REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

The Theory of Communicative Action, Jürgen Habermas
Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society
Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason
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Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Etherealization

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> We are starved to death, fed on the eternal sodom-apples of thought-forms.
> What we want is *complete* imaginative experience, which goes through the
> whole soul and body. Even at the expense of reason we want imaginative
> experience. For reason is certainly not the final judge of life. Though, if we
> pause to think about it, we shall realize that it is not Reason herself whom we
> have to defy, it is her myrmidons, our accepted ideas and thought-forms.
> Reason can adjust herself to almost anything, if we will only free her from her
> crinoline and powdered wig, with which she was invested in the eighteenth and
> nineteenth centuries. Reason is a supple nymph, and slippery as a fish.
>
> D.H. Lawrence 1978: 297

Jürgen Habermas fervently believes that through rational argumentation a just
society can be created and sustained, and his two-volume *Theory of Communicative
Action* (*TCA*) is a massive compendium which explicates these beliefs by squeezing
a vast array of high-powered theories into its brief one thousand or so pages.
Habermas's intentions are grand: his theory of communicative action is at once an
attempt to develop a socially-based theory of action as an alternative to the
subjectivist and individualist underpinnings of much of social theory, a "two-level
concept of society that connects the 'lifeworld' and 'system' paradigms," a critical
theory of modernity which retains the enlightenment ideal of rationally-grounded
societies, and a theory of meaning rooted in a developmental logic of world-
historical rationality.

Habermas seeks to find a *via media* between totalitarian closure and relativism,
to show why the modernist project of a universal reason is still viable, and to

propose a "public" discourse of rationally-grounded argumentative speech—or communicative action—as his answer. Despite the widespread attention Habermas's work has received, and despite my sympathy for issues Habermas has raised, I hope to show why his project is fundamentally flawed because of its uncritical assumption that only rationality can provide a legitimate standard for communicative reason. These flaws become particularly evident in examining his analyses of myth, action, lifeworld, Mead, and the "three spheres" of modernity. A number of other key themes from the book—his discussions of Weber, Parsons, Marx, Piaget and Kohlberg, language analysis, or systems theory, for example—although significant, simply could not be addressed in any detail here. I would direct the interested reader toward the large number of reviews and critiques which have already appeared, including *Habermas and Modernity* (1985), edited by Richard J. Bernstein; *Kommunikatives Handeln* (1986), edited by Alex Honneth and Hans Joas; and "Life-World and Communicative Action" in Fred Dallmayr's *Critical Encounters* (1987).

Like Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action*, Habermas's book draws from a selection of sociological theorists in order to arrive at a grand synthesis: one that includes Parsons' grand system of systems as a component. In fact this book, originally published in German in 1981, was part of a virtual genre of early 1980s books which made "grand theory" seem respectable again and which summarized and synthesized the so-called "classics" in the manner of Parsons while including Parsons as a "classic." C. Wright Mills originally applied the term "grand theory" to Parsons because Parsons shaped the world of ideas to fit his one-size-fits-all system: a jargon-ridden, grandiose theory in which all competing models could be subsumed. The good news for Parsons is that these books of the early 1980s have enshrined him among the "classics." The bad news is that these very same books have swallowed him up within even bigger Ukrainian Matreshka doll within doll systems.

In examining the numerous theorists who appear in *TCA*, it becomes obvious that Habermas relies most heavily on those deriving from the Kantian world, including Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Claude Levi-Strauss (whose structuralism Paul Ricouer has characterized as Kantianism without a transcendental ego). In his explicit appropriation of the mainstream sociological tradition of Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons, Habermas reaffirms the frequently unacknowledged grip of Kant over the sociological tradition. Parsons, for example, thought he saw a great synthesis in the work of Durkheim and Weber, but this "synthesis" is more accurately described as their shared foundations in Kant, which the two theorists put to very different uses. And the great synthesis Habermas seeks from his use of Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons, is, like that of Parsons, more accurately described as a case of seeing the world through Kantian-tinted glasses, the effect of which is to presume artificial dichotomies as given.

Weber is an exemplary case of that nominalistic mode of thought which begins with a typically Kantian false dichotomy of subject and object—claiming that they are primordially separate—then seeks to synthesize them. Weber himself merely assumed the Kantian legacy transmitted through Rickert and others, and then

resolutely stared its consequences in the face: We moderns are fated to an ever-increasingly mechanical instrumental logic of our own devising, a logic of rationality whose foundations are themselves utterly irrational and illogical. Meaning is a human faculty conferred on the chaos of experience. As Weber said of culture: " 'Culture' is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which *human beings* confer meaning and significance" (Shils and Finch 1949; p. 81). Though Weber saw more deeply into the ever-darkening consequences of modern rationalization than many of his more optimistic contemporaries, he could not see the possibility that the very process of rationalization was itself responsible for the Kantian view of the world process as a "meaningless infinity," a sensory manifold. That is, he could not see that the Kantian perspective might itself be a product of a faulty and by no means inevitable development of rationalization. That view of the logic of modernity excluded those extrarational, yet reasonable, tempered sources of human intelligence, such as sentiment and imagination, from scientific understanding and rational action. Though Weber premmis frequently viewed as a "humanistic" sociologist because of his emphasis on an interpretative, *verstehende Soziologie*, his deeply rooted belief in the Kantian worldview that so dominated German thought caused him to accept a reified conception of objectivity and science, and a relativist conception of values.

Although he criticizes Weber's subjectivist theory of action as inadequate, Habermas accepts his theory of the "disenchantment" of the world through rationalization as not only a historical fact but also as a logical necessity for the development of communicative action. The term "communicative" is used by Habermas in a technical sense to mean "rationally grounded convictions" produced by the intersubjective "validity claims" of propositional, argumentative speech. Against Weber's purposive-instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) he proposes communicative rationality: "this concept of *communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated convictions, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld" (*TCA* 1; p. 10).

Habermas does not allow the possibility that "disenchantment" may reflect the peculiar distortions inherent in the modern epoch, distortions due to a nominalized, split worldview of reified materialism and etherealized conventionalism. He cannot conceive that a "communicative re-enchantment" may be possible should the modern epoch be replaced by one that substitutes a humble "caretaking" attitude toward the great mystery of organic life and our place in its drama for the arrogant claims of rationality to be the chief or sole arbiter of human conduct. Habermas not only does not conceive of this possibility, he leaves no room for it, for his rationalistic theory of communicative action provides the sole measuring stick and vantage point for self-criticism: "In an extensively rationalized lifeworld, reification can be measured only against the conditions of communicative sociation, and not against the nostalgically loaded, frequently romanticized past of premodern forms of life" (*TCA* 2; p. 342).

If we apply Habermas's theory of communicative action to the method of the

book itself, we see an apparent conversation between the principal figures of social theory, based on dialogical principles of rational argumentation and striving toward intersubjective consensus. Or do we? The major place given to Marx, Weber, Durkheim, G.H. Mead, and Parsons as a group might instead signify an uncritical acceptance of the legitimacy of institutionalized academic sociology and its canonical theorists. Mead students may like the fact that Mead provides a basis for the theory of communicative action, but be disappointed that Habermas needs to tether Mead to Durkheim's Kantian-based theory of collective consciousness in order to provide the genesis of the generalized other. In *TCA* the canonical theorists appear to have their say, but Habermas's Kantian filter only allows through that which fits his rationalist presuppositions. This suggests that the structure informing his work is that of a projection of, and attraction to, his own unexamined proclivities rather than a genuine communicative dialogue in which a genuinely other view might be allowed its say against Habermas's wishes. Could it be that his own arguments are not rooted in the process of communicative action he calls for, that the apparent dialogue of theories masks an underlying "merely subjective" Kantian quest for synthetic system rather than objective consensus? Does Habermas preserve in his own thought an element of the assumed correctness of one's inner feelings, consciousness, and values usually associated with the traditional German romanticism he otherwise rejects?

TCA represents Habermas's move away from his earlier stress on a "consciousness" based theory in *Knowledge and Human Interests* to a broader model of intersubjective understanding influenced by the "linguistic turn" of philosophy. One might quibble, perhaps, that the transition from subjective to intersubjective is insufficient, in the sense that "intersubjective" still carries a sense of isolate subjects in communication, rather than the centrality of communication itself, intrinsically involving, not subjects, but persons, produced out of the communication process. More fundamentally, though, communicative reason is far more than the restrictive linguistic domain in which Habermas sees it. Human communication is a sign-process involving the varied human capacities and touching the deepest *extrarational* sources of intelligence built-into and grown out of the human body. These resources of reason, as I hope to show, are systematically rejected by Habermas's rationalistic worldview.

