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*What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender**

by Nancy Fraser

To my mind, no one has yet improved on Marx's 1843 definition of Critical Theory as "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age."¹ What is so appealing about this definition is its straightforwardly political character. It makes no claim to any special epistemological status but, rather, supposes that with respect to justification there is no philosophically interesting difference between a critical theory of society and an uncritical one. But there is, according to this definition, an important political difference. A critical social theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification. The questions it asks and the models it designs are informed by that identification and interest. Thus, for example, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models which revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination. And it would demystify as ideological rival approaches which obfuscated or rationalized those relations. In this situation, then, one of the standards for assessing a critical theory, once it had been subjected to all the usual tests of empirical adequacy, would be: How well does it theorize the situation and prospects of the feminist movement? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women?

In what follows, I am going to presuppose the conception of critical

*I am grateful to John Brenkman, Thomas McCarthy, Carole Pateman and Martin Schwab for helpful comments and criticism; to Dee Marquez for crackerjack word processing; and to the Stanford Humanities Center for financial support.

1. Karl Marx, Letter to A. Ruge, September 1843. In *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 209.

theory which I have just outlined. In addition, I am going to take as the actual situation of our age the scenario I just sketched as hypothetical. On the basis of these presuppositions, I want to examine the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas as elaborated in the *Theory of Communicative Action* and related recent writings.² I want to read this work from the standpoint of the following questions: In what proportions and in what respects does Habermas' critical theory clarify and/or mystify the bases of male dominance and female subordination in modern societies? In what proportions and in what respects does it challenge and/or replicate prevalent ideological rationalizations of such dominance and subordination? To what extent does it or can it be made to serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the contemporary women's movement? In short, with respect to gender, what is critical and what is not in Habermas' social theory?

This would be a fairly straightforward enterprise were it not for one thing. Apart from a brief discussion of feminism as a "new social movement" (a discussion I shall consider anon), Habermas says virtually nothing about gender in the *Theory of Communicative Action*. Now, on my view of critical theory, this is a serious deficiency. But it need not stand in the way of the sort of inquiry I am proposing. It only necessitates that

2. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Hereafter, *TCA I*.

Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981). Hereafter, *TCA II*.

I have consulted the following English translations of portions of *TCA II*:

"New Social Movements," excerpt from ch. VIII, section 3, *TCA II. Telos*, 49 (1981), 33-37. Hereafter, *NSM*.

"Marx and the Thesis of Inner Colonization," excerpt from ch. VIII, section 2, *TCA II*, pp. 522-547. Translated by Christa Hildebrand and Barbara Correll. Unpublished typescript. Hereafter, *MIC*.

"Tendencies of Juridification," excerpt from ch. VIII, section 2, *TCA II*, pp. 522ff. Unpublished typescript. Hereafter, *TJ*.

Other texts by Habermas:

Legitimation Crisis, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975). Hereafter, *LC*.

"Introduction," *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives*, ed. Jürgen Habermas; trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984). Hereafter, *OSSA*.

"A Reply to my Critics," *Habermas: Critical Debates*, eds. David Held and John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982). Hereafter, *RC*.

I have also consulted two helpful overviews of this material in English:

Thomas McCarthy, "Translator's Introduction," *TCA I*, pp. v-xxxvii. Hereafter, *TI*.

John B. Thompson, "Rationality and Social Rationalisation: An Assessment of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action," *Sociology*, 17:2 (1983), 278-294. Hereafter, *RSR*.

one read the work in question from the standpoint of an absence; that one extrapolate from things Habermas does say to things he does not; that one reconstruct how various matters of concern to feminists would appear from his perspective had they been thematized.

Thus, in section I, I examine some elements of Habermas' social-theoretical framework in order to see how it tends to cast childrearing and the male-headed, modern, restricted nuclear family. In section II, I look at his account of the relations between the public and private spheres of life in classical capitalist societies and try to reconstruct the unthematized gender subtext. And finally, in section III, I consider Habermas' account of the dynamics, crisis tendencies and conflict potentials specific to contemporary, Western, welfare state capitalism so as to see in what light it casts contemporary feminist struggles.³

I. The Social-Theoretical Framework: A Feminist Interrogation

Let me begin by considering two distinctions which are central to Habermas' social-theoretical categorial framework. The first of these is the distinction between the symbolic and the material reproduction of societies. On the one hand, claims Habermas, societies must reproduce themselves materially; they must successfully regulate the metabolic exchange of groups of biological individuals with a nonhuman, physical environment and with other social systems. On the other hand, societies must reproduce themselves symbolically; they must maintain and transmit to new members the linguistically elaborated norms and patterns of interpretation which are constitutive of social identities. Habermas claims that material reproduction comprises what he calls "social labor." Symbolic reproduction, on the other hand, comprises the socialization of the young, the cementing of group solidarity, and the transmission and extension of cultural traditions.⁴

This distinction between symbolic and material reproduction is in the first instance a functional one. It distinguishes two different functions which must be more or less successfully fulfilled in order that a society survive. At the same time, however, the distinction is used by Habermas to classify actual social practices and activities. These are distinguished according to which one of the two functions they are

3. I shall not take up such widely debated issues as Habermas' theories of universal pragmatics and social evolution. For helpful discussions of these issues, see the essays in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, *op.cit.*

4. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 214, 217, 348-49; *LC*, pp. 8-9; *RC*, pp. 268, 278-9. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxv-xxvii. Thompson, *RSR*, p. 285.

held to serve exclusively or primarily. Thus, according to Habermas, in capitalist societies, the activities and practices which make up the sphere of paid work count as material reproduction activities since, on his view, they are “social labor” and serve the function of material reproduction. On the other hand, the childrearing activities and practices which in our society are performed without pay by women in the domestic sphere — let us call them “women’s unpaid childrearing work” — count as symbolic reproduction activities since, in Habermas’ view, they serve socialization and the function of symbolic reproduction.⁵

It is worth noting, I think, that Habermas’ distinction between symbolic and material reproduction is susceptible of two different interpretations. The first of these takes the two functions as two objectively distinct “natural kinds” to which both actual social practices and the actual organization of activities in any given society may correspond more or less faithfully. Thus, childrearing practices would in themselves be symbolic reproduction practices, while the practices which produce food and objects would in themselves be material reproduction practices. And modern capitalist social organization, unlike, say, that of archaic societies, would be a faithful mirror of the distinction between the two natural kinds, since it institutionally separates these practices. This natural kinds interpretation is at odds with another possible interpretation which I shall call the “pragmatic-contextual” interpretation. It would not take childrearing practices to be in themselves symbolic reproduction practices but would allow for the possibility that, under certain circumstances and given certain purposes, it could be useful to consider them from the standpoint of symbolic reproduction. For example, if one wished to contest the dominant view, in a sexist political culture, according to which this traditionally female occupation is merely instinctual, natural and ahistorical.

Now I want to argue that the natural kinds interpretation is conceptually inadequate and potentially ideological. I claim that it is not the case that childrearing practices serve symbolic as opposed to material reproduction. Granted, they comprise language-teaching and initiation into social mores, but also feeding, bathing and protection from physical harm. Granted, they regulate children’s interactions with other people, but also their interactions with physical nature (in the form, for example, of milk, germs, dirt, excrement, weather and animals). In short, not just the construction of children’s social identities but also their biological survival is at stake. And so, therefore, is

5. Habermas, *TCA II*, p. 208; *RC*, pp. 223-5. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

the biological survival of the societies they belong to. Thus, childrearing is not *per se* symbolic reproduction activity; it is equally and at the same time material reproduction activity. It is what we might call a “dual-aspect” activity.⁶

But the same is true of the activities institutionalized in modern capitalist paid work. Granted, the production of food and objects contributes to the biological survival of members of society. But it also and at the same time reproduces social identities. Not just nourishment and shelter *simpliciter* are produced, but culturally elaborated forms of nourishment and shelter which have symbolically-mediated social meanings. Moreover, such production occurs via culturally elaborated social relations and symbolically-mediated, norm-governed social practices. The contents of these practices as well as the results serve to form, maintain and modify the social identities of persons directly involved and indirectly affected. One need only think of an activity like computer programming for a wage in the U.S. pharmaceutical industry to appreciate the thoroughly symbolic character of “social labor.” Such labor, like unpaid childrearing work, is a “dual-aspect” activity.⁷

6. I am indebted to Martin Schwab for the expression ‘dual-aspect activity.’

7. For a more positive assessment, from a feminist perspective, of Habermas’ categorial distinction between “social labor” and “socialization” and of the classification of childrearing practices as the latter, see Linda Nicholson, *Feminism and Social Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming). Nicholson argues that Habermas’ distinction helps overcome the androcentrism of orthodox Marxism. Orthodox Marxism allowed for only one kind of historically significant activity, namely, “production” or “social labor.” Moreover, it understood that category androcentrically and thereby excluded women’s unpaid childrearing activity from history. By contrast, Habermas allows for two kinds of historically significant activity, “social labor” and the “symbolic” activities which include, among other things, childrearing. Thus, he manages to include women’s unpaid activity in history. According to Nicholson, this helps remedy the problem. I disagree. At best, this leads to what has come to be known as “dual systems theory,” an approach which posits two distinct “systems” of human activity and, correspondingly, two distinct “systems” of oppression: capitalism and male dominance. But this is misleading. These are not, in fact, two distinct systems but, rather, two thoroughly interfused dimensions of a single social formation. In order to understand that social formation, a critical theory requires a single set of categories and concepts which integrate *internally* both gender and political economy (perhaps also race). For a classic statement of dual systems theory, see Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union,” *Women and Revolution*, Lydia Sargent, ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1981). For a critique of dual systems theory, see Iris Young, “Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of Dual Systems Theory,” *Women and Revolution, op.cit.*; and “Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory,” *Socialist Review*, 50-51 (1980), 169-180.

