

Searching for Glimmers in the Dark Night of Reification: The Unfinished Dialogue between Lukács and Mannheim on Subjectivity

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Abstract: The intellectual confrontation between Lukács and Mannheim over the proletarian subjectivity constitutes an unfinished exploration of modernity's critique. This essay, set against the backdrop of twentieth-century intellectual history, delves deeply into the fundamental opposition between these two theoretical pathways: Lukács' Hegelian Marxism views class consciousness as the pivotal force for breaking free from the constraints of capitalism, while Mannheim's sociology of knowledge deconstructs revolutionary narratives into hidden spaces of utopia. By examining the philosophical conflicts between the "dialectics of totality" and "perspectival truth," the retheorization of the role of intellectuals, and the dual test of the digital capitalism era, this essay reveals that proletarian subjectivity is neither an inevitable historical destiny nor a hollow game of relativism, but a continuous dialectical relationship between power structures and cognitive breakthroughs. The legacy of this intellectual dialogue provides contemporary critical theory with a perspective of "weak totality": in the barren lands of algorithmic rule, it both rejects the promise of absolute redemption and resists the fragmentation of cognition.

Keywords: Proletariat, Subjectivity, Critique of Reification, Sociology of Knowledge, Digital Alienation.

1. Introduction

In the intellectual field of Central Europe during the inter-war period, the issue of the proletariat's subjectivity was like a prism, reflecting the profound epistemological rupture between Marxism and the emerging social sciences. This rupture not only concerns whether class consciousness can penetrate the reified structure but also touches upon the fundamental predicament of modernity itself: when the "iron cage of rationalization" described by Max Weber tightens increasingly, is it still possible for the subject to regain control of history in a collective and revolutionary way? Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim, two thinkers who were both immersed in the Neo-Kantian tradition but eventually went their separate ways, engaged in a covert yet intense confrontation on this issue. Their opposition is by no means simply a debate between "revolutionary optimism" and "epistemic relativism." Instead, it reveals an unfinished paradigm revolution in 20th-century social theory: on the ruins of the disintegration of historical teleology, how to reconstruct the normative foundation of critical theory?

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács completed a Hegelian turn of Marxism. By anchoring the concept of "reification" between Marx's critique of commodity fetishism and Weber's analysis of rationalization, he attempted to prove that the class consciousness of the proletariat is not a passive reflection of their economic status, but "imputed consciousness" (zugerechnetes Bewußtsein), and "the conscious realization of historical totality in thought"[1]. This radical proposition actually implies a two-fold theoretical risk: First, it infuses the logic of Hegel's "substance is subject" into historical materialism, making the proletariat the embodied carrier of the historical dialectic. Second, through the presupposition of an epistemological break, it elevates the consciousness of the proletariat to "the position of truth", thus drawing a clear line from all bourgeois "partial rationality"[2]. This longing for totality is not only a rebellion against the

positivism of the Second International but also a philosophical response to the setbacks of the European revolutions at that time. As Theodor Adorno later pointed out, "Lukács' totality is a besieged totality, and its unity precisely stems from the desperate resistance to the fragmented reality".[3]

Karl Mannheim's sociological program of knowledge, on the other hand, sought to undermine this epistemological privilege. In *Ideology and Utopia*, through the concept of "Seinsverbundenheit" (existential connection), he demystified the "utopian consciousness" of the proletariat. All forms of thought, including Marxism itself, are the products of the "existential situation" of specific social groups, and their validity is limited to the "degree of fit with the concrete historical situation" [4]. This assertion not only challenged Lukács' ontology of class consciousness but also dragged Marxism into a self-referential paradox. If the thoughts of the proletariat are equally constrained by social existence, how can it claim its universal truth? Mannheim's solution was to introduce the "freischwebende Intelligenz" (free-floating intellectuals) as a supra-class cognitive subject[5]. However, this precisely exposed the internal tension of his theory. While the sociology of knowledge reveals the partiality of all ideologies, it itself must presuppose a non-partial observational position. This dilemma was later diagnosed by Jürgen Habermas as the "Mannheim Paradox" -- "a theory of knowledge that attempts to escape historicity by historicizing all knowledge will ultimately end up with hidden metaphysical presuppositions." [6]