MYTH

In the first chapter of Volume One, Habermas attempts to come to terms with the concept of rationality in a number of ways, including extended sections on myth and action. He turns to "mythical world-views" because they represent, in his view, an antithesis to the modern understanding of the world, and thereby provide a mirror of otherness through which we can reflect upon the modern world. Habermas claims that this way of proceeding has the advantage of forcing him to turn from conceptual to empirical analysis, by which he means that "for the sake of simplicity," he confines himself to the results of two structuralists, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Maurice Godelier. He uses these two exemplars of twentieth-century

French rationalism as the sole representatives of mythic thought, and assiduously avoids any concrete discussion of a single myth in his "empirical" review. At least Lévi-Strauss, the "cerebral savage" as Clifford Geertz termed him, spent time studying specific myths, even if he did then divest them of their specific qualities in attempting to reveal an abstract universal structure of binary logic. But here and throughout *TCA* Habermas never engages in specific analyses of ethnographic, historical, or empirical data and never goes back to the source materials used by Lévi-Strauss, Piaget, Weber, or others that he draws on.

Habermas relies in particular on Maurice Godelier, a structuralist Marxist who appropriates the side of Marxism in which determining conditions of social life are "invisible," not consciously known in experience. As a structuralist, Godelier must deny what is essential to Marx: that there can be meaning in praxis. Structuralism denies meaning to "surface" phenomena, such as *parole* or speech, because it views meaning as a "faculty" of *langue* or deep structure not susceptible to modification through experience. From a structuralist perspective, myth is only interesting as a manifestation of the underlying logic of the system, not as a voicing and bodying forth of the inner life of humanity, of its achievements and tragedies, of recurrent experiences with wondrous and terrifying forces and movements of nature, and least of all, of the drama inherent in human communication.

Structuralism denies meaning to praxis, and hence it is rather odd, to say the least, for someone like Habermas concerned with a broad-based theory of "communicative action" as means to a free social life, to limit himself "for the sake of simplicity" to structuralist technicians who deny meaning at the level of action and who represent perhaps the most intellectualistic and abstracted approach to myth within the much broader spectrum of schools of thought. Strange also is his reliance on what I will call a totalitarian way of thinking: structuralism denies that flesh and blood human beings embody and body forth meaning and can criticize and revise the "code" of meaning, because it holds meaning to be purely "skeletal," merely the property of a single underlying universal and unchanging code of binary opposition, to be found in all human endeavor regardless of time, place, or circumstance. There is a myth to be found here, but it is the myth of twentieth-century binary thinking, itself the legacy of cultural nominalism. Structuralism reproduces the nominalist tendency to begin with a false dichotomy requiring synthesis. It projects this view on the world as an "objective" theory: nature and culture are clear and distinct categories, surface phenomena and deep structure are clear and distinct categories, individual versus social are clear and distinct categories, logic is a rational, binary system.

One gets the impression in Habermas's discussion of myth that those who live within mythic belief are extremely limited by our standards, that myth is a fuzzy and backward form of thought. Habermas uses the dichotomous premises of modern thought as found in structuralism and semantics to criticize myth as merely vague, as having "a deficient differentiation between *language and world*" (*TCA* 1; p. 49). That the primary purpose of myths might be precisely to express intensely felt relationships to the world—meaning "felt relationship" as that quality that literally lives in the transaction between person and world and not in system or logic

or brain—escapes Habermas's single-visioned view. The entire discussion of myth can be read as an example of how rationalism denigrates those "divine deep waters," as the Babylonians said, in which living myth swims: modalities of intelligence not reducible to the thin filmy surface of rationality.

Habermas's two primary criticisms of mythical worldviews are that they are marked by: "insufficient differentiation among fundamental attitudes to the objective, social, and subjective worlds; and the lack of reflexivity in worldviews that cannot be identified *as* worldviews, as cultural traditions. Mythical worldviews are not understood by members as interpretive systems that are attached to cultural traditions, constituted by internal interrelations of meaning, symbolically related to reality, and connected with validity claims—and thus exposed to criticism and open to revision" (*TCA* 1; pp. 53–4).

Both of these criticisms reveal a shallow ethnocentrism which disallows the voice of mythical worldviews as dialogical "other" in communicative debate. But even if one were to concede Habermas's criticisms, they still reveal the superiority of mythic to rational "communicative" thought. Mythic "thought" indeed does not view objective, social, and subjective worlds as autonomous in Habermas's sense, but rather as fluid and continuous. And there is no reason why mythic thought should radically differentiate these three spheres, because these spheres, as I will argue later, have their existence within the cultural nominalism of modernity, and are mere distortions, mentally skewed forms of communicative action rather than constituent features of it or the world.

Habermas's second criticism is that mythical understanding acts as a form of reification, and one not subject to criticism: How can one criticize the myth one believes in when one believes in it as reality itself? Although the possibility of critical perspective and of criticism itself is understandably an important consideration in modern society, Habermas neglects the ways in which even a single mythic world-view allows for critical conflict and ambiguity of interpretation, as almost any of the Greek myths attest and as a close look at traditional village life will reveal (Kirk, 1974; Turner 1967, 1969). More fundamentally, he neglects the facts that belief comes first and doubt comes after belief, and that myth and ritual involve more than just belief. We should remember that myth and ritual are living forms which transformed us into humans, a fundamental fact which never penetrates Habermas's rationalistic armor. In Habermas's evolutionary perspective, earlier embodiments of human communication are absolutely *"aufgehoben,"* that is, overcome or superseded by a seemingly ever-expanding rationality. Ritually-based societies did and do place severe limitations on personal autonomy, but ritual, contra Habermas, was perhaps the original means of "reflexivity." This was not the dispassionate reflexivity of rational communicators who know what their validity claims are about, but the humble reflexivity of humans confronted with a baffling world and a deeply-felt need to give it voice. By their very restricted and repetitive natures ritual action and myth gradually peeled humankind from participation and impelled us toward belief, toward the good and bad aspects of human belief. This process brought about the enlargement of imagination, but also the encasing of human perception within new webs constructed by these imaginings.

If emerging humankind had only possessed Habermas's communicative action

instead of ritual and mythic action, it could never have coped with the enormous anxieties produced by its surplus brain energy, it could never have unself-consciously formed the artistic expressions of the human psyche, the utterances of speech, the structures of language: it could never have become human. Rather than characterizing mythic-bound cultures as having "deficient differentiation," Habermas should have considered how they could have been so extraordinarily efficient, creating vital societies that often endured for millennia, creating art in paleolithic culture, developing the basis of virtually all modern grains in the neolithic age, inventing mathematics and astronomy in Babylonian civilization, giving birth to philosophy in ancient Greece. The real question Habermas never asks is whether myth might enhance rather than hinder communicative reason.

Habermas does not allow the possibility of a non-critical yet perceptive and self-illuminating narrative. Because he makes propositional argumentation based on the ability to respond yes or no foundational for communicative action, he unnecessarily disallows other modalities of communicative action, such as myth. D.H. Lawrence held a much more "evolved" view of myth and human conduct than does Habermas. In contrast to allegory, "Myth likewise is descriptive narrative using images. But myth is never an argument, it never has a didactic nor a moral purpose, you can draw no conclusion from it. Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description. We *can* expound the myth of Chronos very easily. We can explain its; we can even draw the moral conclusion. But we only look a little silly. The myth of Chronos lives on beyond explanation, for it describes a profound experience of the human body and soul, an experience which is never exhausted and never will be exhausted, for it is being felt and suffered now, and it will be felt and suffered while man remains man. You may explain the myths away: but it only means you go on suffering blindly, stupidly, 'in the unconscious,' instead of healthily and with the imaginative comprehension playing upon the suffering" (Lawrence 1978; p. 296).

"With the imaginative comprehension playing upon the suffering": this idea—virtually a definition of art—falls utterly outside the neat system Habermas has constructed, where "imaginative comprehension" would be reduced to so-called "aesthetic practical," subjective expressions. Because emerging humankind could not differentiate itself from the cosmos, from the sun and moon and birds and beasts and trees and stones, from the wondrous and terrifying passage of seasons, forces of weather, cycles of birth and decay and death, it is judged inferior to Habermas's modern rational communicator and barred from entry to the de-natured kingdom of communicative action, with its ultra-rationalized, autonomous individuals and logically airtight spheres of action: the world of the talking heads.

