THE INVISIBLE WOMAN:
A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS'S
THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

by

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Feminist theory is a vast area of discourse and, while the differences between the many tendencies are extremely interesting, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in such an inquiry. I have chosen to conduct a critique of Habermas's theory of communicative action from a perspective informed for the most part by postmodern/poststructural feminism. I hope that my reasons for working within such a framework will become evident in the following chapters but, in my view, a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective sharpens the critique of Habermas's theory precisely because it stands in such contrast to it.

For the purposes of this thesis, my critique will focus upon Habermas's most recent work - *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society (1984), and Volume II: The Critique of Functionalist Reason (1987). Other works by Habermas will not be specifically addressed although references will be made to them as necessary to clarify his positions on various issues.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, there has been an increasing interest in dialogue between feminism and critical theory (see, for example Feminism and Foucault, edited by Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Feminism As Critique, edited by Benhabib and Cornell, 1987). This thesis is located within this set of debates. Diamond and Quinby ask themselves, in the introduction to their volume, if their project is "yet another attempt to authorize feminism by marrying it into respectability?" (1988:ix) Like them, I answer that question with the assertion that I take the respectability of feminism as a given. And I believe, as they do, that not only will feminism gain strength from such interaction, but so too will critical social theory benefit from an encounter with a body of thought which is capable of identifying and surpassing androcentric bias. Furthermore, I insist that feminist theory is critical social theory and that non-feminist critical social theory is inevitably incomplete. While critical social theory in general and specifically feminist critical theory start from different points on the compass, ultimately they occupy similar discursive spaces. Jurgen Habermas, in the development of his theory of communicative action, is no exception. His importance in contemporary social theory - and across the whole spectrum of the social sciences - and the scope of his work necessitate feminist theoretical attention. Habermas is perhaps the most influential social theorist alive today. He is certainly "the most prolific contemporary critical theorist" (Turner, 1987: 186). As Michael Pusey (1987) remarks:

Scarcely anyone would now challenge what other people have said many times about Habermas, namely that he is one of the most important figures in German intellectual life today and
perhaps is the most important sociologist since Max Weber. (Pusey, 1987: 9)

His importance extends beyond Germany and beyond Europe. Habermas’s own intentions, in combination with what Giddens (1985: 124) terms the encyclopaedic scope of his work, are so grand as to guarantee him an important place in the international intellectual landscape. Giddens characterizes Habermas as "the most important latter-day descendent of...the 'Frankfurt School' of social theory" and further states that "although no doubt he would not say so, he is trying to be a Marx for our times" (Giddens, 1985: 123,124). Feminist theorists can neither afford to ignore Habermas nor to deny him the opportunity to address feminist criticism.

Habermas’s work is ideal for feminist criticism because the issues he addresses are crucial ones. He is indeed an exemplary theorist of the contemporary era. He attempts to resolve many of the problems, albeit from a different perspective, that occupy feminist theorists. These include the issues of rationality, the relations and boundaries between the public and private spheres, the appropriateness of different strategies for the achievement of social change, and the nature of the desired change itself. Ultimately, Habermas addresses the dilemma of the modern era, what McCarthy characterizes as the pervasive "sense of having exhausted our cultural, social, and political resources" (1984: v). The most developed formulation of Habermas’s theory of communicative action is contained in two volumes by the same name which is his "latest attempt to lay out the outlines of a critical theory of society" (Pusey, 1987: 9):

*The Theory of Communicative Action* has three interrelated concerns: (1) to develop a concept of rationality that is no longer tied to, and limited by, the subjectivistic and individualistic premises of modern philosophy and social theory; (2) to construct a two-level concept of society that integrates the lifeworld and system paradigms;
and, finally, (3) to sketch out, against this background, a critical theory of modernity which analyzes and accounts for its pathologies in a way that suggests a redirection rather than an abandonment of the project of enlightenment. (McCarthy, 1984: vi)

According to Habermas, relations of force and coercion distort human interaction - socially, politically and economically - in modern, Western society. This is a consequence of the adoption of a dehumanizing and anti-social form of rationality based solely on purposive action. We are dominated, theoretically and actually, by a quantitative, materially oriented paradigm. The solution for both this theoretical and societal dead-end is, for Habermas, a shift to a qualitative, socially oriented paradigm. Habermas would argue that the pursuit of social (and hence rational) ends in themselves will result in the resolution of material grievances. Material grievances are not to be resolved, in other words, by debates about distribution.

Calls for a paradigm shift have echoed from the fringes of social movements for decades without really being heard. Currently, the more substantive segments of movements challenging the status quo share Habermas's insistence on the need for a qualitative transformation of the world order (Boggs, 1986). Habermas's theory of communicative action is revolutionary in that it attempts to both characterize and provide a program for new conflicts which go beyond traditional types of class conflict focused on relations of production and the welfare state:

Such conflicts no longer primarily concern the distribution of material goods, but rather cultural reproduction and socialization... Since they are an expression of the reification of the communicative order of the lifeworld, it follows that these tensions cannot be alleviated through further economic development, or technical improvements in the administrative apparatus of government. The new conflicts, and associated
social movements, derive from problems that can only be resolved through a reconquest of the life-world by communicative reason, and by concomitant transmutations in the normative order of daily life. (Giddens, 1987: 241, 242)

The theory of communicative action provides a program for the transformation in theory and social organization which would completely eradicate relations based on force, domination, oppression and competition between individuals and within and between collectivities. It runs counter to the adversarial relationship towards nature Western society has adopted with the scientific revolution. This is entirely consistent with feminist goals. As a result of his conception of societal transformation, Habermas's theory is potentially able to incorporate and inform a wide range of social movements - including feminist, environmentalist and anti-militarist - which reject orthodox frameworks of all kinds. Habermas's theory of communicative action is a notable attempt to inject vitality into current theoretical debate and to provide a theory capable of both reflecting and informing the new social movements which are attempting to radically alter the status quo. These new social movements are attempting to step outside the dominant paradigms of social thought and action. And, it provides the basis for a critique of other anti-establishment movements which fail to question the basic quantitative paradigm and therefore fail to challenge the status quo. Habermas's theory of communicative action, therefore, offers an important opportunity to explore a promising area within social theory from a feminist perspective. Habermas's theory of communicative action is critical of welfare state capitalism from a post-Marxist perspective and therefore is in conflict with the theoretical programmatic of the New Right. Habermas's failure to address this programmatic more comprehensively than he does must be attributed to the fact that he wrote at a time which just
preceded the wholesale attack on the welfare state launched by the New Right, and he wrote from within the context of the Federal Republic of Germany which did not see the rise of the New Right to the same degree as did United Kingdom and the United States. (While Volume I of *The Theory of Communicative Action* was published in English in 1984 and Volume II in 1987, Habermas completed the original texts in 1981). While Habermas views the welfare state negatively in terms of its role in the commodification of private life and the pacification of class conflict without substantive societal transformation, the (transatlantic) New Right is attempting to dismantle the welfare state entirely because it inhibits the operation of capital and undermines traditional hierarchies. The New Right is regressive in that it is attempting both to return to the relative freedom of capital in its earlier period and re-institute a rigidly hierarchical society.

Habermas developed his theory of communicative action within the context of an international crisis in economic growth. The welfare state emerged and enjoyed success in the West during a period of economic prosperity and seemingly limitless possibilities for expansion. Now that limits to growth have become a painful reality, the welfare state founders as it is caught between the need to pacify the mass of the population with expensive social welfare measures and corporate demands for ever higher profits.

Faced with economic crisis and the increasing inability of the welfare-state to facilitate 'class compromise', modern social theory must both address the origins of the modern dilemma and propose solutions to it. Socialism, as proposed by Marx, has lost its credibility as a desirable solution. Habermas wrote both volumes of *The Theory of Communicative*
Action before Soviet Perestroika or the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and so addressed the failure of socialism in terms of the inadequacy of Soviet and Eastern European forms to provide models for Western societal transformation. Recent developments simply reinforce his perspective. With this recognition and his attempts to forge a new path for social change, Habermas takes on yet another crucial theoretical and practical issue which belies the vastness of his project:

The guiding thread of all Habermas's work, according to his own testimony, is an endeavour to reunite theory and practice in the twentieth-century world. In the nineteenth century, Marx believed that his theory provided both an analysis of capitalist society and the means of changing it in practice, through the revolution of the proletariat. The revolution has not come about, and will not do so, Habermas accepts, in the manner anticipated by Marx....Marx's conception of the unity of theory and practice is hopelessly inadequate in the late twentieth century. (Giddens, 1985: 124)

Habermas is ultimately concerned to defend modernity and rationality from critical onslaught, arguing that these concepts continue to be socially vibrant and indeed, necessary for human freedom.

Both the importance of Habermas within the intellectual community and the scope of his work make the theory of communicative action an ideal focus for feminist criticism. To date, there has been little engagement by feminists with Habermas's theory as a whole but certain issues have been addressed - in Iris Young's (1987) critique of Habermas's re-definition of rationality and argument for revitalization of the public sphere, and Barb Marshall's (1990) recent and as yet unpublished paper on Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Nancy Fraser (1987) offers a valuable and more comprehensive feminist critique of Habermas's theory of communicative action as a whole but is limited by the
conventions of the essay form. The requirements of this thesis limit the scope of my effort as well. Nevertheless, I intend to do the following: in chapter two I will explore the relationship between Habermas’s dichotomy between instrumental and substantive reason and that posited by many feminists (Merchant, 1980; Morgan, 1982) to exist between ‘male’ and ‘female’ reason. Furthermore, I will use a postmodern/poststructural feminist analysis to criticize the notion of universal rationality endorsed by both Habermas and some radical feminists.

A major contribution to the feminist movement and feminist theory is the slogan "the personal is political" with an accompanying analysis of the ways in which a false dichotomy between the public and private institutionalizes and obscures the oppression of women in Western society. In chapter three, Habermas’s theory will be evaluated in terms of his characterization of the relationship between the public and private realms and the implications for women in transformations he proposes. The notion of a contrast between system and lifeworld potentially camouflages the particular oppression women face. Consistent with the public/private dichotomy, the dichotomy between system and lifeworld may well overlook the experience of women as second class citizens not only as a result of the instrumental reason of the system but of the process of communicative action within the lifeworld as well. Therefore, I will examine Habermas’s conceptualization of the nexus between system and lifeworld and relations and boundaries between public and private spheres in this chapter.

The transformative agents of Habermas’s vision of social change are ‘new social movements.’ Habermas’s account of the bases for and composition of these movements will be analyzed from a feminist perspective in chapter four. A key focal area concerns his characterization
of the feminist movement itself. In order to bring Habermas's arguments into view as clearly as possible, they will be contrasted with the poststructuralist feminist Project for Radical Democracy outlined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985).

The final chapter will summarize and synthesize the arguments that I have developed in reference to Habermas's re-definition of rationality, his account of relations between system and lifeworld, public and private spheres, his treatment of new social movements, and, ultimately, his social vision itself and the means he proposes for achieving it. The implications of specific instances of androcentric bias in the theory of communicative action for Habermas's project as a whole will be drawn out. Finally, the implications for feminism as a result of its interaction with Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action will be discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: HABERMAS'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALITY

In this chapter I will provide an overview of Habermas's approach to the problem of rationality and criticize it from a feminist perspective. This feminist critique will be based upon approaches to the problem of rationality presented by radical feminists and by feminists writing within the postmodernist/poststructuralist framework. Both Habermas's theory of communicative action and feminist approaches to the problem of rationality will be discussed in relation to their challenges to prevailing liberal humanist discourse. Ultimately, Habermas's theory will be evaluated in terms of the degree to which he successfully achieves his own goal of providing a grand theory which transcends that of liberal humanism.

I: HABERMAS'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALITY

In the Theory of Communicative Action, Volumes I and II, Jurgen Habermas is primarily concerned with a defense of reason. This defense is conducted on two fronts - a criticism of the form of reason which predominates in modern Western society and a defense of modernity in the face of both conservative and radical criticisms. Habermas rejects both positivism with its exclusive reliance on 'teleological' or instrumental reason and relativism with its wholesale rejection of universalism in favour of particularism. Instead, he attempts to transcend this false either/or debate with the presentation of his theory of communicative action.

Habermas defends modernity against criticisms from both conservative and radical sources by insisting that the Enlightenment served as a necessary break with the past, allowing for a shift from a traditional to a rational basis of knowledge. The possibility of reflexivity, Habermas
argues, characterizes a society as more or less advanced. This model of social evolution, from the traditional myth-based past to the modern, reason-based present, mirrors the model of the cognitive development of children developed by Piaget (1965). Habermas argues that social evolution follows the same three stages that Piaget outlines for the cognitive development of children. As Giddens notes, these three social stages are the ‘mythical’, the ‘religious-metaphysical’, and the ‘modern’.

For Piaget, cognitive development is associated with a ‘de-centring’ process, in which the child gradually moves away from a concentration upon its own immediate concerns and needs, towards an expanded awareness of the world and the needs of others. (Giddens, 1985: 133)

Habermas argues that cultural reflexivity resulted from the Enlightenment and was specifically made possible by the rationalization and secularization of Western society which produced a necessary distinction between three spheres of existence - science, morality/law, and art - corresponding to the three worlds - material, social, and aesthetic (Giddens, 1985: 133). The differentiation of these spheres as partly separable arenas of activity, however, also produced the institutionalization of instrumental reason as the form of reason. Habermas responds to conservative criticisms of modernity by pointing out that the Enlightenment was a necessary break with the past which allowed us to move forward, that is, to base knowledge upon reason rather than religion, tradition or myth. Radical criticisms of modernity and reason, however, are addressed by Habermas's insistence that, although the institutionalization of instrumental reason was a necessary first step within the modern project, this form of reason is inappropriately predominant. Indeed, Habermas offers an escape from Weber's "iron cage", that is, from the paradox of modernity referred to by
Weber, by insisting on the need to redefine rationality. The defense of reason through redefinition is therefore both integral and parallel to the defense of modernity.

Max Weber conceived of rationality in solely instrumental terms. Consequently, he viewed the rationalization of society as a paradox, as an "iron cage" from which there was no escape. He was torn between a reverence for rationalism on the one hand and a fear of its consequences on the other. Weber observed that rationalization creates a world of technical efficiency and undemocratic administration. Humanistic values, he insisted, have no place in the development of modern Western culture. Habermas agrees with Weber about the consequences of this form of rationalization but claims to rescue reason and modernity from critical onslaught by insisting that instrumental reason is only one form of reason and that others are possible. Habermas thus suggests an alternative to and an escape from Weber's "iron cage" view of society as moving relentlessly toward greater and greater rationalization through an ever-intrusive and dehumanizing bureaucracy.

The instrumentalist, goal-oriented, dehumanized form of rationality which Weber both revered and feared has, as Habermas terms it, 'colonized' and dehumanized the world of everyday living (the 'lifeworld') (Habermas, 1984: 69,70). Habermas makes a distinction between the system (economy, administrative and coercive aspects of the state) and the lifeworld (the world of everyday living). The relationship or nexus between system and lifeworld will be the subject of a later chapter.

