

Critique of Modernity: A World Driven by Commodity

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Abstract—This paper argues for Lukacs' lasting significance in the modern world, for his critique of modernity that reveals the irrationality behind the rational notion of progress, specifically, through how human subjectivity is sacrificed in a society dominated by reason.

Index Terms—critique of modernity, the theory of reification

I. INTRODUCTION

During the 20th century, Gyorgy Lukacs emerged as one of the major figures of Western Marxism, leading a critique of developed bourgeois society that claims to more thoroughly grasp the social realities of contemporary Europe compared to that of orthodox Marxism. This paper argues for Lukacs' lasting significance in the modern world, for his critique of modernity that reveals the irrationality behind the rational notion of progress, specifically, through how human subjectivity is sacrificed in a society dominated by reason. In section one of the paper, I will provide an overview of Lukacs' theory of reification, which circles around the notion of how the commodity form permeates modern capitalist society, resulting in dehumanizing conditions for the workers. In section two, I will examine critiques to the theory of reification by Theodor Adorno, but also attempt to defend Lukacs' position. In section three, I will discuss shortcomings of Lukacs' theory and his lasting influence on the development of western Marxism.

II. METHODOLOGY I

Lukacs' interpretation of Marxism drastically departs from orthodox Marxism through reviving the Hegelian dialectical traditions and rejecting the deterministic downfall of the capitalist society. I will not discuss Lukacs' Hegelian tradition until section two, when I examine his notion of the subject-object. The proletariat revolution, wrote Lukacs, depends on objective conditions which may have already been met by the modern capitalist society, but also on "a struggle of the proletariat against itself: against the devastating and degrading effects of the capitalist system upon its class consciousness" (Kautzer 46, 48) [1]. Whether Lukacs himself fully grasped the social realities of his time will be called into further questioning; regardless, it is worth noting that Lukacs places the proletariat at the crux of his historic view and the awakening of class consciousness as the solution to the phenomenon of reification.

Reification can be defined as the exclusion of the human

element in social operations, or when social relations between individuals develop an objective character, gaining independence and autonomy from man. Reification becomes an ingrained part of social reality only under the context of developed capitalism. The concept of reification is built upon Marx's insight into commodity. Marx defines the use value of a product as its utility, or its usefulness, while the exchange value is presented as "a quantitative relation" that proportionately relate how much of one product can be exchanged for the other (Marx 27) [2]. Functioning as a medium for exchange, commodities manifest their "exchange value ... as something totally independent of their use value" (Marx 27). Exchange value emerges as an abstract form of measurement, reducing products from their qualitative differences to a matter of quantity, creating a "phantom objectivity" (Lukacs 83) [3]. The objectivity created by the exchange value is not inherent to the product itself, just as the price of a product is not one of its natural properties, but one dictated by the market. Thus, this objectivity only exists in the conception of individuals. This abstract form of value measurement is accompanied by an abstracted form of value creation, a process of production reduced of any qualitative distinction: "all are reduced to one and the same sort of labor, human labor in the abstract" (Marx 28). Human labor is converted into a standardized unit, measured through the accumulation of labor time. Here human labor is treated in the most abstract form, each individual laborer taken as an average value, and therefore can be quantified and calculated through their fixed working hours. Reification arises under a society of such conditions, when the commodity form, in its abstraction of value and labor, becomes the "universal category of society as a whole" (Lukacs 86) [3].

Lukacs closely binds the phenomenon of reification with the Marxian concept of commodity fetishism, which reveals that through commodity, "the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor" (Marx 48). Marx argues that there the commodity is worshiped as an "objected invested with superpower" through its phantom objectivity, leading to a form of fetishism (Jeffries 86) . Since labor is transformed as a form of commodity, the social character, or social conditions involved with labor become alien to the workers. The impact of a seemingly autonomous production process on the individual worker's consciousness will be discussed later. Through the commodity structure, human labor, despite its diversity in nature, is abstracted into exchange value, gaining an objective quality. This objective quality excludes the element of human participation in labor and exists solely through the quantifiable relation with other commodities.