ACTION

Habermas's discussion of myth in Volume One is followed by a section on four sociological concepts of action. There he maps out the following progressive differentiation in relations of actor and world:

1. Teleological action. This conception of actions is defined by the actor's choice of successful means to realize his or her goal: "The central concept is that of a *decision* among alternative courses of action, with a view to the realization of an end, guided by maxims, and based on an interpretation of the situation" (*TCA* 1; p. 85). Instrumental action, rational or economic choice, game theory models and strategic action are all varieties of this category. Habermas claims this model has been at the center of action theory since Aristotle, but this seems to me to individualize Aristotle's conception of teleology. It derives from the spirit of the modern solitary individual of Weber's *Zweckrationalität* not the socially rooted ancient Greek citizen contextualized within the public sphere of the polis.

2. Normatively regulated action. This model deals with "members of a social group who orient their action to common values" (p. 85), and is the model of action informing role theory in the tradition of Durkheim and Parsons.

3. Dramaturgical action. If teleological action is excessively individualized and normatively regulated action is excessively socialized, dramaturgical action seems to include both sides, referring "to participants in interaction constituting a public for one another, before whom they present themselves" (*TCA* 1; p. 86). Central to this model is, of course, Erving Goffman's conception of the "presentation of self" in social situations. Or stated differently, Habermas's conception of dramaturgical action is entirely limited to Goffman's conception of presentation of self, ignoring other, less rationally calculating aspects of Goffman's work, such as the "framing" of situations. Much more significantly though, Habermas has ignored other potentially broader dramaturgical accounts of action, such as those of Kenneth Burke or Victor Turner. In Burke and Turner, dramaturgical action may include strategic self-presentation as one aspect, but it also involves broader dimensions such as specific scene and wider context, and especially in Turner, a critical relationship of actor, enacted, and "audience" which, in the case of ritual action, completely transcends the intentions of the individual actor to include those of competing factions, of the dead, of genders, of stages of life, and of the ongoing problems of a society as a whole.

Sociologists have been quite willing to cannibalize stock terms from drama, such as role, actor, or script, but sociology has fairly consistently shied away from taking on the full implications of the dramaturgical perspective, which involves a deep feel for and appreciation of the fundamental significance of signs and symbols, the fantastic, and the "per-forming" or actual forming of meaning through communication and communion involved in the enactment of human action and the drama of life. Habermas in particular reduces the diversity of dramaturgical action to the monopoly of rationalistic individuals presenting themselves, making life in all its fullness to be but a scrim behind which operates the Great Calculator.

What is Goffman's "dramaturgical" presentation of self seen from the perspective of drama? It seems to me that Goffman is better seen as an anti-dramaturgist, in the same way, perhaps, that many of the dominant playwrights of the same time period, such as Samuel Becket or Harold Pinter, have been anti-dramatists. Aristotle believed that drama produced catharsis, yet what one finds in plays such as

Becket's *Waiting for Godot* or Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is the denial of catharsis, the exact antithesis of Aristotle's conception of drama. If one thinks also of drama as producing unself-conscious absorption of the audience into the action of the play—a loss of self—then these plays and many others of the avant-garde also produce the opposite: the continuing breaking of action through self-consciousness. I am not saying that such works are not truly artistic: some powerfully capture the alienated and starved spirit of our time. But they do represent a peculiar moment in the history of drama and are by no means representative of drama as a whole.

Similarly, Goffman's theory is constantly focused on those moments of the eruption of self-consciousness, on those self-presentations of calculating individuals strategically creating facades, ever mindful of potential blockages. Goffman's "actors" seem more concerned with avoiding exposure of their true intentions than with attaining the catharsis of consummated human actions.

As we saw with Habermas's treatment of myth, unself-conscious belief does not meet the legitimacy claims that rationally chosen belief does. Similarly, drama in the sense of unself-conscious action would not have the legitimacy that rationally chosen strategic action does, let alone "communicative action." Perhaps this is why Habermas could rely on one narrow conception of drama, just as he relies on one narrow structuralist conception of myth: his rationalist predilections lead him to rationalist theories and away from considering contrary approaches or concrete experience.

Before going on to Habermas's own fourth type of action—communicative action—I want to consider briefly his use of Karl Popper's concept of "three worlds" as it relates to his types of action, since this distinction is central to Habermas's theories of communication and modernity. Early in this chapter on types of sociological action, Habermas quotes from Karl Popper's 1967 address, "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject," where Popper states:

> We may distinguish the following three worlds or universes: first, the world of physical objects or of physical states; secondly, the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioral dispositions to act; and thirdly, the world of *objective contents of thought*, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of art.
>
> (Popper, 1972; p. 106).

Although expressing strong reservations about Popper's ontological grounding of these categories, Habermas finds ways to "soften" them, and ends up using them in a way much more congruent with Max Weber's distinctions of several cultural spheres of value: science and technology, law and morality, and art and criticism. I will return to this problem later, but for the moment I want to indicate that Habermas considers teleological and strategic action as presupposing only the first world, the objective world, since actors coordinate their actions only on the basis of an egocentric calculus of utility. Normatively regulated action, because it involves not only "the objective world of existing states of affairs" but also "the social world to which the actor belongs as a role-playing subject," presupposes two worlds. This level is more inclusive, but still does not include "the actor *himself* as a world

toward which he can behave reflectively" (*TCA* 1; p. 90), as the next stage, dramaturgical action, does.

Still, because Goffman's dramaturgical action is seen by Habermas as concerned with the coordination of inner and outer worlds, self and audience, it remains at the two world level. Only with the "additional presupposition of a *linguistic medium* that reflects the actor's relations to the world as such" (*TCA* 1; p. 94) do we advance to the third world: "Only the communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their preinterpreted lifeworld, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation" (*TCA* 1; p. 95).

Habermas is clearly seeking a theory of action that can do justice to the intrinsically dialogical nature of human communication, and so it remains odd to me that dramatic expression would be considered uncommunicative. Because of an excessive regard for rational justification Habermas's theory of action divests living speech of its intrinsic quality. Surely there must be a way to do justice to both, and from my perspective the way to do so involves a revaluation of the capacity of human passions to utter living, yet non-critical, truth. In this sense Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, Prospero, and Lear may be among the most communicative "actors" the world has known, even if they could not give fully rational justifications for their actions—or any justification whatsoever. By contrast, those priests of secrecy at the Pentagon and Kremlin may have some of the most rational justifications ever devised regarding their plans to cremate the earth. Habermas shows the way to avoid the Scylla of unjustified action through communicative intersubjectivity, yet he does so at the cost of plunging into the Charybdis of verbal rationalizations: a legalistic "post-action" theory where explanation counts for more than the living act itself. Although communicative action theory denies it, "actions speak louder than words," and both actions and words can speak truer than rational afterthoughts.

LIFE-WORLD

Through his inclusion of the life-world, Habermas seeks to redress an undervaluing by rationalization theories of the everyday practices which contextualize meaning. Critically drawing from a variety of sources in the phenomenological tradition, especially Alfred Schutz, Habermas develops a conception of the life-world as that unquestioned, unproblematic background which stands in contrast to communicative action. Although providing the context for communicative action, as common knowledge, the life-world is "the conservative counterweight to the risk of disagreement," and is "immune from critique." As Habermas says in introducing the concept in Volume 1, "Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld. . . . The lifeworld also stores the interpretative work of preceding generations. It is the conservative counterweight to the risk of disagreement that arises with every actual process of reaching understanding; for communicative actors can achieve an understanding only by way of taking yes/no positions on criticizable validity claims. *The relation between these weights changes*

with the decentration of worldviews. The more the worldview that furnishes the cultural stock of knowledge is decentered, the less the need for understanding is covered *in advance* by an interpreted lifeworld immune from critique, and the more this need has to be met by the interpretative accomplishments of the participants themselves" (*TCA* 1; p. 70).

One sees in this statement Habermas's belief that human development is a process of progressive rationalization. The traditional life-world placed fetters on "rationality potentials," which Habermas sees as progressively released in the "decentering" transformations from traditional mythic worldviews through religious-metaphysical worldviews to modern worldviews. In this evolutionary process, there occurs a separation of systemic "steering mechanisms" from the life-world, as well as an increasing complexity in systems and rationalization of the life-world.