Habermas argues that the instrumental reason of the system has invaded and distorted the lifeworld. For the lifeworld, which is by definition social, this form of reason is anti-social and entirely
inappropriate. It drains the vitality from the process of social reproduction because of this contradiction (Bernstein, 1985: 23). Modern society is distorted by this form of rationality because it allows for, and indeed necessitates, relations of force and coercion. Consequently, the movement toward greater human freedom, initiated by the Enlightenment, has actually resulted in an increase in dominance and repression. Unlike Weber, however, Habermas insists that it is possible, once again, to expand the realm of human freedom and break out of the deadlock produced by the domination of the instrumental rationality of the system over the lifeworld. This is to be accomplished by a redefinition of rationality.

Expanding the concept of rationality is a basic requirement for the development of a theory of communicative action. This task requires not one but at least two paradigm shifts: from a model based on the philosophy of consciousness (the solitary thinker) to language analysis (in terms of actual speech or 'language-in-use') and within action theory from goal-directed purposive action to communicative action.

Habermas argues for the abandonment of the subject-oriented philosophy of consciousness. Humans are, after all, social beings. Hence, the focus of sociological investigation must not be the relationship of the individual to the world (subject/object) but rather that between individuals in relation to the world (intersubjective). Habermas insists that individuals participate in a symbolically structured lifeworld (Habermas, 1984: 236). The lifeworld is the everyday world of human activity. It is instilled with tradition and history, forming a backdrop to the "three spheres" of existence of the "objective world." It is the rationality of communication between individuals which makes us uniquely human. Consequently, it is necessary to drop the model of the "solitary thinker"
consistent with the philosophy of consciousness (Habermas, 1984: viii). This model is problematic because it represents the subject as acting in an objectivating manner with the world rather than intersubjectively.

Language analysis focusing on 'language-in-use' or actual speech allows for a conception of rationality which does not isolate individuals in an objective, objectifying and objectified relationship to each other and the material world. Rather, it reflects the social nature of human beings and represents human communication as an activity oriented towards and constitutive of human community.

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established through communication aimed at reaching agreement - then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action. (Habermas, 1984: 397)

The ability to reason and act rationally is, for Habermas as for Aristotle and classical liberal theorists, what distinguishes a human being from an animal. However, in modern Western society, rationality has come to be thought of in solely teleological or instrumental terms, that is, in terms of purposive rational action. Rationality, in this sense, is construed quantitatively. Of course, this is consistent with and partially reflective of the imperatives of capitalism. In contrast to instrumental reason, Habermas puts forward a model of communicative rationality which is based on an integrative view of humanity, a focus on the community and the regenerative processes of communication between individuals within it. The theory of communicative action transcends the theoretical and practical dichotomy between individualism and collectivism by focusing on
the processes aimed at achieving understanding between individuals and within communities.

Communicative rational action, Habermas argues, is prevalent in everyday life. When we implore a person to "be reasonable", we are asking him or her to think critically, present cogent arguments for or against a proposition, and above all, to make a sincere attempt at reaching an understanding with us. We are not requesting, necessarily, that a more strategic outlook be adopted. In everyday life we recognize various types of rational action. Communicative rationality, as Habermas defines it, involves a communicative practice

which, against the background of a lifeworld is oriented to achieving, sustaining and renewing consensus - and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims. The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based in the end on reasons. (Habermas, 1984: 18)

Communicative rationality is, for Habermas, based solely on the "binding (or bonding)" force of the better argument (Habermas, 1984: 305). It is a process of consensus, that is, agreement arrived at freely, without coercion or force. Thus, Habermas is insisting that communicative rationality justifies social as opposed to anti-social behavior.

Communicative action is rational if it can be grounded in reason. For Habermas, this means that participants in the communicative process would be considered rational if they could provide reasons for their expressions. In this sense then, Habermas insists on a process of argumentation, acting as a court of appeal,

that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements can no longer be repaired with everyday routines and
yet are not to be settled by the direct or strategic use of force. (Habermas, 1984: 18)

Coming to an understanding or reaching an agreement *without force or coercion* is the central criterion of communicative rationality.

Habermas insists that communicative action is rational action in that it can be grounded in reason. This 'grounding' takes place through 'argumentation'. Argumentation is the process whereby participants "thematize contested validity claims and attempt to vindicate or criticize them through arguments" (Habermas, 1984: 18). Habermas insists that there are four validity claims which are universal and implicit in all speech acts. These claims apply to pre-theoretical, theoretical, practical and aesthetic discourse. They are *comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, and normative rightness*. Anthony Giddens summarizes these claims as follows:

> When I say something to someone else, I implicitly make the following claims: that what I say is intelligible; that its propositional content is true; that I am justified in saying it; and that I speak sincerely, without intent to deceive. All of these claims are contingent or fallible, and all except the first can be criticized and grounded by the offering of reasons. (Giddens, 1987: 229,330)

These validity claims are made explicit through the process of argumentation. As far as Habermas is concerned, therefore, knowledge is grounded in reason if it can be criticized. In order for action to be considered communicatively rational, it must be oriented toward reaching understanding. This would be understood as a genuine attempt at achieving consensus, thereby precluding force or coercion.

Habermas rejects the arguments with respect to rationality of both logical positivism and cultural relativism. Logical positivists are solely concerned with instrumental reason and the purely quantifiable. They
insist that such rationality is universal. Cultural relativists reject claims to objectivity and argue that there is no universal definition of rationality. By redefining rationality, Habermas hopes to defend its universality while distancing himself from the logical positivist camp. As Habermas's arguments for a redefinition of rationality have already been presented, I will concentrate, at this point, on his arguments against the adoption of a perspective of cultural relativity.

Habermas opposes cultural relativism as an abandonment of reason. Because it denies reflexivity, cultural relativism denies reason. And, by abandoning universals, it abandons the belief in reason. Obviously, for Habermas, reason is by definition universal. Critical of positivism's narrow conception of rationality, he nonetheless shares the belief in universal criteria for knowledge. The very validity claims which he insists ground all areas of communication, whether scientific (theoretical), practical (moral/legal) or aesthetic, are universal. For Habermas, no dispute which can be tied to a validity claim is beyond argumentation and hence the possibility of being grounded in reason.

Habermas is concerned, in the development of critical, social theory (and he insists that social theory is necessarily 'critical') with the central problem of rationality on both theoretical and methodological levels (Habermas, 1984: 75). The solution to this problem is not the abandonment of rationality as cultural relativism insists. Rather, "the very situation that gives rise to the problem of understanding meaning can also be regarded as the key to its solution" (Habermas, 1984: 12). Accepting the premise that the social scientist, in order to understand society must be capable of participating in it, as distinct from what is required of the physical scientist, Habermas incorporates critical social theory as an
activity within and crucial to social reproduction. Habermas equates the role of critical social theory vis a vis society with the role of psychoanalysis vis a vis the individual, in that the theorist or psychoanalyst assists the subject in self-reflexivity, thereby allowing the society or individual to understand itself and modify its or his or her actions (Giddens, 1985: 126).

II: GENERAL PROBLEMS IN HABERMAS’S THEORY

In constructing his theory of communicative action, Habermas engages in a critique of the notion of rationality developed within the liberal humanist tradition. He dismisses some aspects of the liberal humanist conception of reason while retaining others. In this section I will identify his criticisms and begin to reveal the problematic nature of those aspects of liberal humanist philosophy which Habermas continues to embrace.

For present purposes, liberal humanist philosophy can be reduced to four basic tenets. These are the notions of (a) abstract individualism, (b) normative dualism, (c) universal, value-neutral rationality, and (d) the unitary subject. Liberal humanism views human nature as ahistorical and fixed. The capacity to reason is what sets us apart from animals and it is this capacity which enables us to determine our own interests and needs. These interests and needs are not socially defined. This tenet of liberal humanist theory is labelled ‘abstract individualism’ (Jagger, 1983: 42). Habermas rejects the notion of abstract individualism by rejecting the philosophy of consciousness and the solitary thinker and replacing it with a notion of rationality which is intersubjectively located. That is, reason, for Habermas, is not embodied in individuals but within relationships between individuals. Reason, therefore, is inherently social.
Habermas's notion of reason as social rather than individualistic is consistent with a powerful feminist criticism of abstract individualism. As Alison Jagger points out,

> in order to raise enough children to continue the species, humans must live in social groups where individuals share resources with the young and temporarily disabled. Human interdependence is thus necessitated by human biology, and the assumption of individual self-sufficiency is plausible only if one ignores human biology. (Jagger, 1983: 41)

Thus, for liberal humanists, with their neglect of human biology and in particular reproductive biology, community and cooperation are problematic while self-interest and competitiveness are taken as given (Jagger, 1983: 41). Jagger argues that this is a particularly male perspective in that, given the context of the sexual division of labour within which liberal humanists wrote, only men were in a position to ignore the physical aspects of human survival. This sexual division further reflected a dualism within liberal humanism between mind and body.

Normative dualism is the term used to describe this perspective of a natural dichotomy between mind and body, human and animal, man and nature, the rational and the irrational, and ultimately, male and female because males have been associated with the mind-human-rational side of the equation and females have been associated with the body-animal-nature-irrational side of the equation. While Habermas rejects the notion of abstract individualism and is seeking a more organic form of rationality, he nevertheless fails to completely reject this concept of normative dualism because he comes down clearly on the side of those who insist that rationality, however defined, is superior to irrationality. This leads to a further problem within Habermas's theory of communicative action.
Habermas employs a clear distinction between traditional, irrational society and rational, modern society and hence implies a linear model of social evolution. The form modernity has taken is presented as a wrong turn in the movement from the traditional and irrational to the modern and rational. While critical of the quantitative, polemical theories of social change which have predominated in sociology to date, Habermas nonetheless fails to challenge the notion of progress from tradition to modernity involving capitalism as at least an initially liberating force. As Marxists lament the dehumanizing consequences of capitalism and yet insist that it is a necessary stage in the development of socialism, Habermas laments the dehumanizing effects of teleological rationalization and yet insists on viewing it as a necessary step towards a more comprehensive and humanistic rationalization of society. Certainly, Habermas sees the form of rationality adopted in the West as distortive. Nevertheless, it has provided a basis for further rationality by breaking with tradition (Habermas, 1984: 52,53).

The assumption of progress is unfounded and the distinction between the traditional and the modern is highly problematic. Such a distinction has been convincingly criticized within the field of development theory as highly ethnocentric. As Anthony Giddens remarks, "For Habermas...there is a real sense in which West is best" (Giddens, 1985: 133). Ultimately, Habermas's conception of history and social development is linear and deterministic in that he envisions a movement towards the rational society from irrational beginnings. This linear view of social development highlights the universality of rationality according to Habermas.

For Habermas, the criteria for rationality are universal. That is, language-in-use is presented as providing a basis for validity claims which
are universal properties of speech and which can be appealed to in order to ground our actions in reason. Habermas insists that, if the process of argumentation is sincerely adhered to, the better - that is, the more reasonable - argument will prevail. As Giddens notes, however, this is problematic:

Truth is agreement reached through critical discussion. Here Habermas's standpoint seems to face a major difficulty. How are we actually to distinguish a 'rational consensus' - one based upon reasoned argument - from a consensus based merely upon customs or power? (Giddens, 1985: 130,131)

As Iris Young (1987: 71) observes, Habermas's portrayal of the process of argumentation abstracts from the realities of communication. Habermas ignores the implicit relations of power which colour communicative practices. This is particularly apparent as communication takes place within power configurations where participants are unequal. This is obviously problematic from a feminist point of view. For example, Habermas insists that

Actors are behaving rationally so long as they use predicates such as "spicy," "attractive," "strange," "terrible," "disgusting" and so forth, in such a way that other members of their lifeworlds can recognize in these descriptions their own reactions to similar situations. (Habermas, 1984: 17)

Language has been identified particularly by feminists, but also by other oppressed groups, as a key way in which power relations are established, consolidated, and reinforced. The very meanings of terms, therefore, are inevitably multiple and laden with power connotations. Apply the term "attractive" as a descriptive term for a woman, for example, and it will have power connotations as well as different meanings for different members within the same lifeworld. And, while some members of a lifeworld would
use the term "disgusting" to refer to homosexuality, other members would certainly not agree that this term reflects "their own reactions to similar situations." The issue of the plurality of language will be examined more extensively later in this chapter. As the following exploration of feminist criticisms of the universal notion of rationality and the conception of the 'unitary subject' reveals, conceptions of rationality reflect, perpetuate, and advance particular relations of power. Such configurations are directly relevant to understanding gender relations.

III: FEMINIST CRITICISMS - RADICAL AND POSTMODERN/POSTSTRUCTURAL

In this section I will explore two general alternative approaches to the issues of universal rationality and unitary subjectivity - tendencies within radical feminist and that provided by postmodern and poststructural feminists. From the radical feminist perspective, there are two approaches: the dismissal of reason and rationality entirely and the identification and denigration of 'male' as opposed to 'female' reason. While postmodern and poststructural feminism are not one and the same thing, their notable differences refer more to their emphases, with postmodernism orienting itself more historically in its criticism of philosophy and poststructuralism more epistemologically. For present purposes, this distinction is not relevant. Rather, all feminist criticisms examined here will be applied to a notion of reason such as Habermas's, which posits an opposition between universal reason and non-reason. While these criticisms will be made somewhat generally, they will ultimately be specifically applied to Habermas's theory of communicative action.

Many radical feminists, notably Griffin (1978), Daly (1978) and Rich (1976), have identified the glorification of reason with the maintenance of
patriarchy, and the predominance of rationality over irrationality with the oppression of men by women. As stated earlier, the normative dualism characteristic of liberal humanism posed a dichotomy between the rational and the irrational which was used to justify the dominance of the irrational female by the rational male. Radical feminists have observed this relationship between patriarchy and rationality as a power configuration which has reflected and perpetuated itself. Some radical feminists have responded by dismissing rationality altogether as inherently male and hence oppressive while others have argued for an alternative, 'feminine' form of rationality. This latter group has argued that the predominance of the wrong kind of reason - 'male' - produces not only the oppression of women but the social and environmental imbalance which characterizes the modern world.

Radical feminists such as Daly (1978) and Rich (1976) have demonstrated that the sciences and the social sciences have used the notion of objectivity as a way of masking assumptions and interests, of discounting subjective investment. One radical-feminist answer to this problem is to abandon traditional rationality and celebrate irrational forms of discourse and subjectivity. (Weedon, 1987:28)

This criticism of what Nicholson terms the "Gods eye view" of the Academy is made both within feminist theory and the philosophy of science (Nicholson, 1990: 3). Objectivity and universal truth are no longer readily acceptable as possible goals. Feminists insist, furthermore, that they are not desirable goals. Indeed,

feminists, like other postmodernists, have begun to suspect that all such transcendental claims reflect and reify the experience of a few persons - mostly white, Western males. (Flax, 1990: 43)
Claims to objectivity and rationality have been used to justify existing power relations and to marginalize challenges to the status quo. Consequently, a number of radical feminists, arguing that reason, far from being value-free, is not only inherently a social construct but also a patriarchal distortion of womanhood, have rejected rational means for challenging patriarchal society (Weedon, 1987: 99). Other radical feminists, however, have insisted upon the need to redefine rationality to reflect ‘feminine’ values.

The second tendency within radical feminism addresses the problem of rationality by insisting on a distinction between ‘male’ instrumental reason and ‘female’ substantive reason. Arguing against a dismissal of rationality entirely, this group insists, as does Habermas, that it is simply a case of modern society being dominated by the wrong type of reason. The ‘female’ kind of reason is associated with the social, non-hierarchical, cooperative radical feminist vision while the dominance of the ‘male’ instrumental reason is associated with current social inequalities, environmental and military crises (Lloyd, 1984: 106).