Lukacs argues that this fetishism exerts both objective and

Manuscript received July 23, 2022; revised September 23, 2022; accepted November 23, 2022.

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subjective impacts on society. Objectively, individuals of the society find themselves within a particular “second nature”, characterized by its emphasis on calculability and rationalization, and exists beyond human control (Lukacs 86). Subjectively, the pervasiveness of the commodity form deems that “a man’s activity become estranged from him” (Lukacs 87). In other words, workers treat their labor power as commodity, something exterior to them that holds exchange values.

This abstraction of labor force, the commoditizing of the laborers, in turn both objectively and subjectively influence the products and the producers. Objectively, the “formal equality” present in various types of products through the commodity form come to dominate the process of exchange (Lukacs 87). The use-values of products are neglected in the face of the production of exchange values. Subjectively, the “formal equality of human labor...becomes the real principle governing the actual production of commodities” (Lukacs 87). While production take place under concrete, material settings, the real conditions of workers are buried under the calculation and arrangement oriented around an abstract labor force. Fully industrialized western societies exacerbate this phenomenon through the mechanized industries and standardized assembly lines, suppressing and eliminating the qualitative differences between different types of labor. The abstract and undistinctive labor becomes the real conditions of production for the workers.

Lukacs here connects the formalism pervasive through commodity form with the principle of calculable rationalization, stemming from Max Webber’s insight into modern capitalist rationality. Within such a production process, the producer is organized through strict numeric standards, through working hours and output requirements. Lukacs asserts that the principle of rationalization based on what is and can be calculated “denotes a break with the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity of the product...”, since “rationalization is unthinkable without specialization” (Lukacs 88). The emphasis of the modern capitalist society on a rationalized production process, through regulating calculable elements, inevitably coincides with the specialization of production. The disintegration of the qualitative unity of products leaves them fragmented and atomized, broken down into digits that can be arranged quantitatively. The resulting products are “arbitrarily connected with each other” through the “objective synthesis of rationalized special systems”, thus “the unity of a product as commodity no longer coincides with its unity as a use-value” (Lukacs 88). The difference between the rationalized disintegration and organic unity of the production process can be observed through the contrast between a modern assembly line worker who repeats one step of the assembly process and a medieval craftsman who forges entire sets of armors. As afore mentioned, the specialization of production destroys the organic unity within whole products, thus these products function as commodities expressed through their exchange values, lack of any actual utility.

The devoid of organic, unified elements within end products reflects back to the subject of production. As with the specialization of products, the workers find themselves reduced from organic individuals to “a mechanical part

incorporated into a mechanical system” (Lukacs 89). The human qualities of the workers are treated as “mere sources of error” in the face of an efficient and rational production process (Lukacs 89). Workers lose their internal unity as individuals, finding themselves with a system that is already “pre-existing and self-sufficient” and all-imposing such that workers are reduced to replaceable elements, forced to conform to its laws to keep their posts (Lukacs 89). The workers’ perception of such a reality becomes passive, a stance “adopted towards a process mechanically conformed to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention” that “likewise transform the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world” (Lukacs 89)[3]. The average worker is powerless when confronted by such an autonomous system, for he is dispensable within the production process, but the system can operate independently off him.

The immediate consequence of the lack of subjectivity within the production process is a qualitative change in the nature of time – time is degraded “to the dimension of space” (Lukacs 89). The spatialization of time returns to the pervasiveness of commodity form, in which value is calculated through an abstracted accumulation of labor time. Time, in the rationalized process of production, is “transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space”, fill with “the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker” (Lukacs 90). Time ceases to become a flowing qualitative experience and is instead treated as a standard measurement akin to the distance traversed within abstract physical space. Workers are in turn enslaved by this notion of time, binding their production output with the quantifiable measurements of time (Lukacs 90). Though it is hard to conceive time without its numeric measurements, Lukacs’ emphasis on time is not directed at the rational arrangement of time, but at how this rationalization restrains humans from contingent, qualitative social experiences, i.e., the strict organization of working hours.