Habermas points to the "colonization of the lifeworld" by "autonomous sub-systems" as a key problem of uncontrolled instrumental rationality, and sees his theory of communicative action as providing a medium of rationality for balancing lifeworld and system, and for coordinating relations of the life-world to the three autonomous objective, social, and subjective spheres. He is not against the ratio-nalization of the life-world per se, but wants to place his good kind of communica-tive rationalization against the "colonization of the lifeworld" by instrumental rationalization. Yet he never considers whether a culture based on achieving understanding "only by way of taking yes/no positions on criticizable validity claims" could remain viable and vital. Could its members always wait for the communicative question to be validly posed, let alone answered, before acting? Could painters paint, carpenters hammer, scientist hypothesize, if they had to wait for the problem to be self-consciously posed as a criticizable validity claim on which they had to take a yes/no position within a consensual community? If actor A saw actor B about to be run over by a speeding train and sought to communicate the problem linguistically through propositional argumentation, resulting in actor B achieving a consensual understanding of the problem at the last moment before being splattered by the train, would that be communicative action? If actor A instinctively ran and tackled actor B out of the way of the train with brute force, would that be merely a "power claim" (*TCA* 2; p. 31) and therefore not communi-cative action? Or if it could be regarded as communicative action, would the brute act itself be so regarded, or merely its rational "criticizable validity claim" which would function as the logical afterthought to the act? If actor B did not want to be rescued, would that invalidate the act, since a participant rejected its validity claim?

One of the problems is that Habermas has conceived the life-world as a passive reservoir of knowledge with no capacities for reasoning activity. He could have safely drawn from the Kantian life-concepts of George Simmel or Max Scheler, who held life to be an active force, dialectically opposed to rational form or Geist (Rochberg-Halton 1989). But Habermas's lifeworld is drawn from the anti-naturalist tradition of Dilthey, Schutz, Husserl, and Wittgenstein: biology plays no part in his conception, he conceives life solely from the rationalist's viewpoint as "tacit knowledge."

Habermas claims system and life-world exist in opposition to one another. He seems to deny the many systemic and critical capacities that mark the life-world, although not necessarily rational: the long-term tempering of beliefs through experience, the development of instinctual proclivities such as the capacity for speech, the development of habits of belief providing common sense prejudices, wisdom, traditions, and crafts. Because of Habermas's commitment to the bifurcated world of Kant and its rigid tendency toward dichotomy, he is incapable of seeing that his system and life-world distinction may be a false abstraction, a legacy of cultural nominalism. If he were to use the concept of living habit developed by the pragmatists, he might see the possibility of a continuum between the unreflective habit that is the life-world and the reflective habit of critical rationality or system. He might take more seriously the problem of how the life-world generated "communicative action" out of itself without recourse to the principles of communicative action: by definition the life-world cannot explain its actions.

The peculiar passivity and inertness of the life-world is revealed when Habermas contrasts it to communicative action as the locus of the problematic: the life-world "cannot become problematic, it can at most fall apart" (*TCA* 2; p. 130). Were Habermas ever to climb down from his lofty meta-meta-theoretical perch to examine the substance of myths and rituals, he might see that they form living archives of humanity's attempts to deal with the problems of affliction, life-transitions, death and suffering, as well as the celebration of life and community. Were he seriously to draw from Dewey and Mead's pragmatic philosophy of experience, he would see that problem-finding, though reasonable, is not a fundamentally rational process, and that the finding and resolving of problems through reasonable, communicative means is not restricted to rationally linguistic validity claims, but is an in-built facet and potential of human experience. Were he to go yet further, he would see that the purpose of communicative rationality is to give itself to and be absorbed by the life-world, not the reverse.

The life-world itself is the incorporation of prior experience in human traditions and practices, yet Habermas's life-world seems to be formed out of pure innocence rather than experience. When he defines it as "immune from critique," he neglects the possibility that the life-world, as the product of a vast span of experience, may itself be a form of implicit critique or subliminal, criticizable interpretation. Consider John Dewey's way of putting it, "There exists at any period a body of beliefs and of institutions and practices allied to them. In these beliefs there are implicit broad interpretations of life and the world. these interpretations have consequences, often profoundly important. In their actual currency, however, the implications of origin, nature, and consequences are not examined and formulated. The beliefs and their associated practices express attitudes and responses which have operated under conditions of direct and often accidental stress. They constitute, as it seems to me, the immediate primary material of philosophical reflection" (Dewey 1960; p. 106). Dewey's "life-world," unlike Habermas's, is forged out of problematic life-experience, and is not necessarily arbitrary. In Dewey's view both human conduct and institutions represent a dramatic dialogue of impulse and habit. System or social structure, in other words, is regarded as open-ended habit. Common human

experience, localized in situational contexts, rather than rational linguistic validity claims, provides the yardstick for both individual conduct and systemic norms.

As the incorporation of prior experience, the life-world may possess more reason in a given situation than communicative action. How many times have rational decisions, fortified by linguistic validity claims and consensual agreement, been shown to be inferior to traditional practices which could not be rationally justified by their practitioners? One can cite modern attempts to make "perfect" symmetrical violins which lacked the beautiful sound of an asymmetrical Stradivarius, Maoist attempts to utilize land on mountains and high hills for agriculture which resulted in ruining irrigation systems, or "functionalist" urban and architectural design which ignored the informal rules of neighborhood interaction. In these examples it is usually the case that the traditional practice incorporated a broader experience and interpretation of the problem than could be available to communicative rationality, even if this information could not be articulated. This suggests that the life-world should be conceived as more than a form of inadequate rationality or as a passive data-base for critical rationality.

Habermas believes that an impassable gulf exists between life-world and discursive thought: "Members of a social collective normally share a life-world. In communication, but also in processes of cognition, this only exists in the distinctive, pre-reflexive form of background assumptions, background receptivities or background relations. The life-world is that remarkable thing which dissolves and disappears before our eyes as soon as we try to take it up piece by piece . . . one can label as a life-world only those resources that are not thematized, not criticized. The moment one of its elements is taken out and criticized, made accessible to discussion, that element no longer belongs to the life-world. I also think it is impossible to create new forms of living by talking and talking about things" (Dews 1986; p. 109).

Critical communication, in other words, nullifies the life-world. Conversely, rationality cannot give itself to the life-world. Surely this dichotomy proposed by Habermas is not necessary, for it denies both the possibility that life-worlds can grow through human cultivation, (or, for that matter, that they can atrophy or self-destruct from lack of it), and that the highest critical capacities may serve the life-world rather than pulverizing it. Perhaps a much more fruitful way of viewing what Habermas sees as a dichotomy between the critical (or system) and the life-world, is to view the two as linked polarities of human existence: polarities marked by potentially creative tensions as well as potentially destructive tendencies when the polar relation is severed. From this perspective it would be by no means "impossible" as Habermas says, "to create new forms of living by talking and talking about things"—as long as one acknowledges that talk is experientially rather than rationally based. Idle talk is, of course, nothing next to creative human conduct. Yet there are forms of "talking" essential to the creation of "new forms of living," as myths and sagas, poetry, religious and literary writings, political speeches and manifestos, and even scientific papers have shown so many times in human history. Stranger though, for Habermas's denial that talk can create new forms of living, are the implications for his theory of consensual communicative action. His theory of

communicative action is, if nothing else, a "talking cure." Are members of a
society supposed simply to nod to "create new forms of living?" Or more broadly,
does this mean that new forms of living arise solely from the life-world and apart
from critical capacities? If this were true it would simply reassert the uncontrolled
subjectivity typical of traditional German romanticism in the guise of a life-world
concept, thereby undermining Habermas's claim to have moved away from a
philosophy of consciousness or subjectivity.

MEAD AND DURKHEIM

Volume Two opens with a description of how the philosophy of consciousness was
attacked early in the twentieth-century by both analytic philosophy of language and
behaviorism. Habermas mentions three times that these two separate traditions
had common origins in the pragmatism of Peirce, despite going off in their own
directions. Yet oddly enough, he ignores Peirce's critique. He notes that Mead also
provides a point of common intersection between the two traditions and therefore
that he will examine Mead's theory as providing a "communication-theoretic
foundation of sociology," yet one with certain gaps needing to be filled by
Durkheim's "theory of social solidarity connecting social integration to system
integration" (*TCA* 2; p. 1). Since Habermas relies heavily on linguistic philosophy
and speech act theory—which Mead did not—it is strange that he totally ignores
Peirce, who developed explicit linguistic analyses and a conception of logic as
semiotic. As with his discussion of myth, Habermas never thinks to make validity
claims for his selection of one theorist over another, despite the centrality of
rationally and explicitly grounded argumentation to his own theory of communica-
tive action.

