Critique and Emancipation: Toward a Critical Theory of Leisure

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The charge for this chapter was to explore the relevance to leisure studies of developments in contemporary philosophy. I have interpreted this to mean developments in contemporary social and political theory, specifically the various models of social inquiry being debated. Given the lack of theory-oriented discussion in leisure studies, and given the importance of adequate theoretic frameworks in any emerging field of inquiry, it will be useful to consider approaches to theory that have occupied the attention of our colleagues elsewhere in the social sciences, and to ask whether any of the alternatives currently on the table can be of particular use in leisure studies.

Beginning, then, with some introductory comments on the nature of theory itself, the discussion turns to the underdeveloped state of theory in leisure studies. This raises the issue of paradigms for theory, of which there are four that, at least as broadly characterized here, appear to be the main antagonists in current discussion: positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, and critical theory. If the considerations to be advanced here have any merit, it is the last which has the most to offer leisure studies. Following summary discussions of the other three paradigms, the chapter therefore provides a more extended treatment of critical theory and several of its defining themes. These raise complex but unavoidable issues in any adequate review of critical theory's applicability to the study of leisure. By its very nature, critical theory is political in the broad sense, and thus introduces political elements into social inquiry; how this contributes to a politics of leisure is taken up next. The final section illustrates the possible application of critical theory to leisure studies by offering a set of theses for the critical analysis of leisure. The discussion as a whole suggests new and broadened directions for leisure inquiry, in part because a critical theoretic approach.
reveals an expanded conception of leisure. To demonstrate the value of this approach, and the expanded conception of leisure it provides, is the underlying purpose of this chapter.

In advance of this, however, several preparatory comments are in order. It is important to emphasize the theoretic pluralism in contemporary social science. Unlike the decades of the “behavioral revolution,” when derivatives of positivism held sway and drove other conceptions of inquiry from the field, the current existence of at least four rival positions necessarily raises the question of which is the most appropriate for the study of leisure. How one answers this question depends in part on how one conceptualizes leisure. Here I want to offer several propositions that will be taken as given for present purposes. First, any field of inquiry must be structured in such a way that it adequately addresses the phenomena it investigates. Second, leisure is a multidimensional phenomenon, that is, leisure cuts across many aspects of our social and individual being. Leisure is not a simple phenomenon, easily isolated. It occurs in many forms, at many times and places. It follows, third, that the study of leisure must therefore necessarily be multidimensional. There is no single epistemology or methodology, and certainly no single discipline, that meets the rest of the first two propositions, i.e., that adequately reflects in itself leisure’s multidimensionality. This being so, the study of leisure must become transdisciplinary if it is adequately to address leisure’s multidimensional nature.

Leisure studies has often been thought of in this way, as transdisciplinary, and as the chapters in this volume illustrate, there are multiple perspectives present within the field. This is no guarantee of transdisciplinarity, however. The field may in fact be better characterized as multidisciplinary rather than transdisciplinary. The multiple perspectives in the field are not often in communication with one another. They tend, instead, to be oriented toward what may be called the home disciplines or to be withdrawn into themselves. This tendency works against the creation of research programs that move not only across several perspectives in the field, but also across several disciplines. Given the persistence of the “tyranny of the disciplines,” at least within North American academia, this is neither surprising nor unique to leisure studies.

It is distressing, nonetheless, because it runs counter to leisure’s multidimensionality and thus inhibits theoretical work adequate to the phenomenon of leisure.

The mere presence of multiple perspectives in the field does not suffice as grounds for transdisciplinarity. The means to the necessary conversations are lacking. To establish these requires a substantial reorientation in how leisure researchers are educated and leisure studies curricula organized (a requirement again not unique to leisure studies). Ultimately, transdisciplinarity exists in the individual scholar, in familiarity with several fields of inquiry at once, conceptually and substantively, epistemologically and methodologically. Such an admittedly high standard might well represent a lifetime’s effort, one perhaps not many of us will be able to achieve. But this is a topic for another time. Of immediate concern is the question of how theory may serve as a guide to the transdisciplinary study of leisure. Theory may be the link joining the several perspectives operating within leisure studies, a way past the isolating tendencies of disciplinarity and specialization. It should be clear that this is not to say these perspectives and their supporting research programs should be melded into one. This would contradict leisure’s multidimensionality. It is more reasonable to ask how theory may raise questions cutting across perspectives and joining researchers together even where they hold differing views on epistemology and methodology. The possibility of such theory would represent a tentative step toward transdisciplinarity. Taking this step, however, requires a better understanding of the nature of theory and of the alternative paradigms for theory in play within the social sciences.

**Paradigms for Inquiry**

Discussion of these issues in leisure studies, while scarce, has not been altogether lacking. Even where attention has been given to them, however, the limitations of the prevailing conceptions of theory in leisure studies have been revealed. In her useful analysis of the lack of theoretically informed research in the field, Stockdale (1989) argues it is necessary to rise above the “information gathering” focus of much contemporary leisure research, and that to do this the development of theory is necessary. But Stockdale, as do most leisure researchers, proceeds with a limited view of what constitutes theory, remaining squarely within what will shortly be labeled the postpositivist paradigm by naming the “explanation and prediction” of leisure behavior as the “ultimate end” of leisure research. This is, however, only one among several conceptions of theory.

Discussions of theory in leisure studies have generally proceeded as Stockdale does, with the assumption that only one paradigm of theory has relevance to the field (e.g., Weissinger, 1995). Where, for example, Stockdale offers social representation theory as a possible exit from leisure studies’ theoretic muddle, this may also be understood as simply the a priori affirmation of a specific paradigm for theory. Calls for “more theory” in the field are, in fact, usually calls for more
of one particular paradigm of theory. There is no doubt that some conception of positivist-inspired theory has long been dominant in the social sciences, but there is equally no doubt that the debate on paradigms of theory has continued and perhaps intensified in recent years (see Bernstein, 1978, 1983, for lucid discussions of this). This debate has been slow to emerge in leisure studies, and then mostly outside North America, so the field has yet fully to consider the existence of several alternatives to positivist-based theory. Until this expanded debate occurs, the field will, given the prevalence of the positivist paradigm, find its research being funneled into a narrow range of research questions and methodologies unable in themselves to attain the transdisciplinarity necessary for the multidimensional investigation of leisure.

As a first step, it is necessary to recognize the complexity of theory. Theory always involves propositions about the structure of what is taken to be social "reality," so that theory itself is part of the construction of the very social world we wish to investigate. In Calhoun’s (1995) words, theory constitutes "our very access to the social world, including the facts about which we theorize and the practical actions through which we test propositions and understanding" (p. 7). Theory is an intervention in that social world and so necessarily makes crucial assumptions about that world's structure. These assumptions are the coordinates along which theory-based inquiry orients itself, the beginning point and road map. But these coordinates arise from within the theory, and not from the social world, on which they are imposed. It should be no surprise that theory, at least as conventionally conceived, is reflected in the social world and empirical findings about it. Finding regularities in behavior, as for example in leisure preferences and satisfactions, is not remarkable when the expectation of them is built into the epistemological and methodological doctrines that pass for theory in much of social science. After all, these expectations contribute to the construction of the social world being investigated.

