Rifkin's optimistic vision of the transition to a Collaborative Commons, his initial diagnosis is well founded.

reign undisturbed as a system of social reproduction, *as if* it was delivering those goods. This aporia suggests the dominance of a particular type of denial, whose object is the terminal malady of our economy and, consequently, of our society insofar as it is pervasively defined by the combustion of economic value. Capitalism's growing inability to engender economic value out of human labour, its lifeblood, on account of its ever-more ubiquitous reliance on automation, has been explored from a variety of perspectives.[32] What remains largely unaccounted for is the specific helplessness of our contemporary society and political class *vis-à-vis* this self-evident valorisation deadlock, inasmuch as the latter is positively obscured by the totalising grip of a global economic mandate by now fully internalised as destiny. Because the blind, self-referential expansion of abstract value has finally become what it always-already was, i.e. the single developmental driver of modern life, its victory is matched by an age-specific attitude of perverse disavowal in relation to its historical impasse, which we are currently experiencing. I claim that contemporary cinema is one of the key sites where the specific dialectical constellation in which we dwell can be critically scrutinised.

Increasingly unwilling to immunise itself against the acephalous drive of the capitalist mode of production, which ushers in the decay of its social form, Schrader's world is from the beginning populated by characters whose personal crises are rooted in the loss of symbolic efficiency of the social. Already *Blue Collar* (1978), his directorial debut, introduced us to the inseparability of subject and substance by highlighting their 'speculative identity' in both conflict and crisis. *Blue Collar* focusses on the deterioration and final dissolution of working class solidarity while also demolishing the American dream of the 'hard work society'. From

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32 See for instance E. Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: NLB), 1975; R. Kurz, *The Substance of Capital. The Life and Death of Capitalism* (London: Chronos), 2016; J. Rifkin, *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: Putnam and Sons), 1995; P. Mason, *Postcapitalism. A Guide to Our Future* (London: Allen Lane), 2015; H. Feldner and F. Vighi, *Critical Theory and the Crisis of Contemporary Capitalism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury), 2015.

the start, then, Schrader aims at the interconnection between the decomposing body of contemporary (industrial) society and the crisis of the individual whose identity depends on the invisible dogma of the incessant valorisation of value. In this respect, his interest in pornography is telling, for it stems from his sensibility toward the implosive mechanisms characterising the universe of the value-form. As with *American Gigolo*, the theme of the economic valorisation of sexuality allows Schrader to confront directly the self-dissipation of human relations under the aegis of contemporary capital. Although underpinned by a reflection on the different communicative technologies that have characterised the history of modern cinema, which is part of Schrader's long-standing engagement with film history and film aesthetics,[33] works like *Hardcore* (1979, tradi-

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33 Schrader's interest in the aesthetics of cinema initially emerged with his 1972 monograph *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, and Dryer* (1988). More recently, he has contributed to the debate on the 'end of cinema': "Movies have owned the 20th century. It will not be so in the 21st century. Cultural and technological forces are at work that will change the concept of 'movies' as we have known them. I don't know if there will be a dominant art form in this century, and I'm not sure what form audiovisual media will take, but I am certain movies will never regain the prominence they enjoyed in the last century"(P. Schrader, 'Canon Fodder', *Film Comment*, 2006, p. 35). He himself seeks a way out of the current strictures of cinematic production by using, for instance, crowdfunding platforms such as 'Kickstarter', deferred salaries, free locations and no costume department. In agreement with Dudley Andrew (*The Image in Dispute*) and Walter Benjamin ("The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction"), Schrader summarises his point this way: "Motion pictures are but a way station in the cavalcade of art history, a stopover en route from 19th-century written narrative to the 21st-century world of synthetic images and sounds" (Ibid, p. 41). More explicitly: "The future of audiovisual entertainment (I hesitate to use the term 'motion pictures') will be determined by technology. The technical means of capturing, producing, and distributing moving images has always defined the 'art' in film art. The nickelodeon determined a certain type of cinema, as did the process of projecting images across a darkened room—as did television. The art of audiovisual storytelling has been redefined by every technological innovation: sound stage, crane, color, widescreen, high-speed film, radio microphone, video camera, Steadicam, digital editing, digital images. The movies have never stopped morphing. Technology has defined the art of film as much as its social context. The current uncertainty about the nature of cinema—and its future—cannot be resolved by artists or financiers; technology will accomplish that task" (Ibid, p. 42).

tional film theatres), *Auto-focus* (2002, TV home videos) and *The Canyons* (2013, digital revolution) are especially eloquent in offering a declension of pornography within the increasingly valueless social sphere. Pornography, then, becomes one of Schrader's favourite metonymies to illuminate the loss of symbolic efficiency in the epoch of neoliberal capitalism, insofar as this loss triggers a strategy of perverse (exhibitionistic) submission to the gaze of the camera. As the virtual cover of the big Other evaporates, the subject's best chance to achieve identification would seem to lie with submission to the mediatised eye. In this reading, the reflection on the progressive dematerialisation of cinema (from 'heavy' analogical apparatus to 'light' digital platform), which self-reflexively accompanies Schrader's work, functions as an unconscious metaphorical rendition of his 'dialectic of dissolution', where the focus lies firmly on the self-deployment of the contemporary decomposition of the substance of value.

Auto-focus (2002) is a perfect case in point of the above logic. The crucial feature of Bob Crane's pathology is not his voyeuristic accumulation of pornographic material, but rather *his strange desire to appear in it*, to the extent that his arousal eventually coincides with recording and watching his sexual escapades rather than in simply having them. The term 'auto-focus' should be understood literally: it speaks to the subject focusing on its own image mediated by the ready-made technological eye. Within this self-reflexive loop, sexuality provides the contemporary subject with the ultimate illusion of *being*. How? Precisely through perverse self-externalisation: 'I have sex in front of a camera, therefore I am'. The fundamental principle of contemporary perversion resides in making one's self available for technological reproduction and sharing. In *Auto-focus*, then, Schrader captures the psychic structure that defines the contemporary subject at its historical inception. The libidinal compulsion to appear in a technological image offered up to limitless circulation, which characterises the use of popular social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, begins with Bob Crane's fascination with the possibility of watching himself in a homemade video. In this context, the

pornographic dimension highlighted by Schrader makes the perverse nature of the above attitude explicit. With the progressive evaporation of the virtual eye of the big Other, inaugurated by the 1968 liberation movements and continuing throughout the 'post-ideological' era, individuals are increasingly deprived of their symbolic shield, and consequently use technology to assuage their anxiety. Today, perversion does not necessarily need sexually explicit content, since technology is everywhere and guarantees immediate visibility. However, the general psychic attitude remains pornographic (flat, self-referential, utterly unable and unwilling to transcend itself), whether explicitly or implicitly.

In light of this reading, the ideal sequel to *Auto-focus* is no doubt *The Canyons* (2013), which openly displays the dialectical dissolution of subject and substance, narrating the death of desire and correlative disappearance of humanity as we (still think we) know it. Although the meta-cinematic concern is self-evident in practically every scene of the film, what is truly at stake here is the self-contraction of modern individuals into zombified, interchangeable fetishes whose machine-like movements are nothing but a pale replication of the cold and manipulative microcosm in which they live, itself the cipher of the big Other's vaporisation. The casting of Lindsay Lohan (self-destructive celebrity) and James Deen (ex porn actor) carry explicit extra-textual evidence, sanctioning the film's concern with a Real that is juxtaposed to a battered and broken-down reality. As always unafraid to swan-dive into the sleazy underworld of contemporary degradation, Schrader and screenwriter Bret Easton Ellis deliver a story of human ruins in the age of the radical dissolution of social bonds. The film's characters are self-obsessed, cynical, soulless parodies of subjectivity, incapable of connecting with one another if not through perverse manipulation and empty, funereal sexual rituals. The film's message is political in the widest sense of the word: this, it tells us, is our world; the deluge is here with us, although we seem unable to see it. By rejecting all illusions, and obstinately embracing the senseless core of our epoch, *The Canyons* captures the short-circuiting decadence of our post-Empire world ruled by the naked, gargantuan appetite of an economic body quickly turning bulimic.

4. Immanent eccentricity

Schrader is particularly aware of the problem of human finitude. The death-drive of our civilisation, he surmises, should we observed and understood with a degree of philosophical poise – just like the death-drive of cinema:

> "I kept returning to Hegel's insight that the philosophy of Aesthetics is the history of Aesthetics. That is, the definition, the essence of Aesthetics, is nothing more or less than its history. The philosophy of Aesthetics equals the mutation of the Aesthetic Ideal—understand the mutation, you understand Aesthetics. By extension, the philosophy of Religion is the history of Religion, and so forth. […] The much-debated 'end of Art' is not the end of painting and sculpture (they abound), but the closing of the plastic arts' narrative. Life is full of ends; species die or become outmoded. There are still horses, but the horse's role in transportation has come to an end. Likewise movies. We're making horseshoes. […] All with beginnings, middles, and ends—at an ever-accelerating pace. I agree with Kurzweil that humankind is on an evolutionary cusp. We can foresee both the end of the 20,000-year reign of Homo sapiens and the beginnings of the life-forms that will replace it (something Kurzweil and Garreau predict will happen in the next hundred years). Art looks to the future; it is society's harbinger. The demise of Art's human narrative is not a sign of creative bankruptcy. It's the twinkling of changes to come. Such thoughts fill me not with despair but envy: I wish I could be there to see the curtain rise".[34]

Schrader's futurism, however, should not overshadow his cinema's intrinsic 'passion' for the Real dissolution of the value-form. The com-

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34 P. Schrader, 'Canon Fodder', p. 34.

mon denominator of his films is the recording of this process of implosion, which has to do with subjectivity only if intended dialectically as inseparable from substance. In this sense these films are precisely "society's harbinger".

As anticipated, it would be naive to ignore how impatiently meta-cinematic Schrader's intentions are. He makes it exceedingly clear, for instance, that *Dog Eat Dog* is a film about the end of cinema 'as we know it', brought about by new technologies that destroy and reassemble the old rules of filmic representation. Irrespective of traditional film continuity, almost all sequences here constantly jump across registers and codes, scrambling canons, shifting hyperactively between aesthetic perspectives. The schizophrenic dimension of editing includes the constant alternation of slow and fast motion, Tarantino-like 'pop bloodbaths', voluptuous and melancholic black-and-white, first person narrator noir scenes, and even experimentation with multiple endings. It is not accidental that for the making of this film he surrounded himself with a young troupe of 'post-rules' technicians.[35] On the other hand, we would be twice as naive to ignore how the ultimate target of Schrader's high-octane vision is the fictional fabric of our own social constellation. As a spectacle of self-destruction, *Dog Eat Dog* invites us to reflect on the irredeemable disintegration of the world sustained by and organised around the increasingly unreliable, indeed vanishing, value-form of capital. This collapse invests everyone, including the director (Schrader plays 'El Greco', the gangster who employs the three criminals), the police (depicted as sadistic in the

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35 "We met at a diner every week or so for the summer, and just discussed it — those are the heads of my departments, and it was a first credit for all of them. They'd come from video games, documentaries, commercials. I didn't want them to think out of the box; I wanted people who were *already* out of the box — didn't know where the box was! So that's just how we went about it, and it was very invigorating that way. Because I no longer believed in the monolithic style, the unified style. Today, you could shoot different sequences different ways, it doesn't matter anymore. You know, shoot a Cassavetes scene, shoot a Godard scene, shoot an Errol Morris scene — put them all together" ('Interview: Paul Schrader on 'Dog Eat Dog'', available at https://outtake.tribecashortlist.com/interview-paul-schrader-on-dog-eat-dog-a34247db02db [last accessed 24 September 2017].

scene of Troy's torturing), and the gun-crazed society (as stressed in the TV debate that opens the film) including the black reverend and wife kidnapped by Troy in the final scene, since they also have a gun and are ready to use it.

The collapse of the cinematic grammar joyously endorsed in *Dog Eat Dog* is the collapse of the Lacanian big Other of our global society lacerated by crisis, which stretches individuality to the point of rupture – the *independent* bourgeois-capitalist individuality as opposed to the *dependent* personhood of pre-capitalist societies. We should not forget that *in-dividuus* means 'not divisible' (Latin), in direct equivalence to the Greek 'a-tom'. Modern individualism is synonymous with atomism, which translates as social fragmentation and lack of organic cohesion. Modernity, insofar as it is sustained by the capitalist mode of production, begins with this atom-like concept of the individual, which shatters previous organicist forms of social life. Capitalism recognises individuality only if submitted to the value-form, only if colonised by value. The capitalist mode of production socialises the economic dimension of the human being, reducing them unilaterally to what they are able to express in terms of economic valorisation. Schrader's cinema displays the paroxistic form of atomistic individuality that captures today's social condition. It follows that an emancipated society should free individuality from the specific alienation (economic valorisation) imposed by our mode of production.

The question to ask when watching *Dog Eat Dog* is not whether it conforms, or should conform, to shared moral standards, but whether it manages to disturb us into perceiving the close link between character and social space, or more precisely between the psychopathic structure of the character's mind and the dominant *form* of the social space in which he moves. Because of its complex and magmatic language, to which many a voice contribute, cinema is endowed with the rare gift of anticipating (often unwittingly) the mind's conscious realisation of a given state of affairs that has to do with the society in which we, viewers, are immersed. In this respect, Mad Dog's rebuke to his accomplice Diesel

("when things begin to rot, they're at their least toxic for you because they are structurally bent on their own self-destruction") is more sophisticated and worthy of philosophical investigation than we might think: it is not merely a matter of emphasising how a rotting body is organically focussed on accelerating its own self-destruction; this, as we have seen, is central to Schrader's conscious reflection. What is surprising in Mad Dog's display of scientific knowledge is the reference to the peripheral positioning of the subject who directly witnesses the rotting: paradoxically, that subject is spared the toxicity of the putrefying body. How are we to understand this claim? Is it not the claim of a psychopath who fails to realise how deeply implicated he is in the consequences of his own actions (literally, as he has killed the people in question)? Precisely on account of his 'madness', Mad Dog is able to appreciate what can only appear as absurd or strangely counter-intuitive to someone who is fully immersed in his or her symbolic space: he "knows", in other words, that the self-captivation of a collapsing system offers the subject an unheard of chance for redemption, or else for the radical reconfiguration of the social link itself.

It is this flickering hint at redemption, which again takes a meta-cinematic turn in Troy's (Nicolas Cage) final Humphrey Bogart impersonation, that allows Schrader's Christian inspiration to illuminate the rotting fabric of the social bond. It is no surprise that, released into a collapsing society, the three characters choose to rely on either the accentuation of their psychopathic personality traits (Diesel and cocaine-addict Mad Dog) or a delusional, solipsistic and nostalgic retreat into old-movie suavity (Troy). If the latter no doubt qualifies as poetic license, the former should be taken as a metonymic reminder of what I am tempted to call the 'psychopathic turn' of the contemporary socio-symbolic order hit by a devastating, probably terminal valorisation crisis. In this respect, the meaning of the term 'crisis' is twofold: first, contemporary capitalism's vanishing capacity to generate economic value; second, and contrastingly, its blinding, desensitising dominance as the only legitimate mode of social reproduction (the well-known 'end of History' scenario). If we

read the two definitions of crisis together, we get precisely psychopathy as the prevailing *form* of social life, which contemporary cinema is able to capture so vividly. Today's ascendancy of the psychopathic structure should be understood as a dialectical figure that illuminates the ongoing, unstoppable decomposition of the value-form of capital, as well as the type of subjectivity that confronts such decomposition through adaptive and/or profoundly delusional strategies of denial.

Schrader's film would then seem to invoke the coincidence of redemption and folly, intended as a state of eccentricity through which freedom qua substantial negativity may lead to progressing away from an imploding socio-symbolic structure. Here it is worth insisting on the dialectical (Hegelian) character of this configuration: the subject encounters its traumatic freedom (to re-invent the dialectical link) in the self-contraction of substance. Put differently: precisely because substance and subject are two sides of the same coin, when substance dissolves, the subject has a chance to acknowledge the empty cause of its own social conditioning, which on the one hand causes anxiety but on the other can (potentially) be liberating. The film's insistence on subjective over-determination (to the point of madness) is indicative of its ultimate message: the only way out of the socio-economic predicament in which we languish, and the apocalyptic scenario it prefigures, does not reside in denying or minimising its actual impact, or counteracting it by embracing old stances and moralistic principles, but rather in acknowledging the paradoxically liberating potential of that collapse insofar as it returns the subject to its original and grounding inconsistency, which has no alternative but to feed the demand for a different (better) form of socio-symbolic alienation. The vindication of this passage through the empty (and traumatic) core of subjectivity does not, of course, amount per se to a viable political position vis-à-vis the crisis of contemporary capitalism. However, facing the hopelessness of our condition constitutes the indispensable presupposition for the construction of a political alternative to the status quo insofar as it heeds warnings about the true content of a crisis like ours: not only that the expiration date of 'our world' is fast approaching, but

more importantly that coming to terms with the fundamental fragility or fictional inconsistency of our ego, insofar as it is shored up by the value-form of capital qua receding social substance, is the only *rational* way of avoiding a relapse into barbarism.

In line with this reading, and returning to Schrader's film, perhaps Mad Dog's garrulous madness and final demise are more instructive than we could possibly think. We should not forget that Diesel 'wastes' his friend Mad Dog (thus reproducing the 'dog eat dog' scenario of the title) out of sheer psychological exhaustion, that is to say at the end of Mad Dog's relentless monologue about his aspiration to redeem himself, to make a fresh start after a futile life squandered in utter degradation.[36] It is the possibility, however highly unlikely, of the *clinamen* (unpredictable swerve, change of direction) voiced by Mad Dog that drives Diesel to blow his head away, breaking the oath of mutual support previously sanctioned by the trio of thugs. The possibility of this *clinamen* is the only glimmer of 'liberating' contingency in the lugubrious hymn to self-destruction that pervades Schrader's determinism. The dialectical struggle between necessity (determinism) and contingency is crucial if we are to appreciate the critical significance of the film, and contemporary cinema more generally. For redemptive contingency here is not merely the alter-

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36 Whilst driving to the military base with Mike Brennan's dead body in the boot, Mad Dog begins his redemption speech to Diesel, which apart from a few action breaks is as follows: "I wanna make a strong action and fuckin' change some things so I could be the person that I know I could be... You'll help me do it, yeah?... You'll fuckin' help me untangle my life and make myself a person that doesn't make me fuckin' wanna throw up every time I pass a mirror?... Tomorrow, clean slate. End of all of this shit. So can I just ask you, and I want you to be frank 'cause I really do respect you. I mean, do you think people can change? I mean, like, if your behaviour's one way, that you can, like, alter it?... I wanna, you know, sit down, and I want you to give me five things, five character flaws that I can do a reboot on. You know, a do-over on, amend my character flaws, as it were. Like, you know, I mean, just sit down and really go with candour, whether it's my fuckin' mother's fault or my father's fault, it doesn't really matter.... Oh, you know, it doesn't really make any difference because I'm willin' to alter those things because I believe in redemption, right? And I'm willin' to do that." It is at this that point Diesel puts a violent end to his friend's annoying tirade.

native to the necessary path of self-destruction followed by our civilisation. We should not fall into the trap of considering contingency and necessity as a binary. Rather, following Hegel's lesson, we should perceive them as two dialectical sides of the same coin, whereby contingency is always-already inscribed in necessity.

Habermas and Literature:
The Public Sphere and the Social Imaginary

Geoff Boucher[1]

Abstract: Although Habermas has written about the cultural role of literature and about literary works, he has not systematically articulated a literary-critical method as a component of either communicative reason or post-metaphysical thinking. Accordingly, the current article is synthetic in its fundamental intention, bringing Habermasian concepts and categories into contact with aesthetic and cultural theories in and around the Frankfurt School, and beyond. The fundamental aim of this project is to understand how literature contributes to the cultural frameworks supporting democratic societies. The central claims that the project advances, derived from Habermas, are that literature contributes to the rationality of cultural and social processes, through its catalysation of debates in the public sphere, and that literature performs a key role in the formation of modern social imaginaries. Through provoking public debate—especially in the form of professional and citizen literary criticism—literature generates arguments about the meaning and significance of works, and about their literary value and implications for life, arguments that ultimately have to do with the cultural interpretation of human needs. But through stimulating imaginative transportation, literary works also galvanise transformations in the life histories of individuals, providing fresh perceptions and new feelings, along with a renovation of language and the transformation of socially dominant images. From the Habermasian perspective, then, literary works have "two faces"—discursive intervention in the public sphere and personal integration of imaginative disclosures—that depend upon two modalities of literary reception: critique and identification. In relation to the first face, I explain the way that literary works intervene in the public sphere through catalysing forms of critique, by developing

1   Geoff Boucher is associate professor in literary studies at Deakin University in Australia. His research creates an intersection between Frankfurt School Critical Theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as intervening critically in the space of post-Marxism. He is also a general editor of Edinburgh University Press' Thinking Politics series, and is a regular contributor to theoretical and psychoanalytic journals. His most recent books are Understanding Marxism (Acumen: 2012) and Adorno Reframed (ibTauris: 2012). His journal articles on literary topics include work on Calvino, Joyce, Shakespeare and Winterson.

and extending Habermas' position on communicative reason. The second face of modern literature is its ability to affect the personality structures of individuals through identificatory integration of narrative arcs and social ideals into their individual life histories.