Habermas traces Mead's "logical genesis" of meaning, passing from gestural
through symbolically mediated interaction to normatively guided interaction. He
believes that in the transition from symbolically mediated to normatively guided
interaction, "there is a gap in the phylogenetic line of development which can be
filled in with Durkheim's assumptions concerning the sacred foundations of morali-
ty, the ritually preserved fund of social solidarity" (*TCA* 2; p. 2). Another way of
interpreting this "gap" is that Mead's continuous theory of the emergence and
evolution of human symbolic communication, rooted in a theory of social experi-
ence, does not satisfy Habermas's Kantian predilections for discontinuous evolu-
tion requiring an idealized, anti-naturalistic conception of norms as a means of
artificially "synthesizing" subject and object worlds. This is apparent in the follow-
ing statement: "Human cognitions and expressions, however shaped by language
they may be, can also be traced back to the natural history of intelligent perfor-
mances and expressive gestures in animals. Norm consciousness, on the other
hand, has no equally trivial extralinguistic reference; for obligations there are no
unambiguous natural-historical correlates, as there are for sense impressions and
needs" (*TCA* 2; p. 61). The first sentence can be read as Mead's theory, the second
one as Durkheim's. Both are then "synthesized" through Habermas's discussion of
the differentiated speech requirements of communicative action.

It seems odd when one knows of Mead and Dewey's participation in the Ameri-
can genetic epistemology movement (which later moved to Switzerland with James

Mark Baldwin and was taken over by Jean Piaget), and especially of Mead's interest in "emergent evolutionism" that Habermas sees Mead as ignoring a phylogenetic account of human development in favor of an ontogenetic account of socialization. Mead does draw most of his examples from individual interactions, but it seems to me that these discussions are always framed within a phylogenetic context of the natural emergence of human symbolic communication and rationality. Perhaps because Habermas ignores the place of experience in Mead's thought, he does not see that Mead's account of human development is an experiential phylogenesis—evolution discussed from the perspective of the social act. Habermas's linguistic conceptualism consistently causes him to avoid the place of social experience in the shaping of myth, ritual, action, and the life-world, and the genesis of Mead's "generalized other." He fails to see that Mead sought to account for an evolving process of social cooperation and signification which generated an increasingly self-interpreting sign-world. This origin of interpretation not only could give body and voice to the otherness of death, affliction, the animals and plants of the surrounding environment and the place of humans in that environment, but in so doing, it helped to shape the emerging inner landscape of human consciousness and symbolic communication and the outer landscape of social practices and institutions. In coming to generalize the otherness of experience, emerging humankind radically broadened the possibilities of its participation in the environment. Mead may have outlined this process in overly bland and otherwise limited ways in his discussion of the generalized other, but it seems to me that his account is theoretically more satisfactory than Durkheim's sociological Kantianism. Habermas finds in Durkheim's theory of *conscience collective* the equivalent of a quasi-transcendental grounding for norm consciousness: he reintroduces the element of idealistic foundationalism which Mead's theory makes unnecessary.

This becomes clearer in Habermas's interpretation of Durkheim's view of truth as an ideal added to and above experience and deriving from collective identity: "The idea of truth can get from the concept of normative validity only the impersonality—supratemporal—of an idealized agreement, of an intersubjectivity related to an ideal communication community. This moment of a 'harmony of minds' is *added* to that of a 'harmony with the nature of things.' The authority standing behind knowledge does not coincide with moral authority. Rather, the concept of truth combines the objectivity of experience with a claim to the intersubjective validity of a corresponding descriptive statement, the idea of the correspondence of sentences to facts with the concept of an idealized consensus. It is only from this *combination* that we get the concept of a criticizable validity claim" (*TCA* 2; p. 72). Habermas remarks in a footnote that this dualistic conception comes close to Peirce's conception of truth, but Peirce does not hold to the nominalistic divide between thought or representation and reality which Durkheim and Habermas do. Defining truth as the last result to which the community of inquirers would be led, and of the nature of a sign or representation, Peirce goes on to say that the object of that representation, "that to which the representation should conform, is itself something in the nature of a representation, or sign—something noumenal, intelligible, conceivable, and utterly unlike a thing-in-itself" (Peirce 1935; vol. 5, p. 553). Peirce's thoroughly semiotic conception of truth denies the materialized conception

of experience and idealized conception of intersubjective representation *added* to experience. Similarly Mead's naturalistic account roots symbolic communication in experience and not in a conceptualistic realm superimposed upon it. Human evolution is marked by the progressive incorporation of otherness into sign-habits: internalized dispositions and externalized cults and practices.

Cults and social groups are in Mead's view means of engaging in communicative, though not necessarily self-reflective or rational, dialogue with the external and internal environment. The core of the generalized other in this sense is that it is a habitual representation of conceivable experience produced by experience and carrying consequences for future experience.

Habermas does see how the generalized other as a dialogue of "me" and "I" provides a critique of the subjectivist philosophy of consciousness inherent in Durkheim's thought, yet because of his neat separation of objective, social, and subjective worlds, he again infuses his dichotomous view into Mead's distinction, seeing it in terms of an external world of norm-conforming actions versus an inner world of spontaneous experiences (*TCA* 2; p. 42). He ignores Mead's pragmatic perspective, in which there is an emergent or novel aspect to nature itself, just as the inner world is largely an internalization of experience. The inner world is not only "spontaneous experiences" but includes long-term tempered experiences grown into the body, biological experience as well as traditional and historical experience.

In what seems to me a fundamental misreading of the generalized other, perhaps based in part on a lack of clarity in Mead, Habermas says that the generalized other "is supposed to have arisen by way of the internalization of group sanctions. However, this explanation can only hold for ontogenesis, for groups must have first been constituted as units capable of acting before sanctions could be imposed in their name. Participants in symbolically mediated interaction can transform themselves, so to speak, from exemplars of an animal species with an inborn, species-specific environment into members of a collective with a lifeworld only to the degree that a generalized other—we might also say: a collective consciousness or a group identity—has taken shape" (*TCA* 2; p. 45). Habermas fails to see that groups arise in the same way as individuals for Mead—as habituated practices which incorporate prior experiences and are in communicative dialogue with the internal and external environment. He introduces the idea of collective representations as a collective social glue providing the basis of "norm conformity." Religious symbolism and the sacred form a netherland of "paleosymbols" in which behavior is no longer guided by instincts and not yet governed by the properties of propositional linguistic speech. Religious symbolism represents the transformation from nature to culture. The import of Habermas's use of Durkheim is to reintroduce the Kantian dichotomy, undercut by Mead's philosophy, of a nature incapable of signification and a culture incapable of natural experience. He must then limit "communicative action" to rationally grounded linguistic argumentation instead of the much broader category of dialogical significatory experience which Mead could have provided. As with the treatment of myth, practice is subsumed under the requirements of rational structure.

THE THREE SPHERES OF MODERNITY

If we start from the view that modern structures of consciousness condense to the three complexes of rationality [i. e., cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, aesthetic-practical] then we can think of the structurally possible rationalization of society as a combination of the corresponding ideas (from the domains of science and technology, law and morality, art and eroticism) with interests, and their embodiment in correspondingly differentiated orders of life. This (rather risky) model would enable us to state the necessary conditions for a nonselective pattern of rationalization: The three cultural value spheres have to be connected with corresponding action systems in such a way that the production and transmission of knowledge that is specialized according to validity claims is secured; the cognitive potential developed by expert cultures has, in turn, to be passed on to the communicative practice of everyday life and to be made fruitful for social action systems; finally, the cultural value spheres have to be institutionalized in such a balanced way that the life-orders corresponding to them are sufficiently autonomous to avoid being subordinated to laws intrinsic to heterogeneous orders of life.

(Habermas *TCA* 1; pp. 239–40)

Habermas believes that modernity can be characterized by the differentiation of three autonomous and logically valid spheres of rationality possessed of their own inner logics: cognitive-instrumental rationality, moral-practical rationality, and aesthetic-practical rationality. Triadic divisions of reason are now new, but Habermas is appropriating the modern tradition of Max Weber and Immanuel Kant and not the trifold beauty, goodness and truth of the scholastic *summun bonum*.