This has significance for the social function of theory. Theorizing is every bit a social phenomenon as any we investigate. There is a reciprocal relation between (1) theorizing as the construction of the so-
cial world we ask questions about and (2) the function of theorizing in that social world. The assumptions made in theory about the social world contribute to whether theorizing becomes one aspect of the reproduction of that world, and thus plays a conserving role; or whether theorizing becomes a self-reflective enterprise intended to reveal contradictions in social practices that limit human development, and thus plays a radical role. I will argue in what follows that critical theory falls into the radical camp; it will be clear from earlier essays (Hemingway, 1995, 1996) that I regard more traditionally conceived empirical theory to play a largely conserving role. But for the moment this point can be better illustrated through a brief summary of the assumptions made about the social world by the leading alternative paradigms in social research.2

The term paradigm is at best imprecise, but can be understood as indicating a model of propositions and beliefs, explicit and implicit, held by a community of researchers about the conduct of their work, the structure of what they study, the nature of their findings, how these findings are to be fitted together, and the social meaning(s) of the resulting statements. Benhabib’s (1996) "nontechical" definition is perhaps as clear as any. She characterizes a paradigm as "a coherent set of assumptions, some articulated and some not, which guide, influence, structure, or help ‘format’ a vision of theory and politics" (p. 27). In any event, three components of such a model are generally identified: the ontological, addressing the presumed nature of reality; the epistemological, addressing the manner in which this reality may be known; and the methodological, addressing the means by which this knowledge may be gained. To these I would add a fourth component, the valuational, addressing the underlying historically conditioned values attached to inquiry and those who carry it out. The four paradigms named earlier—positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, and critical theory—may be contrasted with each other using the four components just named.3

1I have dealt with this issue at some length on another occasion (Hemingway, 1995). Since theory is always in evolution, not all I say in this chapter will be in agreement with my earlier writing. Conversations with Don McLean helped clarify some issues that were troublesome in my earlier statement. I want also to acknowledge here the helpful comments and encouragement of Charlie Sylvester and Ben Hunnicutt, who are of course absolved of responsibility for any weaknesses remaining in this chapter.

2I owe my initial familiarity with this formulation of the issue to Keith Holllinshead, whose invitation to participate in a symposium on alternative paradigms sponsored by the International Sociological Association’s research committee on international tourism was the impetus to considering the question more broadly.

3Its substantive shortcomings and occasional superficiality aside, the collection edited by E. Guba under the title The Paradigm Dialog (1990) is a useful introduction to the issues raised here. Although my general description of the alternative paradigms follows to some extent Guba’s introductory essay to this volume, “The Alternative Paradigm Dialog” (pp. 17–27), my conclusions, particularly regarding critical theory and constructivism, are sharply different from his.
Positivism and Postpositivism

Positivism is perhaps the most familiar paradigm for theory. Ontologically, it holds that there is a discoverable external reality describable in statements of increasing generality until these take nomological form, that is, the form of natural laws specifying causal (rather than only correlational) relationships among phenomena. Such statements are taken to be universalizable, that is, independent of temporal and cultural factors. Epistemologically, positivism holds that the knower and the known must be separate. Explanation and prediction, based on measurement, are the forms in which knowledge is to be stated if it is to count as such. A proposition’s truth content rests on the type of data that support it and the means by which these data are collected and analyzed. Epistemological statements can be measured against what is known ontologically, that is, what is known about the presumed external world. Methodologically, positivism insists on “value-free” inquiry, with propositions drawn from existing, preferably more general, statements; these propositions are stated in advance and tested under specified and controlled conditions, with mathematically rigorous methods valued over others.

Postpositivism developed in response to the general discrediting of the claims made by its predecessor. It consists generally of tempering the absolutism of positivism by the recognition that although the aims of positivism are laudatory, the imperfections of methods and the complexity of the phenomena make achieving them highly unlikely. Ontologically, then, postpositivism holds that although there is an external reality describable by lawlike statements, these will always be only approximate because external reality will never be understood in its totality. Epistemologically, postpositivism maintains the separation of knower and known while acknowledging this can never be complete. Nonetheless, it aims at something like statements of cause and effect, but understands these will always be only partial and perhaps expressed correlationally. Given incomplete knowledge of the external world, new propositions cannot be measured against it satisfactorily. They must, as Guba (1990, p. 21) points out, be evaluated by the “critical community,” i.e., the community of scholars working in the relevant specialty, whose views find their expression in journals, research meetings, and so on. A scholarly “consensus” determines which propositions will be accepted, and which not. Value-freedom remains the ideal and the critical community its protector. Methodologically, postpositivism grudgingly abandons the positivist claim that experimentally gained knowledge alone counts, and accepts less rigorously derived statements, particularly when several nonexperimental techniques have been brought to bear on the phenomena in question. Inductive statements, sometimes called grounded theory, are accepted as sources of testable propositions.

The ontological, epistemological, and methodological differences between positivism and postpositivism are those of degree, not of kind. Valuationally they are hardly different at all. There is a belief in the fallibility of human judgment, particularly as it is corrupted by self-interest. There is also a conviction that true knowledge can therefore be only that of which we ourselves are not part, that is, the knower and the known must be kept steadfastly separated. This requires a withdrawal from that which is studied, a dispassionate objectivity, leading ultimately to varying degrees of determinism. Though human beings may take themselves to be acting in a world governed in part, at least, by their own wills and volitions, in the end this is only a delusion. Human beings are part of an immensely complex social reality, but it is not one they themselves make.

Constructivism

Positivism and postpositivism have shaped much of modern inquiry, in the social as well as the natural sciences. They are also the paradigms against which contemporary social inquiry has begun to react in the forms of constructivism and critical theory. Constructivism has emerged with particular force over the past two decades. It is not dissimilar to, and in fact is partly derived from, what is called postmodernism, which has flourished in some areas of the humanities and may be regarded as rejecting what Toulmin (1990, p. 11) terms modernity’s “quest for certainty.”

Such a loosely defined body of thought is difficult to summarize, but constructivism may be said to rest on the claim that human beings are far more constitutive of their world than positivism and postpositivism acknowledge. At the extreme end are those who, like Guba (1990, p. 27), claim that the “world” exists only “in the minds of its constructors,” a nonsensical statement when taken as literally as Guba and others seem to mean it. Ontologically, then, constructivism adopts a relativist approach, emphasizing the local over the universal, and asserting the existence of multiple realities, as opposed to a single external reality. These multiple realities are grounded in the individual experiences out of which the specific identities of the knowers

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4It will hardly show in the brief discussion that follows, but my understanding of postmodernism has been influenced by an earlier project undertaken with Karla Henderson.
emerge. Epistemology and ontology melt into one another in constructivism, for its epistemology simply repeats its ontological claim in a different way by maintaining that knowledge is subjective rather than objective. The knower and the known are linked together in the knower’s experience of the known; knowledge is the product of this experience and is inseparable from it. In this spirit, constructivist methodology emphasizes the individual and the unique. Its resistance to “totalizing” accounts is reflected in Lyotard’s (in)famous statement that postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1984, p. xxiv). Individual reports of experience must be credited as authentic. At most, they can be explicated to reveal hidden meanings and compared to other reports similarly explicated with the hope that something like generalizations will appear. These, however, do not take precedence over the localized reports of experience on which they are based, and cannot be taken as stand-ins for lawlike statements from which testable propositions may be generated.

Valuationally, constructivism advances individual human experience to the foreground. In direct opposition to positivism and postpositivism, it elevates the individual, specific, and local above the totality, the general, and the universal. Constructivism is unconcerned with issues of the fallibility of human judgment. Self-interest and incompleteness are simply parts of the world built by individual experience. In the end, this experience itself becomes sanctified. Any challenge from the outside is rejected as an attempt to subordinate individual experience to unwarranted claims of authority. The relativism inherent in constructivism is profoundly suspicious of threats to individual autonomy, to the imposition of standards of “true and false,” “right and wrong,” “good and bad” alien to a specific individual’s experience of the world. Ultimately, constructivism descends into a chaos of individual identities, each grounded in its own unique interpretation of its individual experience.

The Critical Theory Enterprise

So much for three of the competing paradigms for theory. We turn now to the fourth, critical theory, advanced here as the alternative of most value in the study of leisure. Simply stated, critical theory aims to steer a course between the reification of human action (that is, treating human action as a thing or object) in positivism and postpositivism, and the relativism inherent in constructivism, all while seeking contact between theory and practice aimed at the emancipation of human capacities. How critical theory does this can be illustrated by examining three themes within it: (a) historical specificity and the nature of critique; (b) difference, defined as plurivocality and polyphony; and (c) the emancipation of human capacities, which receives particular emphasis in the following discussion. In this discussion, the four elements of a paradigm identified earlier (ontology, epistemology, methodology, and values) are integrated rather than separated as earlier, allowing a more detailed presentation of critical theory. The reader may wish to review the summary at the end of this section, where these four elements are again treated separately, to enable more ready comparison of critical theory with the three other paradigms.