However, reducing the opposition between Lukács and Mannheim simply to a confrontation between "totality" and "relativism" obscures the shared theoretical motif of the two: the critique and reconstruction of Enlightenment rationalism. Through the theory of reification, Lukács revealed that the "formal rationality" of the bourgeoisie had imprisoned the subject in the cage of calculability, and only the "dialectical rationality" of the proletariat could restore the unity of subject

and object. Mannheim, on the other hand, attempted to deconstruct the universal pretense of rationalism through the sociology of knowledge and reconstruct the public foundation of rationality on the basis of acknowledging the limitations of cognition. Their differences actually represent two paths of Enlightenment critique: Lukács insisted on achieving the unity of reason and liberation through the practical totality of the class subject, while Mannheim turned to the reflective equilibrium of intellectuals to maintain the plural co-existence of rationality. This difference in approach still resonates in contemporary critical theory. From Habermas' communicative rationality to post-modernist politics of difference, from Étienne Balibar's "égaliberte" (equal liberty) to Slavoj Žižek's "radical negativity," we can still discern the ghostly dialogue between Lukácsian totality and Mannheimian relativism.[7]

This paper argues that revisiting this forgotten dialogue is not merely about mending the rifts in the intellectual history landscape, but more importantly, about responding to the pressing issues of 21st - century critical theory. At a time when digital capitalism is dissolving traditional class forms and algorithmic rationality is reshaping subjective cognition, can we, and if so, how can we reconstruct a critical stance that both rejects metaphysical dogmatism and resists relativistic nihilism? By situating the debate between Lukács and Mannheim within the intellectual history context of the Neo - Kantian crisis, Weber's critique of rationalization, and the phenomenological turn, this paper aims to reveal that their differences regarding proletarian subjectivity are essentially extreme manifestations of the tension between "emancipation" and "rationality" in the self - understanding of modernity. This tension remains unresolved to this day and has instead become more acute under the squeeze of technological alienation and post - truth politics. In this sense, the unfinished dialogue between Lukács and Mannheim precisely provides contemporary people with a philosophical lens to diagnose their own predicament.

2. The Philosophical Foundation of Subjectivity Construction: The Divergence between Reification Critique and the Sociology of Knowledge

In the philosophical landscape of *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Lukács, through reconstructing the Hegelian dialectic, established the proletariat as the sole entity capable of achieving the identity of subject and object in the historical process. Central to this theoretical construction is the critique of the phenomenon of capitalist reification. It is not merely an economic exploitation mechanism but an ontological predicament that permeates the cognitive structure. Lukács pointed out that "Reification is the common fate of all in capitalist society, yet only the proletariat can break through this reified structure via a sense of totality"[8]. This assertion reveals a profound paradox in his thought: the proletariat is both the victim of the reification process and the only historical subject capable of transcending it.

The concept of "zugerechnetes Klassenbewusstsein" (imputed class consciousness) proposed by Lukács is essentially a Hegelian transformation of Marx's distinction between "class - in - itself" and "class - for - itself". In his view, the proletariat's class consciousness is not a

psychological state at the empirical level, but rather "an objective possibility determined by the dialectical totality of the historical process"[9]. This consciousness has an a priori nature because it must transcend the immediate experience of individual workers and be directed towards the overall negation of capitalist production relations. As Andrew Arato pointed out, "Lukács' theory of class consciousness actually replaces Hegel's 'absolute spirit' with the collective subjectivity of the proletariat"[10]. When analyzing commodity fetishism, Lukács advanced Marx's critique of political economy to the epistemological level. He believed that the rationalization (Rationalisierung) process of capitalism led to the decomposition of the labor process into calculable parts. This "formal rationalization" trapped the subject in the cognitive dilemma of a "kontemplative Haltung" (contemplative attitude). When workers are forced to sell their labor power as a commodity, their subjectivity is degraded to an object in the production process, which is the material basis for the emergence of reified consciousness. It is worth noting that Lukács coincided with Weber's rationalization theory here, but endowed it with a revolutionary critical dimension: reification is not only a distortion of social relations but also a complete suppression of dialectical thinking.