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Perhaps not surprisingly, in light of the current break-up of post-structuralist-influenced critical orthodoxies in literary studies, there is growing interest in the topic of "Habermas and literature".[2] On the one hand, Jürgen Habermas's concepts of the public sphere, communicative reason, deliberative democracy and discourse ethics have had an enormous influence in the humanities and beyond. On the other hand, there is increasing dissatisfaction with post-structuralist influenced theories that are mired in relativism and nihilism, and there is broad interest in the approach of Frankfurt School Critical Theory to literature and culture.[3] Although Habermas has written about the cultural role of literature and about literary works, however, he has not systematically articulated a literary-critical method as a component of either communicative reason or post-metaphysical thinking. Nonetheless, proposals for a communicative understanding of literary works focused on active reception and on the role of the ordinary reader in public debates on literature have significantly advanced the project of a Habermasian literary criticism.[4]

2   David Colclasure, *Habermas and Literary Rationality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), Pieter Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), Nicholas Hengen-Fox, 'A Habermasian Literary Criticism', *New Literary History*, 43/2 (2012), pp. 235-254, David Ingram, 'Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment', *New German Critique*, /53 (1991), pp. 67-103, Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2006), Franz Koppe, *Grundbegriffe der Ästhetik* (Paderborn: Mentis Verlag, 2004a), Jennifer A. Mcmahon, 'Aesthetic Autonomy and Praxis: Art and Language in Adorno and Habermas', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 19/2 (2011), 155-75.

3   Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

4   Rosa Eberly, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres* (Urbana and Chicago: Uni-

These link up with a growing perception in literary studies that critical practices involving monological versions of the hermeneutics of suspicion need to be rethought, and supplemented by approaches drawn from the hermeneutics of retrieval.[5] Accordingly, the current article is synthetic in its fundamental intention, bringing Habermasian concepts and categories into contact with aesthetic and cultural theories in and around the Frankfurt School, and beyond.

The fundamental aim of this project is to understand how literature contributes to the cultural frameworks supporting democratic societies. The central claims that the project advances, derived from Habermas, are that literature contributes to the rationality of cultural and social processes, through its catalysation of debates in the public sphere, and that literature performs a key role in the formation of modern social imaginaries. In light of post-structuralist interpretations of the term "critique" in literary studies, it is important to note that in the Frankfurt School tradition around Habermas and cothinkers, rational argumentation in the space of public debate is what is known as "critique," while the holistic presentation of imaginative visions is described as "disclosure". Specifically, what I am going to suggest here extends the proposal of Pieter Duvenage for the "reciprocity of critique and disclosure," the idea that the specialised analysis of truth claims works side-by-side with the imaginative refreshment of language and perception.[6] I am claiming, then, that literature triggers processes of critique and disclosure, and that these modalities of reception are related to (but not reducible to) the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of retrieval, respectively.[7] Through provoking

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versity of Illinois Press, 2000), Nicholas Hengen-Fox, *Reading as Collective Action: Text as Tactics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017).

5   Rita Felski and Elizabeth S. Anker (eds.), *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

6   Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason*, pp. 137-141.

7   The "hermeneutics of suspicion" interprets the text as a superficial semblance of completeness whose tiny inconsistencies evidence the effects of a hidden deep structure, whereas the "hermeneutics of retrieval" seeks to recover the

public debate—especially in the form of professional and citizen literary criticism—literature generates arguments about the meaning and significance of works, and about their literary value and implications for life, arguments that ultimately have to do with the cultural interpretation of human needs. But through stimulating imaginative transportation, literary works also galvanise transformations in the life histories of individuals, providing fresh perceptions and new feelings, along with a renovation of language and the transformation of socially dominant images.

From the Habermasian perspective, then, literary works have "two faces"—discursive intervention in the public sphere and personal integration of imaginative disclosures—that depend upon two modalities of literary reception: critique and identification. In relation to the first face, I explain the way that literary works intervene in the public sphere through catalysing forms of critique, by developing and extending Habermas' position on communicative reason. The central proposition defended here is that autonomous literature is a sort of laboratory experiment with new feelings, desires, beliefs and needs, and the expressive resources of a speech community, one with the potential to unlock, through critical debate, authentic new forms of self-realization. The second face of modern literature is its ability to affect the personality structures of individuals through identificatory integration of narrative arcs and social ideals into their individual life histories. I explore the debates on imaginative world-disclosure in this context and then turn to the notion of the social imaginary, as a specific component of the lifeworld's horizon of expectations that is articulated narratively.

Three models of the literary work

Although Habermas affirms the validity of modern literature in his celebrated defense of modernity, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, the

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totality of meaning potential from the text considered as a holistic presentation of possible experience. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 32.

position of the literary work is actually theoretically ambivalent within the architecture of Habermasian philosophy. The problematic status of aesthetics in Habermasian theory has been noticed by many commentators and intensively discussed within critical-theoretical circles.[8] In effect, Habermas vacillates, initially locating aesthetic critique as a development of the expressive dimension within communicative reason,[9] but subsequently proposing an opposition between communicative reason and artistic disclosure.[10] Indeed, it can be argued that Habermas presents three successive models of the literary work, each of which purports to cancel out the previous model, and all of which are, in turn, taken to be exemplary for the new conception of literary interventions that emerges from each successive demolition.

Before describing these three models, it is important to remark that although these discussions are often framed in terms of aesthetics generally, literary works have a special positions within these debates, because they involve the relation between artworks in a linguistic medium and a communicative understanding of reason.[11] Furthermore, even though Habermas sometimes invokes debates around the notion of poetic language, poetry is seldom the illustration for these discussions, which rather centre on narrative fictions. Consistent with these employments, I intend to recruit discussions of Habermasian aesthetics directly to my analysis of literary works consisting of narrative fictions, on the assump-

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8   Pieter Duvenage Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason.*, David Ingram Ingram, "Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment", in Nikolas Kompridis Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future.* and Albrecht Wellmer Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 1-35.

9   Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, trans. Thomas Mccarthy, 2 vols. (1; Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 23, pp. 90-93.

10 Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, trans. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 403-433.

11 Colclasure, *Habermas and Literary Rationality*.

tion that prose literature is paradigmatic in this context.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, then, Habermas argues that literature had an important "structure-forming effect" in the development of bourgeois society, since it provided a template for the partition of experience into public, private and intimate that leads to the distinction between citizen, bourgeois and man or woman. Specifically, the eighteenth-century republic of letters constructed a special domain of private experience that articulated citizenship to publicity and domesticity to intimacy across the bridge of civil privatism.[12] For Habermas, a key exemplification of this process is Richardson's *Pamela*, whose diaristic and then epistolary origins point to "experiments with the subjectivity discovered in the close relationships of the conjugal family".[13] But Habermas is quick to note that this involved a representation of privateness (and not just an expression of interiority), "oriented to an audience [*Publikum*]," which brings the effect of the republic of letters into contact with traditional philosophical conceptions of how literature works, namely, through mimesis.

By contrast, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas does not develop the effects of literature from its capacity to represent the world with verisimilitude, that is, through its presentation of plausible sequences of events enchained by means of action by socially or psychologically typical characters. Instead, he derives aesthetic mimesis from expressive communication happening in dramaturgical action, where an actor, in presenting a privileged insight into their own psychological interiority to an audience, constitutes a potentially shareable subjective world as a referent.[14] The literary work, as a result of reflection on contested validity claims to expressive truthfulness, is an exploration of the subjective world through experimentation with need-interpretations and the lin-

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12 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 28-56.

13 Ibid., p. 49.

14 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, pp. 100-103.

guistic means of their expression. That is a construction of the role of literature that is more in line with James Joyce's *Ulysses* than with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and its implication is an interpretation of the literary work closer to Adorno's expressive, rather than representational, conception of aesthetic mimesis.

Finally, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas presents a completely different position on the literary work, proposing that "world-disclosing poetic language" is the complement to communicative reason—rather than one of its moments.[15] On this interpretation, literary works release the rhetorical power of language from its everyday communicative employment, opening up fresh perceptions and new meanings.[16] Key to this position is Habermas's claim that the holistic meaning-complexes conveyed in, for instance, narrative fiction, are not susceptible to their analytical separation into specific types of validity claims.[17] The implications are that literary works must be grasped through a hermeneutics of retrieval and that aesthetic expression is not a prolongation of the expressive dimension of communicative reason. Furthermore, Habermas's illustration in this context is not Joycean experimentation, but instead Italo Calvino's playful *If, On a Winter's Night, a Traveller…*, where the literary game involves imagining the construction of a literary world that engulfs its real readers.[18]

I want to pause at this point, to take stock of the initial situation and to pose some research questions. My first remark is that the communicative and hermeneutic (disclosing) positions rehearse a longstanding debate in literary criticism, between literary mimesis and imaginative revelation, that is, between literature as "mirror" and literature as "lamp".[19]

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15 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 207.

16 Ibid., pp. 199-201.

17 Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 413.

18 For an extended discussion, see: Geoff Boucher, 'A Cataclysm of Truth from the Crisis of Falsehood: Reading Habermas on Calvino', *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, p. 22 (pp. 22-37).

19 Meyer Abrams, H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical*

Relative to this debate, Habermas's discussion of the republic letters in the public sphere is really a literary-sociological description of the "structure-forming effects" of literature on society, culture and personality in the lifeworld, irrespective of whether literature is theorised as mimetic or disclosing, representational or imaginative. My second remark is that (perhaps unconsciously) these debates position literature as the agent in a process whose nature is under scrutiny: it is as if the literary text communicates need-interpretations to an interlocutor, or unfolds a vision for its audience. I want to completely reject this assumption—I am tempted to say, with Adorno, that the literary text is mute. Literary texts do not communicate, express, envision or represent; authors do not argue, propose, suggest, or intervene. Authors tell invented stories that they probably suppose worthwhile—more of this in a moment—and these form literary texts, whose incompleteness solicits an imaginative activity of concretisation on part of the reader, something that is necessary in order to constitute the literary work in the act of reception.[20] If literary texts end up having structure-forming effects, that is because readers do things with works (e.g., critical argumentation, imaginative identification) that release ideas and meanings into the lifeworld.

Now, in light of the critical commonplace that literary works can be interpreted as both representational and imaginative, surely it is an uncontentious suggestion that critique and disclosure are both operative in the reception of literary works. But how? And why? Is it possible to reconcile Habermas's communicative and hermeneutic accounts of literature, by using the reception-aesthetic fulcrum of the distinction between text and work to grasp the difference between textual structures (that provoke certain reading effects) and reader responses? Rotating the problem of the literary work after the intersubjective turn into the perspective of reception aesthetics, I am going to propose that Habermas's models of

Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

20 Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hpkins University Press, 1980).

the literary work are best grasped in terms of modalities of reception. Foreshadowing the global argument of the article, I propose that these modalities—rational critique and imaginative identification—explain and clarify Habermas' uncertainties and position his work in relation to the relevant debates.

Although what I have just suggested might perhaps constitute an answer to the "how" problem, it has not even broached the "why" question. What is it about literary texts that means that, although they are (propositionally) mute and (imaginatively) incomplete, they nonetheless catalyse arguments and stimulate identifications that typically construct the work as representational or imaginative? In what ways do certain impulses, discovered in the work by its readers, contribute to the structure forming effects of literature? Does modern literature have the same structure forming effects as ancient and medieval literature—or does the specific situation of modernity, aside from the media-sociological question of the "structural transformation of the public sphere," have distinctive potentials? In short, is there a "literary discourse of modernity" that is consistent with the philosophical discourse of modernity?

Mimesis and phantasia in literary discourse

To begin to answer these questions, some deeper account of the nature of literary works, their different dimensions and potentials of reception, and the peculiar characteristics of modern literature, is needed, before Habermas's insights can be reconciled with one another and synthesised into a whole. Let me briefly map out how I think that this can be done. I propose that Habermas's communicative and disclosive models of literature are actually argumentative and imaginative dimensions of response to structures in the literary text that lie beneath the literary strategies and repertoires discovered by Wolfgang Iser.[21] These structures are investigated by Kathryn Hume in her neglected work, *Mimesis and Fantasy*, in terms of the coordination in the literary text of representational im-

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21 Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*.

pulses with the imaginative impulse to fantasise a world that involves a "deviation from consensus reality".[22] Literature, Hume reminds us, is an active *response* to reality, not a faithful *reflection* of reality, and literary works, by their coordination of *mimesis* and *phantasia*, imply various fundamental attitudes to reality, attitudes that texts potentially make available through exemplary vicarious experiences. I want to bring this into contact with the proposal of Franz Koppe, who suggests that fundamental attitudes to reality, conveyed through exemplary experiences, imply distinct ways of coping with reality—specifically, different ways of mapping the subjective realm onto the social world and the objective environment.[23] Next, restoring the under-developed reception-aesthetic component within the Humean perspective, it is further proposed that literary texts are constituted as works in two receptive modes, analysis and identification, which to some extent respond to the impulses of *mimesis* and *phantasia*. Now I will try to outline how this part of the argument might proceed.

Kathryn Hume's proposal is that the literary text is constituted by the two "impulses" of *mimesis* and *phantasia*. "Mimesis," she writes, "[is] the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; fantasy [is] the desire to change givens and alter reality—out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defenses".[24] The polemical dimension to her position aims at the representational preference exhibited in the major forms of literary criticism, especially those derived from Aristotle, which, when they acknowledge the existence of a non-mimetic dimension to literature, typically denigrate it as "sensationalism" and "entertainment".[25]

22 Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 21.

23 Franz Koppe, *Sprache Und Bedürfnis: Zur Sprachphilosophischen Grundlage Der Geisteswissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 2004b).

24 Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, p. 20.

25 Arguably, Aristotle, though, actually proposes that literary works have effects of both reflection, provoked by the text's mimetic verisimilitude, and

The Humean claim can be reframed for a moment in terms of possible worlds theories of literature: every literary world is an imagined incomplete (im-)possible world that exhibits (im-)plausibility, connected with its representation of consensus reality, and (in-)consistency, connected with its invention of relations and "realities" that only exist in the text.[26] *Phantasia*, then, refers to the imaginative activity of world-building, rather than to particular, fantastic representations (such as Medea's Chariot of the Sun). But if we define (with Kathryn Hume) "fantasy" as "any departure from consensus [definitions of] reality," the realism (or otherwise) of a literary work is going to strongly depend on the context of reception, for one culture's "chain of being" is another culture's "enchanted garden".[27] In the present, philosophical context, it is important to underline the radicalism of this position in relation to literary studies. (1) As a category, literature, containing both mimesis and phantasia, is not normatively inflected, but a description of all narrative fiction, including popular fictions routinely dismissed as "sub-literary entertainment".[28] (2) By insisting on the role of the imagination in literature, the position restores to centrality the vast majority of narrative fictions, which are not merely popular, but are written in the mode of "marvellous adventures" (also known technically as Romance). Hume is not claiming that all literature belongs to fantasy, however, only that every work contains some imaginative elements, resulting from the impulse of *phantasia*. Nonetheless, as Northrop Frye (one of Hume's sources) points out:

> Any serious discussion of Romance has to take into account its curiously proletarian status as a form generally disapproved of, in most ages, by the guardians of taste and learning, except

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"wonder," engendered by phantasia or imagination, which is why he famously (but bewilderingly) speaks of both plausible and implausible (i.e., mimesis), and possible and impossible (i.e., phantasia). See: Victor Caston, 'Why Aristotle Needs Imagination', *Phronesis*, 41/1 (1996), pp. 20-55.

26 Lubomir Dolezel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

27 Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, p. 21.

28 Hume, for instance, considers pornography in her discussion of literature.

when they use it for their own purposes. The close connection between the Romantic and the popular runs all through literature. … The conventions of prose Romance show little change over the course of centuries, and conservatism of this kind is the mark of a stable genre. In the Greek Romances, we find stories of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies about the future contortions of the plot, foster parents, adventures which involve capture by pirates, narrow escapes from death, recognition of the true identity of the hero and his eventual marriage with the heroine. We open, let us say, Guy Mannering, written fifteen centuries later, and we find that, although there are slight changes in the setting, the kind of story being told—a story of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies, capture by pirates, and the like, is very much the same. In Greek Romance, the characters are Levantine, the setting is the Mediterranean world, and the normal means of transportation is by shipwreck. In science fiction, the characters may be earthlings, the setting the intergalactic spaces, and what gets wrecked in hostile territory is a spaceship, but the tactics of the storyteller generally conform to much the same outlines.[29]

Call this a "Harry Potter theory of literature": I want to position popular fiction, especially marvellous adventures, at the centre of literary-critical debate, rather than, say, experimental modernism or socially-concerned realism. Not surprisingly, perhaps, I want to do that because I want to foreground the connection between imagination and desire, or, more generally, cultural need interpretations. In Romance, the imaginative impulse in literature is foregrounded, and Romance is what the vast majority of readers actually read.

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29 Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 4-5, p. 23.

The literary discourse of modernity

Readers, however, *read*. In describing literature as presenting an imagined incomplete (im-)possible world, I wanted to highlight not just the imaginative character of narrative fiction, but also its incompleteness. That incompleteness solicits an imaginative, active response from the reader, who must generate a sufficiently complete possible world to extract meaning from the work.

From the perspective of reception theory, the basic problems of reading are (1) the text's "indeterminacy in the stratum of presented objects" and (2) the relation between the reader's "horizon of expectations" and the literary work constructed in reading. The first problem concerns the fact that we are given limited information about the world represented in the text, and must imaginatively fill in the gaps, in order to extract meaning from the reading experience. For instance, although Jorge Luis Borges tells us in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" that the narrator has access to an apocryphal version of Volume 46 of the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* of 1917, with its problematic entry on pages 918-921 on "Uqbar," we know nothing else about the house, bookshelf, volume and pages, beyond what the narrator represents to the reader. The so-called "stratum of presented objects," including represented states of consciousness, such as the encyclopaedia volume and what the narrator thinks about it, must be gradually "schematised," that is, made somewhat more determinate, with reference to textual information and generic expectations. But even though these schemata limit interpretation, an extraordinary variety of imaginative possibilities remains for filling in the gaps. This process of filling in gaps by making the represented world more determinate is known as the "concretisation" of the text as a work, while the "work" may be defined as a consistent vicarious experience with a coherent meaning-structure.[30]

The second problem relates to the interpretive and evaluative stance of the reader who is participating in the dynamic process of the concretisation

30 Iser, *The Implied Reader*.

of a text as work. According to Hans-Robert Jauss, what Iser calls the concretisation of the literary work depends upon the play of generic and life-world expectations in a hermeneutic circle that happens during reading.[31] Literary works employ narrative strategies and representational repertoires to simultaneously defamiliarise everyday communicative language and position readers within generic expectations. To the extent that works successfully break from generic formulae and challenge the reader's horizon of expectations, the work may be said to exhibit aesthetic innovation, so that literary history is constituted through a series of influential ruptures with conventional strategies and repertoires. In light of the fact that cross-cultural and trans-historical encounters may involve situations where production of the text and reception of the work happen within vastly different horizons of expectations, it is crucial to notice that although "innovation" and "provocation" are related, there is no teleological evolution of literary history.

My claim, then, is that the strategies and repertoires by which a text guides the implied reader towards certain concretisation potentialities are conditioned by the coordination of mimesis and phantasia in the text's modal structure. Describing these tendential potentialities—these poles of attraction in the text—as attitudes to reality, Hume proposes that literature suggests engagement or disengagement from reality, as well as the comforting or disturbing effect of illusion.[32]

	Reality: engagement	Reality: disengagement
Illusions: comfort	Literature that stimulates renewed appreciation of existing arrangements	Literature that provides consolation, such as pastoral and erotica
Illusions: disturb	Literature that provokes transvaluation, such as didactic and utopian works	Literature that prompts disillusionment, rejecting myths but refusing alternatives

31　Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

32　Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, p. 57.

Hume wants to catalogue and classify most kinds of literature according to this classificatory schema. That is an enterprise that interests me not at all. Instead, I want to speculate on the proximity of Hume's notion, of the coordination of reality and illusion in the underlying attitudes expressed through the combination of mimesis and fantasy in the text, Freud's notions of the reality and pleasure principles.