In sections II and III of the present paper, I am developing arguments and lines of

Thus, the distinction between women's unpaid childrearing work and other forms of work from the standpoint of reproduction functions cannot be a distinction of natural kinds. If it is to be drawn at all, it must be drawn as a pragmatic-contextual distinction for the sake of focalizing what is in each case actually only one aspect of a dual-aspect phenomenon. And this, in turn, must find its warrant relative to specific purposes of analysis and description, purposes which are themselves susceptible of analysis and evaluation and which need, therefore, to be justified via argumentation.

But if this is so, then the natural kinds classification of childrearing as symbolic reproduction and of other work as material reproduction is potentially ideological. It could be used, for example, to legitimate the institutional separation of childrearing from paid work, a separation which many feminists, including myself, consider a mainstay of modern forms of women's subordination. It could be used, in combination with other assumptions, to legitimate the confinement of women to a "separate sphere." Whether Habermas so uses it will be considered shortly.

The second component of Habermas' categorial framework which I want to examine is his distinction between "socially-integrated" and "system-integrated action contexts." Socially-integrated action contexts are those in which agents coordinate their actions with one another by reference to some form of explicit or implicit intersubjective consensus about norms, values and ends, consensus predicated on linguistic speech and interpretation. System-integrated action contexts, on the other hand, are those in which the actions of different agents are coordinated with one another by the functional interlacing of unintended consequences, while each individual action is determined by self-interested, utility-maximizing calculations typically entertained in the idioms or, as Habermas says, in the "media" of money and power.⁸ Habermas considers the capitalist economic system to be

analysis which rely on concepts and categories that internally integrate gender and political economy. (See note 33 below.) This might be considered a "single system" approach, by contrast with dual systems theory. However, I find that label misleading because I do not consider my approach primarily or exclusively a "systems" approach in the first place. Rather, like Habermas, I am trying to link structural (in the sense of objectivating) and interpretive approaches to the study of societies. Unlike him, however, I do not do this by dividing society into two components, "system" and "lifeworld." See this section below and especially note 15.

8. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 85, 87-88, 101, 342, 357-360; *TCA II*, p. 179; *LC*, pp. 4-5; *RC*, pp. 234, 237, 264-5. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. ix, xvix-xxx.

In presenting the distinction between system-integrated and socially-integrated action contexts, I am relying on the terminology of *LC* and am modifying the terminol-

the paradigm case of a system-integrated action context. By contrast, he takes the modern, restricted, nuclear family to be a case of a socially-integrated action context.⁹

Now this distinction is a rather complex one. It contains six, analytically distinct, conceptual elements: functionality, intentionality, linguisticity, consensuality, normativity and strategicality. However, I am going to set aside the elements of functionality, intentionality and linguisticity. Following some arguments developed by Thomas McCarthy in another context, I assume that, in both capitalist workplace and modern, restricted nuclear family, the consequences of actions may be functionally interlaced in ways unintended by agents; that, at the same time, in both contexts agents coordinate their actions with one another consciously and intentionally; and that, in both contexts, agents coordinate their actions with one another in and through language.¹⁰ I assume, therefore, that Habermas' distinction effectively turns on the elements of consensuality, normativity and strategicality.

ogy of *TCA*. Or, rather, I am selecting one of the several varying usages deployed in the latter work. There, Habermas often speaks of what I have called "socially-integrated action" as "communicative action." But this gives rise to confusion. For Habermas also uses this latter expression in another, stronger sense, namely, for actions in which coordination occurs by explicit, dialogically achieved consensus only. (See below, this section). In order to avoid repeating Habermas' equivocation on 'communicative action,' I adopt the following terminology: I reserve the term 'communicatively-achieved action' for actions coordinated by explicit, reflective, dialogically achieved consensus. I contrast such action, in the first instance, with 'normatively-secured action' or actions coordinated by tacit, prereflective, pregiven consensus (see below, this section). I take 'communicatively-achieved' and 'normatively-secured' actions, so defined, to be subspecies of what I here call 'socially-integrated action' or actions coordinated by any form of normed consensus whatever. This last category, in turn, contrasts with 'system-integrated action' or actions coordinated by the functional interlacing of unintended consequences, determined by egocentric calculations in the media of money and power, and involving little or no normed consensus of any sort. These terminological commitments do not so much represent a departure from Habermas' usage — he does in fact frequently use these terms in the senses I have specified. They represent, rather, a stabilization or rendering consistent of his usage.

9. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 341, 357-359; *TCA II*, p. 256, 266. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxx.

10. In "Complexity and Democracy, or the Seductions of Systems Theory," *New German Critique*, this issue, McCarthy argues that state administrative bureaucracies cannot be distinguished from participatory democratic political associations on the basis of functionality, intentionality and linguisticity since all three of these features are found in both contexts. Thus, McCarthy argues that functionality, intentionality and linguisticity are not mutually exclusive. I find these arguments persuasive. I see no reason why they do not hold also for the capitalist workplace and the modern, restricted, nuclear family.

Once again, I think it useful to distinguish two possible interpretations of Habermas' position. The first takes the contrast between the two kinds of action contexts as registering an absolute difference. Thus, system-integrated contexts would involve absolutely no consensuality or reference to moral norms and values, while socially-integrated contexts would involve absolutely no strategic calculations in the media of money and power. This "absolute differences" interpretation is at odds with a second possibility which takes the contrast rather as registering a difference in degree. On this second interpretation, system-integrated contexts would involve some consensuality and reference to moral norms and values, but less than socially-integrated contexts. In the same way, socially-integrated contexts would involve some strategic calculations in the media of money and power, but less than system-integrated contexts.

Now I want to argue that the absolute differences interpretation is too extreme to be useful for social theory and that, in addition, it is potentially ideological. In few if any human action contexts are actions coordinated absolutely nonconsensually and absolutely non-normatively. However morally dubious the consensus, and however problematic the content and status of the norms, virtually every human action context involves some form of both of them. In the capitalist marketplace, for example, strategic, utility-maximizing exchanges occur against a horizon of intersubjectively shared meanings and norms; agents normally subscribe at least tacitly to some commonly held notions of reciprocity and to some shared conceptions about the social meanings of objects, including about what sorts of things are exchangeable. Similarly, in the capitalist workplace, managers and subordinates, as well as coworkers, normally coordinate their actions to some extent consensually and with some explicit or implicit reference to normative assumptions, though the consensus be arrived at unfairly and the norms be incapable of withstanding critical scrutiny.¹¹ Thus, the capitalist economic system has a moral-cultural dimension.

Similarly, few if any human action contexts are wholly devoid of strategic calculation. Gift rituals in noncapitalist societies, for example, previously taken as veritable crucibles of solidarity, are now widely understood to have a significant strategic, calculative dimension, one enacted in the medium of power, if not in that of money.¹² And, as I

11. Here, again, I follow McCarthy, *Ibid.* He argues that in modern, state administrative bureaucracies, managers must often deal consensually with their subordinates. This seems to be equally the case for corporate organizations.

12. I have in mind especially the brilliant and influential discussion of gifting by Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cam-

shall argue in more detail later, the modern, restricted, nuclear family is not devoid of individual, self-interested, strategic calculations in either medium. These action contexts, then, while not officially counted as economic, have a strategic, economic dimension.

Thus, the absolute differences interpretation is not of much use in social theory. It fails to distinguish, for example, the capitalist economy — let us call it “the official economy” — from the modern, restricted, nuclear family. For both of these institutions are melanges of consensuality, normativity and strategicality. If they are to be distinguished with respect to mode of action-integration, the distinction must be drawn as a difference of degree. It must turn on the place, proportions and interactions of the three elements within each.

But if this is so, then the absolute differences classification of the official economy as a system-integrated action context and of the modern family as a socially-integrated action context is potentially ideological. It could be used, for example, to exaggerate the differences and occlude the similarities between the two institutions. It could be used to construct an ideological opposition which posits the family as the “negative,” the complementary “other,” of the (official) economic sphere, a “haven in a heartless world.”

Now which of these possible interpretations of the two distinctions are the operative ones in Habermas’ social theory? He asserts that he understands the reproduction distinction according to the pragmatic-contextual interpretation and not the natural kinds one.¹³ Likewise, he asserts that he takes the action-context distinction to mark a difference in degree, not an absolute difference.¹⁴ However, I propose to bracket these assertions and to examine what Habermas actually does with these distinctions.

