

in future, erupt in a massive revolutionary upsurge of international dimensions. This is no longer the messianic hope for immediate revolution that Lukács had in 1919; but, for the first time since the twenties, he was beginning to conceive of world revolution as a real historical prospect, in the present century.

Lukács began to criticize the reformist workers' parties: social-democracy, whose politics in Germany for fifty years had been just a 'series of capitulations', and the communist parties – 'In Germany, the parties, and unfortunately this includes the Communist Party itself, because of their exclusive orientation to tactical decisions and their loss of a grand historical perspective, no longer act as a pole of attraction for young people.'⁵⁶ He began to regard the student movement sympathetically, and with (critical) interest. He refused to label these radicalized youth currents 'leftist' – a convenient formula used far too frequently by the leadership of the traditional Communist parties. On the contrary he stated that: 'Anyone who thinks that he can apply a book written by Lenin in 1920 to American youth of 1969 or that Lenin's criticism of Roland Holst can be made to fit Dutschke would be terribly mistaken.'⁵⁷ In radical contrast to the bureaucratic line on the 'adventurist', 'manipulated', or even 'provocative' character of the young 'leftists', Lukács explicitly states: 'I think that this student movement which is springing up, not just in Germany, but all over the world, is an exceptionally positive phenomenon' which must be understood as the product of a simultaneous crisis in the two systems which triumphed in the Second World War: Stalinism and the 'American way of life'.⁵⁸

On 4 June 1971 death cut short, at its outset, this astonishing 'return to first principles'; after half a century of 'reconciliation' and 'lost illusions', Lukács had, in the last three years of his life, begun to rediscover the intense hopes, the red flame of the People's Commissar of 1919.

⁵⁶ Goethepreis, 1970, op. cit. p. 110.

⁵⁷ Lukács, 'The Twin Crises', NLR 60, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Lukács, Goethepreis, 1970, op. cit. pp. 107–8.

in New Left Review (ed) New Left Review: A Critical Reader
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The Frankfurt School

Göran Therborn

In France and Italy, the post-War period has seen the emergence of new schools of Marxist thought (Althusser, Della Volpe). In the German-speaking world, on the other hand, there is a complete continuity from the pre-War years. The veterans Lukács and Bloch are still active and influential, but the centre of the stage is firmly occupied by the group of theorists who have become known as the 'Frankfurt School'. Moreover, while the influence of recent French and Italian Marxism has been largely confined within its country of origin, the ideas of the Frankfurt School have spread, first, thanks to the emigration of the 1930's, to the USA, and in the last few years all over the world. Indeed, one of the most prominent of the members of the School, Herbert Marcuse, has become one of the bourgeoisie's latest bogey-men. Of course, Marcuse's influence is not so great as myth suggests. Nevertheless, in North America and Italy at least, the student movement has certainly been more affected by Marcuse's thought than by that of any other living Marxist, and the SDS in Germany has never emancipated itself intellectually from the Frankfurt tutelage, despite the fact that most of the members of the School teaching in Germany denounced it, often in the most violent terms. Moreover, in France, where the influence of the School was negligible until a spate of translations after the events of May 1968, student militants associated with these events have often spontaneously reproduced typical Frankfurt ideas in their own theory and ideology. This tenacity of the Frankfurt School, and the refluence of its ideas in a situation so unlike that of its origin (Germany in the 1930's) is remarkable. This article is an attempt to sum-

marize and analyse the basis of these ideas,¹ and to provide some explanation for their renaissance.

The School takes its name from the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) set up in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1923.² A young left-wing philosopher, Max Horkheimer, became the Director of this Institute in 1930, and continued to direct it in exile after 1933, first in France and then in the USA, until it closed down in 1941. He was joined by the philosopher and musician, Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno and an ex-student of Heidegger's, Herbert Marcuse.³ Friedrich Pollock, Leo Löwenthal, Franz Neumann and Erich Fromm were closely associated with the Institute in the 1930's, as was Walter Benjamin, though more distantly. After the War, Marcuse remained in the USA, while Horkheimer and Adorno returned to West Germany, re-establishing the Institute in Frankfurt in 1950. Here it has found new adherents, most notably the philosophers Alfred Schmidt and Jürgen Habermas. The core members of the School are Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Some of the original members died during the War, others drifted away (e.g. Fromm), while the younger members have only been active for a few years. Hence this article is devoted almost exclusively to the work of these three

¹ There exists at least one full-length study of critical theory, G. E. Ruscconi's *La teoria critica della società* (Bologna 1968, revised edition 1970). Ruscconi's perspective is a broad history of ideas, focusing on Lukács and Marcuse, with rather limited attention to political and strictly theoretical analysis. For a major history of the School, see now Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, London 1973.