If phantasia invokes something that is orthogonal to the plausible representation of psychological, social and natural reality, and that something is involved with the creation of illusions that may be consolatory or disturbing, so that texts may tend to generate pleasure or anxiety, then we may reasonably relate *phantasia* to Freud's pleasure principle and *mimesis* to Freud's reality principle. I think that if we accept this conjecture, then the notion that the combination of *mimesis* and *phantasia* involves the presentation of a fundamental attitude towards coping with reality begins to take shape. From the Freudian perspective, reality can be accepted or rejected, that is, individuals can resign themselves to the current historical form of the reality principle, or they can long for an alternative principle of reality, through hoping for the social recognition of silenced needs and hidden desires, for the reform of the social world, or for human mastery over the natural environment. At the same time, the pleasure principle can be a source of consolation or disturbance, the origin of relative satisfaction or the focus of intense repression. That generates the following matrix as a modification of Hume's suggestion:

	Reality: acceptance	*Reality: rejection*
Pleasure: comfort	Literature presenting hedonistic attitudes	Literature presenting consolatory attitudes
Pleasure: disturb	Literature presenting attitudes of moderation and self-mastery	Literature presenting ascetic attitudes

To summarise: regarding the text as a combination of impulses to imitation and invention, *mimesis* and *phantasia*, leads us to suppose that the text presents the coordination of these impulses as a fundamental

attitude to reality. The text presents—not so much a determinate space of suggestions about the world or conjectures about needs—a way of coping with reality through a basic positioning, one that can be traced in the final analysis to an existential stance towards reality and pleasure. This fundamental existential attitude is what is expressed through the strategies and repertoires of the text, which guide the reader's response without governing it.

The specific situation of modern literature significantly conditions the way that the anthropological generalities, introduced a moment ago, operate. Despite continuities in what Frye calls the "tactics of the storyteller," the difference between modern literary texts and traditional literary texts concerns the "disintegration of the sacred canopy".[33] That affects both writers and readers. From the perspective of literary production, secularisation not only results in cultural specialisation in aesthetic investigations of the subjective world, but also releases the employment of *phantasia* from the cosmological constraints of official religions. From the perspective of literary reception, readers bring to bear a horizon of expectations that includes not only a history of the growing autonomy of art—expressed prominently through debates on blasphemy and obscenity—but also an acceptance of the provisional and relative status of imaginative visions.

Scholarly consensus on the most general features of literary and artistic modernity remains fugitive, beyond Matei Calinescu's observation that the historical time-consciousness of modernity, with its focus on novelty and innovation, implies that "no tradition is by itself more valid than any other".[34] But if the focus is widened from the "adversary culture" of literary modernism—from Baudelaire to Rushdie, say—to the wider cultural forms of the modern era—from Shakespeare onwards—then some generalisations can be risked. Literature in the modern world has three

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33 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

34 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Second Edition edn.; Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 7-8, 67-68.

salient characteristics—it is secular (and commercial), separated from science and law, and it is non-pragmatically communicative rather than functional.

The secularisation of literature and its commercialisation are coextensive and related processes, beginning with the early modern theatres and the Grub Street presses, which have to do with the shift from aristocratic patronage and religious tutelage, to commercialised entertainment. Although the relation between literary works, on the one hand, and codes regulating blasphemy and mandating observance of religious cosmologies, on the other hand, are doubtless complex, the vast majority of modern political communities do not enforce positive compliance with an official religion from literary authors. It should be noted that nationalist ideologies, despite their secular character, operate as mythologically cognate to religious cosmologies, but that this also has no positive structuring effect on modern literary texts. That means that public debate about literary works—critique—happens in the context of the discourse of modernity, the attempt to generate normativity from reflection rather than tradition.[35] But it also means that religious cosmologies and national ideologies—mythologies that remain active in the modern world—are actually thematised elements, rather than background assumptions, within the horizon of expectations implied by the imaginative disclosures of the text. Joyce's invention of a mythological substrate for both *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* is typical of a kind of imaginative disclosure that no longer happens against the background of any consensus on metaphysics.

Further, modern literature, through a series of prominent trials and scandalous provocations, has gradually asserted its independence from the considerations of science, and of law and ethical life. The requirement that literature accurately represent the world did not survive Romanticism in the nineteenth century. The assertion that literature has a moral vocation, by contrast, dies hard: it lives on, for instance, in philosophy, a century after Flaubert's "obscene" romance, Rimbaud's inflammatory "beautiful evil," and Nabokov's cunning traps in *Lolita*. Generally speak-

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35 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p. 7.

ing, the prescriptive aesthetics and normative evaluations of literature that accompany these claims—the desperate effort to separate Literature from literature—expose what is essential: literary texts may now freely represent criminality and even valorise immorality. That is not the same as the (false) claim that literary texts may constitute criminal acts or breach civil codes, including regulations concerning obscenity, blasphemy or vilification. It is the claim that modern literature is engaged in a constant process of testing the boundaries between the deontological presuppositions of modern law and post-conventional morality (i.e., moral autonomy, on which the autonomy of literature depends), and the conventional substance of ethical life, which the law often defends. Here, literature prompts the enactment of critique fairly directly.

Finally, the commercialisation of literature also entails its loss of direct social function, as glorification of the patron or didactic instrument in the service of an institution. That foregrounds the non-pragmatically communicative character of literature, by removing structural imperatives of ingratiation or instruction, making salient the underlying characteristics of the literary text. In his discussion of the poetic language hypothesis, Habermas valuably brings out the two main characteristics in question, which can here only be outlined in summary. On the one hand, narrative fictions consist of "worthwhile," or "tellable," exemplary experiences that drawn on everyday repertoires for the reporting of sequences of events; one the other hand, a break with everyday communication is performed by the text's bracketing of illocutionary forces and set towards the message.[36]

Critique—Literary rationality in the public sphere

When literary works are imaginatively concretised in a reflective stance, the ways that they map the subjective domain onto the social world and the natural environment can be interpreted analytically and debated argumentatively, something engaged in by both citizen critics and literary

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36 Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, pp. 383-401.

professionals. I now want to sketch out the way that critical interpretation of literary works involves the "translation" of the non-propositional presentation that happens in modern literature into arguments about cultural need-interpretations. The argument contains several steps, rehearsed elsewhere in considerable detail, which try to build up the position in a series of layers, progressively refining assumptions and specifying features.[37]

First, from the Habermasian perspective advanced in *Theory of Communicative Action*, cultural specialisation in the redemption of contested expressive validity claims to truthfulness results in institutions of art and therapy, separated from the scientific investigation of cognitive claims to truth and legal-moral claims to rightness. The aspect of truthfulness relevant to art and literature is the value of authenticity, involving a reflective relation between the subjective world, consisting of needs, desires, beliefs and feelings—generically, "cultural need-interpretations"—and standards of self-realization. Further, literary works engage in renovation of the linguistic means of expression and experimentation with the formal strategies of presentation, of these sometimes provocative need-interpretations. The institutionalised learning process of autonomous art and modern literature therefore results in an exploration of subjectivity, through aesthetic experiments that discover new possibilities for authentic existence and its communicative expression. These have structure forming effects to the extent that the lifestyle implications of aesthetic innovation sediment into the lifeworld as new potentialities for personality structures, specifically, a new dimension of ego maturity, gained through the transition from traditional to post-traditional need interpretations (PTNIs).

Second, Habermas has grave reservations about the universality of expressive validity claims to authenticity, especially when linked to aesthetic claims to innovation. That limits the rationally-binding force of truthfulness as authenticity, rendering questionable the structure-form-

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37　Geoff Boucher, 'The Politics of Aesthetic Affect: A Reconstruction of Habermas's Art Theory', *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy,* 13 (2011), pp. 62-78..

ing effectiveness of literature. Authenticity claims invoke (and challenge) communal standards and they have the structure of reflexive judgments. Innovation claims invoke (and challenge) standards of aesthetic taste and they also have the structure of reflexive judgments. A double particularity surrounds the adjudication of forms of self-realization in light of new need-interpretations, and their relation to artistic quality and communal appropriateness. Additionally, reflexive judgments exhibit subjective universality, removing them from the domain of propositionally formulated discourse and placing them within the sphere of plausible interpretations. Finally, of course, the evaluation of literary works presupposes agreement on the meaning of the work, something that involves the discursive adjudication of claims about the felicity of symbolic articulations. No wonder, then, that Habermas is concerned that the artistic exploration of modern subjectivity cannot transmit PTNIs into a complex and pluralistic lifeworld!

Third, however, the Habermasian concerns can be partly satisfied by noticing that participants in the lifeworld do not have to agree on particular PTNIs—say, for instance, that homosexual desire is a legitimate expression of sexual needs and feelings of romantic attachment, i.e., that gay love is an authentic form of that passionate bond. They just have to agree not to resort to coercion or denigration of the other in the expression of their own, communally-recognised form of authentic self-realization, i.e., they must tolerate one another. It is a presupposition of this argument, of course, that the non-enforceable virtue of tolerance depends upon the capacity to adopt a post-traditional attitude towards need-interpretations. The only thing that follows from that, however, is that each group within the political community and the social formation should have its own literary forms (and other means of arriving at PTNIs), not that all must agree on a standardised interpretation of a literary canon.

Fourth, the component of Habermas's concerns about "critique," as opposed to "discourse," which have to do with the distinction between arguments dependent on interpretive plausibility and arguments susceptible to logical demonstration, can be satisfied by clarifying the differ-

ence between reading literature and literary criticism. I originally argued that literary works consist of non-propositional articulations of validity claims to authenticity and innovation, and that the task of the critic is to propositionally formulate these claims—an argument I now think false.[38] The literary work claims nothing at all—it is critics who stake claims (i.e., readers engaged in rational argumentation about interpretive possibilities). These critical claim complexes are complicated, because they contain (discursive) claims about the meaning of symbols and (discursive) claims about formal aspects of the text. But these are alongside interpretive claims about the meaning of the work and authenticity claims about the satisfactoriness of ways of life. Additionally, there are aesthetic evaluations of literary quality, also in the mode of critique rather than discourse.

Not all of these are based on reflexive judgments, but most elements of literary criticism, despite their rationality, belong to a perpetual "conflict of interpretations" bereft of a progressive structure or universally-binding potentials.[39] I will explain why I think that is the case, in relation to the reception of text as work, in a moment, but I want to pause to ask the question as to whether this is really a problem. Individuals do not need to all agree that Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* valorises lesbian sexuality or that this valorisation reflects a legitimate interpretation of romantic love. All they need to agree on is that the people who *do* think these things—and provide reasons for these positions that conform to recognised protocols of argument and evidence—are not unnatural in their interpretation of passion, nor incompetent as readers of the text. That is, critics (i.e., the public) must accept the conflict of interpretations and the conventionality of needs.

Rotating the problem, of the interminability of the conflict of interpretations and its implications for the structure-formative effects of literature, into the perspective provided by literary reception, clarifies the

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38 Ibid., pp. 72-74.

39 Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

epistemological stakes of this debate. In the phenomenological theory of ED Hirsch, a strong effort is made to secure intersubjective validity in interpretation, by means of the distinction between the meaning of the text and the significance of the work.[40] On Hirsch's revised position, the fixed component of the meaning of the text is the schematic aspect of the intentional object of authorial communication—what Iser describes as the text's strategies and repertoires (e.g., that Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* parodies both confessional and detective literature, through an unreliable narrator, with the effect that the question of guilt becomes a problem for the reader to resolve themselves, in the absence of certainty). The variable component of meaning is the gap between authorial intention (the concretisation of the work envisaged by the writer) and the potential concretisations open to the reader after the text's schemata are taken into account. By contrast, the significance of a work is the relation between the meaning of the work and anything else—generally speaking, an extensional context of some kind, such as the historical reality of the social situation represented in the work, or the author's biography, or some theoretical entities such as those hypothesised by psychoanalysis.[41] Hirsch claims—and I agree—that narratological, semantic and generic investigations of textual structures are scientific. But on reception-theoretic grounds, the extraction of meaning from the text beyond a description of its formal structures and semantic potentials must involve the concretisation of the text as work. Long before anyone begins articulating claims about need-interpretations, readers, in other words, have to make inferences about characters and situations, not to mention imagery and rhetoric, based on the reader's movement within the hermeneutic circle. Significance, in other words, is all that we have, beyond the bare bones of the text's structures. Debates about the significance of, say, the collected works of Shakespeare, perpetually renew

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40 See E.D. Hirsch, 'Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted', *Critical Inquiry*, 11/2 (1984), 202-25, E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

41 Hirsch, 'Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted', pp. 207-208.

the relevance of the text for us, but at the cost of a permanent deferral of consensus on its value, context and implications, or any interpretive saturation of its potential meanings.

Literary-critical claim-complexes, then, have to transform aesthetic provocations into ensembles that relate conjectured expressive claims to a raft of factors, including the fitness of means of expression, the appropriateness of standards of judgement and the character of social worlds. They do so in ways that critique the petrifaction of expressive means and aesthetic conventions, the failure of values and institutions to satisfy acknowledged needs, and the social silencing of new needs or the unnecessary hiding of legitimate desires. Such claim complexes release ego-maturation promoting debates about PTNIs (or criticise their suppression by ideology), albeit in ways that restrict agreement to communities of value and that therefore stop at critique, short of universally-binding discourse.

The rationality of critique, then, is something *done with* literary texts in their reception through public debate, rather than something that literary texts do. Although literary-critical claim-complexes do, of course, exist, they do so as a "conflict of interpretations" that everywhere renders problematic the status of literary criticism as knowledge (and therefore as rationally binding). Returning to the distinction proposed by ED Hirsch, between meaning (the probable semantic range of the text) and significance (the relation between textual meaning and any given context), this article recasts this in reception-theoretical terms as the difference between claim-complexes regarding import (involving the consistency of symbols with expressive and evaluative claims) and impact (involving the plausibility of relations between import and wider claims about lifeworlds).

Worlds—Imaginative identification and visionary disclosure

Imaginative identification with aspects of a narrative within a fictional world taken as a whole is a completely different mode of reception compared with analytical critique. It involves the reception of the literary work as a holistic ensemble of fused validity claims, one that presents

a complex of representation and imagination as a possible experience. Following James Bohman's "deflationary" interpretation of world disclosure, such disclosures do not directly constitute new worlds, but rather invite the adoption of fresh perspectives and renovated meanings.[42] Participation in a disclosure, then, involves adopting a stance—vicariously or actually—which means: identification with a position, which is, generally speaking, personified for the reader in the protagonist of a narrative fiction. Imaginative identification therefore accepts the narrative's solicitation to the reader for direct integration of its vision of reality into the life histories of individuals.

Such a modality of reception is not accidently related to conversion experiences. The maximal integration of a disclosure—or revelation—is the incorporation of its potential frameworks of experience into the key structures of the personality. In psychoanalytic terms, that would be equivalent to identification with the ideals of the work as an ego ideal (or superego figure), perhaps accompanied by a subsidiary identification with the protagonist as ideal ego, that is, an idealisation of the ego's own self-image.

Lest that be thought improbable, consider one of the most successful Romance works of all time, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), an elaborate allegory of the Christian's quest for spiritual redemption, explicitly intended as a proselytising work aimed at providing a template for identification. The modern aspect of Bunyan's work is beautifully exhibited in its subtitle—"A Dream"—which, in contrast with its medieval equivalents, in the lives of the saints, surrounds the totality with an aura of uncertainty by highlighting not only its human provenance, but also its epistemologically dubious character. Nonetheless, the work solicits maximal identification, but identification as a kind of leap of faith, a decision to live in a certain way, that is accompanied by the reflexive (i.e., critical) problem of allegorical interpretation. Modern literature does not purport to be entirely true, but it enjoins identification nonetheless, as identification that is never completely free from the stain of reflexivity.

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42 James Bohman, 'World Disclosure and Radical Criticism', *Thesis Eleven*, 37 (1994), pp. 82-97.

That identification may happen through the incorporation of the imago of the protagonist as an ideal, but it is much more likely to take the mediated form of identification with the fundamental existential attitude of the work, as provisionally supported by its characters.

In that sense, Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1951) is the modernist equivalent to Bunyan's modern (but not modernist) text. The didactic intention of the proselytising work is gone, replaced with a fictional account of a Buddha-like figure, whose path to (something perhaps like) enlightenment is presented as inspiring wisdom, rather than as instructive paradigm. The religious background, with its doctrinal works and mythological cosmos, is gone, replaced by the dialectic of a philosophically informed quest that never amounts to a worldview. Although identification with Siddhartha is possible, much more likely is identification with the process of questing itself, informed by an ascetic relation to reality and the desire to find tranquillity, rather than salvation. The imaginative vision of Siddhartha's life has a provisional or representational status in relation to the fundamental attitude that is thereby presented, unlike Bunyan's protagonist, Christian, whom the narrator dreams as symbol of truth.

Bunyan and Hesse represent literary attempts at creating conversion experiences, illustrating potentials for literary disclosures to operate maximally as personality-altering structuring identifications. It is not impossible that readers exist whose identification with Harry Potter extends thus far—but it is unlikely. Probably, for the vast majority of JK Rowling's readership, the identification is with Harry or Hermione as supports for ways of going about certain things, as elements in a repertoire of possible responses belonging to the ego as dispositional potentials, but not structuring of the totality of the personality. There two sorts of evidence for identification here. The Harry Potter fanfiction community indicates an identification with the "Potterverse" (i.e., the universe of the fiction) that basically enables a logical exhaustion of the space of alternative possibilities within this imaginative world—Harry is not the hero, Hermione is the heroine; Harry becomes a dark wizard like Voldemort;

etc.[43] The fundamental attitude identified with here is implicit but insistent: these are all explorations of narratives of individuation in which authentic self-identity involves an oppositional stance towards traditional authority, indeed, perhaps, towards authority as a whole. The other sort of evidence is the critical reading of Lana Whited and Katherine Grimes, which proposes that Harry's maturation maps out a sequences of stages of moral development consistent with Kohlberg's notions of conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning.[44] That makes the disposition towards authority that is being identified with in the fanfiction community explicit, while clarifying (in an analytic, rather than identificatory mode) the limits to that relation.

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43 See, for instance, the meta-community at https://www.fanfiction.net/communities/book/Harry-Potter/ (warning: a lot of fanfiction is pornographic—reader beware!).

44 Katherine Grimes and Lana Whited, 'What Would Harry Potter Do? Jk Rowling and Larence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development', in Lana Whited (ed.), *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 182-208.

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Is a Socialist Civil Society Possible?

Roland Boer[1]

Abstract: This article begins by pointing out that what many scholars call "civil society" is actually bourgeois or liberal civil society. The reason is that the original German term (used by Hegel and Marx) was *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*," which actually means "bourgeois society." It has been mistranslated as "civil society". The article has two subsequent parts. The first part criticises the idea of bourgeois civil society by engaging with Hegel, Marx and Domenico Losurdo (the leading Italian Marxist philosopher). With their insights, we see that bourgeois civil society is based on the alienation of the private individual and the citizen of the state (Hegel), the economic tensions of capitalism (Marx), and the exclusion of the majority from freedom (Losurdo). The second part makes some initial proposals for what a socialist civil society might look like. It begins with the point that socialist civil society is based not on the bourgeoisie, but on workers and peasants. It then examines what freedom means in a socialist civil society (with insights drawn from Lenin and Yang Guangbin). Finally, it proposes that socialist civil society arises in the space in between official or ideological positions and the hesitations that individuals may have about the official position (here I draw some insights from China).

The term "civil society" is largely assumed to be a neutral term. In current usage, it is supposed to mean the realm of human activity outside the state and outside the economy. However, the term is far from neutral. We need to remind ourselves that the original term is *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, or bourgeois society. So what "civil society" really means is bourgeois civil society. It is inescapably tied up with the development of capitalism and the seizure of power by the bourgeoisie. In light of this development, I ask the question: is a socialist civil society possible? To

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1   Roland Boer is Xin Ao Distinguished Overseas Professor at Renmin University of China, Beijing, and Research Professor at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Among numerous publications, the most recent are, with Christina Petterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (2017), and *Stalin: From Theology to the Philosophy of Socialism in Power* (2017).

answer this question, I begin with the problems of bourgeois civil society, working through Hegel, Marx and Losurdo. Then it becomes possible to see what a socialist civil society might be.