Habermas maps the distinction between action contexts onto the distinction between reproduction functions in order to arrive at a definition of societal modernization and at a picture of the institutional structure of modern societies. Habermas holds that modern societies

bridge University Press, 1977). By recovering the dimension of time, Bourdieu substantially revises the classical account by Marcel Mauss in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). For a discussion of some recent revisionist work in cultural-economic anthropology, see Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming in 1986).

13. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 348-349. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxvi-xxvii. The terms ‘pragmatic-contextual’ and ‘natural kinds’ are mine, not Habermas’.

14. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 94-95, 101; *TCA II*, pp. 348-349; *RC*, p. 227, 237, 266-68; *LC*, p. 10. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxvi-xxvii. The terms ‘absolute differences’ and ‘difference of degree’ are mine, not Habermas’.

differ from premodern societies in that they split off some material reproduction functions from symbolic ones and hand over the former to two specialized institutions — the (official) economy and state — which are system-integrated. At the same time, modern societies situate these institutions in the larger social environment by developing two other ones which specialize in symbolic reproduction and are socially-integrated. These are the modern, restricted, nuclear family or “private sphere” and the space of political participation, debate and opinion formation or “public sphere”; and together, they constitute what Habermas calls the two “institutional orders of the modern lifeworld.” Thus, modern societies “uncouple” or separate what Habermas takes to be two distinct, but previously undifferentiated aspects of society: “system” and “lifeworld.” And so, on his view, the institutional structure of modern societies is dualistic. On the one side stand the institutional orders of the modern lifeworld, the socially-integrated domains specializing in symbolic reproduction, that is, in socialization, solidarity formation and cultural transmission. On the other side stand the systems, the system-integrated domains specializing in material reproduction. On the one side, the nuclear family and the public sphere. On the other side, the (official) capitalist economy and the modern administrative state.¹⁵

Now what are the critical insights and blindspots of this model? Let us attend first to the question of its empirical adequacy. And let us

15. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 72, 341-342, 359-360; *TCA II*, p. 179; *RC*, pp. 268, 279-80; *LC*, pp. 20-21. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxvii-xxix. Thompson, *RSR*, pp. 285, 287.

It should be noted that in *TCA* Habermas draws the contrast between system and lifeworld in two distinct senses. On the one hand, he contrasts them as two different methodological perspectives on the study of societies. The system perspective is objectivating and “externalist,” while the lifeworld perspective is hermeneutical and “internalist.” In principle, either can be applied to the study of any given set of societal phenomena. Habermas argues that neither alone is adequate. So he seeks to develop a methodology that combines both. On the other hand, Habermas also contrasts system and lifeworld in another way, namely, as two different kinds of institutions. It is this second system-lifeworld contrast which I am concerned with here. I do not explicitly treat the first one in this essay. I am sympathetic with Habermas’ general methodological intention of combining or linking structural (in the sense of objectivating) and interpretive approaches to the study of societies. I do not, however, believe that this can be done by assigning structural properties to one set of institutions (the official economy and the state) and interpretive ones to another set (the family and the “public sphere”). I maintain, rather, that all of these institutions have both structural and interpretive dimensions and that all should be studied both structurally and hermeneutically. I have tried to develop an approach which meets these desiderata in “Feminism and the Social State,” *Salmagundi* (forthcoming), and in “Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* (forthcoming). I have discussed the general methodological problem in “On the Political and the Symbolic: Against the Metaphysics of Textuality,” *Boundary 2*, 14:1 (Fall 1985).

focus, for the time being, on the contrast between “the private sphere of the lifeworld” and the (official) economic system. Consider that this aspect of Habermas’ categorical divide between system and lifeworld institutions faithfully mirrors the institutional separation of family and official economy, household and paid workplace, in male-dominated, capitalist societies. It thus has some *prima facie* purchase on empirical social reality. But consider, too, that the characterization of the family as a socially-integrated, symbolic reproduction domain and of the paid workplace, on the other hand, as a system-integrated material reproduction domain tends to exaggerate the differences and occlude the similarities between them. For example, it directs attention away from the fact that the household, like the paid workplace, is a site of labor, albeit of unremunerated and often unrecognized labor. Likewise, it does not make visible the fact that in the paid workplace, as in the household, women are assigned to, indeed ghettoized in, distinctively feminine, service-oriented and often sexualized occupations. Finally, it fails to focalize the fact that in both spheres women are subordinated to men.

Moreover, this characterization presents the male-headed, nuclear family, *qua* socially-integrated institutional order of the modern lifeworld, as having only an extrinsic and incidental relation to money and power. These “media” are taken as definitive of interactions in the official economy and state administration but as only incidental to intra-familial ones. But this assumption is counterfactual. Feminists have shown via empirical analyses of contemporary familial decision-making, handling of finances and wife-battering that families are thoroughly permeated with, in Habermas’ 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, labor, cash and sex, not to mention sites, frequently, of coercion and violence.¹⁶ But Habermas’ way of contrasting the modern family with the official capitalist economy tends to occlude all this. It overstates the differences between these institutions and blocks the possibility of analyzing families as economic systems, that is, as sites of labor, exchange, calculation, distribution and exploitation. Or, to the degree that Habermas would acknowledge that they can be seen that way too, his framework would suggest that this is due to the intrusion or invasion of alien forces; to the “colonization” of the family by the (official)

16. See, for example, the essays in *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, eds. (New York and London: Longman, 1982). Also, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family* (London: Verso, 1982).

economy and the state. This, too, however, is a dubious proposition. I shall discuss it in detail in section III below.

Thus Habermas' model has some empirical deficiencies. It is not easily able to focalize some dimensions of male dominance in modern societies. On the other hand, his framework does offer a conceptual resource suitable for understanding *other* aspects of modern male dominance. Consider that Habermas subdivides the category of socially-integrated action-contexts into two subcategories. On the one hand, there are "normatively-secured" forms of socially-integrated action. These are actions coordinated on the basis of a conventional, pre-reflective, taken-for-granted consensus about values and ends, consensus rooted in the precritical internalization of socialization and cultural tradition. On the other hand, there are "communicatively-achieved" forms of socially-integrated action. These involve actions coordinated on the basis of explicit, reflective, achieved consensus, consensus reached by unconstrained discussion under conditions of freedom, equality and fairness.¹⁷ This distinction, which is a subdistinction within the category of socially-integrated action, provides Habermas with some critical resources for analyzing the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family. Such families can be understood as normatively-secured rather than communicatively-achieved action contexts, that is, as contexts where actions are (sometimes) mediated by consensus and shared values, but where such consensus is suspect because prereflective or because achieved through dialogue vitiated by unfairness, coercion or inequality.

To what extent does the distinction between normatively-secured and communicatively-achieved action contexts succeed in overcoming the problems discussed earlier? Only partially, I think. On the one hand, this distinction is a morally significant and empirically useful one. The notion of a normatively-secured action context fits nicely with recent research on patterns of communication between husbands and wives. This research shows that men tend to control conversations, determining what topics are pursued, while women do more "interaction work" like asking questions and providing verbal support.¹⁸ Research also reveals differences in men's and women's uses of the bodily and gestural dimensions of speech, differences which confirm

17. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 85-86, 88-90, 101, 104-105; *TCA II*, p. 179. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. ix, xxx. In presenting the distinction between normatively-secured and communicatively-achieved action, I am again modifying, or rather stabilizing, the variable usage of *TCA*. See footnote 8 above.

18. Pamela Fishman, "Interaction: The Work Women Do," *Social Problems* 25:4. 398-406. Cited in Barrie Thorne, *op.cit.*

men's dominance and women's subordination.¹⁹ Thus, Habermas' distinction enables us to capture something important about intra-familial dynamics. What is insufficiently stressed, however, is that actions coordinated by normatively-secured consensus in the male-headed, nuclear family are actions regulated by power. It seems to me a grave mistake to restrict the use of the term 'power' to bureaucratic contexts. Habermas would do better to distinguish different kinds of power, for example, normative-domestic-patriarchal power, on the one hand, and non-normative-bureaucratic-patriarchal power, on the other, not to mention various other kinds and combinations in between.

But even that distinction does not by itself suffice to make Habermas' framework fully adequate to all the empirical forms of male dominance in modern societies. For normative-domestic-patriarchal power is only one of the elements which enforce women's subordination in the domestic sphere. To capture the others would require a social-theoretical framework capable of analyzing families also as economic systems involving the appropriation of women's unpaid labor and interlocking in complex ways with other economic systems involving paid work. Because Habermas' framework draws the major categorial divide between system and lifeworld institutions, and hence between (among other things) official economy and family, it is not very well suited to that task.

Let me turn now from the question of the empirical adequacy of Habermas' model to the question of its normative political implications. What sorts of social arrangements and transformations does his modernization conception tend to legitimate? And what sorts does it tend to rule out? Here it will be necessary to reconstruct some implications of the model which are not explicitly thematized by Habermas.