**Historical Specificity and the Nature of Critique**

Social inquiry has not generally acknowledged the historicality of social phenomena. It has frequently failed to understand that social phenomena are “historically conditioned” and not aspects of an atemporal social “brute reality” or “given” (Bernstein, 1978, p. 106). Critical theory, however, is specifically historical, making explicit the historicity of social action against a normative horizon (discussed here as emancipation, defined provisionally as the release of human potential). Social action occurs in specific historical contexts and takes specific historical forms. These contexts and forms often have dimensions unrecognized either at the time or by the actors. Critical theory strives to make apparent the specific historical context in which social action is situated, particularly those elements which have become so much a part of that action (e.g., in daily experience) that the actors themselves no longer see them either as the results of previous action or of historical context. In their apparent immediacy these elements have become part of the “given,” accepted as the “natural” context in which human beings act. Critical theory explores the historical process of reification by which social practices and conditions

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6Reasonably accessible accounts of critical theory and its history may be found in the following: for its philosophical foundations, see Benhabib (1986) and Hoy and McCarthy (1994); for its history, particularly its association with the Institute of Social Research, see Jay (1996); for a richly detailed history that includes many of the minor as well as the major figures in critical theory’s development, see Wiggershaus (1994); for a survey of the contributions of the major thinkers, see Held (1980); for useful selections from the writings of influential critical theorists, see Arato and Gebhardt (1993) and Bronner and Kellner (1989).
created by human action come to be regarded as “quasi-natural” and to “dominate over the apparently more contingent quality of human life” (Calhoun, 1995, p. 15). Building on Marx's analysis (1990, chapter 1) of the commodity relationship as the foundation of capitalism, and inspired by Lukács's important essay on reification (1922/1971), critical theorists have explored how the artifacts of human activity come to appear independent from, and even determinative of, human action.

**Historicity of Human Activity**

Critical theory proceeds by developing an “empirically rich” basis for its analysis, an analysis that acknowledges two related features of human action: first, that such action is irredubly historical; second, that such action takes its substance from a particular cultural context (Calhoun, 1995, pp. 89–90). These points are joined with the proposition that, in their current state, human beings are always less than they could be (Horkheimer, 1937/1972, pp. 209–10; this is a seminal essay in the development of critical theory). In this current state, human beings are confronted with the contradiction between historical actuality on the one hand and human potential on the other. In Horkheimer’s words, “the critical theory of society . . . has for its object men as producers of their historical way of life in its totality” but it does not take this totality as an absolute “given,” for critical theory “is not concerned with goals imposed by existent ways of life, but with men and all their potentialities” (pp. 244, 245).

The historically specific conditions in which human action occurs are the bases of critical theory’s empirical analysis of social roles, practices, and institutions; the concept of emancipation is the normative horizon for their critique. It is any contradiction between these—social roles, practices, and institutions on the one hand; and emancipation on the other—that critical theory challenges.

**Self-Reflexivity in Critical Theory**

Critique has so far been characterized as the historically specific explication of social roles, practices, and institutions (hereafter also referred to as social specifics to avoid repetition) with reference to their effects on human potential. A further component is self-reflexivity. Critique is the effort, in Marx’s words (1977, p. 38), to obtain a “self-understanding” by the participants of the principles that structure social specifics. Social inquiry is a form (albeit too often highly formalized and opaque to the uninitiated) of reflection about these and their surrounding social and material conditions, carried on by individuals who are participants in them if for no other reason than that they have chosen to examine them. From the critical point of view there is no such thing as a pure or detached observer. This is more than a matter of “value freedom” or “value neutrality.” The researcher shares in the web of historically developed understandings about which social phenomena are relevant to and appropriate for social inquiry, about the proper manner in which inquiry is to be conducted, and about expectations for the use of its results. Where “traditional theory” (essentially equivalent to positivism and postpositivism) regards “the social genesis of a problem” as “external to itself” (Horkheimer, 1937/1972, p. 244), critical theory argues that because there is no means to escape the “social genesis” of the problems it investigates, this must itself become a subject for inquiry.

Thematizing the historical embeddedness both of what it investigates and the investigation itself is the source of critical theory’s self-reflexivity. Where positivism and postpositivism separate the researcher from what is researched, and where constructivism fractures this relationship into multiple sites among which any critical judgment is difficult if not impossible, critical theory makes its own enterprise a conscious focus of critical attention. The questions critical theory addresses are understood to have form, content, and importance shaped by historically specific human values and action predicated on them. Critical theory explicitly queries why these questions have arisen and been selected for attention in a specific set of historical circumstances (e.g., workers’ leisure in the 1920s and 1930s, gender and racial differences in the 1980s and 1990s). How are they analyzed? What is treated as natural, as part of a social “given,” and what as manifestations of human historical action? What is the interaction between inquiry and inquirer? What elements in society are interested in their resolution (e.g., in the appeal to IQ in social policy planning or in the effects of ethnicity on learning)? These are not trivial issues; the function of inquiry in society at large depends on their resolution.

**Social Function of Inquiry**

The social function of inquiry ranges from conservative to radical. Conventionally ("traditionally" in Horkheimer’s phrase), inquiry examines the mechanisms by which society is reproduced, attempting to account for them in their continuity or discontinuity under the cloak of a neutrality supposedly ensured by the separation of researcher from the object of research. In fact, this approach contributes itself to the reproduction of society. The separation of researcher from
the "researched" lends to the phenomena concerned with the misleading appearance of being social "givens" rather than the product of historical human action. Such inquiry plays a conservative role in society (cf., Horkheimer, 1937/1972, pp. 196, 208), regarding any practical intervention in society as beyond its scope and reflected in the conventional binary oppositions between "research and values," "knowledge and action," or "theory and practice." Conventional inquiry achieves its self-conception by failing to recognize itself as a historically grounded social practice. Failing to do so, conventional inquiry tends to replicate existing social practices and conditions by regarding the phenomena it analyzes as part of a social "given" from which it is separated. Is it merely coincidence, for example, that there has been a burst of interest in the economic aspects of leisure in a time when "the market" has assumed mystical qualities as the natural arrangement of human transactions? Does such economic analysis of leisure reinforce or challenge existing presuppositions about human interaction? It is neither a coincidence, I think, nor is such analysis sufficiently reflective about its social function.

Critical theory, on the other hand, by virtue of its self-reflexivity, aims not only to explicate existing social roles, practices, and institutions, but to change them as well. It thus has an at least potentially radical social function. Applying a range of analytic techniques, among them methods from conventional social analysis, critical theory assists social action "by helping to see beyond the immediacy of what is at any given moment to conceptualize something that could be" (Calhoun, 1995, p. 9). Critical theory aims not just to identify contradictions in social practices and conditions limiting the release of human capacities, but also to provide the foundations for practical action to remove these contradictions.

Failure to thematize its own historicity would contribute to the replication of the very social conditions and practices critical theory challenges. It takes the "real situations" of human beings as producers of "their own historical way of life in its totality" as its "starting point," but not merely as "data to be verified and predicted according to the laws of probability" (Horkheimer, p. 244). It takes them instead in relation to historically grounded conceptions of human potentialities (p. 245) with "the conviction that men have other possibilities than to lose them-selves in the status quo" (p. 248). Critical theory is thus always a political basis for carrying theory over into practice, for intervention in the social world. This intervention is the drive for emancipation, the release and development of human capacities, to which our discussion turns after exploring the need for critical theory to attend to the concept of difference.