² The original director was the Marxist labour historian Carl Grünberg, and the Institute continued to publish his journal, *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, usually known as the *Grünberg Archiv*. As well as scholarly research into the history of the labour movement, the *Grünberg Archiv* also published important works by Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács and David Riazanov, the director of the Moscow Marx-Engels Institute. The Frankfurt School journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* was a continuation of the *Grünberg Archiv*. The aims of the Institute before 1930 are reflected in the books produced under its aegis: e.g. Henryk Grossman: *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems* (The Law of Accumulation and the Breakdown of the Capitalist System); Friedrich Pollock: *Die planwirtschaftlichen Versuche in der Sowjetunion* (Experiments in Planned Economy in the Soviet Union); and a collective work, *Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Studies in the History of German Social-Democracy).

³ The core members of the pre-War group were committed socialists, irreconcilably to the left of Social Democracy, but with an ambiguous relation to the Communist Party and no organizational affiliation. Only Marcuse had any practical political experience, in the USP in 1917-18.

core members.⁴

Critical versus Traditional Theory

The denomination 'Frankfurt School' was not chosen by the members, but has been applied to them by others. Members of the group prefer their work to take its name from what they regard as their theoretical programme: 'critical theory'. An examination of what they, and particularly Horkheimer, who coined the phrase, have meant by critical theory therefore serves as a convenient introduction to their work as a whole.

The term 'critical theory' does not appear in the early numbers of the Institute's journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. 'Materialism' is used instead. 'Critical theory' was first discussed in an article by Horkheimer in the journal in 1937, entitled 'Traditional and Critical Theory'.⁵ Adorno explains, thirty years later, that 'Horkheimer's phrasing, "critical theory", seeks not to make materialism acceptable, but to use it to make men theoretically conscious of what it is that distinguishes materialism',⁶ and this is plausible, because the substitution of the vaguer term for historical materialism is accompanied by a considerable radicalization of Horkheimer's position. In fact, critical theory is Horkheimer's conception of Marxism, and the phrase derives from the conventional description of Marxism as the critique of political economy. I shall attempt to situate and systematize critical theory in three respects: its relationship to traditional theory, to science and to politics.

The basic dividing line between traditional and critical theory in Horkheimer's conception is determined by whether the theory assists in the process of social reproduction, or whether, on the contrary, it is subversive of it. Traditional theory is embedded in

⁴ Both Horkheimer and Marcuse have republished their major essays from the 1930's. See Max Horkheimer: *Kritische Theorie I-II* (Frankfurt 1968) and Herbert Marcuse: *Kultur und Gesellschaft I-II* (Frankfurt 1965). Page-references to articles in these volumes will refer to them as KT and KG respectively. Some of the essays in KG have been translated into English as *Negations* (New York and London 1969). Hereafter referred to as N.

⁵ Max Horkheimer: 'Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Heft 2, 1937 (hereafter referred to as ZfS); reprinted (with modifications - see notes 8 & 9 below) in KT 11, pp. 137-191.

⁶ Theodor Adorno: *Negative Dialectic*, London 1973, p. 197.

the specialized work processes by which the existing society reproduces itself. It 'organizes experience on the basis of problems arising from the reproduction of life within present society'.⁷ In the prevailing division of labour, the personal views of the individual scientist and his efforts for a free science have as little real significance as the individual entrepreneur's views of free enterprise. Both are allotted determinate roles in the process of social reproduction: 'The apparent independence of work processes which ought to derive their movement from the inner essence of their objects corresponds to the apparent freedom of the economic subjects, in bourgeois society. They think that they act according to their individual decisions, whereas, even in their most complex calculations, they are really only exponents of an obscure social mechanism' (KT II, p. 146).

Critical theory, on the other hand, was for Horkheimer an immanent critique of the existing society itself. For it was designed to bring the basic contradictions of capitalist society to consciousness, by placing itself outside the mechanisms of its reproduction and the limits of the prevailing division of labour. 'There now exists a human attitude which takes the society itself as its object.