For a truly communicative rationality to develop, Habermas claims that a balance between the three spheres is needed, one which will ensure undistorted communication and legitimation. But the problem is much more fundamental. The very spheres themselves, as he has defined them, are products of an uncritical application of nominalized rationality, and reproduce the old Cartesian/Kantian problem of how to relate a primal object and its mechanics with an isolate subject and its values (and with a society whose inner logic is "norm conformity"). One of the dangerous, and I would say mythic, implications of Habermas's argument for the rational autonomy of the three worlds is the subjectivism which underlies his definition of each. Technicalism underlies the objective world, so that "cognitive-instrumental" rationality and science and technology are intrinsically technical and strategic in nature, and any moral or aesthetic considerations have to be "brought in" by communicative coordination from the outside, from the other "spheres." The faceless herd animal constitutes the social world, so that "moral-practical" rationality and law and morality are intrinsically about norm following, regardless of objective conditions or subjective perspective. The subjective world is the sphere of "aesthetic-practical" rationality, art and eroticism: a parody of subjective idealism and romanticism without inherent objective or moral tempering except insofar as it coordinates itself with these seperate spheres. And what, I ask, does "aesthetic-practical" mean other than a misconception: the "-practical" addition to

aesthetic is as needless as the "rationality" addition to "aesthetic-practical" is wrong.

Habermas seeks to acknowledge the genuine achievement of different spheres of conduct in the modern world, the ways in which art and morality, for example, broke free from their traditional religious moorings and developed autonomous secular standards. But in the place of a medieval religious civilization which prevented the emergence of differentiated spheres of conduct, he would collapse the three domains of science and technology, law and morality, and art and eroticism to a modern equivalent by viewing them as "complexes of rationality." The reader should turn to the table on p. 238 of Volume One to see how Habermas fits these categories into systematic boxes, as if art and eroticism fit neatly into different aspects of one box, and as if erotic life is cleanly separable from moral life and can only be associated with "aesthetic-practical rationality."

The development of modern art has much more to do with the evolution and expansion of human feeling than it has to do with mere rationality, unless one adopts a purely technical and external approach, as Habermas does. And the linking of science and technology as if they were synonymous, and as if they could be characterized by "cognitive-instrumental rationality," reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of modern science. Science is a method of inquiry intrinsically incorporating "intersubjective" inquirers into the very notion of objectivity, as well as extrarational tempering—learning by experience. Science, conceived from a truly "communicative action" perspective, as opposed to Habermas's, includes rationality but is by no means limited to it, and a rationality intrinsically subject to criticism by all other inquirers rather than an individualistic "cognitive-instrumental rationality" unbounded internally by the critical community. In other words, the possibility of communicative action is built into these spheres of conduct internally, and not merely in an external coordinating action of linguistically-based intersubjectivity.

Against Habermas's theory that the three spheres are "complexes of rationality" whose balancing results in "good" rationalization, I would juxtapose Peirce's view that rationality is but an aspect of one sphere, the logical, defined differently from Habermas, and that the logical sphere is dependent on the ethical sphere, which in turn is itself dependent upon the aesthetic sphere. In Peirce's view of the normative sciences logic is conceived as self-controlled thought, which is a sub-species of self-controlled conduct, or ethics, which in turn is dependent upon the intrinsically admirable, or aesthetics. Even logic, in Peirce's conception, involves more than rationality, as illustrated by Peirce's incorporation of abductive inference within logic (Rochberg-Halton 1986). Although I cannot discuss it at length here, Peirce's approach provides a much broader basis for the *relative* autonomy of the three modalities than does Habermas's rational perspective. This argument amounts to overturning the dominant categories of modern thought and their prime avatar, rationality. As opposed to a view of humanity becoming matured by becoming better rationalized, it is more accurate to see modernity as a process of disembodiment, in which humanity becomes increasingly denatured, dematured, and etherealized through its overreliance on decontextualized rationality.

REASON'S MYRMIDON

It is clear that Habermas has the image of the totalitarian Nazi Germany of his youth as a key element of his own life-world. He is rightly concerned with designing a theory that can prevent such irrational forces from dominating and destroying, and that can provide the basis for a just society. Yet for all of his just concerns, he seems to me to have taken an insufficiently critical examination of the place of rationality in human communication and modern life: He thinks that we only need to "improve" our conception of rationality, but he neglects to ask whether we need to question more fundamentally the place of rationality in the general scheme of things. The forces of twentieth-century totalitarianism did not simply represent irrationality, but involved the most advanced forms of rationality as well: our century can be described as a time of rational madness.

Habermas's theory of "communicative rationality" only increases the role which modernity assigned to rationality as the be-all and end-all of life. The task of theory today should be instead to find the means to reactivate the fullness of human reason while carefully reharnessing rationality to serve reason. Nostalgic sentimentalism will not do, but neither will nostalgic rationalism.

What is perhaps most strange in this complex work is that Habermas never critically examines his presupposition that critical rationality, rooted in linguistic validity claims, provides the only possible basis for a communicative action society. Because of Habermas's limited understanding of Peirce, Dewey, and communication and Mead's theories of signs, he fails to see the ways in which these theories show rational linguistic symbols to form only a portion of rational symbols and rational symbols to form only a portion of symbols, and symbols to form only a portion of those signs which constitute reasonableness—in other words, socially based communicative reason circumscribes communicative rationality. Habermas is handicapped by a blindingly thin view of signification and a bloated conception of the place of propositional rational language within semiosis.

Habermas's *TCA* may involve "subjects," but it says nothing about *persons*. The irreducible person, "intersubjective" but qualitatively unique, says with Walt Whitman, "I and mine do not convince by arguments: we convince by our presence." The very notion of "presence" in communicative action is virtually absent in Habermas's rationalistic account. Yet the bodying forth of new ideas through the person does not come about simply through parliamentary rules of debate. Rather, as Lewis Mumford observes: " . . . men become susceptible to ideas, not by discussion and argument, but by seeing them personified and by loving the person who so personifies them" (Mumford 1951; p. 101). But love plays no real part in Habermas's version of the evolution of reason, as it does for Mumford. Love is, after all, neither logical nor "differentiated": communicative rationality, not love, is the engine of historical development. Habermas would probably discount Mumford as illogical, but what would he say to Charles Peirce, the bone-dry arch logician who included agapasm—evolutionary love—as an indispensable aspect of evolution and particularly human evolution: "In genuine agapasm . . . advance takes place by virtue of a positive sympathy among the created springing from

continuity of mind. . . . The agapastic development of thought is the adoption of certain mental tendencies, not altogether heedlessly, as in tychism [Darwinian], nor quite blindly by the mere force of circumstances or of logic, as in anancasm [which would include Hegelianism], but by an immediate attraction for the idea itself, whose nature is divined before the mind possesses it, by the power of sympathy, that is, by virtue of the continuity of mind; and this mental tendency may be of three varieties, as follows. First, it may affect a whole people or community in its collective personality, and be thence communicated to such individuals as are in powerful sympathetic connection with the collective people, although they may be intellectually incapable of attaining the idea by their private understandings or even perhaps of consciously apprehending it. Second, it may affect a private person directly, yet so that he is only enabled to apprehend the idea, or to appreciate its attractiveness, by virtue of his sympathy with his neighbors, under the influence of a striking experience or development of thought . . . Third, it may affect an individual, independently of his human affections, by virtue of an attraction it exercises upon his mind, even before he has comprehended it. This is the phenomenon which has been called the *divination* of genius; for it is due to the continuity between man's mind and the Most High" (CP 1935; pp. 5.304, 307).

Social theorists will likely cringe at the wording "Most High," which the religions have called God, and which signified for Peirce the evolutionary creation and growth of reason in the universe. Habermas, of course, thinks the whole business to be some archaic remnant, dressed up as the "sacred," a self-image formed out of collective narcissism and having no contemporary value other than having started the ball of human consciousness rolling. Yet Peirce's idea implies something quite different from Habermas—and from religion. It is that there is a living continuity between the human mind and the general laws of nature and that because of this sympathy or continuity, human minds can become touched by, while co-creating, purposive evolution. This view is radically opposed to the Kantian view of a human mind set apart from a mechanistic universe—expressed in Weber's ideas on culture and so-called purposive or instrumental rationality, in Durkheim's "collective faculty" theory of mind added to nature but fundamentally different, and in Habermas's all-pervasive rationalism.

What is most important here—and one need not accept Peirce's semiotic realist understanding of the continuity between the human mind and the living cosmos—is that there is a mode of evolution by love or sympathetic communication, which need not involve self-conscious understanding, rational argumentation through linguistically based validity claims, or any rationality at all: a thoroughly social form of communicative reason rooted in the unconscious, extrarational, biosemiotic temperament of the human animal. Far from being "*aufgehoben*" or surpassed by the civilization of rationality, sympathetic communication or evolutionary love remains the "supple nymph" on which the "powdered wig" of modern rationality sits.