Lukács' setting of proletarian subjectivity is essentially the result of historicizing Hegel's proposition that "substance is subject." In "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," he wrote, "The proletariat must become both the subject and the object of history simultaneously, because only through this dialectical self - mediation can the true grasp of the social totality be achieved"[11]. This radical philosophical stance actually presupposes that the proletariat has a certain epistemological privilege - it is both the product of capitalist society and the internal negative force of this society. Michael Löwy commented on this, "Lukács transformed Marxist revolutionary theory into a redemptive narrative at the epistemological level, which makes his thought constantly waver between scientific analysis and messianism"[12].

In sharp contrast to Lukács' revolutionary epistemology, the sociology of knowledge developed by Karl Mannheim in **Ideology and Utopia** (1929) attempts to dissolve the epistemological priority of class positions through methodological innovation. He examines all forms of thought, including Marxism, within the framework of the determinism of social existence, and then puts forward "Relationism" as a solution to transcend relativism. This theoretical strategy not only undermines the epistemological privilege that Lukács bestows upon the proletariat but also reveals the possible ideological closure within Marxism itself. By distinguishing between "particular ideology" (partial distortion) and "total ideology" (the overall cognitive structure), Mannheim incorporates Marxism into the category of the latter for deconstruction. He believes that the proletariat's class consciousness is essentially a "utopian mentality" because it presupposes the possibility of transcending the existing social order. This analysis is highly subversive: when Mannheim claims that "the truth - claims of Marxism are equally constrained by its social situation," he actually negates the transcendental status that Lukács attributes to proletarian consciousness. David Kettler pointed out that "Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is essentially a desacralization operation of Marxist epistemology"[13].

The concept of "freischwebende Intelligenz" (free - floating intellectuals) proposed by Mannheim aims to

construct a cognitive subject that transcends specific class positions. He believes that, due to their relative detachment from the concrete relations of production, intellectuals can integrate the perspectives of different social groups and form a more inclusive form of knowledge. This theoretical concept is actually a direct challenge to the proletariat's epistemological privilege proposed by Lukács: if the production of truth can be separated from class positions, then the uniqueness of the proletariat as the subject of history will be dissolved. While adhering to the idea that social existence determines the form of knowledge, Mannheim attempts to avoid falling into the quagmire of relativism through "dynamic synthesis." He argues that although the cognitive perspectives of different social groups are one-sided, they can move towards a more complete truth through continuous dialogue. This solution is quite attractive in theory but faces a fundamental contradiction at the practical level: if all knowledge is constrained by social existence, then how can intellectuals, as synthesizers, acquire transcendent cognitive abilities? Later, in **The Destruction of Reason**, Lukács sharply pointed out: "Mannheim's relationism ultimately degenerates into a philosophical defense of the status quo because it denies the possibility of an epistemological breakthrough by the revolutionary class"[14].