Bourgeois Civil Society

Hegel's influential insight into *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois civil society) is that it constitutes a new development with capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie.[2] Influenced by Adam Smith, David Hume and Thomas Paine, Hegel assumes that this bourgeois civil society contains everything that is outside the state – economics, voluntary associations, religion, education, health, the law and even the police. Hegel defines *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as "an association of members as self-sufficient individuals [*Einzelner*]."[3] The individual is the key, so any voluntary social connections are those formed by individuals "who have their own interest as their end."[4] Yet, this is the source of a distinct problem, for such an

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2   Although the Latin term, *societas civilis* (a translation of Aristotle's *koinonia politike*) has a long history, its meaning was quite different, for it was coterminous with the political life of the polis or republic. For a useful survey of the term's history, albeit with a benign reading, see Jürgen Kocha, 'Civil Society from a Historical Perspective', *European Review* 12, no. 1 (2004): pp. 65-79. The following draws on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1820 [1991]). The best study of Hegel's political and social thought, with a distinct focus on alienation, remains Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). See also the astute depiction of the alienating dimension of bourgeois society in Hegel's thought in Anders Bartonek, 'Labour Against Capitalism? Hegel's Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State', *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6(2014): pp. 113-124 (115-119). The following are also worth consulting: Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univertsity Press, 1979); Zbigniew Pelczynski, ed. *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel' s Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Canbridge University Press, 1984); Ian McNeely, 'Hegel's Württemberg Commentary: Intellectuals and the Construction of Civil Society in Revolutionary-Napoleonic Germany', *Central European History* 37, no. 3 (2010): pp. 354-364; Jeffrey Church, 'The Freedom of Desire: Hegel's Response to Rousseau on the Problem of Civil Society', *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 1 (2010): pp. 125-139.

3   Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 198; #157.

4   Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 224; #187.

individual is deeply alienated: one is torn between being a self-interested individual in association with other individuals (bourgeois civil society) and an individual subject to a given entity (the state).[5] Thus, the individual is caught in between, with the state pulling one way and private concerns in another.[6]

On a number of occasions, Hegel returns to this underlying theme, especially while elaborating his various proposals to overcome such alienation. The most significant (and for Hegel alarming) manifestation of this alienation appears with the family. He precedes his treatment of bourgeois civil society with the argument that the family provides a primary form of social glue, historically and logically prior to bourgeois civil society and its various mediatory mechanisms.[7] Yet the family fares ill before the onslaught of bourgeois civil society, for it "disintegrates" into "the *world appearance* of the ethical, i.e., *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*."[8] Or in more frightening detail:

> But *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* tears the individual [*Individuum*] away from family ties, alienates the members of the family from one another, and recognizes them as self-sufficient per-

5   See Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*; Bartonek, 'Labour Against Capitalism? Hegel's Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State', p. 115-119. Thus, it is simplistic to suggest that egoism and conflict arise from self-interest. Agnes Ku, 'Beyond the Paradoxical Conception of "Civil Society Without Citizenship"', *International Sociology* 17, no. 4 (2002): pp. 529-48 (531).

6   Therefore, Hegel does not fit neatly into the somewhat artificial distinction between liberal and Marxist approaches to civil society. The former sees bourgeois civil society in opposition to the state and thereby requiring protection from state intervention, or at least that it requires institutions within the state to enable such protection. I discuss Marxist approaches in a moment. For example, in her effort to distinguish the two types, Anges Ku enlists Hegel, somewhat ambiguously, for both sides. Ku, "Beyond the Paradoxical Conception of 'Civil Society Without Citizenship'," p. 529-37. See also John Keane, 'Despotism and Democracy - The Origins Development of the Distinction Between Civil Society and the State', in *Civil Society and the State*, ed. John Keane (London: Verso, 1988).

7   Here the conservative dimension of Hegel's thought appears, especially in terms of gender roles. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, pp. 206-207; #166.

8   Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 219; #181.

sons. Furthermore, it substitutes its own soil for the external inorganic nature and paternal soil from which the individual [*der Einzelne*] gained his livelihood, and subjects the existence [*Bestehen*] of the whole family itself to dependence on *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and to contingency.[9]

In short, "*bürgerliche Gesellschaft* affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both."[10] The only solution, for Hegel, is the state, which he regards as an ancient reality, an unquestioned and self-sufficient entity. Indeed, the state pre-exists its historical appearance, being nothing less than the Idea itself and embodiment of reason.[11] Even really existing bad states still partake of the ideal and abstract state.[12] Thus, it is the rational destiny of human beings to live within the state; we are citizens of a state by default and not of our own choosing or by contractual arrangement.[13] For Hegel, the state must overcome what he fears and what the family and all other forms of human association cannot do – unite a people in response to the individualism he sees emerging everywhere around him. Yet the very need to attribute so much to the state indicates the unresolvable problem. Thus, for Hegel bourgeois civil society is not the space for freedom of expression and association; instead, Hegel reminds us that civil society is not only the distinct product of a modern social formation (the middle class and capitalism), but also an inescapably alienated reality, torn between the demands of the private individual and the abstract and distant entity known as the state.

9　Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 263; #238.

10　Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 222; #185.

11　"The state is the actuality of the substantial *will,* an actuality which it possesses in the particular *self-consciousness* when this has been raised to its universality; as such, it is the rational in and for itself. This substantial unity is an absolute and unmoved end in itself, and in it, freedom enters into its highest right, just as this ultimate end possesses the highest right in relation to individuals [*die Einzelnen*], whose *highest duty* is to be members of the state." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 275; #258.

12　Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 279; #258.

13　Hegel clearly goes against a contractarian notion of the state, which he argues applies only to bourgeois society.

Marx's response to Hegel was both appreciative and critical, although for my purposes two features are important.[14] To begin with, Marx agreed with Hegel that bourgeois civil society is inescapably alienated, in terms of the tensions between state and bourgeois civil society, and in terms of the individual who is torn between being private individual and citizen of the state. However, he disagreed with Hegel concerning the role of the state.[15] Hegel somewhat desperately saw the state as the last bastion of unity in relation to the dog-eat-dog individualism of bourgeois civil society. In response, Marx enhanced the tensions between the two, arguing that the state is administered in opposition to bourgeois civil society. Ultimately, this tension is a dialectical one between particular and universal. Those who wield power in the state are assumed to do so on the authority of bourgeois civil society (through elections), and they are supposed to act in light of the general interest. However, since the class divisions of bourgeois civil society are transposed into a political register, the power of the state can only be exercised for the sake of particular, rather than universal, interests. It is simply impossible to represent the general interests of an atomised and divided civil society. Thus, the bourgeois state is opposed to and wields power against bourgeois civil society.[16]

The second important feature concerns Hegel's resort to an abstract and ideal state. This is, for Marx, a religious or theological solution, in which the state is an abstract creation of flesh-and-blood human beings. Thus, Hegel begins with the abstraction of the state and its components and

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14 Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, pp. 3-129 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1843 [1975]).

15 For an able exposition of this argument, see David Adam, *Karl Marx and the State, International Marxist-Humanist: Journal of the International Marxist-Humanist Organisation* 6 September(2010). http://www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org/alternatives-to-capital/karl-marx-the-state.html; William Niemi, 'Karl Marx's Sociological Theory of Democracy: Civil Society and Political Rights', *Social Science Journal* 48, no. 1 (2011): pp. 39-51.

16 See further, Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, pp. 146-174 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1844 [1975]), p. 154.

then seeks to fit the realities of every day bourgeois society within those abstractions.[17] The answer to these problems comprises the major step of standing Hegel on his feet and focusing on bourgeois civil society, which Marx understood in Hegel's sense of including the economy. This focus unfolded into Marx's detailed studies of economics, culminating in his extraordinary work, *Capital*.[18] Marx's insights are many, but my concern is the nature of bourgeois civil society. The cause of the alienation identified by Hegel is actually due, argued Marx, to the tensions between the forces and relations of production, to the systemic patterns of exploitation and production of surplus value, and to the class conflict that ensues. Above all, Marx revealed clearly that this type of civil society is inescapably capitalist and bourgeois, indeed that it serves the interests of the bourgeoisie and not the workers. The question is then how we overcome this type of civil society. The younger Marx may have proposed a somewhat idealised overcoming of the alienation between state and bourgeois civil society, in which what is alienated becomes one in direct participatory democracy.[19] The mature Marx saw that the path involved revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat – to which I return below.

After Marx, the definition of bourgeois civil society made a profound shift by making a distinction between economics and civil society. For Hegel and Marx, bourgeois civil society very much included the economy, but for subsequent proponents of civil society, the economy had to be excluded. This distinction enabled civil society to gain the appearance of neutrality and universality, in which individual expression, civic association and political engagement could take place. This move was en-

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17 See further, Roland Boer, *Criticism of Earth: On Marx, Engels and Theology* (Chicago and Leiden: Haymarket and Brill, 2012 [2014]), pp. 153-160.

18 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1867 [1996]); Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. II, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 36 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1885 [1997]); Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. III, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 37 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1894 [1998]).

19 Marx, *Comments on James Mill, Élémens d'économie politique*; Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

abled by back-translating the English term, "civil society," into German. Instead of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, "bourgeois society," it became *Zivilgesellschaft*, "civil society," a suitably neutral term that removed the specificity of class associations.[20] The tendency to use terms such as "public sphere" or "public square" evinces a further effort to neutralise the class associations of the term.[21] Perhaps the most significant proponent of this idea of civil society has been Jürgen Habermas, who has argued that the "liberal goal" of bourgeois civil society is that all enforceable and publically sanctioned decisions "can be formulated *and justified* in a universally accessible language."[22] Here Habermas unwittingly reveals a problem with bourgeois civil society: this clearly liberal project must be determined and policed, identifying what can be accepted and what must be rejected.[23]

At this point the work of Domenico Losurdo provides another insight, moving a few steps beyond Marx.[24] Losurdo provides a crucial connection between bourgeois civil society and liberalism, as both ideology and practice. Liberalism, with its focus on the freedom of the private individual, provides the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois civil society.

20 Kocha, *Civil Society from a Historical Perspective*, p. 67.

21 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere - An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT, 1991); Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT, 1992); Margaret Somers, 'Narrating and Naturalizing Civil Society and Citizenship Theory: The Place of Political Culture and the Public Sphere', *Sociological Theory* 13, no. 3 (1995): pp. 229-274.

22 Judith Butler et al., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendietta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 26. This is consistent with his earlier statement on the nature of democracy: "only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent of all citizens in a discursive process of legitimation that has been legally constituted." Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT, 1996), p. 110.

23 See Aakash Singh, 'Habermas' Wrapped Reichstag: Limits and Exclusions in the Discourse of Post-secularism', *European Review* 20, no. 1 (2012): pp. 131-147.

24 Dominico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011 [2006]).

The result is that Losurdo enables us to tackle the claim that bourgeois civil society is open to all, indeed that it involves freedom for all to express their views. However, the slogan of "freedom for all" relies on a definition of "all" that excludes a majority.[25] In other words, liberalism and thereby bourgeois civil society restricts who counts as part of the universal. If you do not fit its definition of "all," then you do not count. Losurdo points out that liberal freedom is not merely limited in extent (which would then simply entail an extension of such freedom) but that it is structurally geared to exclude significant groups from "freedom," indeed that it requires such exclusions in order to constitute "freedom" and "democracy."[26] In other words, liberalism and repression are two sides of the same coin; bourgeois "freedom" and "democracy" are inseparable from exclusion and dispossession, for the former relies on the latter to function. Now we can see the implications of Habermas's efforts at policing the boundaries of bourgeois civil society.

The history of liberalism and bourgeois civil society provide myriad examples, but let me select two examples from Losurdo's study. First, the American slave owner, Thomas Jefferson, wrote in *The Declaration of Independence* that "all men are created equal." But this phrase relied on a crucial restriction of the sense of "all," which did not include slaves, women and "inferior" folk. One cannot understand "American liberty" without slavery and dispossession, for they grew together, one sustaining the other.[27] However, the perception of liberty is subtle and the line always shifts; as some groups are included over time, such as

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25 For a comparable articulation of this point, see Yang Guangbin, 'The Socialist Dimensions of Democracy – with Comments on the Myth of the Bourgeoisie and Democratic Politics', *The Social Sciences in China* 33, no. 3 (2009): pp. 53-72(56).

26 For example, see John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J.M. Robson, vol. 18, 213-310 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1859 [1977]), p. 224; Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Tuck, trans. John Clarke, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005 [1625]), I.3.8; II.5; III.7. John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 180.

27 For another angle on this development, see Yang, *The Socialist Dimensions of Democracy*, pp. 57-58.

slaves, workers and women, others are excluded. Thus, during the so-called Progressive Era, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous "democratic" reforms took place: direct election to the Senate, secret ballot, primaries, referenda, and so on. Yet they all took place during a rise in ferocity of the Ku Klux Klan terrorist squads and a push to assimilate Indigenous people and deprive them of their residual lands. As a second example, what is the meaning of the claims for "human rights," "liberty," and "freedom" in the foreign policy of the United States? Losurdo deploys Cecil Rhodes's formula for the British Empire: "philanthropy + 5 per cent," where "philanthropy" is synonymous with "human rights" and 5 per cent the profits to be made by waving the flag of "human rights." The response to these points is usually one of hypocrisy: they do not live up to their ideals. Losurdo's point is that the very possibility of the "freedom" and indeed "democracy" of bourgeois civil society directly is dependent upon systemic dispossession of the majority – whether workers, peasants, or colonial subjects. He calls this "the community of the free and its dictatorship over peoples unworthy of liberty."[28] In other words, this type of civil society is another form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Bourgeois civil society turns out to be rather different to what its proponents suggest. It is an alienated product of bourgeois social formations and rampant individualism (Hegel), a location of thorough economic exploitation and contradictions (Marx), and a zone that operates by means of a universal of exclusion (Losurdo). This type of civil society is hardly desirable.

Socialist Civil Society

In light of these problem with bourgeois civil society, what might a socialist civil society be? It should be clear by now that there is no such thing as a neutral and universal "civil society" applicable to all situations. Instead, there is either bourgeois civil society or socialist civil so-

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28 Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, p. 248.

ciety. So let me outline a few preliminary ideas: socialist civil society is consciously class based; it redefines the sense of freedom; and it operates knowingly at the complex intersections between two levels, those of official and unofficial discourse.

To begin with, since bourgeois civil society is a product of capitalism and the bourgeoisie's rise to power, and since its underlying ideology is liberalism, socialist civil society will be based on a very different class formation – workers and peasants. The possibility of socialist civil society is based on the fact that a communist party is able to seize power and thereby enact the political power of the workers and peasants. In this new context, the old exploiting classes have lost their power, with the result that they may oppose the new order (in which case they need to be dealt with resolutely), opt out of the new order and leave the country, or consign themselves to take a very different and subordinate role. In this new situation a space opens up for what may be called socialist civil society. This entails a process in which the formerly excluded are now included, the formerly voiceless learn to gain a voice, the formerly devalued are now valued. One example of this process is the old communist practice of criticism and self-criticism, in which workers and peasants were encouraged to express their views on the government and management of the economy and society. To be sure, such criticism often became ritualised and empty, but the principle remains valid and very much alive today. In our digital age, this type of criticism finds expression in social media, web forums, and the complex mechanisms of feedback to governments enabled by such media. Of course, it is predicated on one condition: that such criticism is constructive rather than destructive, seeking to improve the system rather than destroy it.

Further, socialist civil society develops a very different understanding of freedom. I do not mean here the revolutionary freedom of being able to change the coordinates of social existence, which is found in revolutionary periods when "everything is possible." Instead, I am interested in the period after the revolution, when socialism has achieved power. The coordinates have already been changed, and the old order has passed

or is in the process of passing. Constructing a new society in such a situation, as Mao Zedong pointed out, is infinitely more complex and difficult, a point that also applies to practice of freedom in socialist civil society. The following factors are the most important.[29]

1) At its basis, the freedom of socialist civil society is partisan. This should be clear from the preceding point, given that it is a civil society primarily for workers and peasants. But immediately the question arises: how is this different from bourgeois civil society, with its limitations and policing of who is allowed to be free? Formerly, the vast majority of people, the workers and peasants, were excluded from the exercise of freedom. The bourgeoisie did so in the name of "freedom in general," but in doing so, they served their own class interests.[30] Instead, this "freedom

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29 The basis for the following points relies on none other than Lenin, in a series of observations in which he developed the category of proletarian and peasant freedom. See V.I. Lenin, 'Party Organisation and Party Literature', in *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 44-49 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1905 [1966]), p. 48; V.I. Lenin, 'The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party', in *Collected Works*, vol. 10, pp. 199-276 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1906 [1962]), p. 264; V.I. Lenin, 'The State and Revolution', in *Collected Works*, vol. 25, pp. 385-497 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1917 [1964]); V.I. Lenin, 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?', in *Collected Works*, vol. 26, pp. 87-136 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1917 [1966]), p. 102; V.I. Lenin, 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky', in *Collected Works*, vol. 28, pp. 227-325 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1918 [1965]), p. 242; V.I. Lenin, 'Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)', March 6-8, 1918, in *Collected Works*, vol. 27, pp. 85-158 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1918 [1965]), pp. 152-157; V.I. Lenin, 'First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education', May 6-19, 1919, in *Collected Works*, vol. 29, pp. 333-376 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1919 [1965]), p. 354; Lenin, 'First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education', May 6-19, 1919, p. 352; Lenin, 'The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University', July 11, 1919.; V.I. Lenin, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat', in *Collected Works*, vol. 30, pp. 93-104 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1919 [1965]); V.I. Lenin, 'First Congress of the Communist International' in *Collected Works*, vol. 28, p. 455-477 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1919 [1965]), pp. 457-467; Lenin, 'Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.)', pp. 107-109; Lenin, 'First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education', May 6-19, 1919, p. 355; V.I. Lenin, 'On the Struggle of the Italian Socialist Party', in *Collected Works*, vol. 31, pp. 377-396 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1920 [1966]), pp. 392-396. I have also drawn on the perceptive insights of Yang, 'The Socialist Dimensions of Democracy.'

30 This point is expressed by V.I. Lenin, 'A New Revolutionary Workers' Asso-

in general" should be deployed specifically for the excluded majority, for only this is genuine, actual freedom. Even more, where such freedom does not empower the majority, the workers and peasants, it is not freedom at all. This is the implication of the famous phrase, "dictatorship of the proletariat," first introduced by Marx, and then elaborated in detail by Lenin and Stalin.[31] The arresting implication is that the precondition of socialist civil society arises from the very partisan nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of the peasants – as Lenin and especially Mao Zedong made clear. For Mao Zedong, of course, this became the category of democratic dictatorship, in which "democracy" itself was a socialist term.[32]

2) Indeed, this is the second feature of socialist freedom: the need to recover and claim the inherently socialist sense of the term democracy. Let me go back to period leading up to the October Revolution of 1917, when much new political terminology entered the scene in Russia.[33] A key term was "democracy," which was understood to refer not to bourgeois democracy, but to the labouring masses of workers and peasants. These were the "people," the vast majority (*demos* in Greek and thereby *narod* in Russian). The opposite of democracy in this situation was not the

ciation', in *Collected Works*, vol. 8, p. 499-510 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1905 [1963]), p. 502.

31 See the initial statement in Karl Marx, "Notes on Bakunin's Book *Statehood and Anarchy*," in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, pp. 485-526 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1875 [1989]); Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 22, pp. 307-377 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1871 [1986]). See further, Derek Sayer, 'Revolution Against the State: The Context and Significance of Marx's Later Writings', *Dialectical Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1987): pp. 65-82; Adam, 'Karl Marx and the State', pp. 6-10. It would subsequently form a key category in Lenin's thought, initially elaborated in Lenin, 'The State and Revolution.'

32 Zedong Mao, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China (June 30)', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 4, pp. 411-424 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1949 [1961]). The term was first proposed by Lenin, 'The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry.'

33 Boris Ivanovich Kolonitskii, 'Democracy' in the Political Consciousness of the February Revolution', in *Revolutionary Russia: New Approaches*, ed. Rex A. Wade, pp. 75-90 (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Russian autocracy or dictatorship, but the classes of the old aristocracy and the newer bourgeoisie. Terms such as "democratic classes," "democratic elements," "revolutionary democracy," along with "democracy" without an epithet, had distinct class dimensions. Democracy was synonymous with the range of Russian socialist parties, while those of the bourgeoisie (Kadets) and the old aristocracy (Octobrists and others) were anti-democratic. But we need not restrict ourselves to the Russian revolution, for, as Yang Guangbin has observed in the current era, "the essence of democracy is therefore socialist in nature."[34]

3) Let us return to the question of partisanship, with the point that it is openly partisan. By contrast, bourgeois claims to "pure democracy" and "freedom for all" pretend to be for everyone, but they are not so (as Marx and especially Losurdo show so well). That is, the effort to proclaim universal freedom is actually a screen, seeking to conceal the specific class nature of the freedom of bourgeois civil society. This means that one must be open about the partisan nature of proletarian freedom. It is openly linked to and focuses on the workers and peasants.

4) As Hegel already observed, bourgeois freedom is predicated on the individual, while proletarian freedom is collective. The catch here is that this supposed individuality of bourgeois freedom is in fact a collective position that is, once again, systematically concealed and denied. However, if one begins explicitly with the collective, then freedom begins to mean a very different type of freedom in which the individual finds a new space. In other words, while bourgeois civil society prioritises the individual seeking his or her own self-interest, socialist civil society assumes the collective as the starting point.