Consider that the conception of modernization as the uncoupling of system and lifeworld institutions tends to legitimate the modern institutional separation of family and official economy, childrearing and paid work. For Habermas claims that there is an asymmetry between symbolic and material reproduction with respect to system-integration. Symbolic reproduction activities, he claims, are unlike material reproduction activities, in that they cannot be turned over to specialized, system-integrated institutions set apart from the lifeworld. Their inherently symbolic character requires that they be socially-integrated.²⁰ It follows that women's unpaid childrearing work could not be incor-

19. Nancy Henley, *Body Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

20. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 523-24, 547; *TJ*, p. 3; *RC*, p. 237. Thompson, *RSR*, pp. 288, 292.

porated into the (official) economic system without “pathological” results. On the other hand, Habermas also holds that it is a mark of societal rationalization that system-integrated institutions be differentiated to handle material reproduction functions. The separation of a specialized (official) economic system enhances a society’s capacity to deal with its natural and social environment. “System complexity,” then, constitutes a “developmental advance.”²¹ It follows that the (official) economic system of paid work could not be dedifferentiated with respect to, say, childrearing, without societal “regression.” But if childrearing could not be nonpathologically incorporated into the (official) economic system, and if the (official) economic system could not be nonregressively dedifferentiated, then the continued separation of childrearing from paid work would be required.

Now this amounts to a defense of one aspect of what feminists call “the separation of public and private,” namely, the separation of the official economic sphere from the domestic sphere, and the enclaving of childrearing from the rest of social labor. It amounts, that is, to a defense of an institutional arrangement which is widely held to be one, if not the, linchpin of modern women’s subordination. And it should be noted that the fact that Habermas is a socialist does not alter the matter. For the (undeniably desirable) elimination of private ownership, profit-orientation and hierarchical command in paid work would not of itself affect the official-economic/domestic separation.

Now I want to challenge several premises of the reasoning I have just reconstructed. First, this reasoning assumes the natural kinds interpretation of the symbolic vs. material reproduction distinction. But since, as I have argued, childrearing is a dual-aspect activity, and since it is not categorially different in this respect from other work, there is no warrant for the claim of an asymmetry vis-a-vis system-intergration. That is, there is no warrant for assuming that the system-integrated organization of childrearing would be any more (or less) pathological than that of other work. Second, this reasoning assumes the absolute differences interpretation of the social vs. system integration distinction. But since, as I have argued, the modern, male-headed, nuclear family is a melange of (normatively-secured) consensuality, normativity and strategicality, and since it is in this respect not categorially different from the paid workplace, then privatized childrearing is already, to a not insignificant extent, permeated by the media of

21. McCarthy pursues some of the normative implications of this for the differentiation of the administrative state system from the public sphere in “Complexity and Democracy,” *op.cit.*

money and power. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence that children raised in commercial day care centers (even profit-based or corporate ones) turn out any more pathological than those raised, say, in suburban homes by full-time mothers. Third, the reasoning just sketched elevates system complexity to the status of an overriding consideration with effective veto-power over proposed social transformations aimed at overcoming women's subordination. But this is at odds with Habermas' professions that system complexity is only one measure of "progress" among others.²² More importantly, it is at odds with any reasonable standard of justice.

What, then, should we conclude about the normative, political implications of Habermas' model? If the conception of modernization as the uncoupling of system and lifeworld institutions does indeed have the implications I have just drawn from it, then it is in important respects androcentric and ideological.

II. Public and Private in Classical Capitalism: Thematizing the Gender Subtext

The foregoing difficulties notwithstanding, Habermas offers an account of the interinstitutional relations among various spheres of public and private life in classical capitalism which has some genuine critical potential. But in order fully to realize this potential, we need to reconstruct the unthematized gender subtext of his material.

Let me return to his conception of the way in which the (official) economic and state systems are situated with respect to the lifeworld. Habermas holds that with modernization, the (official) economic and state systems are not simply disengaged or detached from the lifeworld; they must also be related to and embedded in it. Concomitant with the beginnings of classical capitalism, then, is the development *within* the lifeworld of "institutional orders" which situate the systems in a context of everyday meanings and norms. The lifeworld, as we saw, gets differentiated into two spheres which provide appropriate complementary environments for the two systems. The "private sphere" or modern, restricted, nuclear family is linked to the (official) economic system. The "public sphere" or space of political participation, debate and opinion formation is linked to the state-administrative system. The family is linked to the (official) economy by means of a series of exchanges conducted in the medium of money; it supplies the (official) economy with appropriately socialized labor-power in exchange for

22. McCarthy makes this point with respect to the dedifferentiation of the state administrative system and the public sphere. *Ibid.*

wages; and it provides appropriate, monetarily measured demand for commodified goods and services. Exchanges between family and (official) economy, then, are channeled through the “roles” of worker and consumer. Parallel exchange processes link the “public sphere” and the state system. These, however, are conducted chiefly in the medium of power. Loyalty, obedience and tax revenues are exchanged for “organizational results” and “political decisions.” Exchanges between public sphere and state, then, are channeled through the “role” of citizen and, in late-welfare-capitalism, that of client.²³

This account of interinstitutional relations in classical capitalism has a number of important advantages. First, it treats the modern, restricted, nuclear family as an historically emergent institution with its own positive, determinate features. And it specifies that this type of family emerges concomitantly with and in relation to the emerging capitalist economy, administrative state and (eventually) the political public sphere. Moreover, it charts some of the dynamics of exchange among these institutions. And it indicates some ways in which they are fitted to the needs of one another so as to accommodate the exchanges among them.

Finally, Habermas’ account offers an important corrective to the standard dualistic approaches to the separation of public and private in capitalist societies. He conceptualizes the problem as a relation among four terms: family, (official) economy, state and “public sphere.” His view suggests that in classical capitalism there are actually two distinct but interrelated public-private separations. There is one public-private separation at the level of “systems,” namely, the separation of the state or public system from the (official) capitalist economy or private system. There is another public-private separation at the level of the “lifeworld,” namely, the separation of the family or private lifeworld sphere from the space of political opinion formation and participation or public lifeworld sphere. Moreover, each of these public-private separations is coordinated with the other. One axis of exchange runs between private system and private lifeworld sphere, that is, between (official) capitalist economy and modern, restricted, nuclear family. Another axis of exchange runs between public system and public lifeworld sphere or between state administration and the organs of public opinion and will formation. In both cases the exchanges can occur because of the institutionalization of specific roles which connect the domains in question. Thus, the roles of worker and consumer link the (official) private economy and the private family,

23. Habermas, *TCA I*, pp. 341-342, 359-360; *TCA II*, pp. 256, 473; *RC*, p. 280. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxxii. Thompson, *RSR*, pp. 286-88.

while the roles of citizen and (later) client link the public state and the public opinion institutions.

Thus, Habermas provides an extremely sophisticated account of the relations between public and private institutions in classical capitalist societies. At the same time, however, his account has some weaknesses. Many of these stem from his failure to thematize the gender subtext of the relations and arrangements he describes.²⁴ Consider, first, the relations between (official) private economy and private family as mediated by the roles of worker and consumer. These roles, I submit, are gendered roles. And the links they forge between family and (official) economy are adumbrated as much in the medium of gender identity as in the medium of money.

Take the role of the worker.²⁵ In male-dominated, classical capitalist societies, this role is a masculine role and not just in the relatively superficial statistical sense. There is rather a very deep sense in which masculine identity in these societies is bound up with the breadwinner role. Masculinity is in large part a matter of leaving home each day for a place of paid work and returning with a wage which provides for one's dependents. It is this internal relation between being a man and being a provider which explains why in capitalist societies unemployment can be so psychologically, as well as economically, devastating for men. It also sheds light on the centrality of the struggle for a "family wage" in the history of the workers' and trade union movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. This was a struggle for a wage conceived not as a payment to a genderless individual for the use of labor-power but, rather, as a payment to a man for the support of his economically dependent wife and children. A conception, of course, which legitimized the practice of paying women less for equal or comparable work.

The masculine subtext of the worker role is confirmed by the vexed and strained character of women's relation to paid work in male-dominated classical capitalism. As Carole Pateman puts it, it is not that women are absent from the paid workplace; it's rather that they are present differently²⁶ — for example, as feminized and sometimes sexualized "service" workers (secretaries, domestic workers, salesper-

24. I borrow the phrase "gender subtext" from Dorothy Smith, "The Gender Subtext of Power," unpublished typescript.

25. The following account of the masculine gender subtext of the worker role draws heavily on Carole Pateman, "The Personal and the Political: Can Citizenship be Democratic?" Lecture III of her "Women and Democratic Citizenship," The Jefferson Memorial Lectures, delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, February 1985, unpublished typescript.

26. Pateman, *Ibid.*, p. 5.

sons, prostitutes, and more recently, flight attendants); as members of the “helping professions” utilizing mothering skills (nurses, social workers, child care workers, primary school teachers); as targets of sexual harassment; as low-wage, low-skilled, low-status workers in sex-segregated occupations; as part-time workers; as workers who work a double shift (both unpaid domestic labor and paid labor); as “working wives” and “working mothers,” i.e. as primarily wives and mothers who happen, secondarily, also to “go out to work”; as “supplemental earners.” These 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. And this in turn confirms the masculine subtext of that role. It confirms that the role of the worker which links the private (official) economy and the private family in male-dominated, capitalist societies, is a masculine role; and that, *pace* Habermas, the link it forges is elaborated as much in the medium of masculine gender identity as in the medium of gender-neutral money.