The theoretical divergence between Lukács and Mannheim is essentially a contemporary re-enactment of the dispute between the Hegelian tradition and the neo-Kantian methodology. The former adheres to the historical generativity and class nature of truth, while the latter attempts to achieve value-neutral objective knowledge through methodological innovation. This confrontation unfolds at the following three levels: For Lukács, totality is a dialectical truth that the revolutionary class gradually approaches through practice. In contrast, Mannheim reduces it to a methodological tool, emphasizing the gradual construction of a cognitive picture through the synthesis of multiple perspectives. This difference reflects their fundamental attitudes towards historical teleology: Lukács insists that the internal logic of historical development necessarily leads to the liberation of the proletariat, while Mannheim rejects any a priori presupposition of historical purpose. Mannheim's totality is a "suspended" cognitive framework, while Lukács' totality is a revolutionary reality in the making. Lukács regards the subjectivity of the proletariat as an inevitable product of the contradictions in capitalist society, and its epistemological advantage stems from its special position in the production structure. Mannheim, however, contends that subjectivity is the product of social cognitive competition, and no group (including the proletariat) can monopolize the truth. This opposition is manifested in the conflict between dialectics and empirical sociology at the methodological level: the former reveals the essence through negative thinking, while the latter constructs knowledge through empirical induction. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge has a two-fold deconstruction of Marxism: it not only acknowledges its methodological value in exposing the falsity of ideology but also relativizes its truth claims as products of specific historical conditions. This kind of "undermining" criticism forces Lukácsian scholars to answer: if the proletariat's consciousness is also constrained by social existence, how can it guarantee its own truth? In his later works, Lukács attempts to fill this gap by introducing the "aesthetic dimension," but he has never completely resolved the epistemological self-reference problem.

3. Epistemological Break: The Tension between Class Standpoint and the Objectivity of Knowledge

The theory of class consciousness constructed by Lukács in **History and Class Consciousness** is essentially an ontological commitment at the epistemological level. By positioning the proletariat as an entity of the identity of the subject and object of history, he endows it with the privilege of producing truth that transcends empirical reality. This radical epistemological postulation directly challenges the traditional positivist concept of the objectivity of knowledge. Lukács believed that the proletariat's class consciousness has a unique epistemological advantage because it can sublimate particular experiences into universal truths. When analyzing the commodity structure, he pointed out that "the fact that the worker's labor is alienated into a commodity precisely gives him the possibility of understanding the essence of the entire capitalist society"[15]. This epistemological approach of "breaking through from within" relies on the proletariat's structural position in the relations of production. As the creator of surplus value and the direct bearer of exploitation, the proletariat's living situation is isomorphic with the internal contradictions of capitalism.

In Lukács' framework, truth is not a static cognitive counterpart but a dialectical process continuously generated through class practice. He particularly emphasized that "the proletarian consciousness can only realize its truth in revolutionary practice, for truth itself is the historical movement in which the subject transforms the object"[16]. This dynamic view of truth has a two-fold effect: on the one hand, it avoids the epistemological dilemma of mechanical reflection theory; on the other hand, it risks making the verification criterion of truth a "self-fulfilling prophecy" - only when the proletariat successfully transforms society can the truth of its consciousness be confirmed. Andrew Feenberg sharply pointed out that "Lukács' theory of truth presupposes at the epistemological level the conclusion it attempts to prove, and this circular argument weakens the persuasiveness of his theory"[17]. Lukács' epistemological construction came at a heavy theoretical cost: in order to safeguard the proletariat's epistemological privilege, he had to simplify the complex social cognitive process into a direct reflection of class position. This reductionist tendency is particularly evident in his analysis of the role of intellectuals. He believed that the consciousness of petty-bourgeois intellectuals is necessarily false because their class status blocks the possibility of total cognition. This assertion not only ignores the relative autonomy of intellectual production but also contradicts Marxism's complex analysis of the "ideological stratum." Pierre Bourdieu later criticized that "Lukács' theory of class consciousness actually replicates the reified thinking it attempts to criticize, reducing the living cognitive subject to a passive carrier of the class structure"[18].