Both tendencies within radical feminism, however, share the same basis for an alternative epistemology, that is, the belief that knowledge can only be based on personal experience. Thus, the universalistic form of rationality or rationality defined in universal terms is associated with ‘maleness’ and countered, by radical feminists, with a dismissal of abstract bases of knowledge in favour of experiential ones. This experiential, personal focus is consistent with a radical feminist (and humanist) assumption of a fixed essence of womanhood. As Weedon observes, this project seeks to identify and promote the nature of true femininity:

The radical feminist project is not to deconstruct the discursive processes whereby certain qualities come to be defined as feminine and others as
masculine nor to challenge directly the power relations which these differences guarantee. It is rather to revalue the feminine which patriarchy devalues as an alternative basis for social organization in separation from men. (Weedon, 1987: 81)

For both those radical feminists who associate ‘maleness’ irrevocably with reason and those who make a distinction between ‘male’ and ‘female’ types of reason, gender is viewed as fixed.

Radical feminists committed to the complete dismissal of reason as a tool of white, male power would dismiss Habermas's theory of communicative action outright, if not on the basis of his gender then certainly on the basis of his defense of reason. History has shown us, these theorists argue, that the notion of rationality is nothing more than the philosophical expression of male privilege. Those feminists who argue for a redefinition of rationality along ‘feminine’ lines, however, have much in common with Habermas. Habermas's central thesis - that the ascendence of the wrong kind of reason in modern society, instrumental reason - is responsible for current social and economic crises, is similar to the radical feminist argument that ‘male’ instrumental reason needs to be replaced by ‘female’ reason. No doubt, both arguments have distinctly different bases concerning the notion of gender as problematic. The degree of convergence, although significant, is far from complete.

Habermas wants the rationality of the lifeworld to dominate the rationality of the system, rather than the other way around as is the case at present. From a radical feminist perspective, then, it could be said that Habermas is suggesting that ‘male’ instrumental reason be subverted by ‘female’ cooperative reason. A point of dissonance would very likely emerge, however, as it becomes clear that, according to Habermas, this ‘female’ reason is to be disciplined by what radical feminists would
certainly characterize as ‘male’ validity claims on the basis of their universality.

IV: A POSTMODERN/POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINIST CRITICISM OF RADICAL FEMINIST APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALITY

Postmodern and poststructural feminist theory shares radical feminism’s analysis of the definition of reason as a property of power relations. Likewise, this criticism extends to the liberal humanist claims for the independence of truth from social context, the possibility of objectivity and the universality of reason. Radical feminism’s insistence on fixed meaning regarding gender identity and the epistemological basis of experience, however, is disputed. Indeed, the shortcomings of radical feminist approaches to the problem of rationality are revealed by postmodern/poststructural feminist criticism to remain squarely within and to result from the limitations of the liberal humanist framework.

Personal experience as the basis of knowledge for radical feminists is criticized on two counts. In the first place, an essentialist conception of womanhood tends to preclude the variations in status dependent on class, race, and nationality which interact with but are relevant somewhat independently of gender in terms of their own historical specificity. As Benhabib and Cornell point out:

Underlying the idea that there is an essential connection between feminist theory and the unique experience of women, is the seemingly unproblematic assumption that this experience can be identified and found to yield conclusions generalizable on the basis of gender. Third World women have challenged precisely the assumption that there is a generalizable, identifiable and collectively shared experience of womanhood. (Benhabib and Cornell, 1987: 13)
In the second place, postmodern/poststructural feminist critics of radical feminism point out that there is no such thing as pure experience. Experience gains meaning only through interpretation. The basic principles of poststructuralism are plurality of language and the impossibility of fixing meaning permanently (Weedon, 1987: 85). In Foucault's work, discourses are

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them....They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern. (Weedon, 1987: 108)

Individuals are subject to and participate in the competition between various discourses. Experience, as such, is only meaningful as it is constituted in discourse. The constitution of experience in language reflects the individual’s relationship within the struggle between discourses. Language, therefore, is no mere reflection of anything but rather a process whereby meaning is both assumed and produced. Experience, therefore, does not mean anything in itself. Thus, it is completely inadequate as a basis for knowledge.

The notion of fixed meaning precludes historical and specific relations between competing discourses. This is the basis upon which poststructural feminism challenges the radical feminist commitment to fixed meaning with respect to gender:

Poststructuralist feminism requires attention to historical specificity in the production, for women, of subject positions and modes of femininity and their place in the overall network of social power relations. In this the meaning of biological sexual difference is never finally fixed. It is a site of contest over meaning and the exercise of patriarchal power. (Weedon, 1987: 135)
As such, this struggle has no end and meaning is never finally fixed. By valuing the 'feminine' and labelling it as such in opposition to the 'masculine', radical feminists do employ a fixed notion of gender. As Lloyd (1984: 105) points out, this amounts to an acceptance of the liberal humanist constitution of the 'feminine'. After all, the opposition between 'male' and 'female' is a social construct which has historically reflected patriarchal interests.

The radical feminist approach of accepting the liberal humanist constitution of the 'feminine' but countering its devaluation with valuation, is consistent with what poststructuralist theory terms "reverse discourse":

While a discourse will offer a preferred form of subjectivity, its very organization will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal. Reverse discourse enables the subjected subject of a discourse to speak in her own right. (Weedon, 1987: 109)

Reverse discourse is a valuable theoretical and political tool as it creates room for resistant discourses. However, it is inadequate for challenging the offending discourse as a whole. Until the implicit assumptions of the discourse are challenged (the very assumptions which the reverse discourse are based upon) the capacity to subvert the discourse cannot be realized (Weedon, 1987: 110).

Radical feminism, in turning liberal humanism's devaluation of the 'feminine' on its head, retains a fixed view of gender identity which is highly problematic. As the work of Julia Kristeva (Weedon, 1987: 88,89) reveals, the constitution of the subject is always in process; subjectivity is constantly being constituted in language. Kristeva argues that there are two aspects of discourse - symbolic and semiotic - and that rational discourse marginalizes the semiotic in favour of the symbolic. Symbolic discourse refers to the
actual words of verbal or written language while semiotic refers to body movements or ‘body language’ as well as the intonation which accompanies the articulation of the symbolic aspects of language. This exclusion of an important part of discourse is done

in an attempt to preserve the apparent stability of the unitary subject and thereby to fix the meanings of the symbolic order. (Weedon, 1987: 89)

Now that we understand the creation of subjectivity as relating to configurations of power through the struggle of competing discourses, however, we see the suppression of the semiotic aspects of language to parallel the suppression of the irrational by the rational. Indeed, the power to define what is rational is highlighted as a key aspect of the configuration of modern power relations (Weedon, 1987: 89).

Radical feminism’s acceptance of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ identities as fixed is both challenged by Kristeva’s criticism of the unitary subject, as has been demonstrated above, and supported by it. As Weedon notes, Kristeva associates the symbolic aspect of language with ‘masculinity’ and the semiotic aspect with ‘femininity’. While Kristeva insists that all individuals, regardless of biological sex, have access to both these aspects, Weedon correctly insists that although

The effect of this theoretical move is to break with the biological basis of subjectivity...in making femininity and masculinity universal aspects of language, rather than the particular constructs of specific historically produced discourses, Kristeva’s theory loses its political edge....to equate the feminine with the irrational, even if the feminine no longer has anything to do with women, is either to concede rather a lot to masculinity or to privilege the irrational, neither of which is very helpful politically. (Weedon, 1987: 89,90)
A postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective, therefore, views the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ as entirely social constructs which reflect existing and historical power configurations. As such, they should not be treated as given, either naturally or normatively.

V. A FINAL CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS’S NOTION OF REASON

Habermas has developed his conception of reason and indeed his entire theory of communicative action within the framework of liberal humanism. As this philosophical framework is associated materially with both modernity and capitalism, this makes a great deal of sense. Habermas’s aim, however, is to provide a grand theory which transcends liberal humanist philosophical and material expressions. His notion of reason will be evaluated, therefore, in light of postmodern/poststructural feminist criticisms of liberal humanism.

In an earlier section, four major tenets of liberal humanism were identified and criticized. Again, these are the commitments to notions of (a) abstract individualism, (b) normative dualism, (c) the universality and value-neutrality of rationality, and (d) the unitary subject. Habermas dismisses the notion of abstract individualism when he argues for a shift from the subject oriented philosophy of consciousness perspective of communicative action which locates rationality within social relationships rather than individuals. This is a very positive step. Habermas does not, however, entirely escape the problems associated with normative dualism and he ultimately defends a universal, although redefined, notion of rationality and view of the unified subject.

Habermas does provide much of value to feminist theory, notably by disputing objectivity and insisting upon the critical theorists’ inevitable
subjectivity. However, in many other respects he remains well within the liberal humanist problematic in ways that render his theory incompatible with a postmodern/poststructural feminist approach to the problem of rationality. In spite of his redefinition of rationality, Habermas continues to oppose reason to unreason with the corresponding devaluation of irrationality in favour of rationality.

As Iris Young (1987: 69) points out, Habermas has much to offer a feminist ethics as a result of his arguments against the reduction of reason to purely instrumental terms. In doing so, he poses a partial challenge to what she terms deontological reason. Young's conception of deontological reason is parallel to the traditional liberal humanist conception of reason as impartial and universal. She insists that, for feminists, a dialogic conception of normative reason which implies reason as contextualized and "where answers come out of a plurality of perspectives and cannot be reduced to unity" is appropriate (Young, 1987: 69). Habermas, however, fails to truly transcend deontological reason in that he does not, in the end, define reason contextually and perspectively:

he retains a commitment to the ideal of normative reason as expressing an impartial point of view. Rather than arbitrarily presuppose a transcendental ego as the impartial reasoner, as does the deontological tradition, he claims that an impartial point of view is actually presupposed by a normative discussion that seeks to reach agreement. (Young, 1987: 69)

For Habermas, consensus results from an ideal speech situation where particular motives are suspended in favour of cooperatively seeking an agreement about truth. Clearly, this reflects a universal notion of reason. This universal notion has been shown earlier in this chapter to produce an ethnocentric, Eurocentric, linear approach to social development which
posits a normative opposition between the modern and the traditional, the rational and the irrational. This universal notion has also been shown to be androcentric.

Because Habermas insists upon a universalistic understanding of normative reason, he implicitly assumes the unitary nature of subjectivity. As has been established, this approach enables the powerful to define subjectivity in accordance with their own interests. From a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective, this fixity of meaning and subjectivity abstracts from the specific and historical configurations which shape gender identity.

Young (1987: 71) insists that Habermas promotes an opposition between reason and unreason and desire. She links this to Kristeva's argument that universalistic notions of reason suppress the semiotic aspect of language in favour of the symbolic:

\[\text{this model of communication reproduces the opposition between reason and desire because like modern normative reason it expels and devalues difference: the concreteness of the body, the affective aspects of speech, the musical and figurative aspects of all utterances, which all contribute to the formation of understanding of their meaning. (Young, 1987: 71)}\]

This supports the point I made earlier that Habermas neglects the implicit aspects of power which conversants bring to the process of argumentation. Thus, by abstracting from real life communication situations, Habermas's model is based on an ideal speech situation which denies a feminist awareness of the multiple expressions and effects of power. Power is expressed semiotically as well as symbolically. In this light, Habermas's insistence that in communicative action the force of the better argument will prevail in the absence of coercion or force can be seen to be based on
an abstraction that cannot be meaningfully translated into everyday practice. Accepting both the semiotic and symbolic aspects of language forces us to accept a poststructuralist view of the subject as constantly in process and not statically represented in an ideal speech situation as Habermas would suppose.

Habermas’s theory of communicative action, therefore, while challenging important aspects of liberal humanist discourse - notably the asocial notion of abstract individualism and the reduction of reason to a purely instrumental form - fails to transcend aspects of this framework which figure in the oppression of women as other. As long as rationality and subjectivity are defined normatively in universal terms the historical and specific contexts for the creation and perpetuation of power configurations, on the basis of gender and other socially constructed differences, will be ignored. From a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective with its emphasis on power as both a relationship and a process, the creation of character ideals and processes on the basis of universalistic notions of reason and subjectivity is inevitably and deeply problematic.
CHAPTER THREE: HABERMAS'S CONCEPTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

In this chapter I will provide an overview of Habermas's conceptualization of the relations between system and lifeworld and between public and private spheres. From a feminist perspective, of course, the relationship between private and public spheres is a central issue in any theoretical scheme for the transformation of society. Habermas's account of this relationship, within what he considers to be the larger issue of the nexus between system and lifeworld, will be outlined and evaluated from a feminist perspective. This critique will focus specifically on the relations between private and public spheres, the composition of each sphere, and the solution to the modern dilemma within this context proposed by Habermas.

I: THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION: RELATIONS BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD; PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

As I outlined in the previous chapter, Habermas's attempt to salvage modernity, in the face of conservative and radical criticism alike, rests on his argument that we have simply taken a wrong evolutionary turn. That is to say, the potential of modernity for heightened rationality remains, albeit unrealized.

The rationalization of the lifeworld makes it possible to differentiate off autonomized subsystems and at the same time opens up the utopian horizon of a bourgeois society in which the formally organized spheres of action of the bourgeoisie (the economy and the state apparatus) form the foundation of the post-traditional lifeworld of the homme (the private sphere) and the citoyen (the public spheres). (Habermas, 1987: 328)
Thus, according to Habermas, all we must do is reverse the relationship between the two forms of rationality, instrumental and communicative, so that it is communicative rationality which becomes decisive for the conduct of social life. This is of course implicit in Habermas’s evolutionary model as a whole, where it is ‘moral-practical’ action that is the pacemaker of social change and the means whereby society learns to overcome historically-specific crises (Habermas, 1979). Habermas insists that the pathology of our current form of modernity results from the incursion of system imperatives into the communicatively organized lifeworld. Instrumental rationality has "colonized" the lifeworld. Beginning with the emergence of classical capitalism and ending with the modern welfare state, Habermas describes the historical process whereby system - the official economy and the state - became differentiated from the lifeworld - the public realm of political participation, opinion and will formation and the private realm of the modern restricted nuclear family (Habermas, 1987: 310). Describing the interactions between the institutions within the respective spheres as well as the boundaries between them, Habermas insists that the main battle line in the fight to salvage modernity lies between system and lifeworld (Fraser, 1987: 55). Under both classical and welfare state capitalism, relations are conducted through the media of money and power.

RELATIONS BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD UNDER CLASSICAL CAPITALISM

Habermas defines societal modernization on the basis of the differentiation between symbolic and material reproductive functions. Material reproductive functions are handed over to two institutions - the
state and the official economy - which are system integrated. These institutions are situated in the larger social environment with the development of two other institutions - the modern, restricted nuclear family and the public sphere - which are socially integrated and specialize in symbolic reproduction (Fraser, 1987: 36,37). System and lifeworld, however, are not

simply disengaged or detached from the lifeworld; they must be embedded in it. Concomitant with the beginnings of classical capitalism, then, is the development within the lifeworld of "institutional orders" that situate the systems in a context of everyday meanings and norms. (Fraser, 1987: 41)

Modernity emerged hand in hand with capitalism. Thus, according to Habermas, the imperatives of capitalism influenced the shape modernity took, precluding for the time being a form dominated by communicative rather than instrumental rationality. Interactions between and within system and lifeworld, and problems resulting from the incursion of system imperatives into the lifeworld, reflect this context.

