

A Logical Analysis of the Criticism of Alienation and the Deduction of De-alienation from the Perspective of Western Marxism

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Abstract: The critical reflection on the problem of reification has been the main thread of the century-long journey of Western Marxism. In the process of comprehensively elaborating and innovatively developing the critique of reification, Western Marxism has constructed and deduced logical coordinates based on the changing circumstances of the times, analyzed the new forms of alienation in human existence, and proposed some new paradigms of theoretical thinking, attempting to demonstrate the powerful vitality of the critical approach of Marxism. However, on the whole, the Western Marxist interpretation of the critique of reification and the direction of de-reification has three major shortcomings: weakening or neglecting the foundational position of political economy critique, the increasing disconnection between "theoretical weapons" and political practice, and the gradual inward contraction of practical solutions. With the outbreak of the new round of digital and artificial intelligence revolution, the theory of reification critique can only effectively explore the true path of the organic unity of technological rationality and humanistic rationality, materiality and humanity by broadening its perspective, updating its paradigms, and facing up to the reification attributes of things themselves and the de-reification forms of materiality.

Keywords: Western Marxism, alienation, de-alienation.

1. Introduction

Why is the phenomenon of materialized enslavement always ubiquitous in the capitalist world, and how does this abstract homogeneity emerge from the diverse material production? How does the mechanism of power that negates and reasserts control over production come into being? The critical reflection on such questions implies the logical main thread of Western Marxism. In 1923, "History and Class Consciousness" systematically expounded the theory of reification for the first time. This work, which is hailed as the "Bible" of Western Marxism, "coincidentally" triggered a huge effect in the history of thought. Lukács' slightly ambiguous but original reinterpretation of "reification" initiated the logical deduction of Western Marxism's critique of human alienation[1]. Analyzing the logic of Western Marxism's critique of reification and the deduction of de-reification from the three aspects of the starting point of gradual change, the advancement of transformation, and the trend of metamorphosis has significant reference value for reaffirming the practical significance of the theory of reification and promoting the modernization process that coordinates material and spiritual civilization.

2. The Starting Point of Transformation: A Comprehensive Exposition of The Theory of Materialization Criticism

At the beginning of the 20th century, capitalist society was in a period of transformation, beset by various contradictions, crises and predicaments. With the rise of the scientific ideology, the "rebellion of material" subjected cultural science to specific laws and various forms of laws, providing an important "index" for provoking conflicts among various cultures and civilizations. Lukács' systematic exposition of

the theory of materialization criticism not only stems from his criticism of the crises in the capitalist world but also has an internal driving force to explore the future development path. Specifically, the various alienation phenomena that emerged in capitalist society are the starting point for the emergence of the critical approach to materialization. The reflection of Western Marxists has generally undergone three levels of leaps, highlighting that the materialized critical approach focusing on "the universal fate of the entire society" has delved from isolating and atomizing the individual to the human life form itself.

2.1. From the analysis of labor alienation to the judgment of consumption alienation

The gradual replacement of the traditional production-oriented system by the consumption-oriented one is the result of the transformation of historical circumstances. After more than a decade of fascist rule, examining and criticizing the dominance of totalitarianism over social life has become a major issue in the development of human society. With the rapid economic recovery and gradual prosperity of major capitalist countries after World War II, consumption has revealed a controlling force that restrains people's self-development. By studying consumers, it can be confirmed that the total income, habits and publicity are significantly flattening the structure of consumers' preferences[2]. In developed industrial societies, "false demands" are constantly created, making people's physical and mental states subject to the logic of capital proliferation and subject to the values of consumerism and the political governance mechanism it has constructed.

The double harm caused by this is, on the one hand, aimed at the body that exists naturally. The "fashion trend" only cares about "prefabrication" and discards its content. People appear in stereotyped and abstract images, becoming "machines that pay for their goods". Looking further, the

occupation of the ideological field by consumerism is more related to people's basic survival needs. The survival state presented by individuals' "conformity", "repetition" and "imitation" of the order structure of the capitalist world is passive. Thus, the satisfaction of one's own needs paradoxically becomes an important cause of the loss of one's essential strength. The second is manifested as the erosion of people's mental state. Fromm believed that this abstract production mechanism itself has a personality dilemma, and in the existence mode of "heavy possession", "I buy, therefore I am". The essential relationship between people has been replaced by a competitive and hostile one driven by the pursuit of material interests, which has plunged modern people into a state of existence where they are independent of each other or even opposed to one another. People's behavioral patterns and emotional values have gradually been dissolved in the consumption mechanism, further exacerbating the survival crisis and ecological crisis.