5) This apparently individual, bourgeois freedom operates within a society that holds private property as sacred, with the basis being private property in land.[35] Bourgeois freedom and democracy is predicated

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34 Yang, *The Socialist Dimensions of Democracy*, p. 69.

35 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, pp. 477-519 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1848 [1976]).

on property rights, which the bourgeoisie clearly does not wish to relinquish.[36] In other words, this is the power of money, with vast differences between the very wealthy and the masses of people living in poverty. In other words, bourgeois freedom serves the cause of capitalism in which the majority are systematically denied freedom. In this situation, socialist freedom, a freedom without inverted commas, is what emancipates labour from the yoke of capitalism and replaces it with a socialism. Only when workers and peasants are free from systemic capitalist exploitation are they able to be truly free.

6) The nature of socialist freedom relies on a new definition of the universal. While bourgeois freedom constitutes a false universal, based upon a particular which is concealed, namely the power of capital, socialist proletarian freedom is a genuine universal, based not upon greed or careerism but upon the interests of the vast majority that unites the best of the past's revolutionary traditions and the best of the present struggle for a new life. The over-riding socialist sense is that one seeks to contribute to the collective good, no matter how small or great one's contribution may be.

7) Socialist civil society may be described as both freedom *from* and freedom *for*. It is freedom from bourgeois civil society, with which it is incompatible. This reality is revealed by the function of liberal or bourgeois democracy, which has become an effective tool for excluding any type of viable socialism. Indeed, when a communist government concedes to institute a bourgeois democratic system, it soon finds itself out of power and all that it has worked for is lost. By contrast, socialist civil society is freedom *for* the construction of socialism.[37] This does not mean that some elements of the bourgeoisie may not become part of the process of constructing socialism, if not communism, as long as they divest themselves of bourgeois class identity, cease to resist the construction of socialism and work for the new project.

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36 Yang, *The Socialist Dimensions of Democracy*, pp. 64-65.

37 As succinctly expressed by Zedong Mao, 'On Correctly Handling Contradictions Among the People (February 27)', in *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*, ed. John K. Leung and Michael Y. M. Kau, vol. 2, pp. 308-351 (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1957 [1992]), p. 333.

I suggest that we may see some elements of this socialist society in China, as, for example, with relatively widespread religious and internet freedom. One may see worshippers in churches, mosques and temples throughout the country. One may also witness the lively discussions on social networking and internet discussion forums by the 900 million or so users of the internet China (more than in any other country in the world).[38] All of this is predicated on freedom *for* the common project of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Those who use religion and the internet – whether inside or outside China – to undermine such a freedom, indeed to undermine the socialist project, soon find that such activity is not tolerated.

8) Eventually, this new type of freedom will become a habit, a feature ingrained into daily social life, so that people are no longer conscious of what freedom and unfreedom might be. This is a crucial transformation, but it takes a long, long time and very much for the future. This step entails moving beyond the partisanship of socialist freedom, but it can only be achieved through such a form of freedom. It is simply impossible to do so through bourgeois freedom. Instead, through socialist freedom, eventually freedom and democracy become not a goal to which one must strive but *an everyday habit*.

Thus far I have addressed two main features of socialist civil society, in terms of its class nature and the understanding of freedom in such a context. These are very much initial theoretical points, drawn from the actual experiences and problems of constructing socialism in places like the Soviet Union and China. So also with the final point, concerning the complex interplay between official and unofficial discourses.

For example, when a young person seeks to join the communist party, he or she may have a range of reasons: a good friend has done so; it will provide opportunities for a better job; a grandfather or grandmother who

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38 For a useful recent study on internet use, although it must be read with a critical eye, see Cui Di and Wu Fang, 'Moral Goodness and Social Orderliness: An Analysis of the Official Media Discourse about Internet Governance in China,' *Telecommunications Policy* 40(2016): pp. 265-276.

was deeply influential led them to join; a desire to contribute, in however small a way, to the greater common good. Some of these reasons may be acceptable in terms of the official discourse, while others may not. The documentation produced for such an application will of course mention the acceptable reasons and leave out those deemed less acceptable. However, the intriguing fact is that everyone knows that these two levels are part of the process.

Or take the example of a stalwart of the party such as the writer Sun Li (1949-2010), concerning whom there has been much debate.[39] He is a person whose lifetime of service to the communist party means that he or she was widely regarded as faithful, honest and direct. At the same time, he wrote letters to his wife, Yu Xiaohui, expressing some criticisms and misgivings. Which is the real position of such a person? A faithful and upright member or a critic with misgivings? The answer is neither, but both. Indeed, it is precisely in the intersection between the two that socialist civil society finds its function. And a clear consciousness of this in-between nature of the situation is crucial for such a civil society.

Once again, an intellectual who has been a member of the communist party for many years may express some concerns about a recent decision, or perhaps the direction of policy, or engage in research concerning problems – such as housing, environmental pollution, demographic changes as people move from the countryside to the city – that arise from the rapid pace of development and change. However, when one asks about the reason for being a member of the party, the reason given is that the person in question has a desire to contribute to the common project. When one asks about the misgivings and criticisms, the reply is that this is the role of the intellectual. In other words, the very condition of being a member of the party is that one entertains such misgivings. The two sides are necessary rather than contingent.

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39 For instance, see Zhang Longfu, 'Between Life Sensibility and Social Rationality: A Psychological Analysis of Sun Li's Illness and His Novella Tie Mu Qian Zhuan', *Qingdao Daxue Shifanxueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Teachers College Qingdao University)* 29, no. 3 (2010): pp. 60-68.

This reality also applies to those who work for the many "ideological" institutes, schools and units, ranging from the national to the local level. Initially, we may distinguish between ideological and academic work, with the former working at the behest of the dominant interpretation of Marxist ideology and the latter undertaking research concerning that interpretation. However, the situation is a more complex. For example, the many research institutes and granting bodies seek to fund research that is academic rather than ideological, so that such academic work may contribute critical perspectives to ideological matters. Foreigners are at times brought into such work to provide yet further perspectives. But this means that the ideological and the academic are inextricably entwined with one another. Even more, those who work in these ideological organisations know full well what they are doing, working in a situation which is at the intersection between the ideological and the academic. Once again, we are at the point where it is the space in between, or, rather, the dialectical interaction between the two is the reality.

I have given four hypothetical examples of what may be called the space in between, or the dialectic between the two perspectives. I suggest that it is precisely in this dialectical space that we find signs of socialist civil society. Such a civil society is not the expression of misgivings or criticisms, but the close and dialectical connection between them and the official position, or indeed membership, involvement and contribution to the greater project. This situation pertains as much to the new young member, the old stalwart, the intellectual, or indeed the one who works for one of the many ideological units. This is a fascinatingly complex matter, but it was a constitutive feature of the best years of the Soviet Union and may also be said to present in a systemic manner in China. I do not see this as a sign of the weakness of socialism, but rather a strength. The strength of the system relies on the distinction between the two levels of discourse, and especially a dialectical interaction between them. In this dialectical intersection we may locate another dimension of socialist civil society.

Conclusion

I have provided a preliminary outline of what a socialist civil society may be, predicated on the point that civil society is not neutral but partisan. What is so often presented as "civil society" is in fact bourgeois civil society, with its individualism, alienation, exploitation and constitutive inclusions in the name of a false universal. By contrast, socialist civil society is predicated on the dominance of workers and peasants (even as they are transformed by socialism in power), by a thorough redefinition of freedom, and by the subtle dialectical interplay between official and unofficial discourse.

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Rescuing the Enlightenment Project: Habermas and the Postmodern Challenge

James J. Chriss[1]

Abstract: Jürgen Habermas has spent a long career developing a critical theory of reasoned communication, following Weber's idea concerning the negative aspects of rationalization in western society which places emphasis on technocratic or engineering solutions to problems in society. As the state gathers more power and resources to intervene in the lives of citizens (presumably for their benefit), citizens are less able to act on their own behalf to solve problems locally (i.e., the problem of the system colonizing the lifeworld). To assure reasoned communication and to preserve the lifeworld against the onslaught of instrumental rationality, Habermas locates the condition of reasoned communication within talk itself (by way of the validity claims). He extends this idea into political participation with the idea of deliberative democracy, whereby only the weight of the better argument prevails. Although primarily committed to critical theory, Habermas nevertheless borrows from Talcott Parsons' structural functionalist theory for its indispensable conceptualization of systems and normative solidarity. This tensionful mix of critical and technocratic-functional elements has been subject to criticism over the years, including the rise of postmodern theory which brings into doubt all modernist metanarratives seeking to conceptualize society in its totality. The paper ends with a consideration of how and to what extent Habermas's project withstands this postmodernist challenge.

Epistemology, Ontology, and Crisis

The history of human reflection on the nature of the social world has been and continues to be punctuated with epochal theories which posit master trends or fundamental transformations of society. These are

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often couched in the language of 'crisis', the crisis itself occurring either at the epistemological, ontological, or even axiological level of theoretical analysis.[2]

'Ontological crisis' would refer to a general perception among observers of the social world—theorists and laypersons alike—that the world is, in some demonstrable way, changing, and usually for the worse. Examples of such ontological crises would be revolutions, the rise and fall of dynasties, bureaucratization, secularization, the collapse of communism or state socialism, and so forth.

'Epistemological crisis', on the other hand, refers to those instances in which a sizable group of practitioners within an academic discipline come to share a sense of the inability of currently sanctioned theories or paradigms to provide adequate explanations of present circumstances or phenomena of interest. Hence, a general feeling that the traditional or orthodox theories of the discipline are faltering or close to intellectual bankruptcy.[3]

The crisis of epistemology is certainly not new to sociology. Robert K. Merton speaks in fact of the natural state of affairs in sociology as being in a 'chronic crisis', or rather, the sentiment that sociology has throughout its history been typified as being in a state of oscillating between extreme optimism and extreme pessimism.[4] Wolf Lepenies has illustrated a di-

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2   An axiological crisis would, as Alan Sica explains, amount to a crisis in the ethical content of interpretation. In other words, since axiology is the study of how values and value commitments interpenetrate theoretical discourse, there arise now and again certain topics of study which seem inexorably bound up in questions of ethical and moral interpretation (e.g., abortion, assisted suicide, the death penalty, or even the extent to which researchers allegedly objectify and hence tend to 'dominate' their subjects). Although the latter topic has, as Clifford Geertz has discussed, ramified into the postmodern question in particular and the study of culture in general, I will not here overtly be concerned with the axiological dimension. See Alan Sica, 'Hermeneutics and Axiology: The Ethical Contents of Interpretation', pp. 142-157 in M.L. Wardell and S.P. Turner (eds) *Sociological Theory in Transition* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), and Clifford Geertz, T*he Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

3   See Ben Agger, *Socio(onto)logy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), and Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

4   Robert K. Merton, *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

mension of this oscillation, namely sociology's continuing battle over its own self-identity. The eternal question has been, is sociology a science of society in the truest positivistic, nomothetic sense, or is sociology closer to literary analysis where intuition and ideographic method are more appropriate for capturing the essence of human social life? Phrased alternately, this represents the classic dialectic between the scientific and ameliorative impulses of sociology.[5]

It could be argued that extreme optimism is the starting point of the discipline. For example, Comte envisioned sociology as the culmination of an evolutionary trend in scientific thought which, just so long as its practitioners stayed true to the dictum of positivism and the scientific method, held the promise of ultimately discovering the laws of the social universe. Beyond the early optimism of Comte, Merton notes also Georges Gurvitch's 'crisis of sociological explanation', Sorokin's 'fads and foibles in modern sociology', Homans' admonition to 'bring men back in', and Gouldner's 'crisis of western sociology'. Additional uses of the language of 'crisis' could include Habermas's 'legitimation crisis', Seidman's plea to fellow sociologists to take the 'postmodern turn' toward the 'end of sociological theory', Brunkhorst's crisis of democracy and capitalism, and McVay's crisis of the public sphere. [6]

However it may be phrased, the crisis sentiment of cognitive revolt within the discipline is fundamentally the same. The continuities are that symptoms of crisis are couched in terms of a change and clash of doctrines

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5   See Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Stephen P. Turner and Jonathan H. Turner, *The Impossible Science* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

6   See Hauke Brunkhorst, 'Democracy and Capitalism in Crisis', *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 1 (2): p. 79-99 (2017); Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); George C. Homans, 'Bringing Men Back In', *American Sociological Review* 29 (5): pp. 809-818 (1964); Christine B. McVay, 'Public Sphere in a Time of Crisis', *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 1 (2):101-117 (2017); Steven Seidman, 'The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope', *Sociological Theory* 9 (2): pp. 131-146 (1991); and Pitirim Sorokin, *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976).

which is summarily accompanied by deepened tensions and conflict among (seemingly) disparate practitioners of the trade, especially in terms of the sentiment that the dominant paradigms are no longer sufficiently able to address the problems they purport to explain. The movement toward an idea of postmodernism is indicative of such crisis language.

What is Postmodernism?

What are some manifestations of recent 'historical times of trouble' (Merton's term) that have come to be understood as, or indicative of, 'postmodernism'? An early response to this question was put forward by Stephen Crook who suggested that

> The 1980s witnessed a growing sense among social theorists and cultural critics that the complex phenomenon of social and cultural modernity had entered a period of crisis, that decisive thresholds were about to be crossed.[7]

Postmodernism thus stands for what looms over the horizon of the modern, especially with respect to the social and cultural changes which are believed to be occurring within this phase of modernism. A good example of such a postmodern sensibility is Bo Reimer's test of Ronald Inglehart's theory of value change in the western world. The basic thesis is that over the last several decades Western societies have undergone a change from materialist to postmaterialist values. (For purposes of Reimer's argument, 'postmaterialism' is assumed to be roughly equivalent to 'postmodernism'.) As Reimer explains, 'Thus, in comparison with older generations, post-Second World War generations that have never felt material insecurity put higher priorities on postmaterialist values, such as freedom of speech, than on traditional materialist values, such as economic growth. And as long as prosperity continues, each new generation will be more postmaterialistic than generations preceding it'. Reimer concludes from the data, however, that persons' value-orientations are simply too diverse

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7   Stephen Crook, *Modernist Radicalism and its Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 3.

to allow one to easily categorize respondents as displaying either a materialist or postmaterialist (i.e., postmodernist) nexus of values. In the end, Reimer suggests that at best there exists what we might call a loose coupling between social structure and practice, a social space or field of lifestyles—such as Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus'—within which persons forge a distinct set of tastes and concrete social practices.[8]

Besides general theories of value change within Western society, postmodernism has also been examined through the lens of popular culture. Frederic Jameson, in an early and influential postmodern cultural analysis, focused on the realm of architecture and the modifications in aesthetic production of buildings and other lived and social spaces which have occurred over the last twenty five years. These structures—such as the great free-standing wall of Wells Fargo Court in downtown Los Angeles—exhibit certain 'postmodern' characteristics, such as an effacement of the previously existing frontiers between high culture and mass culture; a new 'depthlessness', wherein in depth is replaced by the flatness of surface(s); and an overall 'waning of affect'. Like the great monolith in Kubrick's '2001', Wells Fargo Court 'confronts its viewers like an enigmatic destiny, a call to evolutionary mutation'.[9] This mutation in the sphere of culture has rendered our older systems of perception—of the city in architectural terms, but also of the whole of society in theoretical terms—somehow 'archaic and aimless'.

As Ben Agger has discussed, beyond its 'legitimate' form as originating in literary criticism and as currently embodied in the humanities and social sciences, postmodernism has become a veritable cottage industry within the American cultural establishment as well. As Agger explains,

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8   See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Bo Reimer, 'Postmodern Structures of Feeling: Values and Lifestyles in the Postmodern Age', pp. 110-126 in J.R. Gibbins (ed.*) Contemporary Political Culture* (London: Sage, 1989), p. 111. For a thorough critique of postmodernist tendencies within the human sciences, see John O'Neill, *The Poverty of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

9   Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 13-14.

> Here I consider the tendencies of a glitzy, Manhattanized post-modernism to monopolize the terrain of cultural production and reception, as well as of the capitalist built environment. ne finds postmodernism as an identifying slogan in nearly every avant-garde bookstore, magazine, television show and movie as well as in the buildings and malls housing cultural producers and consumers.[10]

Hence one manifestation of postmodernism within American popular culture is that of a consumer movement, an untheorized postmodernism whose only distinct cultural attitude is the rejection of politics. This may be viewed, according to Agger, as a sort of 'post-Watergate' loss of certitude regarding the efficacy or even veracity of politics as a form of collective, societal representation. This form of '*New York Times* postmodernism' is neoconservative—as Jürgen Habermas has for years argued—because of its emphasis on consumerist individualism and political cynicism.[11] With the theorized loss of epistemological certitude which Jean-Francois Lyotard envisioned as a concomitant to the generalized critique of the grand and totalizing modernist metanarrative of Enlightenment rationalism, it was only natural that the initially intellectualized 'loss of certitude' would wend its way down to the level of capitalist popular culture, thereby becoming appropriated as a faddish and uncritical slogan among the mass of consumers.[12] This 'postmodernization of everyday life' is, in fact, emblematic of the powerful ideological

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10 Ben Agger, *A Critical Theory of Public Life* (London: Falmer, 1991), p. 198.

11 See the following from Habermas: *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984); *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987b); 'A Reply', pp. 214-64 in A. Honneth and H. Joas (eds.) *Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by J. Gaines and D.L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', pp. 421-461 in C. Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

12 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Both Lyotard and Habermas emphasize language as a central feature in creating and organizing social worlds, yet their differ-

machinery of popular culture and the American mass media which, as Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the 'culture industry' indicates, exists 'in large measure to represent capitalism as a rational social order, hence perpetuating the very commodification of all experience that gives the lie to the postulate of substantive rationality'.[13]

The position of Horkheimer and Adorno is of course not shared by Habermas. As pointed out by Wagner and Zipprian, as he is dedicated to explicating foundations of a critical theory as well as to preserving the Enlightenment project of reflexive reason and rationality, Habermas views their project as an 'unchecked skepticism of reason', which thereby cannot adequately deal with the concept of communicative, much less substantive, rationality. Yet, as Amirhosein Khandizaji has argued, Habermas's break from Horkheimer and Adorno and their central focus on the culture industry leads Habermas to an elision of culture writ large (but see below for clarification) to the extent that, for Habermas, language already contains the essential elements of shared cultural knowledge (i.e., the validity claims) needed for the development of a theory of modern social solidarity.[14]

Habermas, Culture, and the Rise of Postmodernism

One of the tasks set forth here has been to trace the rise of postmodernism within sociology back to the empirical social world, that is, back to the ontological precipitates of the current epistemological and method-

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ences far outweigh points of agreement. For a summary, see Mark Poster, 'Postmodernity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Lyotard-Habermas Debate over Social Theory', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 (3), pp. 567-580 (1992).

13 Agger, *A Critical Theory of Public Life*, p. 203, and M. Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

14 Gerhard Wagner and Heinz Zipprian, 'Habermas on Power and Rationality', *Sociological Theory* 7 (1), pp. 102-109 (1989). See also James J. Chriss, 'Habermas, Goffman, and Communicative Action: Implications for Professional Practice', *American Sociological Review* 60, pp. 545-565 (1995); Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); and Amirhosein Khandizaji, 'The Culture Industry and the Consumer Society', *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 1 (1), pp. 57-79 (2017).

ological critiques highlighted above. I have therefore identified certain events, trends, or phenomena occurring in the social world which have led large groups of social scientists to speak of a postmodern 'turn' or 'crisis'. A cultural analysis of this process is especially crucial because of the complex ways in which social agents perceive, make sense of, and act upon larger sociohistorical events. The interface between epistemology and ontology—between ways of knowing and reality or the world 'out there'—is always mediated by and through culture.

Having said this, however, we must be cautious about falling too easily into a reified conception of culture as a mediating force through which persons simply come to know the world. Paul Hochstim illustrates the shortcomings of 'cultural historical' models which attempt to explain the emergence of certain ideational or material products based upon the ways in which cultural, sociohistorical and/or biographical factors inform the agent(s) or producer(s) of the innovation. Hochstim states that 'culture exists as culture not in the sense of appearance but in the sense of incorporation within the processes of social interaction'. Additionally, 'No amount of reference to culture historical facts can explain the fact that one specific individual at a particular time and place decided to study and combine the various ideas of previous thinkers into a new physical or ideational element'.[15]

With this caveat in mind, we may consider the prevailing definition of culture in current sociology textbooks, namely, all those things, both material and nonmaterial (i.e., ideational), which are a product of human social organization and activity. In his ongoing work in social theory and communicative action, Habermas has chosen to concentrate primarily on the nonmaterial aspects of culture. Borrowing heavily from both Talcott Parsons and phenomenology, Habermas defines culture as 'the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world'.[16]

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15 Paul Hochstim, *The Functional Prerequisites Generic to the Inception and Institutionalization of Positivistic Sociological Epistemology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 50 and 55.