The structure of the modern world is divided into four elements which comprise two distinct but related spheres (see diagram, Appendix A). The system, which is formally organized, systemically regulated, and dominated by instrumental rationality, is comprised of the state and the official economy. The lifeworld, which is socially organized, symbolically regulated, and dominated by communicative rationality is comprised of the private sphere (the family) and the public sphere (the political arena). Thus, there is a division between private (economy) and public (state) within the system and within the lifeworld - private (family) and public (political arena). As the system is dependent on the lifeworld for meaning,
interchange relations between system and lifeworld are based on roles which emerge within the lifeworld. As Habermas explains it,

> various social roles crystallize around these interchange relations: the roles of the employee and the consumer, on the one hand, and those of the client and the citizen of the state, on the other. (Habermas, 1987: 319)

Under classical capitalism, the roles of worker and citizen are central. The role of consumer takes on increasing importance with the development of welfare state capitalism as does that of client which emerges only under these conditions and replaces that of the citizen. Under classical capitalism, the family is linked to the official economy through the role of the worker and hence through the medium of money. The private realm supplies the economy with

> appropriately socialized labour power in exchange for wages, and it provides appropriate, monetarily measured demand for commodified goods and services. (Fraser, 1987: 41)

The public arena is linked to the state through the role of the citizen and hence through the medium of power. "Loyalty, obedience and tax revenues are exchanged for "organizational results" and political decisions" (Fraser, 1987: 41)

The ideal of the bourgeois public sphere within the context of modernity as Habermas defines it was briefly realized in Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This sphere, part of the lifeworld, lay between the absolutist state and private life and consisted of discoursing private persons bent on criticizing and ultimately curbing the absolutist power of the state.

This model of the public sphere recognizes neither social differences nor privileges. Equality of the members and general accessibility are assumed even if they cannot be realized in specific
situations. The revolutionary potential of the model is attributed to the fact that it makes possible, even demands, its application to all social groups. The public sphere sees itself clearly distinguished both from the state and from the private domain. (Hohendahl, 1979: 93)

Conditions for the emergence of the public sphere appear only with the advent of modernity. Modernity, with its rational as opposed to traditional bases of knowledge, makes reflexivity possible. Consequently, the public sphere, unique in its institutional capacity for social reflexivity, emerges with the modern distinction between material and social reproduction. This public sphere, according to Habermas, is vital for the success of the modern project. With it we have the means for the entrenchment of communicative rationality and the predominance of lifeworld considerations over system imperatives. Without it, we have unlimited system expansion and a pathological form of modernity.

The pattern of classical capitalist modernization has been to suppress communicative rationality and institutionalize instrumental reason as the form of reason:

capitalist modernization follows a pattern such that cognitive-instrumental rationality surges beyond the bounds of the economy and the state into other, communicatively structured areas of life and achieves dominance there at the expense of moral-political and aesthetic-practical rationality and...this produces disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld. (Habermas, 1987: 304,305)

The path that modernity has historically followed, therefore, has been one which has produced not a necessarily vital public sphere capable of realizing the emancipatory potential of bourgeois ideals, but one which has overridden public life and the social imperatives of the lifeworld with the asocial logic of the system. The system is properly organized instrumentally
while the lifeworld is properly organized communicatively. Such colonization of the social by the asocial necessarily produces pathological consequences.

RELATIONS BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD UNDER WELFARE STATE CAPITALISM

The colonization of the lifeworld by instrumental rationality commenced with classical capitalism but has been largely accomplished through the emergence of modern welfare state capitalism. Habermas terms his argument regarding the development of welfare state capitalism and the relationship between system and lifeworld within this context the thesis of inner colonization. Nancy Fraser outlines this thesis in the form of six related arguments. In the first place, Habermas states that welfare capitalism results from and emerges in response to the inability of classical capitalism to contain class conflict. Therefore, Keynesian "market replacing" and "market compensating" factors are employed to avert social and political crises. Thus, important and politically fought for concessions are granted. Needless to say, however, a realignment of relations between the official economy and the state, and between system and lifeworld occurs. "Thus, welfare capitalism partially overcomes the separation of public and private at the level of systems" (Fraser, 1987: 47). This has the effect of strengthening the system at the expense of the lifeworld - which is also weakened by the replacement of its public sphere of the citizen with the dependent relationship between lifeworld client and bureaucratic state.

Accordingly, Habermas's second argument concerns the changing nature of the relationship between system and lifeworld. Relations change in the following way: with respect to the private sphere there is an increased importance placed on the role of consumer and second, with
respect to the public sphere, the importance of the citizen role declines. In its place emerges the new role of the social-welfare client (Fraser, 1987: 47).

Thirdly, these new arrangements, while "politically fought for and vouchsafed in the interest of guaranteeing freedoms" nevertheless ultimately limit the scope of human freedom rather than increasing it (Habermas, 1987: 361). In a positive sense they have the effect of restraining the power of capital in the workplace and male dominance in the family. And yet, they
tend perversely to endanger freedom. These means are bureaucratic procedure and the money form. They structure the entitlements, benefits and social services of the welfare system. And in so doing, they disempower clients, rendering them dependent on bureaucracies and therapeutocracies, and preempt their capacities to interpret their own needs, experiences and life problems. (Fraser, 1987: 47)
The welfare state, therefore, rather than advancing the emancipatory project of modernity, has the opposite effect.

The fourth argument Habermas develops in defense of his thesis of inner colonization is that the incursion of system imperatives into the lifeworld, greatly accelerated in the welfare state, has pathological consequences. This occurs as domains of action appropriate to social organization are organized by system integration mechanisms. Such colonization of the lifeworld results in reification and cultural impoverishment. Dehumanization of society and the draining of vitality from public life reflect the uncoupling of system and lifeworld.

Habermas's fifth argument is that the uncoupling of system and lifeworld that results from the inner colonization of system and lifeworld comes about only under the following circumstances:
- when traditional forms of life are so far dismantled that the structural components of the lifeworld (culture, society, and personality) have been differentiated to a great extent;
- when exchange relations between the subsystems and the lifeworld are regulated through differentiated roles...
- when the real abstractions that make available the labour power of the employed and make possible the mobilization of the electorate are tolerated by those affected as a trade-off against social rewards (in terms of time and money);
- where these compensations are financed according to the welfare-state pattern from the gains of capitalist growth and are canalized into those roles in which, withdrawn form the world of work and the public sphere, privatized hopes for self-actualization and self-determination are primarily located, namely, in the roles of consumer and client. (Habermas, 1987: 356)

The modern welfare state has accomplished the inner colonization of the lifeworld in that system and lifeworld have become uncoupled. Rather than the lifeworld generating norms and meaning for the system, the system has distorted the lifeworld to the extent that meaning can be manipulated and extracted from it in keeping with system rather than lifeworld imperatives.

Habermas’s final argument with regard to the thesis of inner colonization is that the dismantling of the public sphere and the distortion of the communicative practices of the lifeworld generate new political configurations. The rise of new social movements is, for Habermas, a direct response to the colonization of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 392). The nature and role of new social movements within Habermas’s theory of communicative action is the topic of chapter four.

Ultimately, Habermas paints a picture of modern society as having been thwarted from the path of emancipation by the predominance of the wrong kind of rationality in the form of system imperatives. The uncoupling of system and lifeworld reflects the dominance of instrumental rationality
over communicative rationality. The welfare state’s specific contribution to the colonization of the lifeworld can be traced to its role in strengthening the system at the expense of the lifeworld. Habermas’s thesis revolves around the contention that the way to get back on track is to revitalize the public sphere. This project stands in opposition to the objectives of the New Right which attack the welfare state from a different perspective. The project of the New Right seeks to reintroduce hierarchies that the welfare state has played a role in eradicating. This would involve the unlimited privatization and complete commodification of all spheres of life through the undermining of the public sphere of the system - the state - as well as that of the lifeworld. In contrast, Habermas seeks to revitalize the public sphere of the lifeworld and see that it predominates over but does not cripple that of the system.

THE REVITALIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE SOLUTION TO THE MODERN CRISIS

The revitalization of the public sphere is the solution to the modern crisis for Habermas because it is the public sphere alone which has the capacity to contain the expansion of the system and hence preserve and expand the integrity of the lifeworld. The public sphere, therefore, has a central place in Habermas’s theory of communicative action, and for that matter, in his work as a whole. Indeed, its longstanding importance in the development of Habermas’s conceptual scheme is indicated by the publication in 1962 of his book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. In the battle to save the lifeworld from colonization by the system, the public sphere is the crucial sector. The revitalization of the public sphere will save both segments of the lifeworld - public and private - alike.
Habermas defends modernity against criticism that it is by definition pathological by insisting that it need not be. Pathological consequences result, not from modernity as such, but from the one-sided rationalization our society has pursued.

It is not the uncoupling of media-steered subsystems and of their organizational forms from the lifeworld that leads to the one-sided rationalization or reification of everyday practice, but only the penetration of forms of economic and administrative rationality into areas of action that resist being converted over to the media of money and power because they are specialized in cultural transmission, social integration, and childrearing, and remain dependent on mutual understanding as a mechanism for coordinating action. (Habermas, 1987: 330,331)

Indeed, for Habermas, bourgeois ideals retain their emancipatory potential and thus provide a basis for attempts at social transformation today (Marshall, 1990: 15). In particular, the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere should be pursued as it contains the potential to combat the colonization of the lifeworld.

As Habermas remarks, "there is an indissoluble tension" between capitalism and democracy" (Habermas, 1987: 345). This tension reflects the emancipatory potential of bourgeois ideals in that it results from the continued vitality of the lifeworld in the face of incursion from system imperatives. After all, regardless of the extent of the colonization of the lifeworld, the system still depends on the lifeworld for legitimation. This dependency ultimately can be used against the system: "the fact that the steering media of money and power have to be anchored in the lifeworld speaks prima facie for the primacy of socially integrated spheres of action over objectified systemic networks" (Habermas, 1987; 312). So although the lifeworld is manipulated and distorted by the system it remains the site
of potential resistance. While the system distorts the communicative practices in the private sphere of the lifeworld, by turning social domains into bureaucratically and monetarily structured contingencies, it is the destruction of the public sphere of the lifeworld which is at the heart of the modern dilemma. The solution to the one-sided rationalization of both the private sphere and the public sphere of the lifeworld, therefore, is the revitalization of the public sphere:

The point is to protect areas of life that are functionally dependent on social integration through values, norms, and consensus formation, to preserve them from falling prey to systemic imperatives of economic and administration subsystems growing with dynamics of their own, to defend them from becoming converted over, through the steering medium of the law, to a principle of sociation that is, for them, dysfunctional. (Habermas, 1987: 372,373)

The potential embodied in the bourgeois public sphere, therefore, is a central aspect of Habermas's defense of modernity and rationality.

II: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS'S ACCOUNT OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

The first criticism concerns his conception of the roles that mediate between system and lifeworld. As I outlined in the previous section, under classical capitalism the role of the worker links the private family of the lifeworld with the official economy of the system. The private realm supplies properly socialized labour in exchange for wages and streamlines demand for commodities. The role of the citizen, on the other hand, links the lifeworld's public sphere - the political arena - to the public sphere of the system - the state. Changes in relations between system and lifeworld with the emergence of welfare state capitalism are highlighted by a change in the roles that serve as a conduit for interchange relations. The private
spheres of system and lifeworld - family and official economy respectively - become linked increasingly by the role of the consumer. Interchange relations between the public sphere and the state witness the emergence of a new role - that of the social-welfare state client.

Habermas ignores the gender subtext of these roles. This is a crucial and revealing oversight. As Fraser insists, a feminist analysis reveals that, in addition to money and power, gender is a media of exchange in capitalist society (Fraser, 1987: 43). The role of worker in classical capitalism is very much a male role. As Fraser points out,

differences in the quality of women's presence in the paid workplace testify to the conceptual dissonance between femininity and the worker role in classical capitalism. (Fraser, 1987: 43)

The consumer, in welfare-state capitalism is, on the other hand, a feminine role. Whether women work outside the home or not they hold primary responsibility for providing the home with consumer goods. Furthermore, the predominance of advertising aimed at women attests to the feminine gender subtext of this role. The role of citizenship is obviously a male role in classical capitalism as it is dependent upon an individual's ability to participate in political debate, public opinion formation, and, crucially, to defend his country as a soldier in time of war. These capacities are historically construed as masculine not feminine (Fraser, 1987: 44). Indeed, the original Greek concept of the public sphere was emphatically masculine and the role of citizen has remained true to its conception (Walby, 1986: 94-142). Likewise, the role of social-welfare client is predominantly a feminine role, with the bureaucratic and therapeutic apparatus of the patriarchal state replacing the individualized patriarch within the family. While men, too, receive social welfare benefits, the vast
majority of recipients are female. Indeed, this reflects the "feminization of poverty" under welfare capitalism (Jordan, 1989: 273-296).

As Fraser convincingly argues, these gender identities are not incidental to relations between system and lifeworld but reflective of the significance of gender in mediating relations between the four spheres (Marshall, 1990: 17). After all, all these roles and their gendered subtexts have something in common in that they reflect and reinforce the power of men and the dependence of women. By ignoring this gendered subtext, Habermas misses the way that

the masculine citizen-soldier-protector role links the state and public sphere not only to one another but also to the family and to the paid workplace, that is, the way the assumptions of man’s capacity to protect and women’s need of man’s protection run through all of them. He misses...the way the masculine worker-breadwinner role links the family and official economy not only to one another but also to the state and the political public sphere, that is, the way the assumptions of man’s provider status and woman’s dependent status run through all of them...(Fraser, 1987: 45)

And, importantly, Habermas completely ignores the way in which the connection between the four spheres is forged in the media of gender by means of the feminized childrearer role and the socialization of children to gendered subjectivity (Fraser, 1987: 43).

Habermas seems to ignore the problematic aspects of gender. He could have expanded his understanding of money and power as media of exchange by examining the way they interact with gender in the construction of social, economic and political institutions. But then this would necessitate a re-drafting of his system/lifeworld, public/private model to incorporate an understanding of interactions as multidirectional.
The second major criticism of Habermas's model concerns his separation between lifeworld and system within the private sphere. According to Habermas, the private sphere of the system - the (official) economy - is system integrated because it is involved with material reproduction. The private sphere of the lifeworld - the family - however, is socially integrated because it engages in social reproduction. The separation between public and private at the level of the system and of at the level of the lifeworld is based, therefore, upon a distinction between material reproduction - that which is necessary for the physical survival of the individual and ultimately the human species - and social reproduction - that which concerns the socialization of the individual. I wish to argue that this distinction, when analyzed in terms of its referents, the (official) economy and the family, is entirely artificial. The (official) economy is not above and beyond contributing to the socialization of individuals - for example, workers learn much of what is expected of them in terms of behavior within the workplace itself - but, more importantly, the activities involved in childrearing are not purely socially reproductive. After all, infants are dependent on adult caregivers for biological survival. Women involved in childrearing, therefore, are involved in material reproduction. Furthermore, the performance of domestic labour by women, although largely unpaid, is ignored. For example, I question the value of a conceptual scheme which labels the toilet-cleaning activity of a janitor in the official economy material reproduction and that of a housewife in the home social reproduction? This distinction, when applied to labour typically performed by women is visibly inadequate. It also draws attention away from the fact that the household is a site of labour (albeit unpaid). Both the household and the paid workplace are sites where inequality and
subordination are the rule for women (Walby, 1986: 94-142). Habermas’s model does little to explain this.