Facing the class reductionist dilemma of Lukács, Mannheim developed the "relationist" epistemology in **Ideology and Utopia**, attempting to reconstruct the foundation of the objectivity of knowledge through methodological innovation. This theoretical strategy not only inherits Marxism's determinism of social existence but also tries to transcend the limitations of its class-position determinism. Mannheim included Marxism itself in the scope of analysis of the sociology of knowledge, pointing out that "when Marxists claim that their theory has scientific

objectivity, they are actually repeating the mistake of bourgeois ideologists - absolutizing the cognitive perspective of a specific social group"[19]. This self-referential critique is highly destructive: if all thoughts (including critical theory itself) are constrained by social existence, then the truth claim of proletarian consciousness loses its epistemological immunity. David Frisby believed that "Mannheim's relationalism is a Copernican revolution in Marxist epistemology, forcing revolutionary theory to confront its own epistemological conditions"[20]. The "dynamic synthesis" solution proposed by Mannheim aims to approximate objective truth by integrating the cognitive perspectives of different social groups. He believed that each social group's perspective contains partial truths, and the task of intellectuals is to synthesize these partial truths into a more complete cognitive picture through continuous dialogue. This epistemological concept has obvious pragmatist colors, but its methodological feasibility is highly questioned. H. Stuart Hughes pointed out that "Mannheim failed to explain the specific mechanism of the synthesis process, and his solution is more like an epistemological utopia than an operable method"[21]. More fundamentally, if the synthesizers (intellectuals) themselves are also constrained by social existence, then the so-called "dynamic synthesis" may degenerate into a tool for the reproduction of the ideology of the dominant group.

Mannheim's relationalism has a two-fold nature in its revision of Marxism. On the one hand, it acknowledges the shaping effect of class positions on cognition. On the other hand, it emphasizes that extra-class factors such as generation, occupation, and education are of equal importance to the cognitive structure. This multi-dimensional determinism shows its explanatory power when analyzing the rise of fascism. Mannheim discovered that the middle-class acceptance of Nazi ideology was not only due to class interests but was also closely related to their generational experiences and cultural traumas. This analytical approach injected new complexity into critical theory but also diluted the strength of Marxist class analysis. Theodor Adorno warned in this regard that Mannheim's eclecticism would ultimately blunt the revolutionary edge of critical theory[22]. The epistemological differences between Lukács and Mannheim are rooted in their different philosophical traditions and methodological presuppositions. This divergence is not only reflected in specific conclusions but also in the incommensurability at the meta-theoretical level. Lukács' epistemology is deeply rooted in Hegel's dialectics of totality, emphasizing that truth unfolds itself in the historical process. Mannheim, on the other hand, inherits the neo-Kantian tradition and transforms epistemological problems into methodological construction. This difference in philosophical foundations leads to their distinct understandings of "objectivity": for Lukács, objectivity is the historical product of class practice; for Mannheim, objectivity is the result of methodological discipline. Gareth Stedman Jones incisively pointed out that "their debate is actually a continuation in the 20th century of Hegel's 'truth is the whole' and Weber's 'value-free'"[23].

The implicit presupposition of historical teleology in Lukács' theory (that the proletarian revolution is the inevitable outcome of history) stands in sharp contrast to Mannheim's empiricist methodology. The former relies on the internal logic of dialectics to ensure the validity of epistemology, while the latter requires the establishment of

the legitimacy of knowledge through empirical verification. This opposition is particularly prominent when analyzing the possibility of social change: Lukács regards revolution as the realization of epistemological truth, while Mannheim views it as a contingent result of the game of social forces. Zygmunt Bauman commented, "This is the fundamental difference between the prophet and the sociologist - one sees an inevitable logic in history, while the other only sees a field of possibilities"[24]. The dialogue between the two exposes the core problem of Marxist epistemology: how to uphold that social existence determines consciousness while maintaining the objective truth of revolutionary theory? Lukács tries to resolve the dilemma by endowing the proletariat with epistemological privilege, but falls into the dogmatism of teleological presupposition. Mannheim dissipates the privilege through methodological innovation, but this leads to the disappearance of revolutionary subjectivity. Jürgen Habermas later attempts to transcend this dilemma with the theory of "cognitive interest," yet his solution still cannot completely break away from the theoretical legacies of the two.