**Difference: Plurivocity and Polyphony**

Early critical theory was strongly influenced by the universalism in the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and (more distantly) Aristotle. This is evident in the work of critical theory's most prominent early practitioners, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (e.g., 1944/1972), who sharply attacked the "culture industry"'s role in the degradation of "high culture"; it remains evident today in the work of critical theory's most active contemporary thinker, Jürgen Habermas (e.g., in his analysis of discourse ethics and communicative action). Among the more telling criticisms of critical theory is, therefore, that it betrays its own principle of historical specificity by failing to confront adequately questions raised by difference (see, e.g., Fraser, 1989, specifically the essay "What's Critical About Critical Theory?").

Critical theory's error was to forget that historical and cultural contingencies render the identity of each person opaque, for each person's identity is grounded in the particularities of his or her historical situation. No universal self-justifying principles can be applied equally across all such individuals (cf., Benhabib, 1992, p. 4). There has historically been a general failure in social science to recognize this, reflected in inattention to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and physical and mental condition. This error, in which early critical theory is implicated, has a contemporary parallel in "identity politics," particularly the insistence that individuals are determined by one among these many previously unacknowledged factors. Both errors are due in significant part to the unspoken and false assumption that individuals may for purposes of social inquiry be placed in a single social world whose features are defined in advance by the purposes of inquiry. Culture, however, and the individual identities developed within it, is a plurivocal and polyphonic enterprise, that is, culture is multivoiced and multithemed (cf., Taylor, 1985, pp. 248–292). Human beings live in multiple social worlds all at the same time and find themselves necessarily adjusting among the multiple social roles they therefore occupy. The individual is in many ways the intersection of these social worlds, and the
individual’s integration of them is a defining characteristic of his or her personality (cf., Calhoun, 1995, p. xv).

In the light of this, the reformulation of critical theory Benhabib (1992) suggests has some importance for the development of a critical analysis of leisure. Benhabib wishes to develop a “communicative universalism” that moves the theoretical issue from non-contradiction of a universal maxim (which forces argument toward one-dimensionality, as in the question What is true leisure? which can be answered only trivially or so generally as to be of little use in studying historically existing leisure) to a question of action among individuals in historically specific conditions (who address grounded questions like What is leisure now? with the prerequisite conditions for effective engagement in such action treated as universal principles). Benhabib’s proposal to reformulate critical theory on a principi of communicative universalism directs us away from the hitherto dominant convention in social science of treating individuals as if they live in a single social world, while avoiding constructivist relativism. Instead, critical social inquiry examines the intersubjective cultural process out of which there emerges some social understanding of the multiple forms of, and sites for, leisure in a particular society. Following Benhabib, critical social inquiry is open to any number of voices arguing along any number of themes as they develop an understanding of what leisure is in their intersubjectively defined historical situation. This means taking people as they are placed in their multiple social roles and as they understand those roles, rather than imposing preconceived universal and one-dimensional conceptions on them.

Benhabib structures communicative universalism to incorporate, for example, the feminist challenge to separating artificially the public and the private (1992, p. 12), which has rendered women’s leisure (among other activities) invisible. By insisting on attention to the many voices hitherto often excluded from social analysis, and by recognizing that these voices are grounded in varying historical situations, the full complexity of social phenomena, leisure included, may become more visible. To continue speaking about human identity as though all identities are universally shaped in the same ways by the same social and material forces or as though they are organized along a single dimension (e.g., race, gender) is in both cases dangerously misleading. There is no single social role a person always fills and from which he or she always engages the social world, nor is there any absolute distinction between public and private social roles, a point which assumes more significance in examining the political implications of leisure. For the present, Taylor’s (1979, p. 52) observation that “we are aware of a world through a ‘we’ before we are through an ‘I’” is telling, for our conception of who we are tends to emerge before any possible reflection on what it is to be a person, and what kind of person in what specific historical circumstances. Who we are, and the standpoint(s) from which we regard our world, is thus very much a historical social product. Any reflection on what we are becoming must occur within the constraints of our own personal history, the constraints of historically available conceptions of personhood, and the determinate resources available to us.

From the interplay among these—our socially emergent identities, our social and material conditions, and our expanding reflections on them—the sense might grow that who we are does not exhaust the possibilities of who we might become. If critical social analysis is as Benhabib (1992) defines it, “the critical uncovering of premises and arguments which are implicit not only in contemporary cultural and intellectual debates but in the institutions and social practices of our lives as well” (p. 7), then the normative thrust of our awareness of constraints on who we might become is toward overcoming these constraints. If we understand critical theory as examining the conditions under which critical dialog may occur, then the joining of many voices in this dialog might result in a conversation that eventually alters the horizon against which we see both ourselves and our historical situation.

**Emancipation**

This critical conversation, which is necessarily polyphonic and plurivocal; that is, multithemed and multi-voiced, both within and among individuals, lies at the heart of emancipation, the valuational focus of critical theory. It requires that some social space be opened in which the complex features of human identity may be given force, their content explored and expanded. The disappearance of such a space, and the consequent impoverishment of social roles in a dominant capitalist culture, was a theme contributing to early critical theory’s pessimism. In Jürgen Habermas’s work, however, an optimism surfaces that suggests at least the possibility of establishing the necessary social space for the formation and expression of human
Rationalization and the Closing of Social Space

For our purposes, the most important concept in Habermas's early work is that of the "public sphere," which may be defined as that social space occupied by individuals in their public roles as members of groups, secondary associations, and extended social relations, but excluding strictly occupational or governmental roles. Benhabib (1992, p. 12) briefly describes the public sphere as "the crucial domain of interaction which mediates between the macropolitical institutions of a democratic polity and the private sphere," the latter consisting of primary social relations. This public sphere contributed to the development of an articulate public by providing social space for critical conversation, and through this to the expansion of ideas about rights and liberties (see particularly Habermas, 1962/1989). Leisure practices were significant in defining the public sphere and activity within it, for example in the provision of sites for discussion and interaction among members of a community in such institutions as coffee houses, taverns, lodges, and fraternal organizations.

In his and his more recent work (especially Habermas, 1984, 1987; these are lucidly summarized in Kissing, 1990), Habermas has analyzed the subsequent fundamental restructuring of the public sphere in Western society, and with it changes in historically available social roles. This restructuring was accelerated by the process of industrialization, one result of which was the narrowing of social roles through what Habermas terms rationalization, a concept he borrows from Max Weber (e.g., 1947, pp. 184–85). If we think of rationality as the constitutive and regulatory rules by which social roles, practices, and institutions are created and structured (see Hemingway, 1995, pp. 38–39), then changes in the underlying rationality entail changes in these social specifics as well (with the caveats that there may be a significant lag between historical changes in rationality and subsequent social changes, and that these changes may well be indirect and subterranean). Habermas contends that the process of rationalization tends toward subsuming social roles, practices, and institutions under one set of rules, that is, under one form of rationality. The dynamics of industrialization are grounded in an instrumental, means-ends-oriented rationality. Instrumental rationality, originally dominant in the economic and governmental spheres, has increasingly driven other forms of rationality (what Habermas terms the expressive, normative, and communicative) more and more from their former places in the private and public spheres. The eclipse of other forms of rationality by the increasingly dominant instrumental form (that is, the increasing presence of means-ends calculations throughout society) is in Habermas's view the chief source of the shrinking of social roles as industrialization proceeded, and which persists now in what has been called postindustrial society. The result is the diminution of the social space within which these now reduced social roles, practices, and institutions might have served as the basis for the exploration of human identities.