Conversely, the other role linking official economy and family in Habermas’ scheme has a feminine subtext. The consumer, after all, is the worker’s companion and helpmate in classical capitalism. For the sexual division of domestic labor assigns to women the work — and it is indeed work, though unpaid and usually unrecognized work — of purchasing and preparing goods and services for domestic consumption. You can confirm this even today by visiting any supermarket or department store. Or by looking at the history of consumer goods advertising. Such advertising has nearly always interpellated its subject,²⁷ the consumer, as feminine. In fact, it has elaborated an entire phantasmatics of desire premised on the femininity of the subject of consumption. It is only relatively recently, and with some difficulty, that advertisers have devised ways of interpellating a masculine subject of consumption. The trick was to find means of positioning a male consumer which did not feminize, emasculate or sissify him. In *The Hearts of Men*, Barbara Ehrenreich quite shrewdly, I think, credits *Playboy* magazine with pioneering such means.²⁸ But the difficulty and lateness of the project confirm the gendered character of the consumer role in classical capitalism. Men occupy it with conceptual strain and cogni-

27. I am here adapting Althusser’s notion of the interpellation of a subject to a context in which he, of course, never used it. For the general notion, see Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

28. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1984).

tive dissonance, much as women occupy the role of worker. So the role of consumer linking official economy and family is a feminine role. *Pace* Habermas, it forges the link in the medium of feminine gender identity as much as in the apparently gender-neutral medium of money.

Moreover, Habermas' account of the roles linking family and (official) economy contains a significant omission. There is no mention in his schema of any childrearer role, although the material clearly requires one. For who else is performing the unpaid work of overseeing the production of the "appropriately socialized labor-power" which the family exchanges for wages? Of course, the childrearer role in classical capitalism (as elsewhere) is patently a feminine role. Its omission here is a mark of androcentrism, and it has some significant consequences. A consideration of the childrearer role in this context might well have pointed to the central relevance of gender to the institutional structure of classical capitalism. And this in turn could have led to the disclosure of the gender subtext of the other roles and of the importance of gender identity as an "exchange medium."

What, then, of the other set of roles and linkages identified by Habermas? What of the citizen role which he claims connects the public system of the administrative state with the public lifeworld sphere of political opinion and will formation? This role, too, is a gendered role in classical capitalism, indeed, a masculine role.²⁹ And not simply in the sense that women did not win the vote in, for example, the U.S. and Britain until the 20th century. Rather, the lateness and difficulty of that victory are symptomatic of deeper strains. As Habermas understands it, the citizen is centrally a participant in political debate and public opinion formation. This means that citizenship, in his view, depends crucially on the capacities for consent and speech, the ability to participate on a par with others in dialogue. But these are capacities which are connected with masculinity in male-dominated, classical capitalism. They are capacities which are in myriad ways denied to women and deemed at odds with femininity. I have already cited studies about the effects of male dominance and female subordination on the dynamics of dialogue. Now consider that even today in most jurisdictions there is no such thing as marital rape. That is, a wife is legally subject to her husband; she is not an individual who can give or withhold consent to his demands for sexual access. Consider also that even outside of marriage the legal test of rape often boils down to whether a "reasonable man" would have assumed that the woman had

29. The following discussion of the masculine gender subtext of the citizen role draws heavily on Carole Pateman, *op.cit.*

consented. Consider what that means when both popular and legal opinion widely holds that when a woman says “no” she means “yes.” It means, says Carole Pateman, that “women find their speech . . . persistently and systematically invalidated in the crucial matter of consent, a matter that is fundamental to democracy. [But] if women’s words about consent are consistently reinterpreted, how can they participate in the debate among citizens?”³⁰

Thus, there is conceptual dissonance between femininity and the dialogical capacities central to Habermas’ conception of citizenship. And there is another aspect of citizenship not discussed by him that is even more obviously bound up with masculinity. I mean the soldiering aspect of citizenship, the conception of the citizen as the defender of the polity and protector of those — women, children, the elderly — who allegedly cannot protect themselves. As Judith Stiehm has argued, this division between male protectors and female protected introduces further dissonance into women’s relation to citizenship.³¹ It confirms the gender subtext of the citizen role. And the view of women as in need of men’s protection “underlies access not just to . . . the means of destruction, but also [to] the means of production — witness all the ‘protective’ legislation that has surrounded women’s access to the workplace — and [to] the means of reproduction [— witness] women’s status as wives and sexual partners.”³²

Thus, the citizen role in male-dominated classical capitalism is a masculine role. It links the state and the public sphere, as Habermas claims. But it also links these to the official economy and the family. And in every case the links are forged in the medium of masculine gender identity rather than, as Habermas has it, in the medium of a gender-neutral power. Or, if the medium of exchange here is power, then the power in question is masculine power. It is power as the expression of masculinity.

Thus, there are some major lacunae in Habermas’ otherwise powerful and sophisticated model of the relations between public and private institutions in classical capitalism. The gender-blindness of the model occludes important features of the arrangements he wants to understand. By omitting any mention of the childrearer role, and by failing to thematize the gender subtext underlying the roles of worker

30. Pateman, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

31. Judith Hicks Stiehm, “The Protected, the Protector, the Defender,” in *Women and Men’s Wars*, edited by Judith Hicks Stiehm (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983) and “Myths Necessary to the Pursuit of War,” unpublished typescript. This is not to say, however, that I accept Stiehm’s conclusions about the desirability of integrating women fully into the U.S. military as presently structured and deployed.

32. Pateman, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

and consumer, Habermas fails to understand precisely how the capitalist workplace is linked to the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family. Similarly, by failing to thematize the masculine subtext of the citizen role, he misses the full meaning of the way the state is linked to the public sphere of political speech. Moreover, Habermas misses important cross-connections among the four elements of his two public-private schemata. He misses, for example, the way 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 woman's need of man's protection run through all of them. He misses, too, the way the masculine citizen-speaker role links the state and public sphere not only to one another but also the family and official economy, that is, the way the assumptions of man's capacity to speak and consent and woman's incapacity therein run through all of them. He misses, also, 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 of woman's dependent status run through all of them, so that even the coin in which classical capitalist wages and taxes are paid is not gender-neutral. And he misses, finally, the way the feminine childrearer role links all four institutions to one another by overseeing the construction of the masculine and feminine gendered subjects needed to fill *every* role in classical capitalism.

Once the gender-blindness of Habermas' model is overcome, however, all these connections come into view. It then becomes clear that feminine and masculine gender identity run like pink and blue threads through the areas of paid work, state administration, and citizenship as well as through the domain of familial and sexual relations. This is to say that gender identity is lived out in all arenas of life. It is one (if not the) "medium of exchange" among all of them, a basic element of the social glue that binds them to one another.

Moreover, a gender-sensitive reading of these connections has some important theoretical and conceptual implications. It reveals that male dominance is intrinsic rather than accidental to classical capitalism. For the institutional structure of this social formation is actualized by means of gender roles. It follows that the forms of male dominance at issue here are not properly understood as lingering forms of pre-modern status inequality. They are, rather, intrinsically modern in Habermas' sense, since they are premised on the separation of waged labor and the state from female childrearing and the household. It also follows that a critical social theory of capitalist societies needs gender-sensitive categories. The foregoing analysis shows that, contrary to the

usual androcentric understanding, the relevant concepts of worker, consumer and wage are not, in fact, strictly economic concepts. Rather, they have an implicit gender subtext and thus are “gender-economic” concepts. Likewise, the relevant concept of citizenship is not strictly a political concept; it has an implicit gender subtext and so, rather, is a “gender-political” concept. Thus, this analysis reveals the inadequacy of those critical theories which treat gender as incidental to politics and political-economy. It highlights the need for a critical-theoretical categorial framework in which gender, politics and political-economy are internally integrated.³³

In addition, a gender-sensitive reading of these arrangements reveals the thoroughly multidirectional character of social motion and causal influence in classical capitalism. It reveals, that is, the inadequacy of the orthodox Marxian assumption that all or most significant causal influence runs from the (official) economy to the family and not vice-versa. It shows that gender identity structures paid work, state administration and political participation. Thus, it vindicates Habermas’ claim that in classical capitalism the (official) economy is not all-powerful but is, rather, in some significant measure inscribed within and subject to the norms and meanings of everyday life. Of course, Habermas assumed that in making this claim he was saying something more or less positive. The norms and meanings he had in mind were not the ones I have been discussing. Still, the point is a valid one. It remains to be seen, though, whether it holds also for late, welfare capitalism, as I believe; or whether it ceases to hold, as Habermas claims.