It is not merely oriented towards the removal of particular abuses, for the latter appear to it as necessarily bound to the whole arrangement of the social structure. Although this attitude has arisen out of social structure, it is no concern either of its conscious intention or of its objective significance that anything in this structure should function any better than it does' (KT II, pp. 155ff.). The intentions of this critical attitude 'go beyond the prevailing social praxis' (KT II, p. 158). Critical theory is primarily a *prise de position* (*Haltung*) and only secondarily a theory of a specific type. 'On the whole, its opposition to the traditional concept of theory derives from a difference of subjects rather than from one of objects. The facts as they arise from work in society are not so external to the bearers of this attitude as they are to the academic (*Gelahrte*), or to the members of the other professions, who all think as little academics' (ibid.). The critical theorist is 'the theoretician whose only concern is to accelerate a development which should lead to a

society without exploitation'.⁸

Hence the content of critical theory was essentially indeterminate: 'There are no general criteria for critical theory as a whole, for such criteria always depend on a repetition of events and thus on a self-reproducing totality. . . . Despite all its insights into individual steps and the congruence of its elements with those of the most advanced traditional theories, critical theory has no specific instance for itself other than its inherent interest in the supersession of class domination'.⁹ The only properties of critical theory are a political position and a place in the history of philosophy seen as a reflection of social development: 'The categorical judgement is typical of pre-bourgeois society: that is how it is, man cannot change it at all. The hypothetical and disjunctive forms of judgement belong especially to the bourgeois world: this effect may occur under certain conditions, it is either like this or otherwise. Critical theory explains: it must not be like this, men could alter being, the conditions for doing so already exist' (KT II, p. 175n.).

The Inheritance of Classical Idealism

However, this sociological radicalism does have definite consequences for the logical structure of critical theory. For Horkheimer, the difference between traditional and critical theory was that they embody two different 'modes of cognition' (*Erkenntnisweisen*). Traditional theory's mode of cognition derives from and is applied in the specialized sciences, particularly the natural sciences. 'The axioms of traditional theory define general concepts within which all the facts in the field must be conceived. . . . In between, there is a hierarchy of genera and species, between which there are generally appropriate relations of subordination. The facts are individual cases, examples or embodiments of the genera. There are no temporal differences between the units of the

⁸ Quoted from the original version in ZfS, Heft 3, 1937, p. 274. In the published version (KT II, p. 170), 'injustice' (*Unrecht*) has been substituted for 'exploitation' (*Ausbeutung*), and the word 'only' (*einzig*) has been omitted.

⁹ Quoted from the original version, op. cit., p. 292. In the republished version (KT II, p. 190), 'social injustice' has been substituted for 'class domination' (*Klassen-herrschaft*).

⁷ Horkheimer: 'Philosophie und kritische Theorie', ZfS, 1937; reprinted in KT II, p. 192.

system. . . . Individual genera may be added to the system or other changes made, but this is not normally conceived in the sense that the determinations are necessarily too rigid and must prove inadequate where the relation to the object or the object itself changes without thereby losing its identity. Rather, changes are treated as omissions in our earlier knowledge or as the replacement of individual parts of the object. . . . Discursive logic, or the logic of the intellect (*Verstand*), even conceives living development in this way. It is unable to conceive the fact that man changes and yet remains identical with himself' (KT II, pp. 172ff.).

Critical theory, on the other hand, starts from a view of Man as the subject or creator of history, and compares the existing objectifications of human activity with Man's inherent possibilities. 'The critical theory of society, on the contrary, has as its object men as the producers of all their historical life forms' (KT II, p. 192). 'In the formation of its categories and in all phases of its procedure, critical theory quite consciously pursues an interest in a rational organization of human activity which it has set itself to elucidate and legitimize. For it is not just concerned with goals as they have been prescribed by the existing life forms, but with men and all their possibilities' (KT II, p. 193).

With this view of man and society, critical theory explicitly announces its concordance with German idealism from Kant onwards, and claims to represent the preservation not only of the heritage of German idealism, but also of philosophy *tout court*, with its roots in Plato and Aristotle. Indeed critical theory's conception of truth is also that of classical philosophy. Horkheimer asserted the objectivity of truth, in opposition to all the relativist currents of the 1930's: 'according to (critical theory), only one truth exists, and the positive predicates of honesty and consistency, of rationality, of the search for peace, freedom and happiness, are not to be discussed in the same sense as other theories and practices' (KT II, p. 171). Truth is objective in the metaphysical sense of being inherent in the essence of human reality, however dismal the latter may appear, 'for the goal of a rational society, which today, of course, only appears to arise in the imagination, is really invested in every man' (KT II, p. 199). In this way critical theory was able to present itself as an inherent part of the historical process and of the struggle for a free society. But this 'political' stand was no different from the ethical aims of the whole tradition

of rational philosophy. As Horkheimer put it in *The Eclipse of Reason*, written during the War, 'the philosophical systems of objective reason implied the conviction that an all-embracing or fundamental structure of being could be discovered and a conception of human destination derived from it. They understood science, when worthy of this name, as an implementation of such reflection or speculation'.¹⁰