Not only is the distinction between material and social reproduction artificial when applied to actual system and lifeworld contexts of women’s work but Habermas’s vision of the modern, restricted nuclear family ignores the fundamental inequality experienced by women. This combination of oversights serves to perpetuate the enclavement and feminization of childrearing and domestic labour. The characterization of the private sphere as ‘naturally’ non-system mediated distorts the experience of women too. A feminist analysis of the nuclear family clearly reveals that it is far from being above mediation by money and power:

Feminists have shown via empirical analyses of contemporary familial decision-making, handling of finances and wife battering that families are permeated with, in Habermas’s terms, the media of money and power. They are sites of egocentric, strategic and instrumental calculation as well as sites of usually exploitative exchanges of services, labour, cash and sex, not to mention sites, frequently of coercion and violence. (Fraser, 1987: 37,38)

Families are themselves economic institutions, therefore, and it is androcentric bias which permits them to be portrayed otherwise (Hartsock, 1983). Habermas tries to insulate modernity from any intrinsic responsibility for the oppressive nature of the nuclear family. He ascribes family situations which are oppressive to a failure to rid ourselves of the vestiges of our traditional, premodern past.

Male dominance is not incidental to modernity, however, but an integral part of it. It is certainly not merely a leftover from the traditional and irrational premodern past. After all, gender inequality mediates relations throughout the modern system and lifeworld. As Fraser remarks,
male dominance is intrinsic rather than accidental to classical capitalism. For the institutional structure of this social formation is actualized by means of gendered roles. It follows that the forms of male dominance at issue here are not properly understood as lingering forms of premodern status inequality. They are, rather, intrinsically modern in Habermas's sense, since they are premised on the separation of waged labour and the state from female childrearing and the household. (Fraser, 1987: 46)

Habermas tries to rescue both modernity from its historical role in creating a private sphere of exploitation and oppression of women and he tries to rescue his utopian vision of the lifeworld. Describing the lifeworld as communicatively organized, Habermas is at a loss to explain the inequality and relations of force and coercion characteristic of the modern, restricted nuclear family.

Habermas attempts to sanitize his communicative vision by making a distinction between 'normatively secured' and 'communicatively achieved' action contexts. Normatively secured action contexts apply to families whose achievement of consensus is questionable because of underlying or explicit relations of coercion or force or where such consensus is achieved pre-reflectively (Fraser, 1987: 38). This distinction is helpful in distinguishing between genuine and ingenuine forms of consensus, but, as Fraser points out, it takes insufficient account of the contexts of power in which the modern nuclear family operates. While the private sphere is designated as such not by choice but by exclusion and while women's roles in both the private and public spheres of both system and lifeworld are subordinated to those of men's, all family dynamics are suspect. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Habermas pays too much attention to the process of communication and not enough to the context. He ignores
the inherent structural inequalities which people bring with them to the bargaining table.

Habermas's model tends to perpetuate or at least make invisible the unique oppression of women in at least two important ways. It ignores the inequality faced by women in both system and lifeworld and it ignores the unique role of modernizing processes in establishing and restricting the concerns of women to a separate, private sphere. As Fraser argues, Habermas has misconceptualized the arenas and boundaries of conflict where women are concerned:

> the struggles and wishes of contemporary women are not adequately clarified by a theory that draws the basic battle line between system and lifeworld institutions. From a feminist perspective, there is a more basic battle line between the forms of male dominance linking "system" to "lifeworld" and us. (Fraser, 1987: 55)

Clearly, Habermas has failed to adequately identify and assess the problems faced by women in both classical and modern welfare-state capitalism. The following section will evaluate his solution from a feminist perspective.

**PROBLEMS WITH HABERMAS'S PROJECT OF REVITALIZING THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

The appropriate starting point for feminist criticism of Habermas's insistence on the revitalization of the public sphere is to discuss the meaning of the feminist slogan, "the personal is political." This slogan emerged from the American feminist movement in the 1970s. Far from denying that a division between the personal and political exists, feminism instead seeks to alter the terms upon which this distinction is made. Two principles which follow from this slogan are, first, that nothing be excluded in principle from being an appropriate subject of public discussion, and
second, that "no persons, actions or aspects of a person's life should be
forced into privacy" (Young, 1987: 74). Habermas's conception of the
public sphere will be discussed with these principles in mind.

In the preceding chapter, Habermas's commitment to the bourgeois
ideals of impartiality and universality, as well as his opposition between
reason and unreason, was outlined and criticized from a feminist
perspective. I concluded that these principles were ultimately exclusive and
argued that Habermas's theory of communicative action therefore fails to
transcend important aspects of liberal humanist discourse which have
figured in the oppression of women as other. I insisted that as long as
rationality and subjectivity are defined normatively in universal terms, the
historical and specific contexts for the creation and perpetuation of power
configurations, on the basis of gender and other socially constructed
differences, will go unchallenged. An examination of Habermas's
commitment to the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere provides an
opportunity to press this point further.

The ideal of the bourgeois public sphere is defined by virtue of its
impartiality and universality. The division between public and private,
furthermore, specifically assigns particularity to the private sphere. The
public sphere, therefore, is to be the realm where equals can discuss and
debate, aiming for rational consensus. At least two implications are
apparent when this model is examined critically.

First, in light of a feminist analysis of the division between the
personal and the political, individual agency is negated by this model in that
it is not what individuals choose to keep private but particularity that is
forced into privacy. Historically this has meant the exclusion of women and
other marginalized groups from full participation in the public realm. And
this is not incidental - it is integral to the bourgeois notion of the separation between public and private. Iris Young refers to Hannah Arendt's insistence that the private is "etymologically related to deprivation...The private, in this traditional notion, is connected with shame and incompleteness...and, implies excluding bodily and personally affective aspects of human life from the public." (Young, 1987: 74) Particularity becomes especially meaningful when we realize that power claims universality as its own; powerful groups define their interests and characteristics in universal terms while particularity is assigned to characteristics or individuals who are other:

the distinction between public and private as it appears in modern political theory expresses a will for homogeneity that necessitates the exclusion of many persons and groups, particularly women and racialized groups culturally identified with the body, wildness and irrationality. In conformity with the modern ideal of normative reason, the idea of the public in modern political theory and practice designates a sphere of human existence in which citizens express their rationality and universality, abstracted from their particular situations and needs and opposed to feeling. (Young, 1987: 73)

Women and/or women's particular interests are excluded, historically and currently, from the realm of the universal. Participants in the public sphere are expected to be neutral. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued, however, neutrality is highly suspect as in the Western conceptualization of male and female, male is viewed as both positive and neutral while female is negative. Habermas's commitment to the principles of universality and impartiality therefore commit him to a vision of a public realm which is inaccessible to women and other marginalized groups.
Habermas's defense of modernity crumbles at this point. His argument that we have simply chosen the wrong form of modernity loses credibility as we acknowledge that principles of exclusion are not incidental to bourgeois ideals but integral components.

Feminists have shown that the theoretical and practical exclusion of women from the universalist public is no mere accident or aberration. The ideal of the civic public exhibits a will to unity, and necessitates the exclusion of aspects of human existence that threaten to disperse...brotherly unity...especially the exclusion of women. (Young, 1987: 59)

A further and related point refers to the definition of appropriate forms of discourse within the public realm. Habermas's persistent placement of rationality and irrationality as opposites rules out affectivity, passion, and play as forms of communication (Young, 1987: 71). Ultimately, the public sphere which Habermas insists must be revitalized is a rather restricted, restrictive, and oppressive social institution. Its openness is illusory; all may enter it providing they leave their particularity - their gender, sexuality, race, age, class and cultural background - at the door. The "neutral" individual which emerges after particularities are stripped, for all intents and purposes, is white, male and middle class.

Habermas makes a good case for the need to revitalize the public sphere. From a feminist perspective this is not problematic in principle. In fact, it is highly desirable and necessary. However, the nature of the public sphere and boundaries between the public sphere and the private must be revised. The first thing that a feminist conception of the public sphere must involve is the centrality of individual agency in deciding what is to be personal. The personal must therefore be understood as an individual's
right to privacy. The second principle guiding a feminist conception of the public sphere is the need to allow for a multiplicity of forms of expression, not just sober, rational, discussion. As Iris Young insists, the distinction between public and private should not reflect an opposition between reason and affectivity and desire, or between universal and particular (Young, 1987: 73). Instead, the public realm must welcome affectivity, passion and play. Of central importance, universality and impartiality must not be the guiding principles of the public sphere. A consensus orientation overlooks particularity and partiality and assumes that there is something universal which underlies all our differences. Again, this universality alludes to a conception of neutrality which is artificial and reflective of power configurations. The pursuit of compromise with the awareness of difference is a far more constructive goal. In short, a feminist perspective necessitates the abandonment of these liberal humanist ideals and the social, economic, and political configuration of modernity.
CHAPTER FOUR: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS - AGENTS OF CHANGE IN HABERMAS'S THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

In chapter two of this thesis, my critique of Habermas's treatment of the problem of rationality was based upon a postmodern/poststructural feminist analysis. This analysis played a role in the chapter three, highlighting the social constitution of private and public domains as well as identifying the role of power configurations in determining the appropriateness of certain forms of expression over others. This fourth chapter is designed to criticize Habermas's conception of new social movements - in terms of origin, composition, and intended role. Habermas's treatment of new social movements is selected for criticism because of the central role these movements play, according to Habermas, in pursuing the societal transformation he advocates.

I will begin this chapter by summarizing Habermas's approach to new social movements. Then, I will juxtapose to it a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective regarding new social movements contained within the book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). The primary project in the book is to argue for the radical deepening of the democratic imaginary, or project. As for Habermas, Laclau and Mouffe, although they, like others (Geras, 1987) express discomfort with the term, new social movements contain the potential, albeit ambiguous, for transforming society into a radical democracy. Following my summaries of Habermas's and Laclau and Mouffe's approaches, several cross-currents between the texts will be identified and explored. Of particular interest, of course, will be issues which lend themselves readily to feminist analysis. For example, an issue which
immediately demands attention is the way the different texts conceptualize feminism within the context of new social movements.

As outlined in chapter three, Habermas considers the main battle in the fight to save modernity and human potential (for he believes the two are inextricably linked) to lie between system and lifeworld. The focal goal for societal transformation is the revitalization of the public sphere and hence the strengthening of the lifeworld at the expense of system imperatives. A strong, communicatively achieved public sphere will limit system imperatives to their appropriate domains, protect communicative rationality in the private sphere from distortion, and, ultimately, ensure that the system is functionally dependent on the lifeworld for meaning rather than the other way around.

The goal of Habermas's normative arguments in his theory of communicative action is to "decolonize the lifeworld" from system imperatives. Habermas makes an analogy which explains his use of the term 'decolonize', but in so doing he reveals the masculinity of his vision through the language he uses:

When stripped of their ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from outside - like colonial masters coming into a tribal society - and force a process of assimilation upon it. The diffused perspectives of the local culture cannot be sufficiently coordinated to permit the play of the metropolis and the world market to be grasped from the periphery. (Habermas, 1987: 355)

The uncoupling of system and lifeworld, resulting from the erosion of the public sphere under welfare-state capitalism, leaves the lifeworld vulnerable to system incursion. At this point it is necessary to consider the means by which Habermas believes decolonization may occur and what specific results he envisions from this process. Of central importance, then,
is the issue of agency in his scheme of societal transformation. Hence, the following section will focus on Habermas's conception of the origin, composition, and potential of "new social movements," while this chapter as a whole will critically analyze this aspect of the theory of communicative action from a primarily but not exclusively feminist perspective.

I: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN HABERMAS'S THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

While not disputing the class nature of capitalist society, Habermas insists that central axioms of Marxist theory, although relevant for the nineteenth century context of classical capitalism in which they emerged, fail to address current issues, specifically those identified with the development of the modern welfare state. Habermas is attempting to reconstruct historical materialism with this in mind. According to Marx, class conflict was both the major source of social tension and the means for societal transformation. While acknowledging that this was true for classical capitalism Habermas insists that the modern source of conflict lies between system and lifeworld. Correspondingly, within this antagonistic relationship lies the potential for positive social change:

In the face of class antagonism pacified by means of welfare-state measures...and in the face of the growing anonymity of class structures, the theory of class consciousness loses its empirical reference. It no longer has application to a society in which we are increasingly unable to identify class-specific lifeworlds. (Habermas, 1987: 352)

This change in the locus and source of conflict has profound implications for the basis and instigation of societal transformation. While for Marx the proletariat or working class were the "harbinger of revolution," welfare-state capitalism has produced a "class compromise" which has neutralized the revolutionary potential of the working class (Giddens, 1985: 135).
Marx wrote during the period of classical capitalism when the contingencies of the market were unbuffered for the most part by the state and conflict between classes was founded on the most basic issues of survival for the worker and profit for capitalists. Today, a combination of market regulation by the state to lessen fluctuations and their impact, the institutionalization of unions and the collective bargaining process in many sectors, and the existence of welfare measures for the economically disenfranchised, mean that:

Class relations...no longer have the hard edge they did in the nineteenth century; and the labour movement is not today the leading agency of social change. (Giddens, 1985: 135,136)

New conflicts have emerged which have new contestants and require new forms of struggle. The New Right, however, faced with these new challenges, is engineering a return to conditions of classical capitalism. Thus, as Habermas sees it, there is also the struggle between those movements which endeavour to expand the lifeworld at the expense of the system - the welfare state - and those which attempt to revert to pre-welfare state capitalist conditions.

According to Habermas, the new conflicts are not conflicts over distribution, conflicts which the welfare state emerged to pacify, but conflicts which go beyond the realm of material reproduction. They emerge, rather, in the realms of cultural reproduction, social reproduction, and socialization. The reification of communicatively structured domains of action that will not respond to the media of money and power, resulting from the colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives, is the basis for the new conflicts:

The issue is not primarily one of compensations that the welfare state can provide, but of
defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life. (Habermas, 1987: 392)

New conflicts emerge from both the overburdening and the undermining of the lifeworld. Three main crises characterize modern welfare-state capitalism, crises which the welfare state was neither designed to nor capable of addressing. Indeed, the welfare state is at the root of much of modern pathology. These crises concern legitimation, problems of excessive system complexity, and environmental limitations.

The first crises, that of legitimation, stems from what Habermas terms the "indissoluble tension" between capitalism and democracy (Habermas, 1987: 345). Legitimation crises which characterize welfare-state capitalism arise from the dependency of the system on the lifeworld for legitimation. At the same time, the colonization of the lifeworld by the system renders the lifeworld increasingly incapable of providing this legitimation. In Marx's time, "false consciousness" both resulted from and prevented the masses from seeing the contradictions inherent in capitalism. In welfare-state capitalism, in contrast, Habermas states that false consciousness has been replaced with "fragmented consciousness." While this fragmented consciousness allows the masses to be somewhat duped by the system, it also renders the lifeworld increasingly incapable of providing a basis for legitimacy. As Anthony Giddens (1985: 136) remarks, according to Habermas, under welfare state capitalism politics is reduced to the matter of who can run the economy best. As this orientation is consistent with system imperatives rather than social ones, the state is increasingly unable to provide moral leadership or adequately address issues of values. Thus, the majority of the population feels no commitment to the state. This
is, for Habermas, an expression of the inadequacy of system imperatives when faced with the requirements of the social realm:

because of its confined technocratic character, the political order lacks the legitimate authority which it needs to govern. Rather than economic contradiction, the tendency to legitimation crisis is for Habermas the most deep-lying contradiction of modern capitalism. Just as class division and economic instability gave rise to the labour movement in the nineteenth century, so this emerging contradiction tends to spawn new social movements in the twentieth century. (Giddens, 1985: 136,137)

The modern, structurally differentiated lifeworld is the only source of legitimation for the state and is hence the basis for the tension between capitalism and democracy (Habermas, 1987: 359). Modern capitalism has survived because of the pacifying and regulatory role of the welfare state. The state, in turn, depends on the lifeworld for legitimation. The imperatives of the lifeworld, however, clash with those of the system and the disintegration of the public sphere under capitalism has undermined the legitimating capacity of the lifeworld.