Lukacs writes further on the fragmentation and atomization of both products and producers within the capitalist society. The concept of the “free worker” emerges from the society under which “consumer articles... appear... as abstract members of a species identical by definition with its other members and, on the other hand, as isolated objects the possession or non-possession of which depends on rational calculation” (Lukacs 91) [3]. Lukacs’ emphasis on the how the rational form of commodity reduce products to generic and isolated fragments is also explanatory of the objectification of “free workers”. The average worker, by “[presenting] himself as the ‘owner’ of his labor power,” transforms it into a commodity which he can ‘freely’ exchange for a living in the market (Lukacs 92). Yet, the worker’s “specific situation is defined by the fact that his labor-power is his only possession,” leaving him vulnerable to all forms of exploitation through the exchange process (Lukacs 92). The fate of the worker is not unique to the proletariat class, but “becomes the typical fate of the whole society”, under the condition that the entire social process is “fragmented into the isolated acts of commodity exchange” (Lukacs 91). Individuals regardless of their class are subjugated by the rationalized production of exchange values,

their capacity to command exchange value itself commoditized and their very own existence objectified throughout the process.

The phenomenon of reification is accompanied by the reified consciousness of individuals within the capitalist society, a mind that acknowledges and treats the ‘phantom objectivity’ of the commodity structure as part of the immediate social reality (Lukacs 93). The reified mind “does not even attempt to transcend” the commodity form but is “concerned to make it permanent by ‘scientifically deepening’ the laws at work” (Lukacs 93). The bourgeois society impedes its own comprehension of economics by “[remaining] stuck fast in its self-created immediacy,” at the same time treating the reified social relations internal to the universality of commodity form as “the timeless model of human relations in general” (Lukacs 93, 94).

On the basis that reification permeates all aspects of society, Lukacs specifically points out the ideological and social influence of rationalism on the existence of a legal system that accommodates the rationalized production process. “The modern capitalist concern... based inwardly above all on calculation,” writes Lukacs, requires “a system of justice and an administration whose workings can be rationally calculated, at least in principle, according to fixed general laws” (Lukacs 96). Here Lukacs alludes to Max Weber’s writings on the state and law to point out their “structural similarity” with the capitalist production process (Lukacs 96). The systemization and formalization of law systems, as for the capitalist mode of production, “abandon empiricism, tradition, and material dependence”, in favor of rational organization and calculability (Lukacs 97). Such a directional change produces a “rigid system”, one that attempts to calculate possible social outcomes through fixed laws and “confront individual events of social existence as something permanently established and exactly defined” (Lukacs 97). By attempting to ascribe concrete and unique social phenomena to a fixed law code, or conversely, to predict all social scenarios through established codes, the modern legal system often finds itself gapped from the social reality (i.e., the civil rights act of 1964 was signed into law only under national protests the phenomenon of discrimination during the civil rights movement (National Archives) [4]. This is only one instance of the irrationality at base of the rational principles that seem to govern society: though individual aspects of society run in accordance with ‘natural laws’, these laws only function as “partial laws whose links with each other are of necessity purely formal” (Lukacs 101). In short, the capitalist society, in its emphasis on form and rationality and negligence of content, fails to reduce the organic social reality to pure reason.