2.2. From the evaluation of commodity landscapes to the criticism of the code world

Unlike the two World Wars, which made people's collective desires betray their own nature and were exposed nakedness through cruel violence and slaughter, the commodity landscape makes the process of people's departure from their own nature more covert. "Commodities" show a gentle side in their daily existence, but stubbornly confront people. Everyone may feel that "they are representatives of an unmanageable physical force, and they can all swear of the danger of this physical force by rudely displaying themselves." This seemingly enhanced self-awareness paradoxically indulges in the world of commodities and is in an unstoppable process of self-disintegration, causing people to be surrounded by objects and project an endless self into them. Commodities "serve as the head of Medusa, and all the features of the world become a rigid, frozen struggle for death." [3] This supreme power of the "god of things" is more vividly presented in Baudrillard's perspective on symbolic value. He saw that daily life was marked by a vast number of symbols, and the senses became the key to confirming self-sustenance. The modern world moved towards "surrealism" in symbols, and with the boost of media, it achieved the control of society. People entrusted themselves to the "virtual other" in the self-organizing symbol system. Big data will gradually transform the materialization of personality into the "digitalization" of personality, and the supreme power in the form of commodities has been gradually replaced by the code "digital god".

2.3. From Reflection on Physical alienation to judgment on intellectual alienation

Body alienation and degeneration are important issues in Western Marxism. Adorno once said, "Love and hate for the body have influenced all modern cultures." Modern Western philosophy extols human reason and activates human desires, but it has not changed the state where the spirit enslaves the body and the subject dominates the body. In the era of large-scale machine production, "the automaton itself was the subject, while the worker merely served as a conscious organ on par with the unconscious organ of the automaton, and was subordinate to the central power along with the latter." In the 20th century, Auschwitz concentration camp presented humanity with an extreme form of physical tearing, and all

proud forms of spiritual reflection were denounced as hypocritical lies in the face of absolute pain. People's forgetting of their own bodies is the most severe form of alienation. In daily life, physical alienation is mainly manifested in the alienation of the social connection between the body and the material world as well as the social world. Theorists generally focus on the potential violence exerted by the capitalist world on social members and the ubiquitous repression resulting therefrom. Lefebvre observed that in modern society, symbolic fetishism, which developed from the rule of writing, led people to "practice the details of actions, ritual attire, eating habits and sexual behaviors, and also tended to enforce regulations through threats and punishments." The various disciplinary machines in modern society make people erode their "physical experience" in so-called "autonomous" planning. As the power of biotechnology and algorithms becomes increasingly prominent, the idea of establishing humans as the source of meaning and authority is constantly eroding. "The main products of the 21st century will be the human body, brain and mind." Human life will be further rationalized and quantifiable, and the relationship between the "self" and the constantly emerging life processes will become increasingly complex. Intellectual alienation is an important issue in the current "digital intelligence revolution". This issue indicates that once autonomous individual life is subordinate to the learning of technological devices, freedom only has true meaning when it relies on data authoritarianism. The "self", which is in a state of dynamic change and full of vitality, is simplified by the automatic device of identity into neurons in a deep network, de-contextualized in an infinite algorithm, and is prone to constantly getting lost in the "exile" of meaning.

3. The Advancement of Transmutation: The Diachronic Leap of the Theory of Materialization Criticism

It has been a century since the Frankfurt School's institutional foundation, the Frankfurt Institute of Social Studies, was officially established in 1923. The Frankfurt School is renowned worldwide for its "critical theory", which targets the mechanisms and consequences of cultural domination in the capitalist world in an attempt to find alternative solutions to human liberation and self-actualization. The ideological positioning of social critical theory was deeply influenced by Lukacs' "History and Class Consciousness", especially the logic of reification. Looking at its logical deduction process, it has generally undergone three leaps, reflecting that the critical thinking path of materialization has achieved a progressive transformation towards historicity, sociality and reality, demonstrating the strong vitality of the critical approach.

3.1. Historical Reasoning: Turning to criticize the logic of modernity's enslavement

The first generation of theorists of the Frankfurt School abandoned Lukacs' version of the materialization critique from a historical and dialectical perspective, thus basically shaping the logical deduction framework of materialization from the perspective of Western Marxism. It is well known that the capitalist commodity relations with historical particularity are the logical premise for Lukacs to criticize the