Rights and the Opening of Social Space

In analyzing the requirements for a democratic society, Habermas (1992) argues for the recovery of this social space. It has its basis in communicative action (though this does not, or at least should not—Habermas is not altogether clear on this point—exclude action grounded in other noninstrumental rationalities). The nature of this social space is both the subject and the result of an ongoing conversation among equal individuals, whose aims are to arrive at some mutually agreed upon definition of their common situation (and thus also of where they differ) and to understand its implications for themselves individually and collectively. This conversation entails the reciprocal offer of and critical response to reasons, and should be independent of mere weight of numbers or instrumentally grounded power (e.g., wealth, social position). Its focus is not instrumental, to persuade others to one's point of view for the purpose of achieving one's individually defined goals, but rather to establish together the social space in which one's possibilities can be discovered and pursued.

The communicative equality of the participants in this conversation is vital to its success. Merely formal equality, or equality without the means to act equally, is empty. This therefore requires attention to the social conditions of the participants. As Habermas argues, economic and social advantages should not pervert
communicative action into instrumental action. Put another way, each participant should be so situated to permit equal access to the social space in which this conversation is conducted. This issue is both structural (i.e., creating a social space accessible to all who wish to enter it) and procedural (i.e., enabling the communicative participation of all those who wish to contribute). It raises the question of rights as fundamental to the establishment and protection of equality. The "original meaning" of rights, according to Habermas (1992, p. 494), is to secure the private and public autonomy of individuals both as the premise of communicatively grounded action and as one of its aims, namely, to further the expansion and refinement of rights themselves. Rights therefore include not only the familiar political and civil ones, but also rights to conditions enabling participation in the ongoing conversation among equal individuals. These include fundamental rights to "work, security, health, a home, nutrition, education, leisure, and fundamental life necessities" (p. 490); they emerge from the concerns people must address in their daily lives (p. 495), and are by extension among the dimensions along which human identities are established. Our individual attempts to address any one of these concerns interact with how we address others. They also affect and are affected by the similar attempts of other people and by the material conditions of our historically specific situation. The achievement of identity is therefore private and public, complex (i.e., plurivocal and polyphonic), and historically situated. It requires commonly defined and achieved social space in which each person's communicative equality is made more effective by an extended system of rights protecting the communicative equality of all.

Rights Grounded in Human Capacities

Autonomy and equality are, as we have just seen, grounded in a system of rights. These rights are themselves in turn grounded in human capacities; they are aimed at the identification, protection, development, and expansion of these capacities. Bypassing philosophical complexities, human beings have certain abilities by virtue of what they are. Not only can these abilities be developed, amplified, expanded, and integrated, but human beings enjoy and appear to seek out opportunities for such activity. Abilities become particularly relevant for social and political theory as human capacities, that is, when human abilities are interpreted within a specific social framework with specific conceptions of human activity. Abilities become capacities in historically specific contexts.

If this holds, then what human capacities are and should be must be an integral part of the critical conversation introduced earlier. Capacities are not given, but are created by the interaction of human abilities and historically situated social contexts. They become the focus of intense debate because they define what it is to be a fully human being within this social context. They fill out the picture of what fully human activity consists. They are the basis for claims to support, recognition, and protection, as well as claims to opposition, denial, and repression. Most importantly, we can reason from existing capacities and their actually existing development (as opposed to ideologically grounded claims about this) to the potential existence of additional capacities and their development, to greater degrees of development for existing capacities, and to the expansion of existing capacities across the members of a specific society. The contrast between these potentialities and the actually existing development of present capacities provides a basis for critical analysis and action in society. It is at the elucidation of this contrast between potentiality and actuality, and its practical implications, that critical theory aims.

Recalling earlier discussion, critical theory takes human beings as bearers of multiple socially grounded capacities recognized within specific historical conditions, requiring for their development a defined social space attuned to the complexity of human identity. Prevailing social practices, roles, and institutions are regarded as inadequate both to the development and expansion of human capacities, and to the expression of complex human identities. This can be stated as the analytic difference between the emancipatory potential of social practices, roles, and institutions, on the one hand, and their actual emancipatory content on the other. Emancipatory content is assessed by the relative presence or absence of conditions fostering emancipatory activity, i.e., the development and expansion of human capacities. Any critical analysis must necessarily open itself to the critique of existing social specifics from the standpoint of identifying historically existing conditions restricting emancipatory activity with the further intention of finding the means for the release of emancipatory potential.

Two Conceptions of Human Activity: Acquisitive and Developmental

This intention cannot be given adequate theoretical or practical expression, however, without an analysis of the nature of human activity necessary for the task of emancipation. As noted earlier, theory may perform either a conservative or a radical social function. And
as Habermas makes clear, the rationalities underlying human activity play central roles in determining the emancipatory content and potential of that activity. Thus theory's social function is, in part, determined by the presumed structure of human activity. As Euben (1996, p. 73) comments, "A theory that adopts the same notion of rationality as the structure it studies helps that structure operate rather than effects a theoretical distance from it." To the degree that the study of social phenomena, leisure included, accepts uncritically currently dominant notions of human activity, to that degree it reinforces them, and so performs a conservative social function. If the emancipatory social space at which critical theory aims is, in fact, to be achieved either theoretically or practically, critical theory must first explicate the dominant conception of human activity in actually existing historical conditions and then provide an alternative that might form the basis for practical action. This, it should be noted, is an exercise in which leisure studies has yet to engage, an omission seriously retarding much of leisure research's emancipatory value.

Not all such conceptions of human activity have the same implications for the expansion and development of human capacities lying at the heart of emancipation. Recognizing the risks in creating binary oppositions, it is nonetheless useful to identify two broad conceptions of human activity that have been historically influential and which draw on different rationalities. These are the acquisitive and the developmental. The former has played a major role in structuring European and particularly Anglo-American society. Despite differences in emphasis, the acquisitive conception remains current within a wide variety of social inquiry, though it emerged into prominence several centuries ago. In this conception, human beings are regarded as bundles of unending appetites and desires (Hobbes); the rationality of human activity consists in mastering ways to satisfy them that secure life and liberty while allowing accumulation of goods (Locke). The satisfaction of individual appetites and desires then becomes the basis of a utilitarian common good defined as the greatest accumulation by the greatest number (Bentham, James Mill). From these origins, the acquisitive conception has gone on to shape Western free market economic theory and "realist" theories of democracy.

In the acquisitive view, human identity rests at bottom on how and to what degree individuals' appetites and desires have been satisfied, that is, on what they have acquired. These acquisitions might be categorized using the four forms of capital Pierre Bourdieu identifies (1987, pp. 3-4): economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. These capitals represent, as Hobbes already notes in Leviathan, forms of power, and it is for these forms of acquisitively grounded power that people are said to strive as the very core of their social beings. Not to have it is to be consigned to social insignificance and impotence. The idea of human beings as blank slates, lying at the center of Locke's psychology and (when mixed with various religious motifs) determinative of much Anglo-American culture, has been extended to the individual's social identity as well. The individual is a composite of those attributes he or she has acquired, pursuing the satisfaction of common human appetites and desires to create himself or herself as a distinct identity. The burden here falls entirely on the individual, not only to acquire but to recognize those attributes that are desirable given existing historical conceptions of what it is to be a human being. The development of society then consists of uncounted numbers of transactions among individuals as they pursue the acquisitive creation of their social identities. Success or failure rides on the individual's

Bourdieu's comments are worth quoting at some length to clarify discussion in the text:

The social world can be conceived as a multi-dimensional space that can be constructed empirically by discovering the main factors of differentiation which account for the differences observed in a given social universe, or, in other words, by discovering the powers or forms of capital which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards, in this particular universe, that is, in the struggle (or competition) for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this universe is the site. It follows that the structure of this space is given by the distribution of the various forms of capital... those properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder... These fundamental social powers are... firstly economic capital, in its various kinds; secondly cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based in connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form different kinds of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate.
ability to recognize and to acquire the appropriate forms of capital. One's social identity, who one is or is not, rests on acquisitive success or failure.