16 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 138. Besides evidence of Haber-

Margaret Somers chastises Habermas for his uncritical appropriation of Parsons' 'depoliticized' conception of culture. However, Habermas clearly distinguishes between culture, in the broader sense here being discussed, and *political* culture. As Amy Gutman explains, 'Habermas distinguishes between culture, broadly understood, which need not be shared by all citizens, and a common political *culture* marked by mutual respect for rights'. In this sense, Habermas's view of culture and political liberalism is at odds with that of John Rawls, insofar as Rawls sees political liberalism as moving 'within the category of the political and [leaving] philosophy as it is'. Although not acknowledging it overtly, Somers seems to be working from a distinctively Rawlsian perspective regarding culture and her own theory of citizenship.[17]

This is not, however, simply a continuation of the storied tradition of German idealism which, as many have argued, tends to downplay material factors in its avowed quest for the cognitive foundations of rationality, reason, enlightenment, democracy, and the essence or quiddity of group life (e.g., the nature and explication of intersubjectivity). Even while borrowing from Parsons' systems formulation which designates

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mas' attention to Parsons in his own writings, biographical resources reveal they occasionally crossed paths. One such instance was at the annual meeting of sociologists commemorating Max Weber's 100th birthday which was held in Heidelberg in 1964. Both men presented papers in a plenary session chaired by Horkheimer, with Habermas reading his paper 'Wertfreiheit und Objektivität', which ironically was a criticism of American structural functionalism but also Weber's decisionism. See Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Habermas: A Biography*, translated by D. Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

17 For Habermas, see: 'Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State', pp. 107-148 in A. Gutman (ed.) *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); 'Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3):109-31 (1995); *Between Facts and Norms*, translated by W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). See also Amy Gutman, 'Preface', pp. ix-xii in A. Gutman (ed.) *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. x; John Rawls, 'Reply to Habermas', *Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3), pp. 132-80 (1995); and Margaret R. Somers, 'What's Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation', *Sociological Theory* 13 (2), pp. 113-44 (1995).

the three analytical categories of culture, personality, and society, Habermas attempts to build upon and go beyond Parsons through the distinction between system and lifeworld, explaining how and in what ways the former colonizes the latter.[18]

Lifeworld

What is this system-lifeworld split, and how does it pertain to Habermas's theory of communicative action? First of all, the term 'lifeworld' is appropriated from standard phenomenology, and Habermas distinguishes it from the ontological concept of 'world'. We need, argues Habermas, to distinguish between 'world' and 'lifeworld' for analytical reasons: as human beings we rely, often unreflectively and in taken-for-granted fashion, on a cultural stock of knowledge which, because it is already intersubjectively shared, both forms the background for communicative action and provides the foundation for our routine social doings. That is to say, we refer to something in the 'world' on a different level than the objects to which our attention is drawn. The 'lifeworld' is an unthematized realm which, suffused as it is with tacit, shared cultural knowledge, allows us to refer thematically to something in the 'world'.

This also touches upon the troublesome material-ideal split. Parsons tried to solve this by speaking of cultural symbols and values as being on the same general level as cultural objects. Parsons' point was merely that what is crucial in the culture-personality-social system analytic is the effect of cultural symbols or objects on actors, that is, the elicitation of specific orientations of action to these cultural objects or symbol-complexes. Hence, Parsons' value-orientation schema is consistent whether the action-orientation is motivated externally (by cultural, social or physical objects) or internally (by the cultural stock of knowledge, be they values, norms, or the like). [19]

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18 See James J. Chriss, 'The Young Parsons and the Mature Habermas', *American Sociologist* 27 (4): pp. 38-40 (1996), and James J. Chriss, 'Goffman, Parsons, and the Negational Self', *Academicus* 11, pp. 11-31 (2015).

19 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 82, and Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, 'Values, Motives, and Systems of Action', pp. 45-275

This attention to the lifeworld as the locus of unthematized cultural knowledge is crucial to Habermas's theory of communicative action insofar as social actors in their everyday lives routinely assert facts, appeal to norms, and claim to be sincere in their actions. These everyday activities in turn produce and reproduce our cultural and private worlds, thereby making the lifeworld appear naturalistic, as a putative or inevitable condition of human existence.

Habermas derives a 'universal pragmatics' based on the general standards which routinely govern communication in everyday discourse. As suggested above, the everyday acts of asserting facts, appealing to social norms, or claiming sincerity in speech correspond to three basic value spheres, described by Habermas as the theoretic/scientific, the moral/practical, and the expressive/aesthetic. The concept of rationality is crucial here because Habermas suggests that each value sphere utilizes its own peculiar criteria for the rational adjudication of such validity claims. But since this discourse necessarily occurs within a lifeworld whereby actors are informed by an unthematized cultural knowledge, the validity claims of normal discourse are adjudicated not necessarily with recourse to reasoned or communicative means, but often by strategic action, by appeals to customs, or by standards of evaluation which are not appropriate to the value sphere encompassed by the particular speech act or claim being raised. This allows then for the systematic distortion of reasoned communication, and Habermas is concerned with shoring up the Enlightenment program of reason aimed at achieving human liberation and the amelioration of oppressive social conditions. As Dmitri Shalin explains, 'It is the task of universal pragmatics to render these unreflexive validity claims problematic, to help settle them by rational means'.[20]

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in T. Parsons and E. Shils (eds.) *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), pp. 159-167.

20 Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, M. Cooke (ed.) (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998). Dmitri Shalin, 'Critical Theory and the Pragmatist Challenge', *American Journal of Sociology* 98: pp. 237-79 (1992), p. 250.

System

The 'system' aspect of Habermas's system-lifeworld analytic is that dimension of human agency constituting the realm of scientific/administrative activity. Through the very act of philosophical reflection, that is, by this attempt to look at the world through the totalizing lens of systems theorization, the previously unthematized lifeworld is opened to reflection and investigation, thereby exposing certain fundamental underlying components of the cultural tradition. As Habermas explains, in thematizing the lifeworld actors must 'thereby adopt a reflective attitude toward cultural patterns of interpretation that ordinarily *make possible* their interpretive accomplishments'.[21]

Habermas has attempted to make this position clear beginning in his 1971 work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. We may grasp Habermas's position on culture in general and knowledge and human interests in particular by analyzing his critique of Dilthey and Peirce. These two thinkers believed that the cultural sciences could be distinguished from other (i.e., natural) sciences insofar as the former is conceived as having arisen from a 'community of life unities'—that is, the double dialectic of the whole and the part which exists on two levels. First, there is the totality of a linguistic community which, through the sharing of a common communicative heritage allows for intersubjective understanding of individual differences, that is, whereby individuals are allowed to assert their 'non-identity' against each other. Second, there is the temporal dimension in which the totality of life history is in dialectical relation to the singular experiences and life relations of individuals, this of course giving rise to the totality of life history. This 'community of life unities' is postulated by Dilthey, then, as providing the foundation for the objective framework of the cultural sciences. (Peirce, employing a similar analytical strategy, identifies a different set of factors which provide the objective framework of the natural sciences.) Dilthey and Peirce believed they

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21 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 82, and Steven Vaitkus, *How is Society Possible?* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).

had solved the problem of the relation between the universal and the particular by noting the ways in which a community of thinkers is structured both historically and linguistically. This is all seemingly well and good, and the position actually comes quite close to that of hermeneutics which, as Alvin Gouldner has described, leads to a new reflexive sociology whereby the 'theorist is regarded as being more like an art or architectural critic than a physicist'. But Habermas rightly notes that hermeneutic understanding must *itself* employ 'inevitably general categories to grasp an inalienably individual meaning'. The problem is, according to Habermas, that we *cannot* make the distinction between cultural and natural sciences based upon the postulate that cultural phenomena owe their 'unrepeatable historical meaning' to the individualizing value-relations which Dilthey and even Gouldner saw as unfolding from the universal-specific or totality-fragment dialectic. Habermas therefore wants to deal with culture primarily on the level of the ideational (i.e., of ideas or of the 'stock of knowledge') because to do otherwise would be to risk reifying culture as in the above so-called objectifying frameworks of the cultural sciences.[22]

Further, the 'rationalization of the lifeworld' has, according to Habermas, created a bifurcated view of cultural knowledge, one which, following Weber, leads to two distinct cultural spheres of values: the cognitive and the noncognitive, corresponding with such dichotomies as subjective and objective knowledge, science versus technology, morality versus law, and even criticism versus art. This also leads to a split between distinct traditions of action theory, such as utilitarianism which views actors as marshaling objective criteria for the evaluation of possible choices of action (e.g., exchange theory, rational choice theory), and non- or anti-utilitarian action theories, such as those of Parsons' earlier 'volunta-

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22 Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by J.J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 158 and 159. Alvin W. Gouldner, 'The Politics of the Mind', *Social Policy* 2 (6), pp. 5, 15, 13-21, 54-58 (1972),. These issues are expanded upon in James J. Chriss, *Alvin W. Gouldner: Sociologist and Outlaw Marxist* (London: Ashgate, 1999) and James J. Chriss, *Confronting Gouldner: Sociology and Political Activism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017).

ristic action', Erving Goffman's dramaturgy, or even Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, all of which stress to varying degrees the normative or nonrational dimensions of social action.[23]

The lifeworld is organized on the basis of mutual understanding (achieved primarily through talk), while the system is organized around functional differentiation of parts and steering media (such as power, influence, money, and value commitments) for purposes of controlling outcomes in an orderly or efficient fashion. The lifeworld is typified by communicative rationality while the system is typified by instrumental rationality. Because the system is organized around bureaucratic organization giving rise to law, administration, and other aspects of formal social control, it is able to secure predictability of outcomes at a higher level relative to the slapdash and openness of lifeworld outcomes which must rely on the multitudes of everyday actors applying informal sanctions (frowns, glares, raised eyebrows, the silent treatment, avoidance, and withholding of expected rewards) against deviants within primary and secondary group relations. Over time, through the process of rationalization (Habermas draws primarily from Weber here) there are pressures to import these aspects of control and predictability from the system into the lifeworld, thereby colonizing the lifeworld and disempowering the communicative activities of interacting lifeworld subjects.[24]

Interestingly enough, Habermas believes that the great strides forward in human emancipation of the liberal human subject embodied in the development of the democratic (or republican) constitutional state, were chimera from the perspective of critical theories (here, specifically the Frankfurt School), to the extent that thick strands of racism, sexism,

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23 See Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1959); and Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: Free Press, 1937).

24 James J. Chriss, *Social Control: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 2013), and James J. Chriss, 'Political Violence in Historical Perspective', pp. 1015-1029 in *Sage Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by W. Outhwaite and S.P. Turner (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018).

homophobia, economic inequality, and lack of recognition persisted across all western democracies. This skepticism of state, systems, and the political (with Carl Schmitt being a key voice here) also gave those who push postmodern agendas an opening to decry all philosophical and political systems of thought which were shown to be impotent in the face of such theoretical failures. Habermas is boxed in on both sides: He begins squarely within the optimism of Marxist critique of modern western capitalism but, realizing also that no proletarian revolution is to come (the gravitational pull of neoliberalism is too great), he must also guard against sliding into postmodern hyperskepticism of metanarratives (whether emancipatory or scientific) which completely abandon hope that concerted human effort can make the world a better or more just place.[25] Habermas believes the only place to go to rescue critical theory while retaining the Enlightenment goals of human emancipation and the expansion of reason, nonviolence, and recognition of the 'other' is the lifeworld, still precariously held together by mutual understanding by way of the three validity claims (propositional truth, subjective truthfulness, and normative rightness) embedded in and retrievable from talk itself. Yet going to the lifeworld to seek analytical refuge there is never a clean or pure move, because any sociologist worth his or her weight would argue that persons are created, or at the very least influenced, by the broader social system within which they live and operate on a day-today basis. There is always the specter of system haunting even the most micro-oriented aspects of sociological theorizing and concept formation. Habermas realizes this as well, and this is why he was attentive to systems elements bearing down on the lifeworld, whether through colonization or other more benign effects.

25 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1932]). On the problems of postmodern thought, see Jürgen Habermas, 'Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (1), pp. 1-28 (2005). For useful analyses of Habermas and postmodernism, see Gérard Raulet, 'Jürgen Habermas and the Discourse of Postmodernity', *Thesis Eleven* 23, pp. 64-84 (1989), and Kenneth MacKendrick, 'The Moral Imaginary of Discourse Ethics', pp. 280-306 in *Critical Theory after Habermas*, edited by D. Freundlieb, W. Hudson, and J. Rundell (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

The systems side of Habermas's thinking, including his three-world model and three validity claims, is attributable to Parsons and, before him, the early American sociologist Franklin Giddings as well as philosophers who in turn influenced Giddings and other American sociologists such as Herbert Spencer and John Earle.[26] Earle's discussion of the concept of 'mind' (from 1881) is in fact the template for later conceptualizations of the linkages between the micro-realm of persons and their subjective endowment and the macro-realm of systems, culture, and social structure. Habermas works with an implicit theory of mind and subjectivity which seeks to go beyond the (Cartesian) philosophy of the subject to a 'postmetaphysical' subject whose subjectivity and identity are secured neither through the political body (e.g., nationalism) nor through tribal solidarity (i.e., Durkheim's mechanical solidarity).[27] An examination of these elements is in order before discussing Habermas's validity claims analytic and the prospects of its withstanding postmodern skepticism. But first, a brief discussion of Habermas's formalism is necessary.

Habermas's Formalism

Just as I have been arguing that Habermas attempts to deal with culture though an analytical program which does not succumb to the temptations of totalizing systems narratives (e.g., Marx, Parsons), many have nevertheless suggested that Habermas's approach is itself overly formalistic. I specifically consider the critical analysis of Craig Calhoun, who perceives Habermas's commitment to the Enlightenment project of achieving the 'good life' through the assurance of reasoned communication—and in so doing, hoping to avoid a slide into solipsism and

26 See, e.g., Risto Heiskala, 'Economy and Society: From Parsons through Habermas to Semiotic Institutionalism', *Social Science Information* 46 (2): pp. 243-272 (2007).

27 See Habermas's discussion in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 58-60, as well as Dieter Freundlieb, 'Why Subjectivity Matters: Critical Theory and the Philosophy of the Subject', pp. 212-232 in *Critical Theory after Habermas*, edited by D. Freundlieb, W. Hudson, and J. Rundell (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

postmodern skepticism of modernist metanarratives (in the guise of universal or formal pragmatics)—as being cut from the same cloth as the empty or 'bloodless' formalism which produced the horrific 'dust bowl' empiricism of bourgeois or conventional science.

Although there is truth to the suggestion that Habermas relies on Enlightenment universalism in explicating the criteria of communicative action, it is also the case that Habermas is aware of the reifying tendencies of positivistic modernist systems of thought. Habermas states that 'A complementary error of modernity is the *utopianism* which thinks it possible to derive the "ideal of a completely rational form of life" directly from the concepts of a decentered world understanding and of procedural rationality'. In his own analytical program, then, Habermas is careful to avoid many of the pitfalls of modernist thought which Calhoun illustrates. It will become quite apparent as well that this line of criticism dovetails with the more general postmodernist sentiment, even while proponents of this critique of Habermas (such as Calhoun) claim to reject, or at least choose not to overtly support, the tenets of postmodernism.[28]

Calhoun advocates what he calls 'cultural sensitivity', this being the attentiveness by social theorists to 'problems of difference'. The idea is that as heirs to Enlightenment rationalism many modernist social theorists tend toward an uncritical and nonreflexive acceptance of the universality of decontextualized truth claims as discoverable through the sheer force of reason. This scientistic over-commitment to a 'culturally insensitive Enlightenment universalism' has produced a tradition of normative theory (e.g., Parsons) which shares many of the problems of the

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28 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 73. Craig Calhoun, 'Culture, History and the Problem of Specificity in Social Theory', pp. 244-88 in S. Seidman and D.G. Wagner (eds.) *Postmodernism and Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992). Habermas formulated this position in the crucible of the dispute over positivism in German sociology beginning in the early 1960s. See especially Jürgen Habermas, 'The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics', pp. 131-162 in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, with contributions from T.W. Adorno, H. Albert and others (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976).

type of empirical theorizing (e.g., utilitarianism, behaviorism, rational choice theory) which the former has attempted to displace. Here, Calhoun attempts to distance himself from the postmodernists by claiming that tacit or unquestioned assumptions of Enlightenment individualism pervade both normative and empirical theoretical traditions, stating that 'In this sense, both that branch of modernity which has lately traveled under the name of postmodernism and the explicit Enlightenment modernism proclaimed for example by Habermas suffer from weaknesses of cross-cultural sensibility'.[29]

The impoverished cross-cultural outlook of Enlightenment universalism does away with difference with a simple analytical sleight of hand. Because, as Calhoun argues, universalist thought tends toward the position that there is only one set of fundamental values, the importance of fundamental differences of value (especially as realized in cross-cultural studies) is forever lost (or at least obfuscated, barely visible) within the mazes of Enlightenment analytical thought.

Calhoun claims that Habermas's attempted delineation of the normative foundations of a critical theory derives these essential concrete norms by way of a convenient fiat, this being Habermas's suggestion that the norms are held to be implicit in the validity claims of all speech. The main problem here, according to Calhoun, is that Habermas's universalization of validity claims is highly decontextualized. In the end, Calhoun argues that although Habermas claims to stress the importance of viewing human beings and the modes of communication being employed as an intersubjective accomplishment, his theory still has not advanced beyond outmoded modernist understandings of morality and the possibilities for communicative (i.e., noncoerced) action. 'Rather', writes Calhoun, '[Habermas] returns moral judgment to a Kantian realm of decontextualized individuals'.

Admittedly, Habermas's proceduralist view of democracy is derived from a Kantian-like discourse theory whose guiding principle states that

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29 Calhoun, *Culture, History and the Problem of Specificity in Social Theory*, pp. 247-248.

'Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourse'. However, contra Calhoun, I believe that Habermas successfully averts the problem of the decontextualized individual as seen, for example, in Habermas own rendering of the weaknesses of the totality-individual dialectic developed by Dilthey, Peirce, and others.[30]

The Concept of Mind

Across society and the contemporary social sciences the word 'mind' is invoked so frequently that there is seemingly little doubt as to its meaning.[31] The mind is the storehouse of thought, reasoning, consciousness, the intellect; in sum, the creative aspect of the functioning brain. Modern language is filled with references to the mind. One can be out of one's mind, or lose it, or even give someone a piece of it. One can seek peace of mind, or see things from the mind's eye, stressing the ready ability to engage in introspection, to take vision back to its locus or seat, to the functioning brain and the ephemeral realm of thoughtful reflection and contemplation that is somehow connected to it. A famous anti-drug commercial proclaimed that a mind is a terrible thing to waste, just as former Vice President Dan Quayle famously botched the slogan by saying, 'What a waste it is to lose one's mind. Or not to have a mind is being very wasteful. How true that is'. People in love are presumably able to read each other's minds. One may be asked to keep or bear something in mind, but one can also call things to mind. One can have a mind to do something, or at the very least

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30 Calhoun, ibid., p. 249. For a defense of Habermas's 'Kantian constructivism', see Thomas McCarthy, 'Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue', *Ethics* 105, pp. 44-63 (1994).

31 For the most part this discussion of mind will remain at the folk psychology level, that is, at the level at which the typical human being uses and understands the concept of mind. The study of mind and consciousness can get very complex, but as Keith Frankish notes, sciences of human behavior such as sociology and economics need not get into the details of the structure of sub-personal cognition, the unconscious, or such concepts as Frankish's own 'supermind'. See Keith Frankish, *Mind and Supermind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 46.

a half a mind. One can make up one's mind, or if undecided or uncertain, be of two minds. On the other hand, you and others with whom you agree could be described as being of one mind. You can also have a meeting of the minds. And two minds are better than one. You can have or put something in mind, or just as readily take one's mind off something. You can tell someone to never mind, and another person to mind his own business. If you keep something out of sight you may also be able to keep it out of mind. The power of the mind is said to be so great it reigns supreme even over the physical world (mind over matter). And when all is said and done, one can always change one's mind.

The point of all this is that today, we routinely invoke the word mind. But this has not always been so. Although a full analysis of the etymology of the word 'mind' would take us too far afield, a brief summary is in order. One such useful summary appeared in 1881 in an article titled 'The History of the Word "Mind"'. John Earle shows how what we now understand as the word 'mind' has deep roots in religious thought, deriving from the early dichotomy of body and spirit. The spirit, understood as the vital source (soul) that resides in all living human beings, becomes an early object of attention, reflection, and worship, especially among a group of like-minded believers (the church) who come together to commemorate the dead (Vico being a lead voice here). Remembering and commemorating those who have come before us provides a first glimpse into the notion of a group mind (or general mind, or collective mind, or social mind, or even psychic unity).