4. Possible Paths to Reconstructing Subjectivity: The Unfinished Project of Critical Theory

In the development of 20th-century critical theory, the reconstruction of subjectivity has always been a central issue that remains unresolved. From Lukács' diagnosis of reified consciousness to the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental rationality, from post-Marxist deconstruction of class essentialism to the reflection on algorithmic governance in the era of digital capitalism, this lineage not only demonstrates theorists' profound insights into the crises of modernity but also reveals the complexity and incompleteness of the subjectivity problem. Lukács' theory of reification put forward in *History and Class Consciousness* laid the core paradigm for critical theory. He regarded the structural dominance of commodity fetishism as the root cause of the alienation of modern subjects, believing that only through the awakening of class consciousness could the proletariat break free from the cage of the reification logic. However, this revolutionary concept encountered fundamental doubts in the theoretical turn of the Frankfurt School.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno pointed out that "Lukács' appeal for totality may itself become a new ideological trap, because pseudo-concreteness, by reifying abstract categories, conceals the contradictory nature of social relations"[25]. He advocated replacing traditional dialectics with negative dialectics, revealing the rupture between subject and object through non-identity thinking, and shifting the reconstruction of subjectivity from affirmative construction to the continuous negation of the existing order. The concept of "negative subject" had a profound impact on later scholars. When Habermas criticized Mannheim's sociology of knowledge in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, he not only inherited Adorno's critique of positivism but also attempted to open up new possibilities through communicative rationality.

Habermas believed that Mannheim's simplification of knowledge as a determinant of social existence ignored the reflective ability of the cognitive subject, and that "the interest structure that constitutes knowledge (Erkenntnisleitende Interessen) essentially contains the potential for

liberation"[26]. This shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language marked the beginning of critical theory's attempt to shift from the deconstruction of subjectivity to the reconstruction of inter-subjectivity. The theoretical transgression of post-Marxism further expanded the boundaries of the discussion on the subjectivity issue. In **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy**, Laclau and Mouffe completely deconstructed class essentialism, arguing that "the field of social antagonism has expanded from the production field to the field of discursive practice. Subject positions are no longer determined by the economic base but are contingently formed in discursive articulation"[27]. The theoretical construction of this radical democratic politics places the reconstruction of subjectivity in the dynamic process of floating signifiers and hegemonic struggles. Žižek, on the other hand, reactivated Lukács' theory of reification through Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In **The Sublime Object of Ideology**, he pointed out that "the true horror of contemporary reification does not lie in the universalization of commodity relations but in the fact that the subject mistakes the internal split of the symbolic order for external reality"[28]. This revelation of the split nature of the subject not only continues the Frankfurt School's critique of the violence of identity but also extends the field of subjectivity reconstruction to the dimension of the unconscious. While these theoretical transgressions break through the traditional Marxist framework, they also face the risk of epistemological relativism. When all subject positions are regarded as products of discursive construction, the urgent problem to be solved is how to avoid falling into the quagmire of nihilism. The rise of digital capitalism has provided a new practical context for critical theory. The phenomenon of cognitive proletarianization revealed by Srnicek in **Platform Capitalism** marks that the reification mechanism has penetrated from the labor process into the cognitive field. "Platform capital transforms users' attention, emotions, and even social relations into quantifiable surplus value through data extraction and algorithmic control"[29]. This new form of exploitation not only exacerbates alienation in the traditional sense but also pre-fabricates subjectivity through personalized recommendation systems and behavior prediction models.