Finally, this reconstruction of the gender subtext of Habermas’ model has normative political implications. It suggests that an emancipatory transformation of male-dominated capitalist societies, early and late, requires a transformation of these gender roles and of the institutions they mediate. As long as the worker and childrearer roles are such as to be fundamentally incompatible with one another, it will not be possible to universalize either of them to include both genders. Thus, some form of dedifferentiation of unpaid childrearing and other work is required. Similarly, as long as the citizen role is defined

33. Insofar as the foregoing analysis of the gender subtext of Habermas’ role theory deploys categories in which gender and political economy are internally integrated, it represents a contribution to the overcoming of “dual systems theory” (see note 7 above). It is also a contribution to the development of a more satisfactory way of linking structural (in the sense of objectivating) and interpretive approaches to the study of societies than that proposed by Habermas. For I am suggesting here that the domestic sphere has a structural as well as an interpretive dimension and that the official economic and state spheres have an interpretive as well as a structural dimension.

to encompass death-dealing soldiering but not life-fostering childrearing, as long as it is tied to male-dominated modes of dialogue, then it, too, will remain incapable of fully including women. Thus, changes in the very concepts of citizenship, childrearing and paid work are necessary. As are changes in the relationships among the domestic, official-economic, state and political-public spheres.

III. The Dynamics of Welfare-Capitalism: A Feminist Critique

Let me turn, then, to Habermas' account of late, welfare capitalism. Unlike his account of classical capitalism, its critical potential cannot be released simply by reconstructing the unthematized gender subtext. Here, the problematical features of his social-theoretical framework tend to inflect the analysis as a whole and diminish its capacity to illuminate the struggles and wishes of contemporary women. In order to show how this is the case, I shall present Habermas' view in the form of six theses.

1) Welfare capitalism emerges as a result of and in response to instabilities or crisis tendencies inherent in classical capitalism. It realigns the relations between the (official) economy and state, that is, between the private and public systems. These become more deeply intertwined with one another as the state actively assumes the task of "crisis management." It tries to avert or manage economic crises by Keynesian "market-replacing" strategies which create a "public sector." And it tries to avert or manage social and political crises by "market-compensating" measures, including welfare concessions to trade unions and social movements. Thus welfare-capitalism partially overcomes the separation of public and private at the level of systems.³⁴

2) The realignment of (official) economy-state relations is accompanied by a change in the relations of those systems to the private and public spheres of the lifeworld. First, with respect to the private sphere, there is a major increase in the importance of the consumer role as dissatisfactions related to paid work are compensated by enhanced commodity consumption. Second, with respect to the public sphere, there is a major decline in the importance of the citizen role as journalism becomes mass media, political parties are bureaucratized, and participation is reduced to occasional voting. Instead, the relation to the state is increasingly channeled through a new role, the social-welfare client.³⁵

34. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 505ff; *LC*, pp.33-36, 53-55. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxxiii.

35. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 522-4; *MIC*, pp. 1-2; *TJ*, pp. 1-2; *LC*, pp. 36-37. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxxiii.

3) These developments are “ambivalent.” On the one hand, there are gains in freedom with the institution of new social rights limiting the heretofore unrestrained power of capital in the (paid) workplace and of the paterfamilias in the bourgeois family; and social insurance programs represent a clear advance over the paternalism of poor relief. On the other hand, the means employed to realize these new social rights 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 preempting their capacities to interpret their own needs, experiences and life-problems.³⁶

4) The most ambivalent welfare measures are those concerned with things like health care, care of the elderly, education, and family law. For when bureaucratic and monetary media structure these things, they intrude upon “core domains” of the lifeworld. They turn over symbolic reproduction functions like socialization and solidarity formation to system-integration mechanisms which position people as strategically acting, self-interested monads. But given the inherently symbolic character of these functions, and given their internal relation to social-integration, the results, necessarily, are “pathological.” Thus, these measures are more ambivalent than, say, reforms of the paid workplace. The latter bear on a domain which is already system-integrated via money and power and which serves material as opposed to symbolic reproduction functions. So paid workplace reforms, unlike, say, family law reforms, do not necessarily generate “pathological” side-effects.³⁷

5) Welfare-capitalism thus gives rise to an “inner colonization of the lifeworld.” Money and power cease to be mere media of exchange *between* system and lifeworld. Instead, they tend increasingly to penetrate the lifeworld’s *internal* dynamics. The private and public spheres cease to subordinate (official) economic and administrative systems to the norms, values and interpretations of everyday life. Rather, the latter are increasingly subordinated to the imperatives of the (official) economy and administration. The roles of worker and citizen cease to channel the influence of the lifeworld to the systems. Instead, the newly inflated roles of consumer and client channel the influence of the sys-

36. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 530-40; *MIC*, pp. 9-20; *TJ*, pp. 12-14. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

37. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 540-47; *MIC*, pp. 20-27; *TJ*, pp. 15-25. McCarthy, *TI*, p. xxxi.

tem to the lifeworld. Moreover, the intrusion of system-integration mechanisms into domains inherently requiring social-integration gives rise to “reification phenomena.” The affected domains are detached not merely from traditional normatively-secured consenses, but from “value-orientations *per se*.” The result is the “desiccation of communicative contexts” and the “depletion of the nonrenewable cultural resources” needed to maintain personal and collective identity. Thus, symbolic reproduction is destabilized, identities are threatened, and social crisis tendencies develop.³⁸

6) The colonization of the lifeworld sparks new forms of social conflict specific to welfare-capitalism. “New social movements” emerge in a “new conflict zone” at the “seam of system and lifeworld.” They respond to system-induced identity threats by contesting the roles which transmit these. They contest the instrumentalization of professional labor and the performatization of education transmitted via the worker role; the monetarization of relations and lifestyles transmitted via the inflated consumer role; the bureaucratization of services and life-problems transmitted via the client role; and the rules and routines of interest politics transmitted via the impoverished citizen role. Thus, the conflicts at the cutting edge of developments in welfare capitalism differ both from class struggles and from bourgeois liberation struggles. They respond to crisis tendencies in symbolic as opposed to material reproduction; and they contest reification and “the grammar of forms of life” as opposed to distribution or status inequality.³⁹

The various new social movements can be classified with respect to their emancipatory potential. The criterion is the extent to which they advance a genuinely emancipatory resolution of welfare-capitalist crisis, namely, the “decolonization of 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. Thus, those movements like religious fundamentalism which seek to defend traditional lifeworld norms against system intrusions are not genuinely emancipatory; they actively oppose the second element of decolonization and do not take up the third. Movements like peace and ecology are better; they aim both to resist

38. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 275-277, 452, 480, 522-24; *MIC*, p. 2; *TJ*, pp. 1-3; *RC*, pp. 226, 280-81; *OSSA*, pp. 11-12, 16-20. McCarthy, *TI*, pp. xxxi-xxxii. Thompson, *RSR*, pp. 286, 288.

39. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 581-83, *NSM*, pp. 33-37; *OSSA*, pp. 18-19, 27-28.

system intrusions and also to instate new, reformed, communicatively-achieved zones of interaction. But even these are “ambiguous” inasmuch as they tend to “retreat” into alternative communities and “particularistic” identities, thereby effectively renouncing the third element of decolonization and leaving the (official) economic and state systems unchecked. In this respect, they are more symptomatic than emancipatory: they express the identity disturbances caused by colonization. The feminist movement, on the other hand, represents something of an anomaly. For it alone is “offensive,” aiming to “conquer new territory”; and it alone retains links to historic liberation movements. In principle, then, feminism remains rooted in “universalist morality.” Yet it is linked to resistance movements by an element of “particularism.” And it tends, at times, to “retreat” into identities and communities organized around the natural category of biological sex.⁴⁰

Now what are the critical insights and blindspots of this account of the dynamics of welfare-capitalism? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women? I shall take up the six theses one by one.

1) Habermas’ first thesis is straightforward and unobjectionable. Clearly, the welfare state does engage in crisis-management and does partially overcome the separation of public and private at the level of systems.

2) Habermas’ second thesis contains some important insights. Clearly, welfare-capitalism does inflate the consumer role and deflate the citizen role, reducing the latter essentially to voting — and, we should add, also to soldiering. Moreover, the welfare state does indeed increasingly position its subjects as clients. On the other hand, Habermas again fails to see the gender subtext of these developments. He fails to see that the new client role has a gender, that it is a paradigmatically feminine role. He overlooks that it is overwhelmingly women who are the clients of the welfare state: especially older women, poor women, single women with children. He overlooks, in addition, that many welfare systems are internally dualized and gendered. They include two basic kinds of programs: “masculine” ones tied to primary labor force participation and designed to benefit principal breadwinners; and “feminine” ones oriented to what are understood as domestic “failures,” that is, to families without a male breadwinner. Not surprisingly, these two welfare subsystems are both separate and unequal. Clients of feminine programs, virtually exclusively women

40. Habermas, *TCA II*, pp. 581-83; *NSM*, pp. 34-37; *OSSA*, pp. 16-17, 27-28.

and their children, are positioned in a distinctive, feminizing fashion as the “negatives of possessive individuals”: they are largely excluded from the market both as workers and as consumers and are familialized, that is, made to claim benefits not as individuals but as members of “defective” households. They are also stigmatized, denied rights, subjected to surveillance and administrative harassment, and generally made into abject dependents of state bureaucracies.⁴¹ But this means that the rise of the client role in welfare capitalism has a more complex meaning than Habermas allows. It is not only a change in the link between system and lifeworld institutions. It is also a change in the character of male dominance, a shift, in Carol Brown’s phrase, “from private patriarchy to public patriarchy.”⁴²