For eons the church was the overseer, purveyor, and interpreter of the collective will, unity, or solidarity of a group of people (the congregation). Nevertheless, an inexorable secularization of this idea had begun to compete with the religious notion of congregation or community, and by the early sixteenth century, in his revisions of the translation of the New Testament (beginning in 1525), William Tyndale started adding other elements that went beyond religious remembrance or memorial per se. For example, at All Saints Church in Bristol, a yearly custom existed whereby a list of Founders and Benefactors was recited, and this ceremony went by the

name of the General Mind. By this time, both in terms of liturgical practice and biblical interpretation and translation, the General Mind was understood as the place where thought and memory reside. As Earle explains, 'Mind is coextensive with the capacity for experience, coextensive with consciousness, even with the faculty of sensation; but it has a special relation to Ideas, and when the word is used acutely, it means the faculty of Ideas'. Secularization of this notion was accelerated with the Reformation, and especially with the move to abolish services commemorating the dead. The second half of the sixteenth century saw the word being used much more freely in everyday usage, torn as it was from its religious moorings. It is especially prevalent in the works of Shakespeare, and the way mind was being used by then was as a catchall for capturing the inner side of human conduct and experience. Beyond simple thought or reflection or remembrance or experience, mind now encompasses feeling, sentiment, opinion, inclination, fancy, temper, humor, and disposition.

The original dichotomy of soul and body becomes secularized as well, transmuted into the notion of *mind* and body, especially as embodied in the philosophy of Descartes. At about the same time in Britain, Hobbes was secularizing the group mind via his concepts of the social contract and especially the Leviathan. Earle explains that, by the beginning of the seventeenth century,

> The time was come for the Mind as the intellectual region and organ of ideas to win recognition and to be individualized in its turn. The whole upheaval of new thought in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was, not less in word than in deed, for the establishment of Mind.

Earle goes on to make a further provocative point. If Soul served as the region and organ of ideas for the collective understanding and solidarity of a people, Mind does not merely replace soul with the coming of secularization, but touches upon a new or emergent aspect of the progression of human thought and experience. Indeed, if we take the Good, the Beautiful, and the True as a convenient summary of the chief heads

of Ideas, then the church or religion represents the Good, and the newly burgeoning era of science ushered in with the Enlightenment represents the True. The Beautiful is then left to the aesthetic realm, the realm of theater arts, poetry, plays, music, and the drama of everyday life. In fact, Earle's notion of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True align remarkably well with the validity claims underlying all speech and the three analytical worlds (social, subjective, and objective respectively) as developed a century later by Habermas.[32]

Although modern English makes a clear distinction between the terms 'spirit' and 'mind', the German word *Geist* incorporates both of these ideas seamlessly. Furthermore, even as we take for granted that persons are endowed with their own unique minds, we should be aware that the idea of a collective or social mind was developed prior to the widespread acceptance of something called 'culture'. There are two distinct ways of talking about and conceptualizing the social mind. First, there is the notion of the socialized mind, that is, the line of thinking that argues that the mind is socially constructed, or similarly, that emphasizes the social character of thinking. Cognitive psychologists as well as some philosophers and sociologists (such as John Dewey, George H. Mead, Josiah Royce, and Pierre Janet) operate to varying degrees with this version of the social mind. The primary focus of this version of the social mind is on the human person, seeking to explain how individuals comes to be endowed with minds—as distinct from the physiological realities of the brain—that are said to be created through interaction with human beings and other objects in the social world. In early psychology especially, the social mind was developed to counter psychological behaviorism, which assumed that mind is biologically given. Where the behaviorists favored a biogenic explanation for the human mind, cognitive psychologists and some sociologists (such as Lester Ward George H. Mead, Charles Cooley,

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32 John Earle, 'The History of the Word "Mind"', *Mind* 6 (23), pp. 301-320 (1881), pp. 315, 319, 320. See also Arthur J. Vidich and Stanford M. Lyman, *American Sociology: Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Direction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

and Max Weber to name a few)—favored a sociogenic explanation. It is these latter developments, more or less synonymous with phenomenology, the social construction of reality, the definition of the situation, and interpretivism more generally that are more congenial to Habermas as opposed to the earlier analytical philosophy of mind.[33]

As mentioned above, even though Habermas was influenced by an incipient notion of a three-world model evident in the writings of the young Parsons, Parsons was by no means the first person to conceptualize this. Writing in 1899, early American sociologist Franklin Giddings argued that 'Every human being is at once an animal, a conscious individual mind, and a socius. As an animal he is studied by the anatomist and physiologist; as a conscious mind he is studied by the psychologist; as a socius, loving and seeking acquaintance, forming friendships and alliances with other socii like himself, imitating them and setting examples for them, teaching them and learning from them, and engaging with them in many forms of common activity,—he is studied by the sociologist'. Among sociologists, Giddings should receive proper credit for being the innovator of this three-world concept.[34]

Some of Parsons' papers from his undergraduate days at Amherst University in 1922 were published in the journal *American Sociologist* in 1996. In his paper titled 'The Theory of Human Behavior in Its Individual and Social Aspects' we see an explicit statement on this three-world model. Railing against unilinear models such as institutional economics and utilitarianism, Parsons wrote that 'there is no reason to make any radical distinction in kind between habits of thought and technological habits. We are one organism, not two, and viewed from one angle we are physical, from another mental, from another moral. Also society is made up of individuals so that there is no absolute distinction between society viewed as a whole and as

33 See James J. Chriss, 'Giddings and the Social Mind', *Classical Journal of Sociology* 6 (1), pp. 123-144 (2006); Harold N. Lee, 'Social Mind and Political Order', *Ethics* 84 (1), pp. 70-77 (1973); and Jaan Valsiner and Rene Van der Veer, *The Social Mind: Construction of the Idea* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

34 Franklin H. Giddings, *The Elements of Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 10.

a collection of individuals'. These worlds—the objective, subjective, and social—first articulated by Giddings, play a prominent role in Habermas's three world model and the validity claims lying behind all speech.[35]

Three Worlds and Three Validity Claims

Habermas's theory of communicative action is concerned with the problem of overcoming curtailed, distorted, or coerced communication. Although modern industrial society has made great advances in assuring rights and just treatment for all citizens, primarily as a result of democratization and the freedom-guaranteeing juridifications embodied in welfare state law, certain social or culture structures—such as class and family systems, racism, sexism, age discrimination, and so forth—continue to support inequality and differential power. These oppressive structures or cultural codes thereby effectively serve to cut off the possibility of consensus or intersubjective understanding through fair discussion or argumentation. The ultimate goal of communicative action is the institutionalization of the ideal speech situation, whereby only the weight of the better argument would prevail. In such an egalitarian environment, it is understood by all participants that no claim can be dismissed outright, but also that, since no claim is privileged, all can be challenged on their merits. This means that through fair argumentation and discussion, all participants are free to negotiate the conditions of their existence and eventually settle upon what is right, proper, or just for all.

In order for the ideal speech situation to be realized in concrete settings, all persons in talk would have to understand, and be granted access to, the validity claims associated with each of the three analytical worlds. The ideal speech situation is the condition of communicative action, the latter defined as 'the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations'.[36] Through their utterances,

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35 See Talcott Parsons, 'The Theory of Human Behavior in Its Individual and Social Aspects', *American Sociologist* 27 (4): pp. 13-23 (2006), p. 23, and James J. Chriss, 'The Young Parsons and the Mature Habermas'.

36 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 86.

persons make claims about the world, and each claim may be challenged or evaluated with regard to the appropriate validity claim connected with each world. Specifically, through talk actors make reference to the validity claims of (1) propositional truth, whereby a hearer can deny or contest that certain objective conditions hold in a situation (associated with the objective world); (2) subjective truthfulness, whereby a hearer can challenge whether a speaker really means what he or she is saying or implying (associated with the subjective world); and (3) normative rightness, whereby a hearer can contest the appropriateness of the aims of the speaker based upon prevailing normative standards (associated with the social world).

The process of responding to the utterances of others draws from the validity claims associated with each of the respective worlds. For example, suppose a manager in an upholstery shop of a major airplane manufacturing company has been told by upper management that the work coming out of his shop has been substandard of late, and that he needs to 'take care of it'. According to Habermas's model, the manager has three supervisory actions or options at his disposal. First, the manager could cite to his staff statistics concerning the hours of work that will have been lost and the work that will be duplicated because of having to remove the faulty seats from the planes (i.e., the validity claim of propositional truth associated with the objective world). Second, the manager could present himself in such a way as to claim certain subjective states have been aroused, for example, telling his staff how 'disappointed' he is at the shoddy workmanship on the seats, and that he knows they can do a better job (here, attempting to elicit feelings of guilt; this is the validity claim of subjective truthfulness associated with the subjective world). Third, the manager could argue from the perspective of the aesthetic values and normative expectations of the typical airline passenger, for example, that passengers don't want to see frayed and shoddy-looking upholstery on their seats (i.e., the validity claim of normative rightness associated with the social world).[37]

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37 James J. Chriss, 'Management and Supervisory Practice in the Organization: The Relevance of Goffman and Habermas', *Sociological Imagination* 36 (4), pp. 217-237 (1999).

Forms of Action

The concept of the three analytical worlds points to the following observation. Since human beings are carbon-based life forms moving about in a natural world, an observer may choose to account for social phenomena only on the basis of instrumental rationality. That is to say, one may assume that the human organism engages in a decision calculus that takes into account the elements of his or her action options in relation to the constraints and exigencies of only the objective world. Hence, from the perspective of the objective world and taking into account only the validity claim of propositional truth, the human person's actions can be judged a success or failure according to criteria of truth and efficacy. The implication of such teleological action is that human behavior, as realized through the cognitive processes of a knowing subject, is represented only as a relation between the actor and a world.[38]

Habermas goes on to point out, however, that human beings are not merely physical entities operating and moving about in an objective world. Far beyond the utilitarian model of rational actors calculating the best means for achieving particular ends, human action also involves subjective and social considerations of the actions to be taken and their possible effect on other actors. That is, action also can have meaning in relation to a subjective world (in terms of an actor's internal sentiments, thoughts, attitudes, disposition, etc.), and a social world (in terms of judgments of the justness or appropriateness of an actor's actions based upon prevailing normative standards).

Beyond what is variously described as strategic, instrumental, goal-oriented, or teleological action, which takes into account only an actor and the objective world, normatively regulated action presupposes relations between an actor and two worlds. Actors depicted in the normatively regulated concept of action are endowed with a 'motivational complex' in addition to teleological action's lower-level 'cognitive com-

38 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 87.

plex'.[39]   The motivational complex makes norm-conformative behavior possible in that actors judge whether or not actions are in accordance with existing norms. Beyond providing judgments of the extent to which actions are successful or unsuccessful in relation to the objective world, the normatively regulated model of action also provides for judgments of an actor in his or her relation to the social world, insofar as the actor is able to comply with (or is unable or chooses not to meet) the normative expectations of the members of his or her social group. Here, actors distinguish the factual or objective from the normative elements of an action situation, or, stated differently, they distinguish between conditions and means, on the one hand, and values, on the other.[40]

This distinction between the objective and social worlds, and the parallel distinction between the lower level cognitive complex and the higher order motivational complex, is a good way of explaining why findings from animal studies may not be applicable or appropriate to explanations of human behavior and society. When interpretations of the world are circumscribed by recourse only to propositional truth and instrumental rationality, 'success' becomes the sole criterion for judging, understanding, or responding to one's or other's behavior. Hence, the Darwinian notion of evolution leads to bald explanations of the world in terms of, say, species survival (at the phylogenetic level), or reproductive success (at the ontogenetic level). In the animal kingdom, there are no judgments made as to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the activity. This is because only humans have culture, norms, values, and stocks of knowledge. This cultural heritage overlays a social world onto an objective world, and raw success (for example, in the areas of procreation or food quests) as interpreted through a cognitive complex often gives way to a higher order motivational complex where actions can be judged to be appropriate or inappropriate in relation to that social world. For example, in the human world infanticide or nonconsensual sex are deemed 'wrong' in most cultures, while in the animal kingdom they are simply facts of life.

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39 Habermas, ibid., p. 88.

40 Habermas, ibid., p. 90.

In addition to the objective and social analytical worlds, Habermas suggests it is useful to conceive of a subjective world. The validity claim appropriate to this subjective world is subjective truthfulness. That is, through their utterances actors may make claims regarding any number of subjective states ('I am happy, sad, worried', etc.). The primary form of action relevant to the subjective world is dramaturgical action. Diplomacy, tact, and politeness—such as making an overt show of being interested in or caring about our fellow human beings—are the sorts of behaviors that are part and parcel to dramaturgical action.

As Habermas suggests, dramaturgy assumes a two-world model insofar as actors strive to make certain subjective states visible to their audience (that they are caring, or a nice person, or interested in what you have to say, etc.). Most of these dramaturgical actions occur in the form of accounts, apologies, and requests, and they are presumed to be connected to demonstrable subjective states of speakers (as we saw above in the case of the manager).

Parsons and Cybernetics

As is well known, Talcott Parsons developed a functionalist theory of social systems which designates at any level of reality the operation of four functions (adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latent pattern-maintenance) which must be fulfilled in order to maintain any system or its subsystems as a going concern. Additionally, Parsons discovered that Norbert Wiener's work on cybernetics could be used to conceptualize and clarify the interrelation among the four functions themselves.[41] The cybernetic principle states that 'things high in information control things high in energy'. Think of the rider on a horse, or the helmsman steering a ship at sea, or the thermostat controlling the

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41 The single best source for an overview of Parsons' four-function or AGIL schema is the technical appendix in Talcott Parsons and Gerald M. Platt, *The American University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973). For the seminal work on cybernetics, see Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics; Or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: Technology Press, 1948).

temperature of a room, or DNA determining the form and composition of a biological entity.

As far as the four functional problems are concerned, the cybernetic hierarchy of control always goes in the direction of L => I => G => A, which means that the L-function is highest in information relative to the other functions while the A-function is highest in energy. At the level of Parsons' action system, culture (L), which is high in information, sits at the pinnacle of the cybernetic hierarchy as it is high in information relative to the next subsystem down, namely the social system. The social system (I) is in turn higher in information than the personality system, while in turn the personality (G) system is higher in information than the organism or, as Parsons dubs it, the behavioral system (A). Finally, in turn, the behavioral system is lowest in information but highest in energy. In addition, with regard to interpreting the three analytical worlds and their interrelation, we may say that the social world is the highest in information among the three worlds, bounded above by the cultural subsystem and below by the social system, then similarly for the subjective and objective worlds which are bounded above and below accordingly.[42]

Habermas was aware of Parsons' application of Wiener's work on cybernetics to the sociocultural realm, but was much less sanguine than Parsons was concerning its potential for meaningful contributions to sociological explanation. Cybernetics has lurking within it a highly dystopian vision of technocratic domination of the lifeworld, of capitulation to 'self-regulated subsystems of the man-machine type' toward the ultimate realization of the 'cybernetic dream of the instinct-like self-stabilization of societies'.[43] Nevertheless, by the time of his *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas had discovered the indispensability of Parsons' functionalist theory of social systems for his own work.

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42 I cover this in more detail in my paper 'Goffman, Parsons, and the Negational Self'. For an application of Parsons' AGIL schema to the criminal justice system, see James J. Chriss, *Beyond Community Policing: From Early American Beginnings to the 21st Century* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

43 Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, translated by J.J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 118.

Parsons' cybernetic theory of control is in full view when considering the validity claims. As depicted in figure 1, the functional significance of the three validity claims are ordered cybernetically according to their relevance to the objective, subjective, and social worlds. For example, propositional truth fulfills the A-function for the system of validity claims because it gears into a world of 'bald' assertions of 'fact' which can be challenged by interlocutors in a yes or no fashion. Subjective truthfulness fulfills the goal-attainment function for the system, as person put on dramaturgical displays for an audience, in the process claiming certain subjective states attain in efforts to create the appearance of an authentic presentation of self. Indeed, subjective truthfulness within the validity claim subsystem fulfills the same goal-attainment function that the personality system fulfills for the broader action system. Finally, normative rightness gears primarily into the social world and performs the work of integration for the validity claim system. Normative rightness is higher in information that either subjective truthfulness or propositional truth, to the extent that notions of the 'ought' or 'propriety' often outweigh bald statements of fact or subjective claims such as feelings, emotions, self, or identity.[44] (See figure on the opposite page.)

Sitting atop the cybernetic hierarchy of the validity claims is a fourth one which up to this point has not been discussed. The goal of assuring an ideal speech situation, that is, of reaching mutual understanding through discourse, is not at all possible if participants in talk are not speaking the same language to begin with. The validity claim of intelligibility or com-

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44 There is an adage that the truth is always the best defense, or will win out in the end. But this is very often not the case. Consider the case of a waiter and a very heavy customer who has just completed a three-course dinner. The dining patron requests the dessert menu, to which the waiter replies 'You are very heavy but I will bring the menu anyway'. The patron would likely be shocked by this affront and would call over the manager to complain. In all likelihood, this would result in the firing of the waiter. The fact that the waiter was factually correct about the weight of the customer—a scale could easily determine whether the customer is indeed 'heavy'—would be irrelevant in the face of the violation of tacit norms of propriety regarding the treatment of dining patrons.
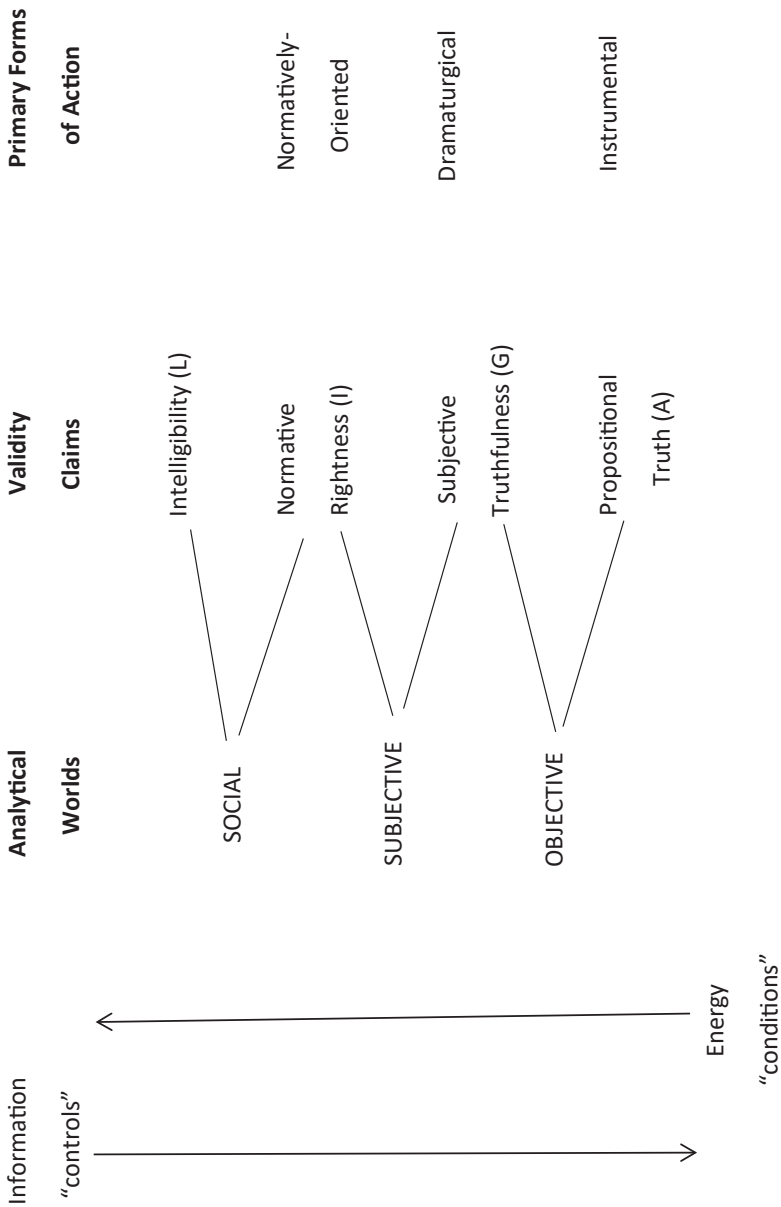
Analytical Worlds	Validity Claims	Primary Forms of Action
	Intelligibility (L)	
SOCIAL	Normative Rightness (I)	Normatively-Oriented
SUBJECTIVE	Subjective Truthfulness (G)	Dramaturgical
OBJECTIVE	Propositional Truth (A)	Instrumental

Information "controls" →

Energy "conditions" ←

Figure 1: **The Functions of the Validity Claims**

prehensibility is a tacit or latent claim which rarely gets explicitly raised in talk, but forms the background of all possible communication which may occur.[45] Intelligibility is easily the highest in information relative to the other validity claims because without a minimal fulfillment of the requirement of the mutual intelligibility of talk, no other claims-making is possible. It is, however, a deep, latent, or tacit claim because it is rarely explicitly raised in talk, and indeed, it comes to the surface only when someone says, 'I don't understand'.