objective process of modernity. Although this approach is not without its profound points, it is both narrow-minded and unscientific to confine historical materialism to the "self-awareness of capitalist society", because once the social and historical basis of the real process is dispelled in a historicized way, it becomes difficult to grasp the development trend and influence of things from the perspective of historical genesis. At the same time, Lukacs bridged the gap between the subject and the object in the "object-self-form" with the proletariat, where the subject and the object are truly identical. Although this was based on a dialectics generated for the "actual content", this "history" still serves as the embodiment of identity precisely what Adorno criticized, because this truth is actually deceptive. At the same time, the shift of the criticism of objectification towards the historical path is an ideological response to the transformation and change of The Times. In the 1920s, Lukacs clearly could not have foreseen that people's historical circumstances would further fall into extreme turmoil. The pain of reality had spread from the failure of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe to the collapse of humanistic ideals and beliefs. Some theorists pointed out that this internal and external crisis was a threat to the survival of the human race rather than a specific defect of a certain social form. Thus, the deduction of the logic of materialization further turned to the criticism of modern production and its process, directly facing the most paradoxical living conditions of human beings in the capitalist social structure. At the same time, Pollock's thought on state capitalism held that the most distinctive feature of this period was that "the political approach replaced the economic approach, ensuring the reproduction of economic life in a latest way and changing the characteristics of the entire historical period", which promoted the internal theoretical turn of critical theory. The deductions of the logic of materialization by Hawkeheimer, Adorno and Marcuse are all concrete manifestations of this internal turn.

3.2. Social Reasoning approach: Shift towards the normative construction of the rationalization process

After Adorno declared Lukacs' criticism of reification invalid, the two core predicaments of reification logic have become prominent: First, in the normative dimension, the existing reification logic is confined by the contradiction between the anthropological path and the historical philosophical path, neglecting "sociality" and making it difficult to confirm the source of criticism within the object of criticism itself; Second, in terms of the dimension of possibility, the existing solutions to materialized problems are difficult to dispel the anti-modernist color of romanticism and lack an action perspective. To rebuild the critical paradigm of materialization, Habermas, Hornet and others all turned to constructing the "normativity of the rationalization process", thereby moving towards a social rational path. While reviving the logical deduction of materialization, they also completed the defense of the legitimacy of this rational path. Specifically, the logical deduction of materialization has never been a kind of detached contemplation from reality, but rather a process of transforming truly social practices into history. This implies that it is necessary to clarify the normativity and possibility of the criticism of materialization. For Hawkeheimer and Adorno to transform the object of materialization criticism into the modernity enslavement brought about by the "capital" rational subject, they must

confront its realistic paradox, that is, the standard of rational criticism stems from the rationality of economic and technological development. Although the dialectical stance of non-identity can be described as discarding the ideological support of objectification within the perspective of objectification itself, when the given society is the sole support for the theorist's form of existence and no realistic alternative has emerged yet, this critical, negative and revolutionary stance is difficult to truly establish itself. This is what Habermas did later: acknowledging the collapse of Hegelian-Marxist historicism and replacing it with transcendental criticism. If there is no "next step" to point out the direction, perhaps ethics can do this instead of it. Thus, the theorists of the Frankfurt School depicted a "new" deduction of the logic of materialization: In social relations, the "constant" of the "a priori condition", which serves as the normative requirement of criticism, interacts with the "variable" of human practice in society, enabling the logic of materialization to distance itself from the philosophy of ideas and its class paradigm, transcend the barriers of the philosophy of consciousness and the field of appeal to dialectics, and embark on the journey of reconstructing the critique of materialization at the place where instrumental rationality ends.

3.3. Realistic approach: Shift to explaining living conditions

In the nearly century-long ideological evolution of Western Marxism, the concepts of reification and alienation have frequently emerged in various capitalist critiques and popular humanitarian ideas. However, the vast and profound ideological "edifice" created by theorists has become increasingly distant from people's lives and practices. Today, people are confronted with an even more severe phenomenon of reification and alienation between the old and the new. This has led to the widespread application of the concepts of reification and alienation in many contemporary academic fields. Some scholars have taken a different approach, analyzing and solving typical alienation problems from the phenomenological perspective of daily life. This is a beneficial transformation. They have proposed an anti-essentialist view of "unrelated relations" alienation, which can not only profoundly reflect the degree of estrangement and distortion between individual self-actualization and social life forms, but also promote the further activation of the intrinsic vitality of critical theory. It not only reflects that various forms of alienation of the self remain the key to understanding the widespread social ills in contemporary life, but also awakens people's conscious will to actively "diagnose and treat" by hitting the mark of their perception and recognition. Thus, Habermas and Hornett sought the a priori conditions of materialized logic, and here they turned to the exploration of self-relations centered on the concept of "possession", which is placed in action, creation and change, constantly moving towards reality.

4. Trends of Transformation: The Objectification of Things, The Deobjectification of Things, And the Deobjectification of Things

Through an examination of the vertical and horizontal deductive logic of the materialization criticism of Western Marxism, it can be seen that although many critical theorists

have "revised" the initial version of the materialization criticism theory in various ways, few have truly confronted the dematerialization deductive, that is, what is the dematerialization of discarding materialization and what is the dematerialization of discarding materialization. Although Western Marxism represented by Lukacs has opened up a unique path of materialization criticism, it generally shows three major deficiencies: weakening and neglecting the fundamental position of political economy criticism, the "theoretical weapon" increasingly disconnected from political practice, and the practical plan gradually contracting inward. Dematerialization deduction, as an important clue for the reconstruction, development and revival of materialization criticism, The potential for thinking is in urgent need of exploration.