3) This gives a rather different twist to the meaning of Habermas’ third thesis. It suggests that he is right about the “ambivalence” of welfare capitalism, but not quite and not only in the way he thought. It suggests that welfare measures do have a positive side insofar as they reduce women’s dependence on an individual male breadwinner. But they also have a negative side insofar as they substitute dependence on a patriarchal and androcentric state bureaucracy. The benefits provided are, as Habermas says, “system-conforming” ones. But the sys-

41. For the U.S. social-welfare system, see the analysis of male vs. female participation rates, and the account of the gendered character of the two subsystems in Nancy Fraser, “Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation,” *op.cit.* Also, Barbara J. Nelson, “Women’s Poverty and Women’s Citizenship: Some Political Consequences of Economic Marginality,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 10:2 (1985); Steven P. Erie, Martin Rein and Barbara Wiget, “Women and the Reagan Revolution: Thermidor for the Social Welfare Economy,” in *Families, Politics and Public Policies: A Feminist Dialogue on Women and the State*, ed. Irene Diamond (New York: Longman, 1983); Diana Pearce, “Women, Work and Welfare: The Feminization of Poverty,” in *Working Women and Families*, ed. Karen Wolk Feinstein (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage Publications, 1979) and “Toil and Trouble: Women Workers and Unemployment Compensation,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 10:3 (1985), 439-59; Barbara Ehrenreich and Frances Fox Piven, “The Feminization of Poverty,” *Dissent*, Spring 1984, 162-70. For an analysis of the gendered character of the British social-welfare system, see Hilary Land, “Who Cares for the Family?” *Journal of Social Policy*, 7:3 (1978), 257-84. For Norway, see the essays in *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society*, ed. Harriet Holter (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984). See also two comparative studies: Mary Ruggie, *The State and Working Women: A Comparative Study of Britain and Sweden* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Birte Siim, “Women and the Welfare State: Between Private and Public Dependence” (unpublished typescript).

42. Carol Brown, “Mothers, Fathers and Children: From Private to Public Patriarchy,” *Women and Revolution*, *op.cit.* Actually, I believe Brown’s formulation is theoretically inadequate, since it presupposes a simple, dualistic conception of public and private. Nonetheless, the phrase ‘from private to public patriarchy’ evokes in a rough but suggestive way the phenomena a socialist-feminist critical theory of the welfare state would need to account for.

tem they conform to is not adequately characterized as the system of the official, state-regulated capitalist economy. It is also the system of male dominance which extends even to the socio-cultural lifeworld. In other words, the ambivalence here does not only stem, as Habermas implies, from the fact that the role of client carries effects of “reification.” It stems also from the fact that this role, *qua* feminine role, perpetuates in a new, let us say “modernized” and “rationalized” form, women’s subordination. Or so Habermas’ third thesis might be rewritten in a feminist critical theory — without, of course, abandoning his insights into the ways in which welfare bureaucracies and therapeutocracies disempower clients by preempting their capacities to interpret their own needs, experiences and life-problems.

4) Habermas’ fourth thesis, by contrast, is not so easily rewritten. This thesis states that welfare reforms of, for example, the domestic sphere are more ambivalent than reforms of the paid workplace. This is true empirically in the sense I have just described. But it is due to the patriarchal character of welfare systems, not to the inherently symbolic character of lifeworld institutions, as Habermas claims. His claim depends on two assumptions I have already challenged. First, it depends on the natural kinds interpretation of the distinction between symbolic and material reproduction activities, i.e., on the false assumption that childrearing is inherently more symbolic and less material than other work. And second, it depends upon the absolute differences interpretation of the system vs. socially-integrated contexts distinction, i.e., on the false assumption that money and power are not already entrenched in the internal dynamics of the family. But once we repudiate these assumptions, then there is no categorical, as opposed to empirical, basis for differentially evaluating the two kinds of reforms. If it is basically progressive that paid workers acquire the means to confront their employers strategically and match power against power, right against right, then it must be just as basically progressive *in principle* that women acquire similar means to similar ends in the politics of familial and personal life. And if it is “pathological” that, in the course of achieving a better balance of power in familial and personal life, women become clients of state bureaucracies, then it must be just as “pathological” *in principle* that, in the course of achieving a similar end at paid work, paid workers, too, become clients. (Which does not alter the fact that *in actuality* they become two different sorts of clients.) But of course the real point is that the term ‘pathological’ is misused here insofar as it supposes the untenable assumption that childrearing and other work are asymmetrical with respect to system-integration.

5) This sheds new light as well on Habermas’ fifth thesis. This thesis states that welfare capitalism inaugurates an inner colonization of the

lifeworld by systems. It depends on three assumptions. The first two of these are the two just rejected, namely, the natural kinds interpretation of the distinction between symbolic and material reproduction activities and the assumed virginity of the domestic sphere with respect to money and power. The third assumption is that the basic vector of motion in late-capitalist society is from state-regulated economy to lifeworld and not vice-versa. But the feminine gender subtext of the client role contradicts this assumption. It suggests that even in late-capitalism the norms and meanings of gender identity continue to channel the influence of the lifeworld onto systems. These norms continue to structure the state-regulated economy, as the persistence, indeed exacerbation, of labor force segmentation according to sex shows.⁴³ And these norms also structure state administration, as the gender segmentation of U.S. and European social-welfare systems shows.⁴⁴ Thus, it is not the case that in late-capitalism “system intrusions” detach life-contexts from “value-orientations *per se*.” On the contrary, welfare-capitalism simply uses other means to uphold the familiar “normatively-secured consensus” concerning male dominance and female subordination. But Habermas’ theory overlooks this counter-motion from lifeworld to system. Thus, it posits the evil of welfare-capitalism as the evil of a general and indiscriminate reification. So it fails to account for the fact that it is disproportionately women who suffer the effects of bureaucratization and monetarization. And for the fact that, viewed structurally, bureaucratization and monetarization are, among other things, instruments of women’s subordination.

43. The most recent available data for the U.S. indicate that sex segmentation in paid work is increasing, not decreasing. And this is so in spite of the entry of small but significant numbers of women into professions like law and medicine. Even when the gains won by those women are taken into account, there is no overall improvement in the aggregated comparative economic position of paid women workers vis-a-vis male workers. Women’s wages remain less than sixty percent of men’s wages. Which means, of course, that the mass of women are losing ground. Nor is there any overall improvement in occupational distribution by sex. The ghettoization of women in low-paying, low-status “pink collar” occupations is increasing. For example, in the U.S. in 1973, women held 96% of all paid child care jobs, 81% of all primary school teaching jobs, 72% of all health technician jobs, 98% of all Registered Nurse jobs, 83% of all librarian jobs, 99% of all secretarial jobs, and 92% of all waitperson jobs. The figures for 1983 were, respectively, 97%, 83%, 84%, 96%, 87%, 99% and 88%. (Bureau of Labor Statistics figures cited by Drew Christie, “Comparable Worth and Distributive Justice,” paper read at meetings of the American Philosophical Association, Western Division, April 1985.) The U.S. data are consistent with data for the Scandinavian countries and Britain. See Birte Siim, “Women and the Welfare State: Between Private and Public Dependence,” *op.cit.*

44. See note 41.

6) This entails the revision, as well, of Habermas' sixth thesis. This thesis concerns the causes, character and emancipatory potential of social movements, including feminism, in welfare capitalist societies. Since these issues are so central to the concerns of this essay, they warrant a more extended discussion.

Habermas explains the existence and character of new social movements, including feminism, in terms of colonization, that is, in terms of the intrusion of system-integration mechanisms into symbolic reproduction spheres and the consequent erosion and desiccation of contexts of interpretation and communication. But given the multidirectionality of causal influence in welfare capitalism, the terms 'colonization,' 'intrusion,' 'erosion,' and 'desiccation' are too negative and one-sided to account for the identity shifts manifested in social movements. Let me attempt an alternative explanation, at least for women, by returning to Habermas' important insight that much contemporary contestation surrounds the institution-mediating roles of worker, consumer, citizen and client. Let me add to these the childrearer role and the fact that all of them are gendered roles. Now consider in this light the meaning of the experience of millions of women, especially married women and women with children, who have in the postwar period become paid workers and/or social-welfare clients. I have already indicated that this has been an experience of new, acute forms of domination. But it has also been an experience in which women could, often for the first time, taste the possibilities of a measure of relative economic independence, an identity outside the domestic sphere, and expanded political participation. 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.⁴⁵ Interpellated simultaneously in contradictory ways, women have become split subjects; and, as a result, the roles themselves, heretofore shielded in their separate spheres, have suddenly been opened to contestation. Should we, like Habermas, speak here of a "crisis in symbolic reproduction"? Surely not, if this means the desiccation of meaning and values wrought by the intrusion of money and organizational power into women's lives. Emphatically yes, if it means, rather, the emergence into visibility and contestability of problems

45. This account draws on some elements of the analysis of Zillah Eisenstein in *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981), chapter 9. What follows has some affinities with the perspective of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 1985).

and possibilities which cannot be solved or realized within the established framework of gendered roles and institutions.