Conclusion: The Validity Claims and Postmodern Skepticism

I have been concerned with identifying an aspect of the crisis sentiment within the social sciences, namely the rise of postmodernism within sociology and the ways in which culture mediates between ontology and epistemology. Within this culture/postmodernism milieu I have analyzed the analytical program of Jurgen Habermas and how these factors have contributed to the development of his theory of communicative action. As summarized above, a number of analysts complain of the overly formalistic nature of Habermas's work, and have proceeded to marshal the arguments of deconstruction (poststructuralism) and constructivism (postmodernism) to literally 'deconstruct' Habermas's attempt to rescue Enlightenment reason toward his ultimate goal of completing the project of modernity.

As much as I have attempted to defend Habermas against his detractors, I realize also that Habermas's 'ideal speech situation' seems somewhat detached from the realities of the empirical social world. In his defense, however, it should be noted that Habermas has increasingly distanced himself from his original notion of the ideal speech situation and now

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45 Here I use the term intelligibility for the fourth validity claim. Mark Gould uses 'comprehensibility', but otherwise his description of the functional significance of the validity claims is the same as mine. See Mark Gould, 'The Generalized Media of Communication and the Logic of Cultural Intelligibility: Macro and Micro Analyses in Luhmann, Habermas and Parsons', pp. 119-146 in *Parsons'* The Structure of Social Action *and Contemporary Debates*, edited by G. Pollini and G. Sciortino (Milan, IT: FrancoAngeli, 2001).

speaks more carefully of the strong idealizations of 'discourses'. The latter refers to forms of argumentation that not only satisfy the idealizations of everyday talk, but also point to a rationally motivated consensus on the universality of the validity claims of propositional truth ('constatives'), normative rightness ('regulatives'), and subjective truthfulness ('expressives').[46] In this final section I consider the viability of Habermas's project in light of the various postmodern criticisms raised above.

We can begin by considering Simon Susen's explication of ten key assumptions of postmodernism.[47] Postmodern social theory is:

- an *interdisciplinary* endeavor;
- a *foundationless* endeavor, which rejects the totalizing metanarratives of modernist science and questions the grounds upon which any system of knowledge or ideology (including religion) purports to legitimate its claims;
- a *directionless* endeavor, which basically rejects teleology and other modernist projects which had some specific endpoint in sight (e.g., liberation, utopia, egalitarianism)[48];
- a *public* endeavor, which seeks to avoid elitism and scholarly mo-

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46 Much of this is contained in Habermas' *Between Facts and Norms* where a more explicit shift to a Kantian framework is evident in the development of his discourse theory of law. Also see Chriss, 'Habermas Goffman, and Communicative Action', and Maeve Cooke, *Language and Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). Cooke contends that Habermas's linguistic account of solidarity in postconventional society—namely, the bonds that hold members of a democratically self-regulated lifeworld together via a rationally motivated agreement to reach understanding—is on its own unconvincing. But Cooke also warns that abandoning Habermas's project gives at least tacit approval to the postmodernist position that stresses that there is no basis for deriving normative standards in a postmodern world where universally-shared notions of the good life no longer seem possible.

47 Simon Susen, *The Postmodern 'Turn' in the Social Sciences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

48 Although clearly not a defender of Habermas, the critical rationalist Hans Albert is nevertheless on target when he describes the 'big three' social evils which socialists seek to eradicate as 'poverty, oppression, and war'. See Hans Albert, *Between Social Science, Religion and Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 196.

nasticism by connecting with everyday citizens and giving them voice (e.g., public sociology);

- a *situationist* endeavor, which favors the particular over the general or universal;
- a *pragmatic* endeavor, which draws attention to the existential significance of social practices in all their variety and circumstances;
- an *ethno-conscious* endeavor, which guides social observers toward foregrounding the cultural specificity of their epistemic claims to validity, thereby guarding against ethnocentrism;
- a *socio-conscious* endeavor, which places emphasis on the relational contingencies underlying human agency, thereby favoring indeterminacy and intersectionality;
- a *pluralist* endeavor, which is the critical exploration of heterogeneous struggles of everyday persons on the basis of class, gender, age, disability, or other sociological variables;
- a *historicist* endeavor, which denies the quest for the search for universal covering laws and rejects claims of the appropriateness of deductive-nomothetic (that is, causal) theory for the social sciences.

Some of these projects represent boilerplate leftist politics—especially those of historicism, pluralism, and raised socio-conscious awareness—while others obviously are not. For example, Habermas's program would collapse if the postmodern preferences for foundationlessness or directionlessness were applied to his universal pragmatics, ideal speech situation, or deliberative democracy.

The tension that Habermas describes between system and lifeworld and the paradigm clashes associated with them within sociology—specifically positivism vs. postpositivism, whether of the evaluative or the interpretive strand—is embodied in his own work as a sociologist (as opposed to his role as a philosopher, which would bring to bear a different set of intradisciplinary tensions vis-à-vis postmodernism). [49] As Susen argues, the focal point for postmodern critique within sociology

49 To be more precise, within sociology there are three paradigms. The oldest is positivism, while the other two could be considered 'postpositivist'

proper is the challenge of the 'cultural turn'. Susen presents a rather complex argument to justify this, and nearing the end of this paper I cannot give it the coverage it is due. But suffice to say, this idea of a post-modern 'cultural turn' as a challenge to conventional (or mainstream, or scientific, or modern) sociology has to do with the growing sentiment of the 'implosion', 'death', or 'crisis' of the social. That is to say, sociology cannot legitimately take society in its totality as its object of study: first, because society is too massive and its study cannot be contained solely within one discipline; and second, modernist notions of a stable 'thing' or object, namely society or the social, are nothing but chimera because, since the establishment of sociology in the late 1800s, societies have gone through so many fundamental changes—at the structural, interpersonal, and sociopolitical levels to name a few—that the inherited notions of the social that contemporary sociologists (including Habermas) work with are antiquated and irrelevant.[50]

The cultural turn, as something that lies beyond sociology, is understood more in line with a hermeneutical 'cultural sociology' rather than the old, tired status-role, or structuralist understanding of culture. For example, it is clear that Parsons—and by extension Habermas—took culture seriously, as it sits at the pinnacle of the cybernetic hierarchy of control, fulfilling the function of latent pattern-maintenance for the action system. But culture cannot act in such limited, steering capacity, as is evident with ongoing globalization and glocalization (the dictum that one

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because their axiological, ontological, and epistemological commitments are incompatible (to varying degrees) with positivism. These other two are the evaluative paradigm (e.g., Marxism, feminism, critical race theory, and queer theory) and the interpretive paradigm (e.g., symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, dramaturgy, and some strands of phenomenology). See Helmut Wagner, 'Types of Sociological Theory: Toward a System of Classification', *American Sociological Review* 28 (5):735-742 (1963).

50 Susen's argument is close to that of Bruno Latour. But whereas the anarchic tendency of the postmodern critique is to throw the baby (sociology) out with the bathwater (its antiquated notions of the social), Latour seeks to salvage sociology by way of his actor-network-theory toward the goal of 'reassembling the social'. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

should 'think globally, act locally'). This idea of culture being already always everywhere kills two birds with one stone—for example, bridging the global-local or universal-particular divide—so that the system-lifeworld distinction can be jettisoned. This also causes massive damage to any critical theory that takes seriously—even if present merely as an unthematized, background assumption—Marx's notion of a base-superstructure distinction. In this scenario of the cultural turn's postmodern challenge, both positivism and evaluative theory take it on the chin. Interpretive theory is spared somewhat because of its attention to the self and subjectivity, but it now operates in a minefield strewn throughout the sociological landscape.

This sorrowful ending is something akin to a Greek tragedy, the culmination of Hegel's 'bad infinity'. Adorno's loss of faith in the Promethean task undertaken by critical theorists toward the unity of theory and practice is the epitome of 'resignation', punctuated by Adorno's missive aimed at Korsch among others:

> The call for unity of theory and practice has irresistibly degraded theory to a servant's role, removing the very traits it should have brought to that unity. The visa stamp of practice which we demand of all theory became a censor's placet. Yet whereas theory succumbed in the vaunted mixture, practice became nonconceptual, a piece of the politics it was supposed to lead out of; it became the prey of power. [51]

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51 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 143. I expand on this issue in my *Confronting Gouldner*, pp. 111-112.

Adorno to Habermas: A Late Reckoning

Christopher Norris[1]

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world, and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements.

> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*

Freedom may never be conceived merely negatively, as the absence of compulsion. Freedom conceived intersubjectively distinguishes itself from the arbitrary freedom of the isolated individual. No one is free until we are all free.

> Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*

On the one hand, 'positive' means what is given, is postulated, is there – as when we speak of positivism as the philosophy that sticks to the facts. But, equally, 'positive' also refers to the good, the approvable, in a certain sense, the ideal. And I imagine that this semantic constellation expresses with precision what countless people actually feel to be the case.

I would guess that at the next stage of regressive ideology people would be expected to believe in 'the positive', in the same spirit as marriage advertisements regard 'a positive attitude to life' as especially commendable.

> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Lectures on Negative Dialectics'

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1   Christopher Norris is Emeritus Professor in Philosophy at the University of Cardiff. In his early career he taught English Literature, then moved to Philosophy *via* literary theory, and has now moved back in the direction of creative writing. He has published widely on the topic of deconstruction and is the author of more than thirty books on aspects of philosophy, literature, the history of ideas, and music. More recently he has turned to writing poetry in various genres, including – unusually – that of the philosophical verse-essay. He has published several collections of poems, including *The Winnowing Fan* and *For the Tempus-Fugitives*, and is now working on a further volume. He has lectured and held visiting posts at universities around the world, and his books have been translated into many languages.

A dvice from your old teacher: just get real.
　　I mean, don't play the self-deluding role
Of thinking positives will get you through.

Harsh truth: speech-situations aren't ideal,
And never have been; even as a goal
Or 'regulative notion', it won't do.

Of course it goes down well, that earnest spiel
Of yours about how reason should have sole
Charge of our discourse-ethics, but if you

Just lend an ear you'll quickly get a feel
For all the ways we bully, force, cajole,
Manipulate, and twist far out-of-true

Each others' speech-acts till your stock appeal
To discourse seems like giving up control
To whomsoever in the human zoo

Roars loudest.
　　　Sure, there's all that stuff about
Its being an ideal, a way to gauge
Just how far short they fall, those kinds of speech-

Act commerce by which politicians rout
Opponents, or loud academics wage
Some footling war, or bar-room Hitlers teach

Their audience lessons in the way to shout
All parties down. But, don't you see, their rage
Is your fine ethic honoured in the breach,

Or your ideal with all the extra clout
That such ideals acquire when they rampage
In league with downright positives that reach

The mental parts unreachable without
Their power to grab the headlines and upstage
Us thinkers of the negative who preach

A harder way.
      That's where the difference lies
Between us, Jürgen: not just in the fact
That I, not you, lived out those endless years

Of exile, war, brief meetings, long goodbyes,
Huge culture-shocks, the Nazi-Soviet pact,
And post-war drawing-up of strange frontiers

Across our mental maps, but in the guise
Of your belief that public discourse backed
By reason's gentle force could quell the fears

And horrors through some splendid enterprise
Of reason plus the kind of verbal tact
That went along with it. Your public sphere's

A great thing just so long as it applies,
That fine ideal, but proves an artefact
Of wishful thinking once dissension rears

Its ugly head. You say I'm one of those
First-generation Frankfurt thinkers cursed
With a weird mix of temperamental gloom

And wire-drawn intellect that only goes
To pre-incline our lot toward the worst,
Least hopeful view and leave us with no room

For any dialectic that bestows,
Like yours, an outlook principally versed
In ways of thought resistant to the doom-

Fixated auguries we elders chose
To steer by. So if us lot were the first
To think things through and you the lot to whom

Things didn't look so bad then it's our lows,
And not your highs, that show a grievance nursed
And nurtured so at last it comes to loom

Above all else.
        I say: just think a bit
More carefully about the various ways
Around you've gone *en route* to all this stuff,

This hopeful stuff, by which you try to fit
'The force of the best argument' (your phrase,
And one worth dwelling on – we've had enough

Of force-talk) to whatever concept-kit
Best serves to validate some latest phase
Of fake democracy, or deck some duff

New constitution out in robes backlit
By Kantian motifs designed to raise
The moral stakes but call the sceptic's bluff

By couching them in terms that make 'legit'
Or 'right' a matter of who gets to phrase
The claim, and how, and all that discourse guff

You're now so hooked on. Can't help thinking what
A way you've travelled since the days of your
First student brushes with the bourgeois state,

The legal order, and whatever got
Your blood up in the form of our post-war
'New settlement' and effort to create

From scratch a social order that would not,
The Western Powers decreed, throw wide the door
To socialism yet accommodate,

Let's say, some few demands that *sans-culottes*
Like you were making.
          Back then I'd deplore,
And still do, protest-movements that can't wait

To put those bourgeois bastards on the spot
And so take loudly to the streets before
The time's arrived for them to activate

More than a show of militant distaste
For everything they take as just a Mark
Two version of the evils witnessed by

Their parents, whether resolutely faced,
Resisted (really?), shut up in some dark
Recess of memory, or apt to try

The patience of their offspring when such haste
For action as you showed betrays the spark
Of a long-kindling fear lest you should pry

Too deeply into matters better placed
Under tight wraps. Else it was just a lark,
A juvenile disorder, as with my

Disrupted lectures when the students chased
Me from the podium or stood there stark
Naked and read their slogans out while I

Tried hard to carry on.
      That's why I find
It symptomatic, how you've swung across
From student activist to one intent

On keeping us continually in mind
Of our great *Grundgesetz*, of how its loss
Or watering-down would leave the state hell-bent

On chaos come again, and how the kind
Of eminently charitable gloss
You place on its fine articles seems meant

To shore up every word you once consigned
To the junk-pile of laws devised by boss-
Class profiteers to gain the forced assent

Of wage-slaves. Tell your young self what's enshrined
Therein and he'd reply 'don't give a toss –
It's total shit', and go straight on to vent

The sorts of rabble-rousing rhetoric
That you once aimed at me when I refused
To join your *Kameraden* in the street

Because – unlike a canny Bolshevik –
You let the whole thing get you so enthused
That in your premature desire to greet

The red dawn you lacked skill or care to pick
The proper time and place.
     If I've accused
You principally of one thing it's complete

And utter failure to resist the trick
Of thought by which fake positives have schmoozed
Negation's conscience-call so as to beat

Down every counter-impulse that would kick
Against their power to keep us all bemused
By schemes, like yours, that give false hope a treat

Since drawing on the intellectual stock
That gave an old Enlightenment its claim
To reason, truth, and justice yet soon ran

In contraflow and so turned out to mock
The principles once touted in its name
By Voltaire, Kant and those who first began

That line of talk. 'No turning back the clock',
You may say, 'no reverse moves in the game',
Though it's not clear this precept's one you can

Defensibly resort to just to knock
A hole in my position since the same
Old Whiggish case for staying in the van

Of progress come what may is apt to dock
More points off your late exercise to tame
Such heady notions as the rights of man

Or universal liberty. It's that
Whole discourse of enlightenment critique
You harness to your precious *Grundgesetz*

And fiddly stuff that any bureaucrat
Could turn his hand to, like the odd new tweak
Of phrasing or priority that gets

The broadsheets all a-flutter, starts a spat
Between the media pundits for a week,
Then promptly goes the way of all safe bets

For propping up the state with some old-hat
New gimmick.
        It's security you seek,
Friend Jürgen, through this mental trick that lets

You shift ground like a cautious alley-cat
And always hedge those bets as if to speak
A negative was to unleash the threats

Of chaos, anarchy, and all that you'll
Emphatically disown but back then did
Your best to bring about. You say my thought

Veers always to the negative, that Rule
One in my maxim-book runs 'Just don't kid
Yourself, it's sure to turn out bad' – a sort

Of Sod's Law for the early Frankfurt School
Of mental hard knocks where we never hid
Our growing sense of all that strove to thwart

Those fine ideals by which you came to fool
Yourselves and others in the reckless bid
For social transformation by a short-

Cut route. Don't get me wrong: you're not a tool
Of party faction, and you've helped us rid
Our civic selves of viruses we caught

Way back not just from all the sources known
To every school-kid but from that great spring
Of thought-corrupting verbiage as well

As genuine wisdom (note the switch of tone –
Negation can't apply to everything!)
Called 'German metaphysics'. Its hard sell

In bastard forms by thinkers mostly prone
To concepts with a proto-fascist ring
Still has its cautionary tale to tell

And one rehearsed in depth by you alone
In such exhaustive style.
        Yet still I'd bring
The charge – and don't take umbrage if I dwell

On it a moment longer – that you've grown
So used to bourgeois statecraft that you cling
To it as your deliverance from the spell

Of old associations or the lure
Of those collective passions that once fired
Your youthful soul (forgive this stupid turn

Of phrase) and spawned all sorts of premature
Since un-thought-out though fervently desired
Attempts to change the world. Not 'live and learn',

My pious moral, nor 'physician, cure
Thyself', a piece of wisdom hard acquired
Though quickly lost – more like advice you earn

Late on from one who's not entirely sure
He's earned the right to give it, but who's tired
Himself out in the chosen role of stern

Preceptor and enforcer of a pure-
Bred negative thought-system more admired,
You might think, for its stubborn will to spurn

All comforts, false or real, than any sense
Of truth. Like the old mystics, though with none
Of their deft sophistry, the looked-for end

Of all my negatives might yet condense
In aphoristic form the kinds of un-
Deluded yet utopian dividend

That came of having long held in suspense
All *promesse de bonheur* and every one
Of our long-cherished hopes. You know, my friend,

There are some passages of future-tense
Imagining or thoughts of mine that run
Flat counter to all that, as if to send

A message out that might yet recompense
Those labours of the negative begun,
Let this remind you, in my quest to mend

The fractured spheres of truth, love, beauty, art,
And every aspect of a life-world made
The more inhuman with each new device

For keeping sense and intellect apart
Or calling shackled reason to the aid
Of that which shackles it. This would suffice

To give the culture-industry fresh heart
For pushing through its mission to degrade
All values to their current market price

And so ensure that any off-the-chart
Achievement or experience won't evade
A form of Gresham's Law. Thus: paradise-

On-earth comes cheap so long as we all start
From what the current rule-book says and trade
For its large catalogue of ways to spice

Our lives up our prerogative to take
The critic's part, expose the lies concealed
Behind the promised joys, and so provide –

A point you've long neglected for the sake
Of ideal positives – the vital yield
That comes of negativity applied

Relentlessly to every sort of fake
Utopia.
      Whence the subterfuge revealed
In every dream-world's seamy underside

Or every latest sure-fire plan to rake
The dollars in and monetise the field
Of culture on a market-plan supplied

By figuring out what's likeliest to make
Us feel that welcome sense of class-wounds healed,
Conflicts resolved, or quarrels pacified

Through ideology's pernicious knack
Of falsely reconciling those that no
Such fix can mend. That's where we've most to lose

By pseudo-resolutions, those whose lack
Of real-world content merely goes to show
Them who's controlling everything and who's

On the receiving end.
      I'll soon hear back
From you, dear Jürgen, with some apropos
Remarks and no doubt civic-minded views

On why I'd do much better to attack
These issues in a manner that's not so
Precisely calculated to refuse

My readers any momentary slack
Or easing of the will to overthrow
Those mind-and-soul corrupting residues

Of pleasurable readiness to cede
One's critical responses in a sign
Of having finally surrendered all

Claim to autonomy. We're half-agreed,
I've often thought, on some of this though mine
Is pretty much the way the stress would fall

If you just factor in my famous need
To preempt everything that takes the shine
Off our bright hopes alongside yours to call

In aid a custom speech-act theory keyed
To how we talk when things are going fine
With our linguistic and, in the long haul,

Our social-civic lives. Yours, too, to plead
The case for a speech-ethic more benign
Than cock-eyed-optimist or off-the-wall,

As I've sometimes been given to suggest,
Not least when brought up short by some odd quote
Of yours about my making sure to keep

Well out of the front line at every test
Of readiness to practice what I wrote,
Or each reminder that ideas come cheap

While thought-in-action gives by far the best
Guide as to whether ideas we promote
Extend beyond mere theory and go deep

Into our lives.
        That's got it off my chest,
The churlish bit, so now to strike a note
Closer to your ideal: from this black sheep

Of negativity to one who pressed
Those positives that somehow got my goat,
Let's just for once not look before we leap.

The lively voice of Critical Theory

Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

Therefore, we are planning to link the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt school to the problems of our age. This means that we are looking for original and high-quality articles in the field of critical theory. To reach our goals, we gathered some of the leading scholars of critical theory in our editorial board to select the best articles for this journal.