Thus, when examined from the epistemological point of view, the difference between critical theory and traditional theory turns out to be the difference between classical philosophy and modern science. Critical theory's epistemological basis is a *metaphysical humanism*.

What is the effect of this epistemology where the science of economics is concerned? What is critical theory's conception of the Marxist critique of political economy? The step from classical philosophical speculation to Marxism is simply to put idealism back 'on to its feet'. Classical idealism 'treats the activity which emerges in the given material as spiritual. . . . For the materialist conception, on the contrary, every fundamental activity is a matter of social labour' (KT II, p. 193). As an 'implementation' of humanist speculation, critical theory (i.e. for the Frankfurt School, Marxism) is a unique existential judgement on man's life in capitalist society. The Marxist critique is thus conceived as a negation of economic concepts, above all of the concept of just or equal exchange, which the Frankfurt School regards as the key concept of bourgeois economics, just as exchange is the central principle of the bourgeois economy. 'Unlike the operation of modern specialized science (*Fachwissenschaft*), the critical theory of society remains philosophical even as a critique of economics: its content is formed by the inversion of the concepts which govern the economy into their opposites: fair exchange into widening social injustice, the free economy into the domination of monopoly, productive labour into the consolidation of relations which restrict production, the maintenance of the life of the society into the immiseration of the people' (KT II, p. 195). But this radical philosophical critique has a paradoxical result. Since it is philo-

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer: *The Eclipse of Reason*, New York 1947, p. 12. Cf. the chapters on one-dimensional thought in Herbert Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man* (New York 1960). Hereafter, this book will be referred to as *odm*. Page references are to the London paperback edition of 1968.

sophical and does not directly intervene in scientific discourse, it cannot create any new scientific concepts. It certainly 'transcends' bourgeois economics, but it leaves its system of concepts intact. Critical theory sees bourgeois economics as ahistorical, but not as incorrect or unscientific. 'The critical theory of society begins with an idea of simple commodity exchange defined by relatively general concepts; it then shows that, assuming all the available knowledge, and *without transcending the principles of the exchange economy as represented by scientific political economy*, this exchange economy must, in the present state of men and things (which of course changes under its influence), necessarily lead to a sharpening of the social oppositions which drive towards wars and revolutions in the present epoch' (KT II, pp. 174ff. – my italics). The very radicalism of this interpretation of Marxism drastically limits its effects: the gaze of this philosophy on economics fulfils Wittgenstein's prescription. It leaves everything as it is.

The Reduction to Philosophy

In another sense, according to this programme text, critical theory is more the intellectual aspect of a political practice than a specific theory. The critical theorist's 'vocation is the struggle to which his thought belongs, not thought as something independent, to be divided from this struggle' (KT II, p. 165). Horkheimer's programmatic statement links critical theory, as a mode of cognition, to the proletariat. 'Those view-points which (critical theory) takes as the goal of human activity for historical analysis, and above all the idea of a rational social organization corresponding to the general will (*Allgemeinheit*), are immanent in human labour, without being present to individuals or in public opinion in a correct form. It is the property of a specific interest to experience and perceive these tendencies. Marx and Engels's theory claims that this will happen in the proletariat.' As the last sentence suggests, however, Horkheimer is not sure. 'But in this society, the situation of the proletariat does not provide any guarantee of correct knowledge, either. . . . The differentiation of its social structure which is fostered from above, and the opposition between personal and class interests which is only overcome at the best of times, prevent this consciousness from acquiring immediate validity' (KT II, p. 162).