The second related crisis - that concerning the problems of increasing system complexity - concern the forcing of abstractions on the lifeworld and the implications of technology gone wild (Habermas, 1987: 395). Anxiety-producing cognitive dissonance plagues individuals within the lifeworld as a result of contradictions which emerge between moral and technical imperatives. Here, Habermas refers to a new category of risks - those associated with technological capacities for the destruction of humanity and the world, and those resulting from the uncoupling of this technology from lifeworld constraints (Habermas, 1987: 394,395). Technology, in other words, has become a runaway train. The inability of the lifeworld to comprehend, let alone control the system, is at issue here. In this sense
then, the system is out of control and people know it but are at a loss as to how to regain some form of control.

"Green" problems, a term which Habermas uses to characterize the problems plaguing our environmental well-being, are the third crisis. Green problems result from the impingement of system imperatives (industrialization) on not only the physical quality of the lifeworld but on the living world itself, present and future. This tension between system and lifeworld priorities is a focus of new forms of conflict.

New conflicts do not take place between classes, as nineteenth-century conflicts/struggles did, but "arise along the seams between system and lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 395). The conflicts result from the colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives and therefore concern resistance to the technicization of the functions of symbolic reproduction and impingements on the quality of life (Habermas, 1987: 351):

The new politics have to do with quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realization, participation, and human rights. (Habermas, 1987: 392)

There is an overall critique of growth binding the new movements together, a critique which finds no endorsement in the labour movement or in the tradition of bourgeois emancipation movements (Habermas, 1987: 393). As the locus of the new conflicts is the boundary between system and lifeworld, Habermas sees the focus of protest as being just those roles (discussed in chapter three) which perform interchange relations between system and lifeworld via the media of money and power. These new conflicts challenge not only the conditions under which these roles are fulfilled but, unlike earlier struggles, the nature and dimensions of the roles themselves:

Alternative practice is directed against the profit-dependent instrumentalization of work...the
market-dependent mobilization of labour power, against the extension of pressures of competition and performance all the way down into elementary school. It also takes aim at the monetarization of services, relationships, and time, at the consumerist redefinition of private spheres of life and personal life-styles. Furthermore, the relation of clients to public service agencies is to be opened up and reorganized in a participatory mode, along the lines of self-help organizations. (Habermas, 1987: 395)

Above all, Habermas insists, new forms of protest challenge the definition of citizen and notions of self-interest consistent with purposive-rational action in the domains of health care and social policy (Habermas, 1987: 395).

"New social movements," as Habermas and others call them, include a wide variety of social groupings. What they have in common are their concerns not with material reproduction but issues relating to the quality of life - physical and social - and forms of protest that are sub-institutional or extra-parliamentary. Neither the party system nor traditional interest group lobbying is sufficient for dealing with these new conflicts. New social movements include the anti-nuclear, peace and environmental movements, the psychoscene of support groups and youth sects, religious fundamentalism, the tax protest movement, school protest by parents' associations, resistance to "modernist" reforms, and the women's movement. On the international level, Habermas includes movements for regional, cultural, religious and linguistic autonomy (Habermas, 1987: 393). These movements generally find their base of support within the new middle classes, the younger generation, and the more educated sectors of the population. This is in contrast to "old politics" supported by employers, workers and middle-class tradesmen (sic) (Habermas, 1987: 392).
Habermas makes several distinctions within the general category of new social movements. All distinctions are based on the degree to which these movements attempt to decolonize the lifeworld:

Decolonization encompasses three things: first, the removal of system-integration mechanisms from symbolic reproduction spheres; second, the replacement of (some) normatively secured contexts by communicatively achieved ones; and third, the development of new, democratic institutions capable of asserting lifeworld control over state and (official) economic systems. (Fraser, 1987: 49)

New social movements are classified according to what Habermas considers to be their emancipatory potential on the basis of the above principles. In the first place, Habermas distinguishes between movements with emancipatory potentials and movements with potentials for resistance and withdrawal: "The resistance and withdrawal movements aim at stemming formally organized domains of action for the sake of communicatively structured domains, and not at conquering new territory" (Habermas, 1987: 393). Thus, movements such as religious fundamentalism are not ultimately emancipatory because, although they work against system intrusion into the lifeworld, they oppose the abandonment of any normatively secured action contexts and do not pursue the development of genuinely democratic political institutions. Movements like peace and ecology, in contrast, are genuinely emancipatory providing they avoid retreating into particularism and isolationist communities (Fraser, 1987: 49). Movements must challenge the hegemony of the system if they are to be considered genuinely emancipatory. If they do not, they are "more symptomatic than emancipatory: they express the identity disturbances caused by colonization" (Fraser, 1987: 49).
Habermas makes a second distinction between new social movements whose defense of the lifeworld is based on traditional access to property and privilege and those which "already operate on the basis of a rationalized lifeworld and tries out new ways of cooperating and living together" (Habermas, 1987: 394). Habermas uses this distinction to separate the protest of traditional middle classes against attacks on their relative advantages from those which comprise the core of a new conflict potential...youth and alternative movements for which a critique of growth sparked by themes of ecology and peace is the common focus. It is possible to conceive of these conflicts in terms of resistance to tendencies toward a colonization of the lifeworld. (Habermas, 1987: 394)

These "core" new social movements are genuinely emancipatory and are the vehicle Habermas looks to for the achievement of the decolonization of the lifeworld.

Of central importance, given the topic of this thesis, is Habermas's categorization of the feminist movement according to the above criteria. For Habermas, the feminist movement is difficult to peg. On the one hand, he considers it to be particularistic and hence connected to non-emancipatory but defensive social struggles:

the emancipation of women means not only establishing formal equality and eliminating male privilege, but countering concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies. Furthermore, the historical legacy of the sexual division of labour to which women were subjected in the bourgeois nuclear family has given them access to contrasting virtues, to a register of values complementary to those of the male world and opposed to one-sidedly rationalized everyday practice. (Habermas, 1987: 393,394)
Habermas also extends his critique of particularism among new social movements to the feminist movement, observing tendencies towards "retreat" into communities and identities organized "around the natural category of biological sex" (Fraser, 1987: 49). On the other hand, the feminist movement is unique among the new social movements in that it both retains links to bourgeois liberation movements, remaining rooted in "universalist morality" and, as Fraser observes, according to Habermas's criteria for genuinely emancipatory social movements, it is offensive in that it is aimed at "conquering new territory" (Fraser, 1987: 49). The feminist movement, among new social movements, is particularly emancipatory in that it is attempting to expand realms of communicative action beyond their historical limits. Thus, according to Habermas's criteria, his characterization of the feminist movement is contradictory. The feminist movement is both particularistic and universalistic, offensive and prone to withdrawal or "retreat", genuinely emancipatory and simply reformist.

In his discussion of new social movements as agents of societal transformation, Habermas is least specific about the means by which these movements are to achieve the decolonization of the lifeworld. He does offer several clues, however. He takes note of idealistic programmatic conceptions which focus on the "partial disintegration of the social roles of employees and consumers, of clients and citizens of the state" which are intended to

clear the way for counterinstitutions that develop from within the lifeworld in order to set limits to the inner dynamics of the economic and political-administrative action systems. These institutions are supposed, on the one hand, to divert out of the economic system a second, informal sector that is no longer oriented to profit and, on the other hand, to oppose to the party system new forms of a "politics in the first person," a politics that is
expressive and at the same time has a democratic base. (Habermas, 1987: 396)

For Habermas, these ideals, although unrealistic, "are important for the polemical significance of the new resistance and withdrawal movements reacting to the colonization of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987: 396). In other words, the adoption of such an orientation leads certain new social movements to develop truly emancipatory potential by pursuing the revitalization of the public sphere, thus creating political institutions capable of challenging the hegemony of the system. Habermas's point is that it is not possible to protect areas of life which are functionally dependent on social integration through a purely defensive posture. Institutions which are communicatively rational must be developed to curb the influence of the instrumental rationality of the system.

Although he does not develop a practical program, Habermas does hint at the centrality of the role of mass communications in decolonizing the lifeworld, based on what he terms their "ambivalent potential":

These media publics hierarchize and at the same time remove restrictions on the horizon of possible communication. The one aspect cannot be separated from the other - and therein lies their ambivalent potential. (Habermas, 1987: 390)

While acknowledging that "video pluralism" and "television democracy" are no more than "anarchist visions" at the moment, Habermas insists that the lifeworld can not only defend itself from mass media manipulation but can make use of it. However systemically colonized, the mass media is based in the lifeworld, through professional codes of journalism, for example, as well as content (Habermas, 1987: 391). Mass media is therefore a contestable area, a realm within which the imperatives of system and lifeworld clash. Habermas's remarks in this respect suggest that new social movements
make popular participation in mass communications a primary focus of struggle.

Habermas devotes little attention to the specific and practical means by which emancipatory new social movements are to achieve the decolonization of the lifeworld, beyond providing the above suggestions as to appropriate foci. Perhaps a practical program will be the subject of a later work.

II: THE PROJECT FOR RADICAL DEMOCRACY: LACLAU AND MOUFFE'S CONCEPTION OF NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Like Habermas, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) believe that Marxist principles concerning the primacy of class conflict and the revolutionary role of the working class are irrelevant for Western society today. However, theirs is primarily a critique of Marxist essentialism, while Habermas, although he does object to Marx’s economism, insists that Marx was right in his time but has become outdated. For Laclau and Mouffe, the democratic revolution is a continuous process which was set in motion in the nineteenth century, with the French Revolution introducing the democratic imaginary:

This break with the ancien regime, symbolized by the Declaration of the Rights of Man, would provide the discursive conditions which made it possible to propose the different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural, and thus make them equivalent as forms of oppression. Here lay the profound subversive power of the democratic discourse, which would allow the spread of equality and liberty into increasingly wide domains and therefore act as a fermenting agent upon the different forms of struggle against subordination. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 155)

The introduction of the democratic imaginary with its two themes of equality and liberty provided the potential, therefore, for unlimited conflict. Laclau and Mouffe describe this process as the introduction of
radical indeterminacy - nothing is absolute. What happens as a result of this potential is equally indeterminate - nothing is fixed. Laclau and Mouffe cite Lefort's insistence that

the radical difference which democratic society introduces is that the site of power becomes an empty space...Democracy inaugurates the experience of a society which cannot be apprehended or controlled, in which the people will be proclaimed sovereign, but in which its identity will never be definitely given, but will remain latent. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 186,187)

The introduction of the democratic imaginary and the dissolution of absolutism in the nineteenth century has shaped the politics of the twentieth century. Laclau and Mouffe employ the term 'hegemony' to understand western societies since the introduction of the democratic imaginary in the nineteenth century. 'Hegemony', Laclau explains, "means the contingent articulation of elements around certain social configurations - historical blocs - that cannot be predetermined" (Laclau, 1988: 16). In contrast to the absolutism that preceded it, therefore, hegemony consists of social struggles without fixed boundaries and power with no predetermined locus or form.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that 'new social movements' is an unsatisfactory term as

it amalgamates a series of very different struggles at the level of the relations of production, which are set apart from the 'new antagonisms' for reasons that display all too clearly the persistence of a discourse founded upon the privileged status of 'classes'. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 159)

Nevertheless, they accept the term 'new social movements' pragmatically because of its common usage and say that it is pointless to argue any further about its appropriateness. They see new social movements as worthy of
attention because they are playing a novel role in the advanced industrial context. New social movements articulate the rapid diffusion of social conflictuality to an ever increasing number of relations (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 159). Laclau and Mouffe conceive of these movements as

an extension of the democratic revolution to a whole new series of social relations. As for their novelty, this is conferred upon them by the fact that they call into question new forms of subordination. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 160)

These movements are highly diverse but, according to Laclau and Mouffe, they do have in common their differentiation from typically ‘class’ struggles (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 159).

New social movements, or ‘new antagonisms’, as Laclau and Mouffe prefer to call them, are different than but related to historical democratic struggles. Some continuity exists because of the legacy of the egalitarian imaginary stemming form liberal-democratic ideology. New social movements extend this imaginary in unprecedented and radical ways. The discontinuity exists largely because of vastly different historical circumstances. The field of social conflictuality has been expanded in relation to three significant developments - the commodification and bureaucratization of social relations resulting from the implanting and expansion of capitalist relations of production and the growing intervention of the state; the reformation of liberal ideology as a result of the expansion of struggles for equality; and, finally, new cultural forms resulting from the growth of mass communication:

the new struggles - and the radicalization of the older struggles such as those of women or ethnic minorities - should be understood from the double perspective of the transformation of social relations characteristic of the new hegemonic formation of the post-war period, and of the effects of the displacement into new areas of
Laclau and Mouffe emphasize the multiplicity of social relations from which new antagonisms emerge. Civil society itself is included as a context within which relations of subordination exist (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 179).

Relations of subordination, as such, are not sources of conflict, not by definition anyway, Laclau and Mouffe insist. What is important, rather, is that such relations are identified and called into question. This socially constitutive process transforms relations of subordination - "that in which an agent is subjected to the decisions of another" - into relations of domination - "the set of those relations of subordination which are considered illegitimate from the perspective, or in the judgement, of a social agent external to them" - which, can be transformed into relations of oppression - "those relations of subordination that have been revealed as arbitrary by identifying them as relations of oppression in this way." The movements taking up the project of radical democracy seek to transform those relations of subordination which they deem oppressive - either those relations of subordination already in existence or those which are introduced or threatened:

\[
\text{in every case what allows the forms of resistance to assume the character of collective struggles is the existence of an external discourse which impedes the stabilization of subordination as difference. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 159)}
\]

In keeping with the 'radical unfixity' produced by the democratic imaginary, however, neither the subject of an antagonism, its form, nor its contestants, can be predetermined (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 159).
What Laclau and Mouffe term the "deepening of the democratic revolution" refers to the proliferation of antagonisms based on the calling into question of various relations of subordination (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 163). The democratic project is furthered in this way and much of this expansion occurs through chain reactions - as one form of subordination is called into question, it leads to questions being posed about others. This is what Laclau and Mouffe consider to be an important aspect of the revolutionary power of the democratic imaginary, arguing that its liberatory potential is limitless. They carefully point out, however, that its potential is also ambiguous:

It is precisely this polysemic character of every antagonism which makes its meaning dependent upon a hegemonic articulation to the extent that...the terrain of hegemony practices is constituted out of the fundamental ambiguity of the social, the impossibility of establishing in a definite manner the meaning of any struggle, whether considered in isolation or through its fixing in a relational system. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 170)

Consequently, Laclau and Mouffe make a distinction between radically democratic new social movements which function on the basis of radical indeterminacy and go beyond criticisms based on democratic logic to provide proposals for a new order and those movements which are at best oppositional or at worst, be they right or left, universalistic.