The solution that Lukacs has in mind for the phenomenon of reification is the path of praxis, in other words, to close the gap between form and content. Its origin traced through the tradition of German Idealism back to Immanuel Kant, the “essence of praxis consists in annulling that indifference of form towards content that we found in the thing-in itself” (Feenberg 16) [5]. Lukacs’ theorization of praxis following the Hegelian tradition marks the departure of western Marxism from the orthodox body. The path of praxis is a path of practicality, of utilizing reason that is not restrained by its own formalism, but reason that corresponds to the content

that make up the concrete and qualitative conditions of social reality. Lukacs follows Hegel’s steps in incorporating praxis with a historical dialectics, positing “history as [the] reality” through which the “implicit meaning” is unfolded from the “explicit form” (Feenberg 186). For both Lukacs and Hegel, the dialectical movement of the subject and object occurs within the bounds of time, under the historic sequence through which reality happens.

However, Lukacs and Hegel differ in their identification of the historic subject. While Hegel relies on the metaphysical concept of the Absolute Spirit, Lukacs argues that the proletariat class acts as the “identical subject-object” whose unfolding of its internal tendencies through praxis will eventually achieve the socialist revolution (Kautzer 51, Feenberg 187). The significance of Lukacs’ subject-object, a continuation from Hegel’s historic subject, can also be understood as “the totality of concrete history, understood as the expression of a subject” (Stahl 3.1). Thus, history, for Lukacs, is “a product of the proletariat’s collective action” (Stahl 3.1) [6]. The unfolding of the “implicit meaning” is for the proletariat the awakening of its class consciousness, its self-recognition as the subject-object of history (Feenberg 187). Lukacs believes that only through the rise of the proletariat consciousness can the individual workers overcome the immediate reified reality that confronts them in the production process, paving the way for a successful communist revolution.

In this section I have outlined some major elements of Lukacs’ theory of reification. From the start, he states that reification is a phenomenon specific to the modern society, under the condition of the universality of the commodity form. Through his insight into the commodity form, he discusses the dehumanizing reality of a reified society and critiques the irrationality at the base of the modern emphasis on reason. To secure a valid ground for his theory, I will now examine critiques of Lukacs by Theodor Adorno, who simultaneously inherits the western Marxist tradition in the Frankfurt School.

III. METHODOLOGY II

Adorno’s critique of Lukacs is launched from two directions, accusing him of romanticizing a pre-capitalist past and charging him of his idealist tradition that depart from reality. Beginning with the first critique, Adorno argues that Lukacs’ criticism of the commodity form serves as an “abstract negation” (Hall 67) [7]. He points out that if the notion of comparability, the rationality within exchange values, is fully rejected, the principle of fair exchange would collapse to a state of “direct appropriation” between unequal things (Hall 68). The problem of commodity form does not lie within the concept itself, but with “the specifically exploitative form they assume in capitalist societies” (Hall 68). Adorno is reaching far for an ideal society in arguing for the employment of a commodity form that is free of exploitation; since, the basic assumption for commodity exchange is to establish a phantom equality between qualitatively different products (Hall 68). Rationalization based on quantitative calculations cannot establish a principle of fairness for concrete, varying products or determine their

utility on a universal scale. However, he should be acknowledged for studying the phenomenon of exploitation in the modern capitalist society, where industrialized production should supposedly emancipate humans from worrying about daily necessities. I will further examine Adorno's theory in section III, where I discuss the heritage of the theory of reification. By fully denying the rationality behind the principle of exchange, Lukacs' critique of reification has the potential to be used to justify authoritarian, direct domination of the process of exchange.

Even before Lukacs' turn toward Soviet Marxism, sections of his writings in *History and Class Consciousness* already reveal traces of his thought process of critiquing the commodity form as an abstract negation. Lukacs writes that rationalization within the production process "must declare war on the organic manufacture of whole products based on the traditional amalgam of empirical experiences of work" (Lukacs 88). Here Lukacs directly opposes the formative, quantified capitalist mode of production with the qualitative, traditional production process, constructing a society that emphasizes quality to abstractly negate the capitalist society operating on reason (Hall 74). He further writes that "the...traditional craft production preserves in the minds of individual practitioners the appearance of something flexible, something constantly renewing itself, something produced by the producer" (Lukacs 97). Here Lukacs constructs a generalized and idealized image of traditional workers to contrast against modern laborers. These critiques of the commodity form are only established through a direct contrast with the past and, according to the Adorno, lack an "immanent standpoint" (Hall 74). Lukacs' critique of the commodity form loses its immanence when it is carried as a complete opposition, while Adorno believes that a critique of the commodity form can only take the shape of a self-critique (Hall 69).