In this context, the concept of "digital reification" proposed by Fisher is of great theoretical value. He believes that "algorithmic governance creates a new illusion of objectivity by transforming social relations into data relations - people mistake the probability distribution output by algorithms for the essence of social reality"[30]. This epistemological alienation poses a double dilemma for the reconstruction of subjectivity: it is necessary to break through the cognitive obscurity of the algorithmic black box and resist the colonization of subject desires by platform capital. Facing these challenges, critical theory needs to re-contextualize at the methodological level. The concept of "Resonanz" (resonance) proposed by Rosa in **Critical Theory in the Age of Acceleration** provides a new idea for breaking through the closed system of algorithmic governance. He believes that "the key to the reconstruction of subjectivity lies in establishing a relational connection with the world, which is neither instrumental possession nor passive adaptation but a resonant relationship that maintains dynamic responsiveness"[31]. At the practical level, this theoretical concept echoes Stiegler's exploration of the "negentropic economy" - by reconstructing the organic connection between

the technological system and collective memory, a new form of knowledge that resists digital alienation is cultivated.

When algorithmic governance attempts to simplify the objectivity of knowledge to data correlation, the task of critical theory is to reveal the power relations and value judgments hidden behind algorithmic objectivity and elevate the critique of technology to a new field of democratic politics. From Lukács' class consciousness to the algorithmic critique in the digital age, the theoretical schemes for reconstructing subjectivity have always been in an unfinished state. This incompleteness is not a theoretical defect but a fundamental characteristic that keeps critical theory alive. When the reification mechanism reproduces itself in new forms, the reconstruction of subjectivity must continuously update its critical edge in the historical concreteness. In today's world where platform capital has comprehensively penetrated daily life, only by combining the critical spirit of negative dialectics, the normative basis of communicative rationality, and the material conditions of the digital age can a practical path be opened up to break through the cage of cognitive capitalism. This path needs to inherit the Frankfurt School's profound critique of the logic of identity and also absorb the theoretical insights of post-Marxism on multiple subject positions, ultimately realizing the emancipatory potential of subjectivity in the dialectical movement of technological critique and democratic practice.

5. Conclusion

The intellectual exchange between Lukács and Mannheim over proletarian subjectivity is a pivotal, unfinished dialogue that sheds light on the theoretical challenges of modernity and offers valuable insights for contemporary critical theory. Lukács' Hegelian Marxism and Mannheim's sociology of knowledge present opposing approaches to understanding the role of the proletariat in the critique of reification, with Lukács emphasizing the historical and revolutionary role of class consciousness, and Mannheim highlighting the limitations and contingency of knowledge shaped by social positions. This intellectual divide is not merely a matter of theoretical differences; it encapsulates a broader philosophical debate about the nature of truth, objectivity, and the possibility of social change in a reified world. In the age of digital capitalism, these philosophical tensions have only grown more relevant. As technological alienation and algorithmic governance redefine subjectivity and social relations, the challenge of reconstructing subjectivity in a meaningful way becomes increasingly urgent. Lukács' critique of reification, while rooted in the material conditions of capitalist society, faces criticism for its epistemological circularity and reductionist tendencies. Mannheim's sociological approach, while offering a more nuanced understanding of knowledge's social context, risks collapsing into relativism, eroding the possibility of any stable foundation for critical theory. Together, their opposing theories reveal a deep-seated tension between the aspirations for emancipation and the limits of rationality, a tension that remains unresolved in contemporary thought. Modern critical theory must confront these unresolved issues while adapting to new technological realities. The rise of digital capitalism and its accompanying cognitive proletarianization demand a rethinking of how subjectivity is constructed and how it can resist the forces of algorithmic control. In this context, critical theory's task is to navigate between Lukács' call for revolutionary totality and Mannheim's relativism, while

incorporating insights from the critiques of technology and digital governance. The search for a “weak totality” that rejects absolute metaphysical claims while resisting the fragmentation of knowledge offers a productive path forward. Such a stance would combine the critical spirit of negative dialectics with the insights of communicative rationality and the realities of the digital age, ensuring that critical theory remains a potent tool for analyzing and resisting the forces of reification in the modern world. Thus, the unfinished dialogue between Lukács and Mannheim continues to provide critical theory with essential conceptual tools for grappling with the complexities of modernity, offering a roadmap for a more emancipatory future in the face of new technological and social challenges.

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