Horkheimer then went on to explain the relationship between the critical theorist and the proletariat in the following terms: 'If we regard the theoretician and his specific activity alongside the oppressed class as a dynamic unity, such that his representation of the social contradictions appears not just as an expression of the concrete historical situation, but rather as a stimulating, transforming factor in it, then his function emerges clearly. The course of the conflict between the advanced parts of the class and the individuals who express the truth about them, and then the conflict between these most advanced parts together with their theoreticians and the rest of the class, should be understood as a process of mutual interaction in which consciousness unfolds with its liberating and propulsive, disciplinary and aggressive powers' (KT II, p. 164). Note that the relationship is not presented simply as one between the theoretician and the proletariat, but also as one between the theoretician and the 'most advanced parts' of the class on the one hand, and the rest of the class on the other. A few lines earlier, the expression 'advanced part' is equated with 'a party or its leadership'. In the main, however, Horkheimer's focus is on critical theory, not on a party. There is only one other reference to organization in Horkheimer's programme, and that is equally abstract. 'Something of the freedom and spontaneity of the future appears in the organization and community of those in struggle, despite all the discipline based on the need to prevail. Where the unity of discipline and spontaneity has vanished, the movement is transformed into a concern of its own bureaucracy, a drama which is already part of the repertory of recent history' (KT II, pp. 166ff.).

Thus critical theory's conception of politics also ends in a paradox. On the one hand, it presents itself as a mere component of a political practice; on the other, it lacks any specific political anchorage. This is not just a description of its historical situation after the victory of Nazism in Germany, but a rigorous consequence of Frankfurt School theory. The over-politicization of theory leads logically to the substitution of the theory as a surrogate for politics – an *Ersatzpolitik*.

So far our analysis has been confined almost exclusively to a single essay by Horkheimer outlining the differences between 'traditional' and 'critical' (Frankfurt School) theory. Nevertheless, two important conclusions have already emerged. Horkheimer

argues that Marxism, or critical theory, is a completely new kind of theory; yet, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the radical break is not with classical philosophy, whose heritage, on the contrary, it claims, but with science. Moreover, it does not propose to replace existing science with a new science, i.e., it refuses to enter the scientific arena, but denounces science from outside, from the realm of philosophy. The paradoxical result is that bourgeois science is retained, the only change being a philosophical (or even ethical) minus sign in front of its categories. Similarly, 'critical theory' associates itself with the struggle of the oppressed against capitalist class rule, but it is unable to situate this association in the political arena. It remains outside denouncing bourgeois class politics from the philosophical sphere. Horkheimer's critical theory involves a *double reduction of science and politics to philosophy*.

Backdrop: Rationalization and Reification

What was this philosophy which could thus be substituted for both science and politics in a revolutionary stance? In fact, the theory outlined in Horkheimer's programme and developed by the Frankfurt School from the 1930's to the present was by no means a completely original intellectual formation. It was rather an extreme development of the most philosophically self-conscious form of Marxism available to the Frankfurt theorists – the philosophy of the young Lukács and Korsch, which was itself a development of a whole trend of 19th- and 20th-century German sociological thought represented most completely by Max Weber's work. The central concern of this tradition was that of 'capitalist rationalization'.

The original conceptualization of this problem in Germany was made in 1887 when Ferdinand Tönnies published his book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society). The distinction which constituted the title was the contrast between the intimate personal relations of family and neighbourhood in rural pre-industrial and pre-capitalist society, and the impersonal contractual relations between men in urban, commercial and industrial society. The rationalization implied by *Gesellschaft* relations subsequently became the master concept of all Max Weber's work. For Weber, it was an inevitable destiny of Western

society since the adoption of Judaeo-Christian religion in the West. It meant the *Entzauberung* (disenchantment) of the Western world, its liberation from magic, tradition and affectivity, and the development of instrumental rationality, calculation and control. Weber traced this development in religion – the Reformation; in the political sphere – bureaucracy; and in the economy – the capitalist firm and the 'spirit of capitalism'.

In his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), the young Lukács linked Weber's 'rationalization' with Marx's conception of the 'fetishism of commodities', which he generalized into the concept of 'reification' – the reduction of human relations to relations between things. Reification was a feature not of modern society in general but of a particular type of modern society dominated by market exchange; capitalist society. The Vertex of reification was the labour market, where the free labourer, the proletarian, is forced to treat his living activity, his labour, as a thing. Hence the proletariat, the class most oppressed by capitalism, was the negation of capitalist society, and the force which could realise the philosophical critique of reification by a socialist revolution. The proletariat was the legitimate heir to German idealist philosophy, and revolutionary politics was the only means to make the divided and reified world whole and human.