To respond to Adorno's critique, I must first examine the fundamental arguments to Lukacs' theory, that is, his claim that reification is specifically a phenomenon of the modern world. Lukacs argues that reification does not take place until the commodity form has permeated all aspects of society, which is intertwined with the development of modern capitalism (Lukacs 86). In earlier ages, though exchange values, in the form of currency, are used in commercial activities, production orients more around products of utility, for example, the craftsmen that make complete sets of tools and utensils (Lukacs 86). Moreover, relations of direct domination, such as slavery, regulate the producers, contrary to the reified society where the worker is confronted by an autonomous production process (Lukacs 86). Thus, there is a qualitative difference between a reified society and pre-modern eras. In this sense, though Lukacs alludes to pre-modern societies, he begins from the conditions of the modern world to develop its self-critique. Lukacs' approach to historic materialism likewise reveals his stance as a reflective critique of modernity, for he sees materialism as "the self-knowledge of capitalist society" (Hall 75) [7]. As Adorno recognizes that it is the phenomena of exploitation that overlaps the promise of fair exchange that necessitates a critique for modernity, so does Lukacs see the same issue, through how the rational emancipation from nature is marked as failure by creating a second nature (Hall 75).

From a different direction, Adorno's critique of the idealist tradition within Lukacs' theory calls the proletariat revolution, as envisioned by Lukacs, into question. Adorno begins by arguing that Lukacs has conflated reification and objectification, "failing to distinguish between the illusory objectivity that is really alienated subjectivity and a genuine objectivity beyond the subject" (Hall 69). In other words, Adorno accuses Lukacs of treating not just the phantom objectivity of reification but also concrete objective conditions as part of reification. He is correct for criticizing Lukacs for still attempting to reconcile the gap between subject and object through treating reification as the sole objectivity that the subject will overcome, but as I will discuss later in this section, Lukacs does leave space for concrete objectivity in his theory. Such a conflation leaves Lukacs' theory still in the bounds of idealism. Idealism orients around the search for a "first," or an "original principle that ... reconciliates the subject and object" (Hall 69) [7]. For Adorno, idealism views objectivity as "an inessential limitation of subjective freedom," thus autonomy in idealism is achieved through "overcoming one's dependence on [objectivity]" (Hall 69). Adorno argues that Lukacs treats the proletariat as the first, as the subject-object that engenders the world through praxis, in other words, reducing the entire world to being created by the proletariat (Hall 70). The idealist doctrine, in seeking a reconciliation between subject and object, does not recognize concrete conditions as objective and beyond the subject (Hall 70). Lukacs' identification of the proletariat is constructed with an overconfidence in the capacity of the subject; thus, it departs from the conditions of reality into the realm of ideals.

As a critique against the idealist tradition, Adorno proposes the "priority of the object," arguing that the subject and object are fundamentally irreconcilable (Hall 71) [7]. Adorno contends instead that reconciliation and fulfillment are based on the recognition of the irreducible qualities of the object (Hall 71). To put this in the context of the proletariat revolution, Lukacs' proletariat subject is rendered mythical, containing the possibility of revolution in itself. While for Adorno, "subjective action always requires objective mediation," [8] and to distinguish between the "subjective and objective parts of the object" (Hall 72). Adorno's concept of mediation attempts to reveal how the subject and object play a constitutive role in each other's construction (O'Connor 14). Thus, the reliance of subjective action on objective mediation reveals the constitutive role of irreducible objective conditions in the actions of the subject. In essence, Adorno argues that to recognize the institutional constraints of modern capitalist society and the irreducible objective conditions that affect the subject are foundational for discussing new possibilities for society (Hall 82).