First, the logical development of the criticism of objectification has never been able to provide a powerful model for clarifying the boundaries of objectification phenomena, resulting in its deobjectification deduction not being fully developed or even missing. It is well known that when Western Marxism extends the critical approach from the economic base to social existence, there is a phenomenon of shifting from economics and political science back to the philosophical approach, and it is difficult to effectively respond to the core propositions that Marxism is concerned about. The critical theory of reification initially held that the objective relations of things existing in the capitalist world are themselves mediated by abstract materiality, and all people are governed by the natural historical movement laws that are nearly "without a subject". Reification seems to have become the "meridians" of the operation of capitalist society, while the revolutionary actions to achieve dematerialization are rather vague. Most of the subsequent critical theorists pointed out that this original understanding was general and inappropriate. However, neither the exposure of the antithesis of Enlightenment rationality nor the diagnosis of the colonization of the living world could effectively clarify the phenomenon of materialization. At this point, although the materialization criticism of Western Marxism has analyzed the adversarial nature of the abstract ruling mechanism in the capitalist world, it has never clearly stated what the ruling mechanism contains, and thus the dematerialization deduction has lost its true economic foundation.

Secondly, although the "diagnosis" of the alienated living conditions of human beings in the capitalist world has been constantly improving, the objective "paradox" of materializing the essence still needs to be overcome. Western Marxism is often regarded as a kind of scholarly Marxism, and most critical theorists do not attempt to overcome objectification as a revolutionary change or action. Lukacs' discussion on "class consciousness" and organizational issues reveals his awakening of autonomous consciousness and his confirmation of the real resistance movement, because this transformative practice of established laws can reverse the fragmented logic of capital and dematerialize capitalist society. The process of change it triggers is the dynamics of the revolution[4]. In this context, "socialist modernity" may be defined as the real movement process of shattering the materialized form of capitalism through the "proletariat". A comprehensive review of the subsequent discussions on the form of dematerialization reveals that the prior conditions of dematerialization deduction can serve as an important link in reconstructing the critique of dematerialization, and absorbing the latest achievements of philosophy and social

sciences is a beneficial approach to analyzing its objective basis. But as some foreign scholars have expounded, the internal criticism of life forms has failed to overcome the restrictive distinctions between a good life and moral principles, as well as between justice and goodness. However, the "unrelated relations" under its methodological overtures eventually paradoxically return to essentialism.

Third, the practical plan of discarding the materialistic reality is gradually contracting inward. Some scholars hold that the "amnesty" of the capitalist system and its bureaucratic groups transforms the criticism and struggle of dematerialization into internal compromise. This is because the labor struggles in most developed capitalist countries are difficult to contain the socialist essence from the traditional perspective, and contemporary radical movements, due to the narrowness of their perspective, are difficult to possess the overall connotation of class struggle. Both seem difficult to bring about radical changes to the existing social structure. But as Marcuse put it, "the objective duality that exists defines the nature of every radical opposition movement, and this duality simultaneously reflects the power of the ruling group over the whole and the limitations of this power." Finberg proposed to pay attention to the micro-politics in modern life. Most of them are not the "cutting edge of epoch-making changes" as currently regarded by popular science, social media, authorities, futurists, etc. However, these elements that seem to be outside of history can be re-historicized, which has the significant meaning of acknowledging the openness of the future and subverting it. This micro-political demand can be transformed into new regulations, new designs and influence or even determine the use of specific technologies. Finberg believes that this is a specific and irreplaceable form of activism in a technological society because it can effectively restrain the power of so-called "expertise" and is based on the experience of those living in a capitalist society. Reshape the "world" for broader interests. In the current confrontation with the existing capitalist society, radical activists have also made progress. No matter where socialism appears on the historical agenda, these advancements must be maintained. Even though the above assumptions are so positive and optimistic, they are still based on a "bystander's" perspective and have extremely limited impact on issues such as social movements and their organizations.

5. Conclusion

Whether it is the materialization of objects themselves or their dematerialization, it indicates that people are facing an increasingly severe reality of materialization. Since Lukacs' first systematic analysis a hundred years ago, the critique of objectification has demonstrated its inherent vitality. The deobjectification path of discarding the materialized reality is gradually coming to the forefront. Whether people today reproduce Materialities in a poetic, aesthetic and romantic way, or actively pursue and construct true social autonomy and political liberation, they must understand: Only by striving to excavate the force of justice contained in history and adhering to the direction of Marxist transformation in the era of change and liberation of humanity can one truly undergo a "metasection".

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