Habermas presents us a vision of society which would discount the sympathetic impulse to meaning by making it a mere *conscience collective*, not touched by experience and continuity with nature. The condition of communicative action would, in my opinion, literally destroy the living impulse to meaning through its

disallowances of ideas which cannot yet be rationally justified. Far from being an antidote to the self-destructive tendencies in modernity, *The Theory of Communicative Action* is an ideal document of the escape from life in the late twentieth-century under the dead hand of ethereal rationality.

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Habermas's Interactionism: The Micro-Macro Link To Politics

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Interactionist theory is persistently lacking on two issues. The first has been stated so often that it has become cliché: interactionism lacks a politics. The second is more contemporary: interactionism remains a micro theory, limited to defining situations in terms of consciousness and self, without a strong theoretical linkage to the macro institutional level. Both claims are half truths, and any number of citations could be presented to refute both. But for all those citations, both accusations stick; each has a half which is true. Thus when a theory comes along which addresses both issues, it deserves attention. Jürgen Habermas's (1984/87) theory of communicative action has a potential for providing a strong political

agenda for interactionist research, and for linking interactionist studies to a macro theory of social structure. The theory of communicative action is in no sense complete, but its promise cannot be ignored.

This endorsement of Habermas must be circumscribed by the acknowledgement that much about his work will limit its appeal to interactionists. On at least three counts Habermas may put off interactionist readers. First, Habermas's empiricism is not ethnographic; he is a conceptual theorist, not a field worker. I want to argue that to understand his meta-theory, we must situate it as a response to what he observes in the politics of contemporary life, but these observations are made at a Parsonian level of generality. Just as Parsons' extensive "applied" essays are often forgotten in the face of his meta-theoretical musings, so the empirical basis of Habermas's thought can get lost in his encyclopedic references to an interdisciplinary array of work. But much more than Parsons, Habermas's work does seem to me to be "problem driven." Since this is still not "data driven," some will be put off by his style.

Second, is the question of Mead. Interactionists will be pleased that in Habermas's redoing of the Parsonian project—*The Theory of Communicative Action* echos *The Structure of Social Action* in both title and design—Mead is now given pride of place alongside Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons. But some may be equally distressed at the implication that a theory cannot be based on Mead alone, and needs these others to complement his work. I understand Habermas not as appropriating Mead to a European agenda, but rather as reading the Europeans (among whom I include Parsons) as pragmatists. A pragmatist logic pervades communicative action theory, and it is only by reading Habermas as a pragmatist that the oxymoron "communicative reason" makes any sense. More of this below. The present point is that Habermas is a theoretical internationalist and interdisciplinary eclectic, and readers who are put off by this will have problems with his work.

Third, and most troubling, is Habermas's reliance on the concept of "reason." The word elicits two worries. The first is that Habermas is returning us to a transcendental theory in which abstract criteria govern what is appropriate "rationality" in communication. The second is that Habermas is excluding the emotional and aesthetic bases of symbolism. Both worries misrepresent Habermas's project, at least as I read it, but Habermas has not been as clear as he might have about what "reason" does mean within a communicative action theory.

Why, then, read Habermas? The reader wishing to find a specific framework into which ethnographic data can be fitted will be disappointed. I will suggest below that communicative action theory has applications, but to approach it as an "applied" theory is mistaken. Nor is Habermas's offering a Parsonian "convergence" of the many sources he invokes. Rather he is marshalling theoretical resources to confront what he understands as the fundamental threat of our time, which is simply the *loss of communicative rationality* at all levels of interaction. Interpersonally, within organizations, and at the level of national and international politics, we have lost both the interactive competence to argue, rather than merely assert, our respective positions. As a society, we have lost the imperative of responsibility which would require such arguments as foundational to communication.

The political situation of our time is amenable to interactionist research because it is a communicative problem. But Habermas's point about this loss is not moralistic, it is structural. Micro-interaction can only be understood as proceeding within a macro-structure. As in the work of Anthony Giddens, Jeffrey Alexander, and Randall Collins, there is a recursive implication of the macro and micro, each of which creates the possibility for the other. Macro-structure constrains micro-interaction, out of which macro-structure is constituted.

Where Habermas is perhaps distinct is in his linkage of both questions, the political issue of communicative rationality and the theoretical issue of micro-macro linkage. By making communicative action the focus of his theory, Habermas places interactionism at center stage. But by placing interaction in a theory which is politically motivated and micro-macro linked, he destroys any sense of interactionism occupying a singular niche within social science. Those who want to bring interactionism into a political and micro-macro problematic will find an extraordinary resource in Habermas's work. Interactionists who want to retain a separate niche will be put off.

To those who wish to read further, I want to attempt the most capsule of summaries of what communicative action theory says. After reducing Habermas's thousand pages of argument to three one-sentence "theses," I will suggest two specific applications of interactionist research to the development of communicative action theory. My orientation emphasizes Mead, not only because of his particular interest to readers of *Symbolic Interaction*, but also because of my contention that Habermas is imposing a pragmatist rereading on the "classic" corpus of sociological theory, and so Mead occupies a particularly important place.

Here, then, are my three theses on Habermas, with brief supporting comments on each.

1. *The contemporary political problem is communicative, and problems of communication are political.* In 1978 an interview was published in which Habermas pushes Marcuse to respond to the question which is foundational to critical theory, "Who determines what the better life is?" (Habermas 1978, pp. 136–37). Marcuse replies that "Whoever still doesn't know what a better life is, is hopeless." This response summarizes the failure of classic critical theory, which is its univocal elitism. To understand Habermas we must recognize him coming out of the Frankfurt School tradition of Marcuse and Adorno, but also realizing its failure. Habermas's response to Marcuse expresses what he considers to be wrong not only with critical theory, but also with society. Nowhere, I think, is the agenda for communicative action theory stated more concisely:

> No [Habermas replies], the problem is that everyone knows very well what a better life is, but that, at least here and now, these conceptions don't coincide. . . . Value standards do not fall abstractly from heaven, once and for all. . . . One determines which values are to be rationally accepted and pursued only . . . by making what everyone could want in this situation plausible.

Habermas is arguing that the essential problem of politics is communicative. People all have conceptions of a better life, but these don't coincide. Unlike Marcuse's univocality, in which "every human being knows" what the standards of happiness, beauty, and a worthwhile life are, Habermas's politics are pluralist. Everyone does know, but the political problem is that each knows differently. The politics of pluralism are a politics of articulation, in both senses of that word. We must *speak* our conceptions of the good life so that these can be *fitted together*; in this sense, communicative action is a theory of articulation. Habermas's political agenda is set by the problem of how we respond to a world in which each knows, but differently. The generalized other has become other*s*, who generalize but not so neatly. How, in this world of difference, are we now to talk to each other, to make decisions in common, to achieve the mutual articulation of a life together? Interactionism has always been about these questions, but in Habermas's work their political implication is specified. Our politics are our communicative interactions, and *vice versa*.

2.   *Modernity creates a problem of communication, but also a potential.* Not all communication is communicative. What makes action truly communicative for Habermas is suggested in his phrase, "making what everyone could want in this situation plausible," but what does this mean? Mead (1962, p. 208) describes everyday "salesmanship which seems always to carry with it hypocracy, to putting one's self in the attitude of the other so as to trick him into buying something he does not want." Mead is clear in his dislike for such action, but his theory lacks the terms in which to condemn it: "Even if we do not regard this as justifiable, we can at least recognize that even here there is the assumption that the individual has to take the attitude of the other. . . ." Communicative action theory suggests a stronger response to the problem of salesmanship.

For Habermas, the salesman is not acting communicatively but strategically. The salesman seeks to define the situation so that only what he himself wants is plausible. He takes the role of the other, but only to convince that other, not to be convinced by him. Therein lies the difference: strategic action seeks only to convince, communicative action proceeds in a willingness to be convinced. Communicative action thus specifies what Mead (1964, p. 148) meant in writing of conflict resolution that "the test of the reconstruction is found in the fact that all the personal interests are adequately realized in a new social situation." For this reconstruction, role-taking is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The salesman's strategic attitude involves taking the role of the other, but not in order to be influenced by that other, only to influence him. Communicative action, in which taking the attitude of the other is complemented by a willingness to be changed by that attitude, generates a new social situation.

The argument so far seems like good humanistic morality, but it is not yet social theoretical. Social theory comes in with the key terms, system and lifeworld. Habermas's point is that the distinctly modern breakdown of the communicative is not a sum of individual failings. Rather it represents a structural condition of society.