The second historically significant conception, with a heritage extending back to Aristotle, is the developmental. In it, human beings are conceived as bundles of abilities rising from such human characteristics as reason and language, abilities that become capacities when defined socially and historically. In this conception, it is the nature of human beings to seek development of their capacities as far as they are able. Unlike the abstract individualism inherent in the acquisitive conception, the development of human capacities requires a historically specific social context. Capacities, however, should not be confused with social roles. They are instead the "building blocks" out of which social roles are constructed. Different roles demand different mixes of capacities. To the degree these are regarded as "higher" capacities, and to the degree a social role requires their fuller development, the social role is itself regarded as "higher" in content and human significance. The developmental conception has yielded strikingly different social theories, from those at best aristocratic and hierarchical (e.g., Aristotle, Hegel) through those moderating the effects of acquisition but with acquisitive content (e.g., Green, Rawls) to radical egalitarianism (e.g., Marx). Central to the moderate and radical theories is the idea that society itself has an interest in the fullest possible development of human capacities, both in range and degree, and that these capacities therefore represent rights to be protected and expanded by social and political arrangements fostering cooperation among people pursuing their own capacities. Human beings as active in society are in a sense born as already social creatures with abilities that are socially interpreted and developed as capacities. These are the basis of mutual expectations among individuals and within society: on the one hand, that these capacities will be recognized as the basis of rights to conditions for their development; on the other, that they will in fact be developed as the basis for a strengthened and enriched society.

Social roles will look different depending on which conception of human activity is adopted. Thinking unhistorically results in submerging in the "given" the fact that a historically effective choice was made for the dominant acquisitive conception that has shaped so much of our Western thinking about what it is to be a human being (see the sources cited in footnote 8).

To say this choice has had important social consequences is hardly sufficient. As even neoconservative commentary has suggested, the "ontological individualism" resulting from the acquisitive conception has led to a fragmented social order composed of indi-

viduals in competition with themselves for something they cannot quite identify (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, 1985, which is representative of, but more eloquent than, most of this literature). This affects the entire range of social roles, not least in leisure. The traditional association of leisure and freedom loses its force if that freedom is (and it is) shaped by unacknowledged historical factors, such as the acquisitive conception of human activity and the social roles and practices resulting from it. Rojek (1995) has gone so far as to question whether the association of freedom and contemporary leisure remains appropriate: "what we understand by the term [leisure] is socially conditioned, which makes conventional associations of 'freedom,' 'choice' and 'self-determination' with leisure unsupportable" (p. 1). In a social context shaped by the acquisitive conception, and in which instrumentalism has colonized a large range of social roles, these roles can only duplicate each other and are thus unlikely to be but temporarily satisfying. Again Rojek: "Our leisure is a restless quest for choice, freedom and self-determination in the heart of modern culture which is objectively unable to deliver these experiences except as momentary diversions" (p. 110).

It is remarkable that in a field which has seen constraints and barriers to "leisure satisfaction" become among its dominant themes, the arguably greatest constraint—the historically operative acquisitive conception of human activity—has remained largely unthematized through an unspoken ahistorical assumption that this conception is in fact natural and "given," rather than historically evolved through human activity.

Human activity is, of course, not the sole force at work shaping social practices, roles, and institutions. It is not independent of external circumstances, which impose multiple limitations (cf., Horkheimer, 1937/1972, p. 210). What does remain open to human activity is the spirit of the social world human beings evolve in response to these external circumstances. Critical theory insists that we not mistake reified human activity, whether in material forms such as machines and computer programs or in social forms such as government and the corporation, as part of what is extrinsic to human activity. To confuse what they themselves have shaped and formed for something "given" external to them is perhaps the most basic form of human alienation. The acquisitive conception of human activity, by its projection of human identity into the things people acquire, contributes significantly to the alienation of human activity into a supposedly "given" social world. Nor is any recovery from this alienation available within the acquisitive conception.
The alternative is to rethink the dominant acquisitive conception from the perspective of the emancipation of human capacities, that is, to reflect on the content and structure of social roles and practices from the developmental conception of human activity. Something like this is the sense of Horkheimer’s distinction between critical and traditional theory, as discussed earlier. Horkheimer insists that, although critical theory must begin with the “real situations” (1944/1972, p. 244) in which human beings find themselves, these situations must not be taken as defining human beings. They are, in fact, the opposite: they constrain human beings within a dominant if often subterranean conception of their activity, thereby narrowing the range of what it is to be human (p. 248). Horkheimer, and with him all subsequent critical theory, insists that to be human includes having and experiencing possibilities extending beyond such narrowly conceived “real situations.” The analysis of human activity must acknowledge these “potentialities” just as much, perhaps more, than it does what is taken to be “real” (p. 245).

Such analysis must include not only what human beings are, but what they have in them to become, given the rejection of the constraining acquisitive conception of their activity and, with this, of the social roles and practices based on it. To include possibility in the analysis of human activity is necessarily to turn toward a developmental conception of that activity, one that clears a space not only for the theoretic explication of social roles and practices, but also for practical intervention in them: “The issue is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is its practice as well” (p. 233).

Summary

This section has traversed difficult territory. It will therefore perhaps be useful to summarize it using the paradigm schema introduced earlier. This will serve both to sum up the preceding extended discussion of critical theory and to facilitate its comparison to the brief sketches of positivism, postpositivism, and constructivism presented previously.

It will be remembered that there are four components to a theoretic paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and values. Ontologically, as we have seen, critical theory accepts the existence of an external social reality, but does not regard it as immutably given. Instead, critical theory understands this reality to be the product of human interactions under historically specific material and social conditions (e.g., late capitalist Western liberal democracy with its attendant maldistributed abundance, as in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe). Critical theory therefore introduces a temporal dimension (specifically omitted in positivism and postpositivism) reflected in its epistemology. If the world in which human beings act is constituted out of their interactions within (presumably) identifiable material and social conditions, then all knowledge claims are historically specific, that is, conditioned by the historically existing material and social conditions in which such claims emerge. The knower and the known are joined together by their historical specificity and the results of social inquiry are not universalizable. General statements must be carefully delimited by specification of the historical conditions under which they apply. Nonetheless, as we saw in Benhabib’s concept of communicative universalism, critical theory is willing to entertain certain forms of universalism focusing on the prerequisite conditions for human activity, in contrast to constructivism, which even in its mild forms has difficulty overcoming its particularism and escaping relativism. Methodologically, critical theory proceeds as its name suggests, through a process of critical evaluation of knowledge claims. This process is best described as dialectical and hermeneutical, identifying the relationships between the knower and the known while teasing out the often hidden meanings of social practices. Both epistemologically and methodologically, critical theory is exceptionally careful to examine the degree to which any social inquiry reinforces rather than critiques existing social practices, roles, and institutions.

It will be clear from the preceding discussion that a chief component of critical theory is its valutational dimension, resting on the concept of emancipation. Critical theory takes human beings to be, at their best, autonomous agents possessing a range of capacities realized to a greater or lesser extent in a given historical situation and in given social practices, roles, and institutions. The application of empirical social scientific methods is aimed at uncovering the actual extent to which capacities are realized; normative critique is intended to identify manifest and latent barriers to their fuller realization, as well as the degree to which social inquiry itself serves to reinforce or to challenge such barriers. It is this valutational element that propels critical social inquiry into the realm of the political, to which I now turn.

Toward a Politics of Leisure

Critical theory is unavoidably politically charged. Its fundamental task is to query the difference between the emancipatory content of existing social roles, practices, and institutions—measured by their contribution to the fuller development and expression of human
capacities—and their emancipatory potential. It remains grounded in an empirically rich analysis of the present projected against a horizon of normative possibilities. In this way it escapes the conservatism of positivist inspired research, with its emphasis on the social "given" and rejection of "value-laden" questions, and the relativism (some would say nihilism) of constructivism, with its inability to make critical comparative statements. Critical theory is more than simply joining empirical and normative research strategies. The critical fruitfulness of bringing together different epistemologies and methodologies results only from their focus on a common theme: the emancipation of human capacities. It is this focus that both encourages, in fact demands, transdisciplinary inquiry and introduces a political element into it. By further understanding itself to be part of its own inquiry, critical theory also raises the question of the political role of scholars and scholarship.