Arguing from a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective, Laclau and Mouffe highlight the importance of renouncing the unitary subject and notions of universal human nature. This is highly relevant for understanding the origin, constitution, and aims of new social movements.

The public sphere, traditionally and historically, has been constructed as the arena for the expression of democratic ideals through
the participation of certain individuals who qualify as citizens. The underlying principle of the public sphere is that within this space, differences are to be erased. These differences are assigned room only in the private realms. The public is to express the universal, the private the particular. Many new social movements, those consisting of marginalized groups in particular, respond to the so-called universality of the public sphere by showing that its very universality excludes them on the basis of their highly relevant particularity. A critique of principles of universality and the unitary subject allows us to see the purely social and hence arbitrary construction of these boundaries:

What has been exploded is the idea and the reality itself of a unique public space of constitution of the political. What we are witnessing is a politicization far more radical than any we have known in the past, because it tends to dissolve the distinction between the public and the private, not in terms of the encroachment on the private by a unified public space, but in terms of a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces. We are confronted with a plurality of subjects, whose forms of constitution and diversity it is only possible to think of if we relinquish the category of 'subject' as unified and unifying essence. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 189)

Radically democratic new social movements contest universalism in principle and in practice and, logically, question the boundaries between the public and private spheres.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that, with the proliferation of new antagonisms and 'New Rights', a massive social crisis is inevitable and impending. Of course, its form or resolution cannot be predetermined (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 168). They argue on behalf of a project for
radical democracy, insisting that many new social movements have adopted it already, whether implicitly or explicitly.

Radical democracy is founded on two major premises: "the rejection of privileged points of rupture and the confluence of struggles in a unified political space, and the acceptance, on the contrary, of the plurality and indeterminacy of the social" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 152). This involves, necessarily, both the renunciation of the unitary subject and the rational society as ideals and as possibilities. As Laclau and Mouffe insist, these ideas are mythical (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 191). The renunciation of the unitary subject opens up a new range of possibilities. As we recognize that antagonisms are constituted on the basis of different subject positions, we now have

a theoretical terrain on the basis of which the notion of radical and plural democracy...finds the first conditions under which it can be apprehended. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 166)

A thoroughly radical pluralist democratic movement seeks nothing less than the recognition of difference and particularity as important but within the context of equivalence and egalitarianism.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that we must not abandon liberal-democratic ideology "but on the contrary...deepen it and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 176). The basis of their argument is that the affirmation of individual rights within liberalism is a permanent and powerful characteristic of Western consciousness:

the conversion of liberal-democratic ideology into the 'common sense' of Western societies laid the foundation for that progressive challenge to the hierarchical principle which Tocqueville called the 'equalization of conditions'. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 160)
This characteristic is, importantly, unfixed. That is, although liberal ideology can be conservatively interpreted, particularly in narrow economic terms, to support the agenda of the New Right, it can also be radically interpreted. History has shown us, Laclau and Mouffe argue, that liberal ideas of individual rights have been radically extended and the potential to take this powerful ideology much further remains. Contrary to conservative interpretations of the rights of the individual, we must radically interpret and understand these rights to be exercised fully only within a collective context which is based on equal rights for all (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 184,185). Furthermore, not only are individual rights to be interpreted radically, but the spheres in which they exercised must be radically enlarged. Thus, democratic rights must be exercised, not only in the traditional public sphere of citizenry, but in all sectors, such as the economy and the family. Here, Laclau and Mouffe explain the place of socialism in a project for radical democracy:

> every project for radical democracy implies a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to put an end to capitalist relations of production, which are at the root of numerous relations of subordination; but socialism is one of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 178)

Radical democracy, with its comprehensive emancipatory potential, must be understood to be a continuation of the democratic project initiated in the nineteenth century. Liberal-democratic ideals, interpreted as being radically unfixed, are therefore at the heart of the current project.

Radical democracy is all about potentiality and is therefore open to non-liberatory interpretations. Problems include the conservative potentials of ambiguous principles and movements:
The forms of articulation of an antagonism...far from being predetermined, are the result of hegemonic struggle. This affirmation has important consequences, as it implies that these new struggles do not necessarily have a progressive character. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 169)

Many liberal-democratic ideals have been employed by the New Right in their efforts to reconstruct a hierarchic society. In addition, tendencies toward unifying aspects of the social threaten us with the logic of totalitarianism. On the other hand, we face the dangerous possibility of a complete lack of unity where the unfixity of meaning is taken to lengths so extreme that literally nothing matters. As Laclau and Mouffe insist, articulation must never be viewed as fixed and must be constantly re-created. But, this articulation of the recognition of social logics must be made. These are problems which the Left must confront should it take up the project for radical democracy.

The task of the Left is, for Laclau and Mouffe, to take on the project for radical democracy, thereby locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and developing a new ‘common sense’ based on the equivalence of different struggles against oppression. The Left must endeavour to develop itself and its agenda within this context.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that the Left must go far beyond the mere politics of opposition to provide proposals for the positive reconstruction of the social order. A central aspect of this endeavour is the creation of a social context of equivalence. Political spaces must be multiplied and concentration of power prevented (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 178):

For the defense of the interests of workers not to be made at the expense of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers, it is necessary to establish an equivalence between these different struggles. It is only on this condition that struggles against power become truly democratic,
and that the demanding of rights is not carried out on the basis of an individualistic problematic, but in the context of respect for the rights to equality of other subordinated groups. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 184)

Each movement, each struggle, therefore, will have its own particular agenda but if this agenda involves achieving goals at the expense of the rights of others, real democratic rights are denied to all. This involves a shift in the politics of the Left from universalism which is ultimately exclusive to an inclusive radical democracy:

there is no radical and plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to 'the truth', which can be reached only by a limited number of subjects. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 191,192)

The task of the Left, therefore, is to empower itself through empowering others. Only in this way can it be radically democratic.

III: CROSS-CURRENTS BETWEEN THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND THE PROJECT FOR A RADICAL DEMOCRACY

While Laclau and Mouffe's thesis is not immune to criticism in itself (see Geras, 1987; Mouzelis, 1988), such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this thesis. For my purposes I hope it has sufficed to outline their project for radical democracy in order to bring Habermas's theory of communicative action into as sharp a contrast as possible.

While Habermas insists that new social movements are a response to the colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives, Laclau and Mouffe consider these movements to emerge from and engage in a process of questioning relations of subordination. These relations of subordination result, not from the one-way flow of system imperatives into the lifeworld which Habermas depicts, but from a multitude of sources - the state and the
economy certainly, but also from the so-called private realm and civil society. Habermas depends on an inherent human capacity for communicative rationality for emancipatory potential. In contrast, Laclau and Mouffe cite the specific historical process which introduced a democratic imaginary into western consciousness as the potential means for societal transformation. The differences between Habermas's theory of communicative action and Laclau and Mouffe's project for radical democracy are philosophically and practically significant. Analysis from a feminist perspective can, I think, establish this in a powerful way.

Nancy Fraser (1987) makes a strong criticism of Habermas's conception of the colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives as the basis of modern pathology and for the existence of new social movements. She insists that a feminist analysis reveals it as inadequate and, correspondingly, so too the scheme of decolonization which he proposes as the means for its resolution.

In the first place, Fraser argues, the process of 'colonization' is portrayed by Habermas as unidirectional and negative. System imperatives impinge on the lifeworld with negative consequences. In actuality, Fraser insists, by thematizing the gender subtext of the roles of worker, consumer, citizen, and client, and adding that of childrearer, the ambiguous effects of the welfare state on women's lives is revealed. While women in the postwar period have experienced new forms of domination, these have been accompanied by a heretofore unrealized degree of economic and political emancipation:

Above all, it has been an experience of conflict and contradiction as women try to do the impossible, namely, to juggle simultaneously the existing roles of childrearer and worker, client and citizen. The cross-pulls of these mutually
incompatible roles have been painful and identity-threatening, but not simply negative. Interpellated simultaneously in contradictory ways, women have become split subjects; and, as a result, the roles themselves, previously shielded in their separate spheres, have suddenly been opened to contestation. (Fraser, 1987: 52)

The removal of system imperatives from lifeworld spheres does not address the subordination women experience in the workplace of the family and it ignores the multidirectionality of causal influence, positive and negative.

Fraser is also critical of Habermas’s insistence on the need to reverse the direction of influence and control from the system to the lifeworld without challenging the actual organization of the system. This is problematic in two ways. In the first place, lifeworld norms are far from homogeneous although Habermas’s portrayal of the lifeworld tends to be monolithic. While Habermas views the major conflicts to exist between system and lifeworld he misses the significance of conflict within the lifeworld - the contestation of male and female roles and notions of masculinity and femininity being a case in point. We are reminded of Fraser’s insistence that Habermas has drawn the battle line at the wrong point - between system and lifeworld rather than between relations of subordination and those of emancipation which exist within all social spaces (Fraser, 1987: 55). In the second place, strengthening lifeworld institutions at the expense of systemic incursion fails to challenge the very hierarchical and oppressive basis of the system itself:

If the real point is the moral superiority of cooperative and egalitarian interactions over strategic and hierarchical ones, then it mystifies matters to single out lifeworld institutions - the point should hold for paid work and political administration as well as for domestic life. (Fraser, 1987: 52)
Habermas seems to treat the imperatives of the system as given. In this sense, we can see that although he has escaped one aspect of Weber’s iron cage, that of the inevitability of instrumental rationality to penetrate and dehumanize *all* of society, he has accepted the seeming necessity of letting instrumental rationality claim and hence dehumanize at least a significant segment of society. Habermas has made a deal with the devil.

Fraser is most accepting of the second element of decolonization, that which concerns the replacement of normatively secured action contexts with communicatively achieved ones. But, she notes, Habermas fails to achieve the potential he suggests. New social movements, Fraser argues, are involved in struggles over the meanings and norms at a number of levels - *within* social movements as well as those underlying government and corporate policy. Habermas restricts his theory to an understanding of struggles waged erroneously "over systems media above" and fails to thematize altogether the "contestation for hegemony over the 'socio-cultural means of interpretation and communication'" (Fraser, 1987: 52,53). The strength of Laclau and Mouffe’s work is precisely their ability to conceive of the multidirectionality of causes of relations of subordination and their conception of meaning as being unfixed and therefore open to a perpetual and conflictual process of interpretation and construction.

Habermas embraces a universalistic notion of rationality and bases his argument for the need to revitalize the public sphere on this opposition between reason and unreason. Laclau and Mouffe deny universalism altogether and consequently argue, not for the revitalization of the public sphere, but for the multiplication and dispersion of political spaces and the repudiation of the artificial boundaries between public and private realms.
Laclau and Mouffe agree with feminist analyses of the purported universal nature of the public realm which see its historical role as one of marginalization of women and racial minorities in particular. Laclau and Mouffe's conception of new social movements involves the celebration of the particular which Habermas views negatively but Iris Young (1987) finds to be a central impetus and role of new social movements. New social movements, she insists:

have begun to create an image of a more differentiated public that directly confronts the allegedly impartial and universalistic state....The women's Movement...has claimed to develop and foster a distinctly women's culture and that both women's specific bodily needs and women's situation in male-dominated society require attending in public to special needs and unique contributions of women. (Young, 1987: 75)

The conceptualization of new social movements developed by Laclau and Mouffe is consistent, therefore, with the postmodern/poststructural feminist critique of universal rationality outlined in chapter two and with the corresponding critique of the bourgeois public sphere developed in chapter three of this thesis.

Habermas and Laclau and Mouffe make similar distinctions between new social movements which are defensive and those which are potentially transformative and between those which challenge relations of oppression and those which seek to re-institutionalize certain forms of hierarchy. Habermas makes his distinctions on the basis of a three-fold project of decolonization while Laclau and Mouffe base theirs on the principles of radical democracy. Both theoretical bases have been outlined above.

Habermas both praises the feminist movement as being uniquely emancipatory in that it breaks new ground in expanding realms of communicative action beyond their historical limits and condemns it as
defensive in its tendency to withdraw into particularism. Laclau and Mouffe, in contrast, herald feminist tendencies which are critical of universalism as being in the forefront of the project for radical democracy.

Laclau and Mouffe see feminism as a historical development, emerging first with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Wollstonecraft "determined the birth of feminism through the use of the democratic discourse" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 154). This understanding of feminism as a historical process is based on Laclau and Mouffe's argument, explored earlier, that relations of subordination do not become relations of oppression and hence contestable until they are subjected to scrutiny and revealed as arbitrary. Wollstonecraft used the democratic discourse to initiate this process of questioning. Other feminists (Donovan, 1987: 8; Jagger, 1988: 38) locate Wollstonecraft's work within the genre of enlightenment liberal feminism and acknowledge her book as a "classic" in feminist theory. They, however, focus more on the shortcomings of liberal discourse when applied to feminist concerns which Wollstonecraft's work highlights. All feminists do not agree that Wollstonecraft is, as Laclau and Mouffe would have it, the "mother" of modern feminism, but they generally acknowledge that there is a degree of continuity from that early movement to the present day one. Laclau and Mouffe argue that since the publication of Wollstonecraft's book, feminism has undergone a process which reflects the increasing radicalization of liberal-democratic ideals:

> it was a question of gaining access for women first to political rights; later to economic equality; and, with contemporary feminism, to equality within the domain of sexuality. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 156)
And, in keeping with their insistence on the hegemonic articulation of new or radicalized older antagonisms, there are multiple tendencies within and against feminism, all struggling to define its terms and their meaning. Tendencies towards withdrawal are not necessarily understood as belonging outside the domain of ‘strategies of construction of a new order’ or as refusals to participate in the democratic process, but rather, potentially, as Laclau and Mouffe conceive of a multiplicity of political spaces, one form among possible others for advancing the project for radical democracy. In keeping with their conception of the unfixed nature of antagonisms, also, they view feminism as a collection of competing tendencies, some more radical than others, rather than a monolithic movement.

Nancy Fraser (1987) raises three critical points concerning Habermas’s conception of feminism within his various categories of new social movements. In the first place, she challenges his failure to make a distinction between short-term and long-term strategies in his dismissal of cultural feminism’s tendency toward withdrawal:

> cultural separatism, while inadequate as long-term political strategy, is in many cases a shorter-term necessity for women’s physical, psychological and moral survival; and separatist communities have been the source of numerous reinterpretations of women’s experience which have proved politically fruitful in contestation over the means of interpretation and communication. (Fraser, 1987: 54)

I am inclined to believe that Fraser does not go far enough in challenging Habermas’s distinction between feminist political engagement and so-called apolitical engagement. This criticism of feminist separatism comes often from the male Left and goes largely unchecked by all but the most radical feminist writers. I believe that a defense which is less reductionist than that which radical feminism tends to offer is more appropriate. In the
first place, feminists who 'separate', separate themselves not from society in
general but from the particular society of men - the 'mainstream' society
which has been created by men and dominated by men at the expense of
women, not to mention minorities. It is important to realize that 'society' is
another term which connotes generality but which, in reality, connotes the
particularity of male-dominated sectors. The society of women is certainly
no less social. This devaluation of a counter society of women must be
understood as suspect when it is made by men whose theoretical schemes
continue to exclude women and assume masculine norms. In the second
place, much of the criticism of feminist separatism coming from the male
Left can be understood as resentment and jealousy at feminist withdrawal
of women's organizational services. In many cases, feminists have
withdrawn into organizing with and on behalf of women alone on the basis
of a healthy refusal to tolerate the misogyny of the male Left or to take
responsibility for eradicating it or 'healing' the rifts which have arisen from
it. Habermas's condemnation of feminist tendencies can be understood as
frustration at women's refusal to join in 'larger' projects such as his. It is
fair to argue that, before he has a right to complain at women's lack of
participation in such theoretical designs, his theory must genuinely and
fully include us.