If colonization is not an adequate explanation of feminism (and other new social movements), then decolonization cannot be an adequate conception of an emancipatory solution. From the perspective I have been sketching, the first element of decolonization, namely, the removal of system-integration mechanisms from symbolic reproduction spheres, is conceptually and empirically askew of the real issues. If the real point is the moral superiority of cooperative interactions over strategic 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. Similarly, the third element of decolonization, namely, the reversal of the direction of influence and control from system to lifeworld, needs modification. Since the social meanings of gender still structure late-capitalist official economic and state systems, the question is not *whether* lifeworld norms will be decisive but, rather, *which* lifeworld norms will.

This implies that the key to an emancipatory outcome lies in the second element of Habermas' conception of decolonization, namely, the replacement of normatively-secured contexts of interaction by communicatively-achieved ones. The centrality of this element is evident when we consider that this process occurs simultaneously on two fronts. First, in the struggles of social movements with the state and official economic system institutions: these struggles are not waged over systems media alone; they are also waged over the meanings and norms embedded and enacted in government and corporate policy. Second, this process occurs in a phenomenon not thematized by Habermas: in the struggles between opposing social movements with conflicting interpretations of social needs. Both kinds of struggles involve confrontations between normatively-secured and communicatively-achieved action. Both involve contestation for hegemony over the socio-cultural "means of interpretation and communication." For example, in many late-capitalist societies, women's contradictory, self-dividing experience of trying to be both workers and mothers, clients and citizens, has given rise to not one but two women's movements, a feminist one and an anti-feminist one. These movements, along with their respective allies, are engaged in struggles with one another and with state and corporate institutions over the social meanings of 'woman' and 'man,' 'femininity' and 'masculinity'; over the interpretation of women's needs; over the interpretation and social construction of women's bodies; and over the gender norms which shape the major institution-mediating social roles. Of course, the means of interpretation and communication in terms of which the social meanings of

these things are elaborated have always been controlled by men. Thus feminist women are struggling in effect to redistribute and democratize access to and control over the means of interpretation and communication. We are, therefore, struggling for women's autonomy in the following special sense: a measure of collective control over the means of interpretation and communication sufficient to permit us to participate on a par with men in all types of social interaction, including political deliberation and decision-making.⁴⁶

The foregoing suggests that a caution is in order concerning the use of the terms 'particularism' and 'universalism.' Recall that Habermas' sixth thesis emphasized feminism's links to historic liberation movements and its roots in universalist morality. Recall that he was critical of those tendencies within feminism, and in resistance movements in general, which try to resolve the identity problematic by recourse to particularism, that is, by retreating from arenas of political struggle into alternative communities delimited on the basis of natural categories like biological sex. Now I want to suggest that there are really three issues here and that they need to be disengaged from one another. One is the issue of political engagement versus apolitical counter-cultural activity. Insofar as Habermas' point is a criticism of cultural feminism it is well-taken in principle, although it needs the following qualifications: 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. The second issue is the status of women's biology in the elaboration of new social identities. Insofar as Habermas' point is a criticism of reductive biologism it is well-taken. But this does not mean that one can ignore the fact that women's biology has always been interpreted by men; and that women's struggle for autonomy necessarily and properly involves, among other things, the reinterpretation of the social meanings of our bodies. The third issue is the difficult and complex one of universalism versus particularism. Insofar as Habermas' endorsement of universalism pertains to the meta-level of access to and control over the means of interpretation and communication it is well-taken. At this level, women's struggle for autonomy can be understood in terms of a

46. I develop this notion of the "socio-cultural means of interpretation and communication" and the associated conception of autonomy in "Toward a Discourse Ethic of Solidarity," *Praxis International*, forthcoming. Both notions are extensions and modifications of Habermas' conception of "communicative ethics."

universalist conception of distributive justice. But it does not follow that the substantive content which is the fruit of this struggle, namely, the new social meanings we give our needs and our bodies, our new social identities and conceptions of femininity, can be dismissed as particularistic lapses from universalism. For these are no more particular than the sexist and androcentric meanings and norms they are meant to replace. More generally, at the level of substantive content, as opposed to dialogical form, the contrast between universalism and particularism is out of place. Substantive social meanings and norms are always necessarily culturally and historically specific; they always express distinctive shared, but nonuniversal forms of life. Feminist meanings and norms will be no exception. But they will not, on that account, be particularistic in any pejorative sense. Let us simply say that they will be different.

I have been arguing that struggles of social movements over the means of interpretation and communication are central to an emancipatory resolution of crisis tendencies in welfare capitalism. Now let me clarify their relation to institutional change. Such struggles, I claim, are implicitly and explicitly raising the following sorts of questions. Should the roles of worker, childrearer, citizen and client be fully degendered? Can they be? Or do we, rather, require arrangements which permit women to be workers and citizens *as women*, just as men have always been workers and citizens *as men*? And what might that mean? In any case, does not an emancipatory outcome require a profound transformation of the current gender roles at the base of contemporary social organization? And does this not, in turn, require a fundamental transformation of the content, character, boundaries and relations of the spheres of life which these roles mediate? How should the character and position of paid work, childrearing and citizenship be defined vis-à-vis one another? Should democratic-socialist-feminist, self-managed, paid work encompass childrearing? Or should childrearing, rather, replace soldiering as a component of transformed, democratic-socialist-feminist, participatory citizenship? What other possibilities are conceivable?

Let me conclude this discussion of the six theses by restating the most important critical points. First, Habermas' account fails to theorize the patriarchal, norm-mediated character of late-capitalist official-economic and administrative systems. Likewise, it fails to theorize the systemic, money- and power-mediated character of male dominance in the domestic sphere of the late-capitalist lifeworld. Consequently, his colonization thesis fails to grasp that the channels of influence between system and lifeworld institutions are multidirectional. And it tends to replicate, rather than to problematize, a major

institutional support of women's subordination in late-capitalism, namely, the gender-based separation of the state-regulated economy of sex-segmented paid work and social-welfare, and the masculine public sphere, from privatized female childrearing. Thus, while Habermas wants to be critical of male dominance, his diagnostic categories deflect attention elsewhere, to the allegedly overriding problem of gender-neutral reification. Consequently, his programmatic conception of decolonization bypasses key feminist questions; it fails to address the issue of how to restructure the relation of childrearing to paid work and citizenship. Finally, Habermas' categories tend to misrepresent the causes and underestimate the scope of the feminist challenge to welfare state capitalism. In short, the struggles and wishes of contemporary women are not adequately clarified by a theory which 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*.

Conclusion

In general, then, the principal blindspots of Habermas' theory with respect to gender are traceable to his categorial opposition between system and lifeworld institutions. And to the two more elementary oppositions from which it is compounded, the reproduction one and the action-contexts one. Or rather, the blindspots are traceable to the way in which these oppositions, ideologically and androcentrically interpreted, tend to override and eclipse other, potentially more critical elements of Habermas' framework. Elements like the distinction between normatively-secured and communicatively-achieved action contexts. And like the four term model of public-private relations.

Habermas' blindspots are instructive, I think. They permit us to conclude something about what the categorial framework of a socialist-feminist critical theory of welfare capitalism should look like. One crucial requirement is that this framework not be such as to put the male-headed, nuclear family and the state-regulated official economy on two opposite sides of the major categorial divide. We require, rather, a framework sensitive to the similarities between them, one which puts them on the same side of the line as institutions which, albeit in different ways, enforce women's subordination, since both family and official economy appropriate our labor, shortcircuit our participation in the interpretation of our needs and shield normatively-secured need interpretations from political contestation. A second crucial requirement is that this framework contain no *a priori*

assumptions about the unidirectionality of social motion and causal influence, that it be sensitive to the ways in which allegedly disappearing institutions and norms persist in structuring social reality. A third crucial requirement, and the last I shall mention here, is that this framework not be such as to posit the evil of welfare capitalism exclusively or primarily as the evil of reification. It must, rather, be capable of foregrounding the evil of dominance and subordination.⁴⁷

47. My own recent work attempts to construct a conceptual framework for a socialist-feminist critical theory of the welfare state which meets these requirements. See Fraser, "Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation," *op.cit.*, "Feminism and the Social State," *op.cit.*, and "Toward a Discourse Ethic of Solidarity," *op.cit.* Each of these essays draws heavily on those aspects of Habermas' thought which I take to be unambiguously positive and useful, especially his conception of the irreducibly socio-cultural, interpretive character of human needs, and his contrast between dialogical and monological processes of need interpretation. The present essay, on the other hand, focuses mainly on those aspects of Habermas' thought which I find problematical or unhelpful, and so does not convey the full range either of his work or of my views about it. Readers are warned, therefore, against drawing the conclusion that Habermas has little or nothing positive to contribute to a socialist-feminist critical theory of the welfare state. They are urged, rather, to consult the essays cited above for the other side of the story.