The lifeworld is the ground of shared understandings which make intersubjective agreement possible. That agreement may be verbal or tacit; it may rest on formal "validity claims" or implicit norms. Within Habermas's lifeworld, interactants have both a communicative attitude and the symbolic resources to realize that attitude. The problem which modernity has created for communication is what Habermas calls the "colonization" of the lifeworld. Lifeworld understandings have been colonized—their resources for producing understanding taken over, appropriated, and destroyed—by invading forces of functionally driven institutional systems. How did these systems come to be?

Lifeworld understandings become elaborated, as Mead suggested but did not specify, into more complex structural arrangements. Parsons extends Mead's story with his recognition that as functional subsystems develop, they come to be controlled by an autonomous logic. This logic invokes only the systems' own functional imperatives, not the human needs which the systems were originally designed to meet. Rather than remaining responsive to lifeworld needs and understandings which generated these functions, systems develop their own immanent purposes, and then impose these purposes on their members.

Most significantly, systems develop their own "media" of exchange. Here Habermas completes Parsons' story, giving it a critical twist. Habermas differentiates lifeworld and system according to the media by which each is "steered." The lifeworld remains steered by linguistic media; in Parsonian terms, influence and value-commitments. Systems, on the other hand, become steered by the non-linguistic media of power and money. As Mead (1962, pp. 301–302) understood no less than Parsons, power and money are founded on language based consensus as to their value and terms of exchange. Habermas's insight is that power and money may be language-like, but they are themselves non-linguistic in the sense that *they cannot provide for intersubjective consensus*. One can exchange in the media of power and money, but *one cannot make what each wants plausible*, or in Mead's terms, one cannot generate a new situation which adequately realizes all personal interests. In interactionist language, one cannot negotiate in the media of power and money. Power and money may be what one negotiates for, but they cannot be the media of the negotiation.

It is this insight into the non-consensus building nature of systems media which takes Habermas beyond both Mead and Parsons. What remains is for Habermas to demonstrate how these functional "mediatized" systems encroach upon—colonize—the lifeworld, making communicative action progressively impossible. This colonization is the problem of modernity. As more and more spheres of social life become based on autonomous, functional (non-linguistic) system imperatives, the sphere of lifeworld (language-based) understandings is progressively eroded. This colonization produces pathologies such as "production" creating environmental destruction or a "juridification" which is abstracted from a sense of justice. Colonization eventually produces system crisis, since without the lifeworld understandings in which they originated, the system imperatives lack legitimacy. In the above example, autonomous juridification can only depart so far from a lifeworld understanding of "natural" justice before a crisis sets in. Or, the industrial produc-

tion which originally sought to ease the conditions of life becomes abstracted from those needs, gets caught up in its autonomous functional imperatives, and finally renders the physical environment unlivable.

Here Habermas is at his most macro-theoretical, but the macro is always linked to the micro. The autonomy of functional systems is real but also illusory, in the sense that systems can be autonomous but are never self-sustaining. The macro always rests on a micro foundation: systems can only be sustained and reproduced at the level of interaction. And for interaction to proceed in a way which gives systems legitimacy, it must be communicative, not strategic. In colonizing the lifeworld understandings which could sustain and legitimize them, functional systems cut off the branch on which they sit. The micro-macro linkage is thus complete: (a) communicative interaction generates complex systems, (b) the logic of these systems colonizes the interaction which made them possible, (c) producing a crisis of the legitimation of these systems, and (d) one effect of this crisis is to render communicative interaction increasingly impossible, intensifying the crisis. Mead's salesman interacts strategically because it is required by the functional system (his company, capitalism) of which he is a part. But his interaction also subverts the legitimacy of that system, which no longer is experienced as meeting anyone's needs.

If this system colonization is the problem of communication which modernity generates, what is modernity's complementary possibility?

3.   *The response to modernity is not to abandon the project of reason, but rather to enhance the scope of rationality*. The resource which modernity provides to meet the crisis of colonization is reason. But reason for Habermas is not some Kantian transcendental criteria; it is pragmatic in its immanence in interaction. The clearest gloss on Habermas's notion of reason is Mead's (1962, p. 334) definition that "reason arises when one of the organisms takes into its own response the attitude of the other organism." If reason is based on taking the attitude of the other, then reason can only be communicative, and communication can only proceed in an attitude of reason. Recall again the fundamental problem: each knows what the good life is, but these conceptions don't coincide. Reason is interactants' reflective recognition of this situation—that my concept of the good life doesn't coincide with yours—and their assumption of responsibility to work through that difference. As the basis of a genuinely pluralist politics, there can only be reason.

Central to communicative action is the notion of interaction proceeding by the exchange of "validity claims." In the validity claim, each asserts a version of the good life. But since these assertions are made in a communicative attitude, each assumes the responsibility to be affected by the claims of the other, including refutations of one's own claims. Neither is trying to "sell" the other on his or her own claims; both are trying to arrive at a new situation in which both claims are recognized.

Communicative action is reasonable because it is responsible, and *vice versa*. The advance of modernity is to base interaction on the communicative exchange of validity claims, rather than on ascriptive or particularistic claims. In modern

reason, any claim can be open to critical scrutiny. In this argument, I read Habermas as specifying one of Weber's most significant and eliptical concepts, the ethic of responsibility. Schluchter's (1979, p. 110) gloss on the ethic of responsibility also states the fundamental political principle of communicative action based on validity ,claims. "For the ethic of responsibility formulates the same postulate as does critical rationalism: Thou shalt expose even thy most profound convictions to critique and have them examined for their feasibility. There can be no final solutions." Communicative rationality is the responsibility of interactants not to pass their claims off with rationalizations, but to make these claims accessible to the critical examination of others. Most significantly, Habermas's world envisions communicative interaction without foundation or telos: there can be no final solutions, only a perpetual process of exchanging validity claims, generating new social situations.

Where does this meta-theory of communicative action leave empirical interactionism; what are the "directions for further research"? Two points follow from the above argument. One involves studying the colonization of interaction; the other involves reason as a form of resistance.

In examining any empirical interaction, Habermas sensitizes us to consider the following (1) How is action based on interactants' respective conceptions of the "good life," and how do these conceptions differ?; (2) Is their attitude toward the mediation of these differences communicative or strategic? How does each frame his/her validity claims, and how does each respond to the claims of the other?; (3) What are the resources of lifeworld understandings by which the interactants might reach a consensus? And most important (4) How are these resources colonized by the functional logic and communicative media of the system in which the interaction occurs? Do the interactants' media of interaction provide for consensus building or obviate it? What lifeworld resources become unavailable in interaction so constrained?

As one example, in medical interactions colonization can be located in the physician attitude that they do not speak to patients (or even to nurses) in validity claims but only in "orders." Among patients there is a reciprocal sense of what cannot be asked of a physician—what claims are *a priori* invalid. These failures of communicative action can be tracked back to functional demands of the medical system, but at the same time they produce the crisis of that system: the sense that medicine is no longer about "care" but is a form of capitalist control of bodies. Thus the lifeworld resources (for example, shared human experiences of pain and fear) which might provide for mutual understanding and consensus between patients and physicians become unavailable, colonized by a medical system which does not admit these within its discursive medium. Most important is how system constraints cut off communicative interaction.

But where there is colonization there is also resistance, and thus a second line of research. If all communicative action were obviated, social life would be static and communicative action theory would fall into a paradox of rendering itself impossible. Each colonizing system finds a reciprocal form of opposition. Habermas directs our attention more specifically to the problem of communicative opposition.

Faced with a system which colonizes communication, the temptation of a resistance movement is to become strategic itself. But the larger crisis is that strategic interaction is supplanting the communicative; resistance is in the recovery of the communicative.

The task of oppositional movements is not to assert their claims over those of others—to argue their case more loudly—but to generate a communicative milieu of mutual responsibility, in which all validity claims are open to critical scrutiny, and each is willing to be changed by the claims of the other. Again in the medical example, part of the interest of AIDS groups is that their claims are not specific to themselves, but can be generalized to all ill persons. The problem of opposition is not simply to claim material resources (research funds, treatment facilities) for themselves, but to claim pluralism and a social milieu which values care as productive activity. The very difficult dilemma of such groups is how to act communicatively in a milieu which is strategic.

Of course these research questions are not new. What Habermas provides is a meta-theoretical framework within which to organize much of what is already being done, to generate new linkages of research questions, and to extend existing research in new directions. Perhaps in studying how communication might become more reasonable and responsible, social science can express the "emancipatory interest" which has been and remains the invocation of Habermas's theory.

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