The second point Fraser raises in connection with Habermas's
conception of the feminist movement concerns his dismissal of feminist
identification with the body. As Fraser (1987) notes, Habermas does well to
be critical of biological reductionism but not to ignore the historical and
social significance of women's bodies:

women's struggle for autonomy necessarily and
properly involves, among other things, the
reinterpretation of the social meanings of our bodies. (Fraser, 1987: 54)

Women's bodies have been and continue to be the physical sites of struggles over power and meaning and therefore are a significant component of the feminist problematic.

Fraser's third point refers to Habermas's endorsement of universalism and condemnation of particularism on a theoretical level. Habermas is appealing to a universal notion of distributive justice and concerned about the undermining effects of particularism on a project to further it. Rather than challenging the very possibility of universality, as postmodern/poststructural feminists do, Fraser holds back, cautioning Habermas against dismissing particularism out of hand. Indeed, Fraser embraces a universal notion of distributive justice as being consistent with feminist goals. She excuses certain forms of particularism from Habermas's condemnation by insisting that they are not "particularistic in a pejorative sense" (Fraser, 1987: 54). As established in chapter two of this thesis, however, universals are inevitably exclusive. It is only through the recognition of the significance of the particular that women's concerns can be addressed.

Habermas's treatment of the feminist movement is problematic in ways which reflect his commitment to universal political principles which historically and currently function on behalf of those power configurations which shape them, thus belying their very universality. The postmodern/poststructural feminist approach adopted by Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, allows for a recognition of feminism's role in a social struggle of interpretation and meaning which is necessarily particular. Furthermore, the project for radical democracy revolves around
a conception of an inclusive multiplicity of political spaces rather than an inevitably exclusive, specifically but arbitrarily defined, public realm.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I: IMPLICATIONS OF SPECIFIC FEMINIST CRITICISMS FOR HABERMAS'S THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AS A WHOLE

While Habermas acknowledges certain aspects of the patriarchal oppression of women, such as the historical sexual division of labour (Habermas, 1987: 393,394) and inequality within the family (Habermas, 1987: 368), he fails to follow through on these observations. In other words, while paying lip-service to some feminist concerns, he fails to incorporate this knowledge into his theoretical framework. In most respects, he says nothing about gender at all. Far from engendering a critique on the basis of an absence of feminist content, however, I am arguing that this failure produces substantial inadequacies within the Theory of Communicative Action. As Alison Jagger remarks,

> every aspect of social life is governed by gender...all of social life is structured by rules that establish different types of behaviour as appropriate to women and men. Feminists subject these rules to critical scrutiny, arguing that, in many cases if not all, they are oppressive to women. (Jagger, 1983: 21)

Not only has Habermas left out of his critical theory of modern society an analysis of the way the construction of gender identities, in keeping with political and economic factors, institutionalize the inequality of women, but he has perpetuated this inequality by rendering much of it invisible and by failing to challenge its institutional bases. The invisibility of women in the Theory of Communicative Action, however, is problematic not only for women but for Habermas's entire theoretical framework. In this final chapter, I intend to establish this point by bringing together the arguments
about specific androcentric biases in the Theory of Communicative Action which I have made in the previous chapters.

In chapter two, I argued that Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, while challenging important aspects of liberal humanist discourse - notably the asocial notion of abstract individualism and the reduction of reason to a purely instrumental form - fails to transcend aspects of this framework which figure in the oppression of women as other. I based this argument on the insistence that, in reality, when rationality and subjectivity are defined, not socially and historically but universally, this very definition is exclusive as it represents the specific interests of dominant power configurations. Women and other marginalized groups have been excluded from this universal notion of rationality; their disenfranchisement based on their particularity. Ultimately, I argued against Habermas's employment of a universal notion of rationality on the basis of a postmodern/poststructural feminist perspective which insists that universality is mythical and serves only to mask relations of power and inequality.

Habermas's commitment to principles of universality ignore the social and historical construction of meaning. This is evident from his assumption that in an ideal speech situation the force of the better argument will prevail and consensus will be achieved. As I pointed out in chapter two, Habermas believes that absolute meanings exist in language, independently of society, and are simply distorted by relations of coercion and force. Removing those relations accesses that underlying, unchanging meaning. This assumption of universality is clearly exclusive.

In chapter two I was also critical of Habermas's unidimensional model of communicative rationality. I pointed out that the abstract ideal
speech situation neglects the larger social context within which individuals internalize relations of force and coercion and neglects the highly relevant semiotic aspects of communication. Habermas thus ignores the implicit relations of power which are characteristic of human interaction.

In chapter three I defended Fraser's argument that Habermas has drawn the battle line between system and lifeworld erroneously. Rather than viewing the central conflict to be against relations of subordination in all sectors of society, Habermas views the incursion of system imperatives to be at fault. The causal flow creating the pathology of the modern world is, according to Habermas, unidirectional - from system to lifeworld. In combination with the fact that Habermas ignores the gender subtext of the roles which he insists mediate relations between system and lifeworld and his neglect of the childrearing role, this singlemindedness about the source of oppression prevents Habermas from understanding or explaining either the oppression women experience in the home or the particular oppression women face in the workplace.

In chapter three I also agreed with Fraser's argument that the distinction between material and social reproduction is entirely artificial. This reflects the fact that, ultimately, Habermas fails to question the boundaries between the public and private within the lifeworld and thereby leaves intact an institutional mainstay in the subordination of women. Habermas, thereby, fails to acknowledge that women "work" in the home although they are not generally paid for it. By making a distinction between material and paid production and social and unpaid production, Habermas fails to question the historical, sexual division of labour.

Habermas's solution to modern crisis resulting from the colonization of the lifeworld is the revitalization of the public sphere. While this
solution is not inconsistent with a feminist perspective in principle, it certainly is inconsistent in practice. Habermas's gender-blindness prevents him from seeing that the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere which he insists we should strive to realize is inherently masculine. As long as this public sphere is based on principles of universality and the opposition between rationality and irrationality, dominant power configurations will be able to define the terms of entry and the acceptable forms of expression to exclude others. At this point the connection between the critique of rationality I made in chapter two and the critique of Habermas's argument for the revitalization of the bourgeois public sphere becomes apparent.

A further criticism of the bourgeois public sphere which I made, supported by the work of Iris Young (1987), is that as long as the public sphere is founded on the principle of universality, it means that particularity is driven into the condition of the private sphere. As I pointed out, this means that women and other marginalized groups are disenfranchised, at least in terms of their specific concerns.

In contrast to Habermas's ideal of the public sphere, I proposed a feminist program for the creation of an accessible public sphere. The principles which are appropriate to such a project included the emphasis on individual agency in designating the private sphere, the abandonment of universal notions of rationality and the hegemony of so-called rational forms of expression, and, finally, the orientation towards compromise with the awareness and valuation of difference rather than a consensus-orientation. Ultimately, I argued that, in keeping with the critique of Habermas's notion of rationality that I made in chapter two, and in combination with a feminist analysis of the oppressive nature of a private sphere based on particularity and a public sphere based on universality, the
liberal-humanist ideal of the public sphere - with its two principles of universality and rationality - and the social, economic, and political configuration of modernity, based on this opposition between reason and unreason, must be abandoned.

Thus, so far, two central principles have been identified: that of the need to abandon universal notions of rationality and that of the need to deconstruct the boundaries between public and private spheres within the lifeworld. These principles emerge as a result of a feminist analysis which views gender as problematic. It is quite clear that Habermas's ability to defend a universal notion of rationality and to ignore the artificial and oppressive nature (to women and other marginalized groups) of the boundaries between public and private spheres within the lifeworld results in part from his failure to consider the gender subtext of subject matter. These principles informed the critique of Habermas's conceptualization of new social movements advanced in chapter four.

In chapter four, a poststructuralist feminist critique, based on principles compatible with the conclusions I reached in chapters two and three, was enlivened by the introduction of Laclau and Mouffe's work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). Laclau and Mouffe's poststructural feminist Project for a Radical Democracy provided contrast to throw Habermas's treatment of new social movements into sharp relief. As a result, I was able to identify a number of problems in the theory of communicative action. In the first place, Habermas's failure to conceive of the multidirectionality of causal influence, positive and negative, between and within system and lifeworld, in contrast to Laclau and Mouffe's very insistence on such multidirectionality, was shown to prevent Habermas from grasping the particularly ambiguous effects of the welfare state on
women's lives. Furthermore, he fails to realize that many of the problems
which the feminist movement, as a new social movement, addresses concern
relations of subordination within the lifeworld. Again, this is in keeping
with the argument for a multidirectional understanding of the oppression
of women within the lifeworld as well as a result of the incursion of system
imperatives.

In the second place, a related point emerged which concerned the
fact that if the system was to become directed by lifeworld norms these
norms would very likely be oppressive to women. After all, the lifeworld is
far from monolithic and there are forces striving to increase the oppression
of women as well as those working to abolish it. The agenda of the New
Right could equally emerge in the struggle for hegemony within the
lifeworld. This is a point which Laclau and Mouffe, with their
poststructural deconstruction of conceptions of universality, are able to
make.

In the third place, following from the argument against a
universalistic public sphere made in chapter three, the new social
movements which Laclau and Mouffe see as advancing the project for
radical democracy seek to break down the boundaries between public and
private and to see particularity appreciated and valued. Universalistically
oriented social movements, whether they be on the Right or the Left - as in
the case of Habermas - are considered by Laclau and Mouffe to be the
greatest danger of all. By employing the technique of contrast between
Habermas's theory of communicative action and Laclau and Mouffe's
project for a radical democracy, I have been able to show that Habermas's
commitment to universality and failure to question the boundaries between
public and private cripple his entire theoretical framework.
A fourth critical point which I made concerned Habermas's categorization of the feminist movement with respect to his distinctions between 'progressive' and 'defensive' new social movements. By this time, Habermas's positive reaction to feminist strands with universalist tendencies and negative reaction to those strands which emphasize particularism and the social construction of women's physical, emotional, and intellectual beings could simply be reversed from a feminist perspective in keeping with the two central principles outlined above.

A final point which I would like to raise was made earlier in chapter four and it concerns the relative lack of ambition Habermas demonstrated in leaving the organization of the system unchallenged. After all, if system imperatives are not replaced with communicative imperatives, political administration and the paid workplace will remain rife with relations of coercion, force, and inequality. Considering the vastness of Habermas's project, it is unseemly that he should settle for so little in this respect.

II: IMPLICATIONS OF A CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS'S THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION FOR FEMINISM

In this following section I will discuss the implications for feminism of an analysis of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action. Feminism, clearly, has much to be critical about with respect to Habermas's theory but, as criticism is necessarily an interactive process, this thesis would be incomplete if I did not outline the aspects of Habermas's theory which have much to offer feminism.

In the first place, Habermas provides a number of analytical tools which, after modification to take into account gender subtexts, can be adopted by feminist theorists. For example, Habermas (1987) presents a sharp critique of the distortive effects of systemically organized media - in
this case, law - when introduced into domains which are properly communicatively organized. Indeed, in areas of family law it is all too clear that the adversarial basis of civil law is destructive (Chodorow, 1978). Habermas (1987) also introduces the concept of "therapeutocracy" to refer to the non-monetary social-welfare measures of the state. He makes a solid point that these measures, far from actually addressing the underlying social problems behind unemployment or single-motherhood, for example, simply address the symptoms. While this liberal process of 'blaming the victim' is quite well known, Habermas presents it in an original context - that of the inappropriateness of systemically organized interventions into the lifeworld.

In the second place, Habermas makes an extremely valuable contribution to feminist theory with his arguments in support of the 'naturalness' of cooperative and egalitarian interactions as opposed to competitive, strategic and hierarchical ones. While some feminists, myself included, question the 'natural' bases of any form of behaviour, preferring rather to insist, where behaviour is concerned, that human potentiality for any number of behaviours is all that is 'natural', Habermas's argument provides a useful contrast to the Social Darwinism which drives the agenda of the New Right.

In the third place, a related point is that Habermas's critique of positivism and the recognition of social as well as instrumental forms of knowledge and 'rationality', however problematic that word may be, are positive contributions to feminist theory. As Habermas remarks, the sexual division of labour has given women access to a different register of virtues and values which stand in contrast to the one-sidedly rationalized, 'male' world (Habermas, 1987: 393,394). The value of non-instrumental bases of
knowledge and of women's historically constructed emphasis on means as well as rather than exclusively on ends has been an important argument of many feminist theorists. Indeed, some argue that women are uniquely capable of transforming the aggressive nature of social relationships and relations between 'man' and nature into cooperative forms (Griffin, 1978). It is an important contribution Habermas is making when he insists that these so-called 'female' qualities, rather than devalued, should dominate the lifeworld. As I have argued earlier, I question his limited scope, but nevertheless, his point is well taken.

A final point which needs to be made on behalf of the value of feminist interaction with critical theory is that through this process of interaction assumptions within both bodies of thought, emerge sharply. It is only when such assumptions are thrown into relief that they can be criticized. Indeed, as part of this thesis involved a critique of Habermas's approach to the problem of rationality, the employment of a poststructural feminist perspective allowed me to uncover the assumptions surrounding the approaches to the problem of rationality of both Habermas and of two tendencies within radical feminism. This is a very valuable result of the critical interaction between feminist and critical social theory in general.

III: CONCLUSION:

While Habermas's theory of communicative action did not ultimately fair well from a feminist perspective, it certainly cannot be dismissed. The subjects which Habermas discusses so exhaustively are of great concern to feminist theorists and to critical social theorists in general. By raising many of the central issues of our time in such a comprehensive manner, Habermas's important place in on-going intellectual debates is guaranteed.
The substantial flaws in Habermas's Theory of Action, although not entirely resulting from androcentric bias, have been highlighted by a feminist analysis. This provides a convincing example of the capacity of feminist discourse to access and reveal underlying and questionable assumptions which have the potential to undermine the basis of a theory. In this case, feminist analysis identified as crucial two principles - the need to abandon universality (including universal notions of rationality) and the historical social construction of the public sphere - which Habermas failed to embrace. It was by identifying this failure that I was able to challenge three main principles of Habermas's theory of communicative action - the defense of modernity, the opposition of reason to unreason, and the commitment to the revitalization of the bourgeois public sphere.
APPENDIX A:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYSTEM AND LIFEWORLD, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, IN THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION (Habermas, 1987: 320)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional orders of the lifeworld</th>
<th>Interchange relations</th>
<th>Media-steered subsystems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private sphere</td>
<td>1) $P'$</td>
<td>Labor power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Income from employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) $M$</td>
<td>Goods and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$M'$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sphere</td>
<td>1a) $M'$</td>
<td>Taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$P$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2a) $P$</td>
<td>Political decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$P'$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$M$ = Money medium
$P$ = Power medium

Figure 39. Relations between System and Lifeworld from the Perspective of the System
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