Radical Democracy:
Expanding the Political

To adopt a critical theoretic perspective is therefore necessarily to acknowledge the political contents and meanings of leisure. Perhaps this is only fitting, given the symbolic meaning the leisure studies field attaches to leisure's classical heritage (see Sylvester, chapter 2 in this volume), which of course includes a political element in the importance of leisure for active citizenship. It is also to ask whether existing conceptions of the political are adequate for critical inquiry generally and into leisure specifically. These conceptions of the political prevailing in the United States, and perhaps increasingly elsewhere among the Western democracies, are too narrow either to support critical inquiry or to explicate the political elements in leisure. They revolve around interest-based competition for decision-making influence and its spoils among tightly defined groups, especially those working within the economic and governmental hierarchies. Underlying these narrow conceptions of the political is the acquisitive conception of human activity, with its fundamental instrumentalism and presumption of adversarial stance toward others. The basic political acts arising out of this combination, other than the purfucy "duty" of voting, are the instrumental calculation of interest and the manipulative persuasion of others.

These conceptions of the political fail to provide an adequate basis for a critically inspired politics of leisure. Falling to challenge them relegates leisure to a conservative social function, in which, for example, the commodification of leisure or the rational calculation of benefits (see, e.g., Schreyer and Driver, 1989) contribute to the replication of acquisitively grounded social roles and practices. The developmental conception of human activity, on the other hand, understands the political as an arena for the emancipation of human capacities. To establish this arena there is politically only one possibility: radical democracy, and with it radically expanded conceptions of human capacities. Rather than defining politics as irredeemably adversarial, radical democracy conceives the political as a process through which people work out together what capacities they wish to recognize and to develop. Radical democratic politics, as Lummis (1996, p. 90) defines them, are "the activity by which human beings choose and build their life together."

Such politics are at once critical and radical, at least in their potential. They are critical because they address a historically existing state of affairs from the standpoint of an ideal that is always evolving, namely, democracy. Democracy extends beyond representative institutions and rights embodied in legal codes, though these are obviously necessary. It is instead a process that is always changing and (one hopes) growing, part of this growth being an expanding understanding of what social conditions and human capacities are necessary to sustain its momentum. Thus, if radical democratic politics are in this fashion always critical, they are also always radical because the very process of democratic critique points beyond any existing state of affairs toward greater democratization. Radical democracy requires all forms of power to justify themselves, power being here provisionally defined, following Bourdieu, as having economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms. Such power is manifested in leisure no less than elsewhere in society, and perhaps more so to the degree it remains invisible and unthematized. As Habermas (1992) argues pointedly, forms of power migrate, so that, for example, economic power becomes social power, which can in turn become cultural and symbolic power, all the while sustaining the interests of the original economic power. Such migration is visible in leisure, as for example in its commodification or in its instrumentalization as a

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9For classic statements of the conceptions referred to here, see Schumpeter (1942) and Downs (1957). For a powerful critical response, and argument for a participatory form of democracy, see Barber (1984); see also Davis's (1964) criticism of "realist" conceptions of democracy.

10The availability of free time as a political resource within the conventional understanding of the political should not be overlooked, however, even where its significance has decreased in the face of the expanded importance of money as a means of participation (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).
Leisure as Political

Leisure has a central place in this expanded conception of the political. Regarded as a “bridge phenomenon,” leisure connects the private and the public spheres. As a major arena in which multiple social roles are enacted, it contributes to the creation of the social space necessary for radical democracy. Indeed, radical democracy requires a radicalized conception of leisure, one focusing on the actualization of leisure’s emancipatory potential. Transcending the narrow range to which the acquisitive conception of human activity consigns the political, developmentally focused radical democratic politics demands attention to the social bases of human activity, to the interconnections among social roles, practices, institutions, and forms of power; and to the forms and content of private and public activity. There are, from this perspective, at least three ways in which leisure is directly political.

It is political, first, because political activity of all kinds is carried on within leisure contexts, whether in more private forms of information gathering, in the increasingly public discussion and analysis of issues, or in fully public participation in political events and activities. Leisure is at least to some degree a prerequisite for all this (see Verba et al., 1995, for a discussion of leisure as among the resources necessary for political participation). There has been little interest, however, in the role leisure has in shaping modern citizenship, despite the fact that the availability of meaningful leisure would seem to be a significant filter through which those who would take an interest and be active in political action must necessarily pass.

Leisure is political, second, because it is a social phenomenon, and all social phenomena necessarily reflect their historical situatedness in a specific society under specific conditions. This includes the social roles, practices, and institutions present in that society, who occupies them, and the distribution of resources throughout that society. A central issue is the possible discrepancies between ideological defenses of those roles, practices, institutions, and distributions, on the one hand, and the actualities of each, on the other. Such discrepancies are significant because they reveal the gaps between the possibly emancipatory potentials of these roles and institutions, and their actual emancipatory content, along with their general accessibility and the resources available to enable this
access. Social phenomena reflect the existing distributions of power in a specific historical society. To repeat again Bourdieu’s forms of capital and hence of power, these distributions take economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms. Leisure’s contents and forms reflect the actual distributions of these forms of power. Studying leisure noncritically reinforces these distributions and enhances their ideological justification. There is, in this sense, no politically neutral leisure or leisure studies.

Leisure is political, third, because it offers a potential arena for challenging dominant conceptions of human activity and for overturning dominant patterns of power in a given society. Here coupling Bourdieu’s forms of capital and Habermas’s forms of rationality opens the way for the critical analysis of leisure’s emancipatory content. Given the prevalence of the acquisitive conception of human activity, the intrusion in leisure of instrumentally grounded activity represents the colonization of leisure by an at least presumptively “foreign” rationality and, with it, the migration of different forms of power into an arena of at least presumptively free activity. Both colonization and migration reinforce in leisure existing patterns of social dominance, whatever the ideological representation of freedom in leisure might be. It is surely clear that the patterns and content of leisure have undergone significant changes since the beginnings of industrialization, and that these changes have political importance in the broad sense of the political introduced earlier. But any arena in which such colonization and migration can be exposed is also an arena in which they can be resisted. The recovery in leisure of noninstrumental rationalities (e.g., what Habermas calls communicative, expressive, and normative rationalities) and the rejection of ideologically justified distributions of power are, at least potentially, two forms of resistance to existing patterns of social dominance, and with this, the clearing of social space for the expansion of human capacities. It may be that in a society in which work has become a principal and perhaps primary focus of energy and which controls the creation of social identities (see, e.g., Hochschild, 1997), leisure is the only arena in which people have opportunity to encounter others, whether in the private or the public spheres, on something other than the instrumental grounds characterizing work relationships. Noninstrumental relationships certainly occur in work, and there will perhaps always be some instrumental elements in leisure. Nonetheless, leisure might provide the preeminent arena in which noninstrumentally and developmentally oriented activity may emerge. Such an emancipatory leisure arena might then provide the social space in which the development and expansion of human capacities could become a dominant theme.12

12Leisure’s political content as an arena for emancipatory activity can be illustrated by two examples. The first is the “new social movements,” which encompass a wide and diverse range of issue-oriented activity, addressing such concerns as women’s issues, ethnic and racial identity, the recovery of community solidarity, environmental and ecological threats, and participatory democracy (Boggs, 1986, p. 9). These movements work in the public sphere. By contesting the artificial barrier between private and public, and by challenging the notion that social issues must be addressed through existing administrative and representative institutions, these new social movements bring together people from disparate backgrounds who encounter each other in at least potentially noninstrumentally and developmentally oriented activity (cf., Cohen, 1985; Offe, 1987, pp. 65, 68–69). The second example of leisure as an emancipatory arena is the development of democratic attitudes. In his excellent analysis of democratic reform in contemporary Italy, Putnam (1993a) found a strong association between support for democracy and participation in secondary associations, the most common of which were sports and leisure clubs, as well as civic, charitable, artistic, and religious groups (p. 92). A sense of civic engagement and competence grows out of such memberships, which are an education in democratic values and procedures (Putnam, 1995b). Bonds of civic trust, identity, and virtue were all higher in those regions of Italy where patterns of leisure-based associational membership were well-established. This creates what Putnam terms social capital, a capital that increases the more it is used, since it was in those regions where this capital was richest that its history ran deepest.
Theses for a Critical Analysis of Leisure