As I pointed out earlier, Adorno's criticism about Lukacs' idealist heritage is overstated. While Adorno argues that Lukacs treats the proletariat as the subject-object capable of engendering the world, idealism at maximum power, Lukacs' theory does not fully give up objectivity to uphold a subject (Feenberg 188). Lukacs follows Hegel's logic in reconciling the subject and object through historic progression, that the a priori condition is comprehended and incorporated into the subject "without [being eliminated] of its alterity as an objectivity confronting the subject"

(Feenberg 188). Objective conditions are still recognized as alien to the subject. For Lukacs, as for Adorno, the concept and the object exist in tension; the concept represents “potentialities unrealized in the limited, concrete object” while the content of the object “overflows the limit of the concept” (Feenberg 190). In this sense, the proletariat revolution represents when the concrete real conditions of the proletariat leads to its overflowing beyond the constraints of the “reified concept” of individual workers (Feenberg 190). Contrary to Adorno’s critique, Lukacs’ employment of Hegelian historicism leaves space for the existence of an alien objectivity.

In this section I have examined Adorno’s critiques of Lukacs and have defended Lukacs’ theory. Though Adorno argues that the theory of reification is written with an inclination to romanticize the past over the modern world, Lukacs has stated that reification is a modern phenomenon and has revealed key distinctions between pre-modern and modern societies, showing that the universality of the commodity form is only made possible by modern capitalism. Adorno also criticizes Lukacs for retaining the idealist tradition by reconciling the subject and object through Lukacs’ identification of the proletariat as the subject-object, which is valid, but Lukacs, through his Hegelian historicism, acknowledges an external objectivity. In the following section I will highlight Lukacs’ importance through how he influences later theorists.

IV. METHODOLOGY III

To fully grasp the significance of Lukacs’ theory, it is important to examine his reception by later western Marxists. Whether Lukacs successfully grasped the social realities of Europe can be called into question. Though his theory holds its ground, the failure of communist revolutions within Europe seems to already be set in stone by the 1920s (Jeffries 75) [9]. The Frankfurt School, despite being a Marxist research institution, develops a grave pessimism about the realization of a socialist society in Europe, with Max Horkheimer fiercely writing about the impotence of the proletariat class, rejecting Lukacs’ prophecy of revolution (Jeffries 95) [9]. Horkheimer, witnessing the division between the working class in Germany and its “integration...into the capitalist process of production”, argues that the proletariat no longer has the capacity to lead the revolution (Jeffries 95) [9]. Adorno similarly develops the notion of “late capitalism”, arguing that Marx’s critique of the bourgeois society needs to be revised to apply to a fully developed capitalist society, including constructing an independent critique of the cultural industry (Zuidervaart 3).

Under the directorship of Max Horkheimer, the Frankfurt School would shift its focus toward interdisciplinary research on the social, psychological, political, and cultural dimensions of modern society, to examine the great gap between Lukacs’ promised revolution and the unnerving social conditions of contemporary Europe (Jeffries 139) [9]. Extending from the theory of Reification, Adorno develops the theory of exchange society, which, connected to his criticism of Lukacs’ romantic views, sought to offer a critique to the exploitative form that the commodity structure has taken, specifically in modern capitalist societies

(Zuidervaart 3) [10].