With this reminder, it is important at the conclusion of this chapter to return to the question of theory's role in fostering transdisciplinary study of leisure. What has been under discussion here is one paradigm for theory, namely, critical theory. As a paradigm for theory, critical theory is characterized by a number of general propositions about the nature of human activity and its analysis, on which most of its practitioners would substantially agree. Among these are the insistence on the historical specificity of all social phenomena, the complexity of social phenomena, the import of attending to difference in understanding them, and the focus on the emancipation of human capacities. Two other propositions are conceptually linked to the foregoing: the developmental conception of human activity, and the political content of leisure as a social phenomenon. But if there would be some broad agreement on these propositions as a critical paradigm for theory, this does not mean there is one and only one substantive critical theory.

A paradigm shapes and guides the theory-building enterprise, but does not supply its specific content. Given leisure's multidimensionality, there could be no one substantive theory adequate to the whole of it. To bring together the resources necessary for the transdisciplinary study of leisure requires room for a considerable number of alternative research frameworks which might not always be completely epistemologically or methodologically congruent. What would unite them is some sense of agreement beyond the trivial on the general propositions indicated previously. An empirically rich critical analysis of leisure, which might differ on issues of epistemology and method, must in any event include a shared normative commitment to the emancipation of human capacities and thus to the idea that present historical conditions do not exhaust human possibilities.

This aspect of the critical theory paradigm is important for the critical study of leisure. As noted earlier, leisure studies can be more accurately characterized as multidisciplinary rather than transdisciplinary. This comes about because many of the approaches within the field take their reference points from within their home disciplines or, in other words, outside leisure studies.1 The critical theory paradigm does not sever so much as transcend these connections by drawing on much of what already goes forward in the study of leisure, in the home disciplines, and in other fields not frequently represented in our literature. By reaching out to these various other enterprises in the name both of the study of historically specific leisure practices and of the emancipatory potential to be found in leisure, the presuppositions of critical theory provide a basis for bringing together a variety of means to probe a broad array of social roles, processes, and institutions (as well as their natural and material circumstances) that bear on the emancipatory content and potential of leisure. Clearly the concepts of emancipation and development of human capacities are not limited to one or a few fields of inquiry, but instead provide links to any number of them to the degree traditional disciplinary barriers may be dissolved. It is good to remember that failure to dissolve these barriers is in a sense to reinforce them, and thus works directly against what critically inspired scholarship intends, that is, the challenge of any historically existing distribution of social power in the name of emancipatorily and developmentally conceived human action.

Having said this much, it is appropriate in closing to suggest some possible themes to which a critically motivated theory of leisure might initially turn its attention. I prefer to label these themes as preliminary

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1It is perhaps worth speculating whether this will necessarily continue in any event. There has been a great deal of discussion about the need for leisure studies to train its own doctoral students, who will move into the field's teaching and research corps, rather than either sending them elsewhere in the university for doctoral preparation or looking to students with interests in leisure but prepared in other fields. The ability to supply its own doctoral students seems to some to be an indicator of the field's maturation. There are serious questions whether this is intellectually desirable for a transdisciplinary field of inquiry. Leisure studies, already small enough, is too likely to become entirely inbred and stagnant without a steady infusion of scholars from outside the field and the ideas they bring with them. Neither disciplinary fragmentation nor disciplinary monolithism are desirable; to substitute the latter as a cure for the former simply substitutes a new set of intellectual problems for the old. A truly transdisciplinary field of inquiry, guided by common theoretical commitments and drawing on the work of scholars from a number of fields, is far more attractive, if also perhaps more difficult to achieve.
theses for a critical analysis of leisure, which if unfolded in their implications might begin to provide the empirical richness and conceptual refinement necessary for a critical theory of leisure. At least in spirit, they are intended to draw together a number of fields of inquiry in order to illuminate specific aspects of leisure's contents and meanings.

First, a critical analysis of leisure examines the empirical content of leisure practices against an articulated historical horizon; this is the requirement of historical specificity.

Second, a critical analysis of leisure identifies and explores the contradictions between the content of leisure practices and the emancipatory potential of leisure.

Third, a critical analysis of leisure recognizes that all social phenomena are complex, that is, plurivocal and polyphonic, and respects this complexity in its inquiry.

Fourth, a critical analysis of leisure is sensitive to the different forms of power and to their migration within society. It therefore interrogates leisure practices to determine the degree to which they are shaped by nonemancipatory forms of power.

Fifth, a critical analysis of leisure recognizes that commodification and consumption-oriented practices reflect an instrumental rationality foreign to leisure's emancipatory potential.

Sixth, a critical analysis of leisure remains connected to practice, and enables action based on an extended theoretic framework intended to increase the emancipatory content of leisure practices (e.g., in the administration of leisure services, the distribution of leisure and other emancipatory resources in society, and in the avoidance of replicating existing patterns of social domination).

Seventh, a critical analysis of leisure acknowledges leisure's political content in the broad sense of the political, and explores the connections between emancipatory leisure practices and the enablement of radical democratic citizenship.

Eighth, a critical analysis of leisure is not misled by issues of "free time," but addresses instead the content of leisure practices and their social and political meanings. The amount of "free time" available in any society is irrelevant if it is tied to nonemancipatory conditions and practices, if in fact activities during that "free time" emulate or reinforce nonemancipatory conditions and practices. To the degree that leisure reflects and is tied to work, as for example in dependency on the ability to consume or acquire, to that degree leisure's emancipatory content is questionable. It is the content, and not the amount, of "free time" that is of primary concern in the critical analysis of leisure.

Ninth, a critical analysis of leisure rejects any suggestion that human capacities are fixed, looking always to the expansion and development of these capacities as the core of a radical democratic society and as the measure of the degree of emancipation in leisure as well as other social practices.

Tenth, a critical analysis of leisure recognizes that leisure cannot be emancipating unless this critical analysis is itself emancipated from alien rationalities and forms of power, which entails recognizing the conservative or radical implications of the manners in which leisure is studied.

Finally, it is worth turning to a famous thesis 11 that succinctly captures the ethical and practical intentions of critical theory. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world," Marx wrote in his Theses on Feuerbach (1845/1968); "the point, however, is to change it."

If we amend philosophers to scholars, we have a fair statement of the spirit animating critical social inquiry, the critical analysis of leisure included. To separate oneself from that which one studies, to maintain the "givenness" of the social world and the fixity of human capacities, or to deny not just the possibility but the very need for critical analysis of forms and distributions of power in social roles, practices, and institutions are all to contribute to the replication of existing patterns of social domination with their underlying forms and distributions of power. To deny that these exist, or that they have relevance to one's inquiry, is to allow them to go unchallenged and to contribute to their enduring presence in society. Scholarship is not an activity apart from what goes on in society; it is rather very much entangled in it. Inquiry and reflection have the capacity, however, to pry open the social "given" and to point the way beyond it. This is the intention of critical social inquiry. The theses offered here, based on the preceding discussion, are intended to contribute to a critical analysis of leisure that opens itself to the multidimensional nature of leisure and sees it in its full social complexity, but recognizes in this complexity the arena for the emancipation in leisure of human capacities otherwise limited and stunted. This would be a fine theme around which to gather the transdisciplinary study of leisure.
References