Adorno’s analysis of the exchange society is launched from three levels. From the political-economic level, Adorno examines the merging of political and economic power, particularly in Nazi Germany and contemporary United States, forming what he calls “state capitalism” (Zuidervaart 3)[10]. Power is even more concentrated in this form of capitalism, leading to a more thorough process of exploitation (Zuidervaart3)[10]. From the social-psychological level, Adorno discusses how new forms of exploitation in developed capitalist societies can be related to populist movements such as anti-Semitism (Zuidervaart 3)[10]. In his cultural analysis, Adorno builds on the universality of commodity form as proposed by Lukacs, arguing that the commodity character of art is “deliberately acknowledged,” and that the cultural industry shifts towards the reproduction of exchange values (Zuidervaart 3)[10]. Marketability dictates the products of the cultural industry, and art, like other forms of product, are deprived of their use values and their connections with individuals, solely represented by their exchange values (Zuidervaart 3)[10]. In essence, the “purposefulness without purpose” innate to art has been reverted to a “purposelessness for a purpose” in which the purpose is directed by the market (Jeffries 228) . From his experience of working in a commercial radio project in the states, Adorno has come to argue that “the stereotypical production mechanisms of popular culture molded the expectations of consumers to maximize profit for its shareholder” (Jeffries 206) . The market not only dictates the production process of cultural commodities but also shape consumer demands for them, becoming a miniature of the capitalist production process that is autonomous and self-reproductive.

Going beyond Lukacs, Adorno and Horkheimer also investigates the movement behind the rationalism that dominates the modern world in their work *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. This work reveals the dialectical movement behind the enlightenment promise of progress, that instead of “liberating humans from fear and installing them as masters”, the enlightenment renders “the earth [radiating] under the sign of disaster triumphant” (Zuidevaart 2). The enlightenment advancement through reason is accompanied by an irresistible regression into new forms of irrationalism. Similar to Lukacs’ insight of the irrationalism at the base of modern rationality, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that reason has been reduced to an instrumentalized reason, only serving as a means (Zuidevaart 2).

Lukacs’ theory of reification remains as a crucial foundation for later critics of modernity, such as Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of enlightenment reason. Reaching to strikingly similar conclusions as Marx’ discussion of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which was not published until after Lukacs’ work, Lukacs systematically reveals the alienation of the modern individual and his inverted role to the products of labor within society. Though his articulation of an imminent revolution remains too optimistic for a Europe already entering developed capitalism, the phenomenon of reification and the notion of a universal commodity form is foundational to the construction of social theories such as Adorno’s cultural industry. In one way or another, Lukacs’ works continue to strive for a better

future.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Lukacs' theory of reification has had a significant impact on later Western Marxists, despite the failed realization of his envisioned communist revolution in Europe. The Frankfurt School, led by Horkheimer and Adorno, adopted a pessimistic outlook towards the possibility of a socialist society, citing the integration of the proletariat into the capitalist process of production and the emergence of "late capitalism."

Building on Lukacs' work, Adorno analyzed the exchange society from three levels: political-economic, social-psychological, and cultural. He examined the concentration of power in "state capitalism," the connection between new forms of exploitation and populist movements, and the commodification of art and culture driven by market forces. This analysis revealed the pervasive influence of capitalism on all aspects of society, which has become autonomous and self-reproductive.

Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment* further explored the paradoxical nature of rationalism, exposing the regression into new forms of irrationalism as a result of the Enlightenment's promise of progress. Lukacs' theory of reification thus remains a crucial foundation for critics of modernity, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, who delve into the alienation of individuals in a capitalist society.

Ultimately, while Lukacs' optimism for an imminent revolution may have been misplaced, his insights into reification and the universal commodity form have significantly shaped the development of social theories, such as Adorno's cultural industry, and continue to inspire the pursuit of a better future.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I deeply appreciate Professor Mark Wrathall for guiding me through every step of this project. Professor Mark Wrathall is a professor of Oxford University, and he has shown the utmost dedication and passion towards helping me investigate *Critique of Modernity*. He introduced me to many valuable texts, and he also helped me comprehend many concepts that were novel to me.

In addition to understanding books and articles and their implications to this paper, Professor Mark Wrathall was also of immense help during the drafting and editing phase. Many of my ideas came into shape with his guidance.

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