This tradition, especially as represented by Lukács, had two important consequences for the subsequent development of the Frankfurt School. The first concerned its attitude to science, particularly the natural sciences; the second, its attitude to history and historical and social knowledge. The rise of the natural sciences was also part of the process Weber called rationalization, and one of the crucial problems of German idealism (using the term in the widest sense) during the latter half of the 19th century was therefore its relationship to science. In academic culture, the question concerned the relations between the natural and the cultural sciences. Historians, philosophers of history and sociologists in the idealist tradition, all insisted on a sharp distinction between them, both in the character of their object and in their method.

Paradoxically, however, the Marxism which developed in Western Europe after the First World War and the October Revolution faced the same problems, since it saw itself as the heir to classical German idealism. But these problems were also rele-

vant to it for directly political reasons. Both classical Social-Democratic Marxism and revisionism had been permeated with a strong commitment to science, interpreted in a positivist and evolutionist sense, and with indifference and hostility, respectively, to Hegelian philosophy.

The revolutionary intellectuals of Western Europe in the 1920's, steeped in the Hegelian tradition, carried on the earlier fight of German historicism for a conception of social and historical theory different from the natural sciences. And just as Weber saw science as a moment in the process of rationalization, so Lukács regarded it as an aspect of reification, when applied to the human sphere. Immutable scientific laws of society were the expression of a world in which human relations had become things beyond human control, and the separation of different scientific disciplines revealed a specialization which destroyed the totality and historicity of human existence. For both Lukács and Korsch, the conception of Marxism as a strict science and the abandonment of the Hegelian dialectic were also directly connected with the political treachery of Social Democracy. They therefore regarded their re-introduction of Hegelianism into Marxist discourse as a reaffirmation of its revolutionary vocation.

In the early 1930's, the position on the natural sciences adopted by the Frankfurt School, and particularly by Horkheimer, was much the same as that outlined in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács's critique of science was aimed at the contemplative position which he claimed it implied. To regard society as governed by scientific laws, was, according to Lukács, to take a reflective attitude to it, instead of intervening actively to change it and thereby transcend its laws. The Social-Democrats had oscillated between contemplation of an inevitable evolution to socialism and moralistic exhortation of the proletariat. In both, the unity of theory and practice had been broken. The Frankfurt School took up this critique, but as it was almost completely isolated from the working-class movement, the unification of theory and practice was broken *de facto* – especially, of course, after the victory of Fascism in 1933. Its critique of scientism therefore moves steadily away from the problem of its consequences for those who are to change capitalist society to the problem of its consequences for those who have to live in a still existing capitalist system. The emphasis is no longer on science as *contemplation* so

much as on science as *domination*. In 1932, Horkheimer wrote: 'In the Marxist theory of society, science is numbered among the human forces of production. . . . Scientific knowledge shares the fate of productive forces and means of production of other kinds: the extent of their application is in grave contrast both to the level of their development and the real needs of men. . . . In so far as an attempt to found present society as eternity took over from the interest in a better society, which still dominated the Enlightenment, a restrictive and disorganizing moment entered science. A method oriented towards being and not towards becoming corresponded to the tendency to see the given form of society as a mechanism of equal and self-repeating processes.'¹¹ By 1944, however, Horkheimer and Adorno were arguing: 'Bacon's view was appropriate to the scientific attitude that prevailed after him. The concordance between the mind of man and the nature of things that he had in mind is patriarchal: the human mind, which overcomes supersession, is to hold sway over a disenchanting nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: neither in the enslavement of men nor in compliance with the world's rulers.'¹² The importance of this change for the political ideas of the Frankfurt School is discussed in the section on fascism below.

Theory as the Self-knowledge of the Object

A second influence of the historicist tradition on the Frankfurt School affected its view of history, and its characteristic form was that of a return to Hegel. Lukács had already stated this project in *History and Class Consciousness*. 'The fact that historical materialism is profoundly akin to Hegel's philosophy is clearly expressed in the function of the theory as the *self-knowledge of reality*.'¹³

¹¹ Max Horkheimer: 'Bemerkungen über Wissenschaft und Krise', KT 1, pp. 1–3.

¹² Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London 1973, p. 4. Hereafter, this book will be referred to as DE. This position produces the characteristic idea that nature is not something to be mastered by man, as it appears in most Western thought from the Greeks onward, but something that should be regarded as a 'garden', 'which can grow while making human beings grow' (see Marcuse: *Error and Civilization*, Boston 1955). Some writers have argued that this idea is the defining feature of the School, but as we have seen, it was not present in Frankfurt thinking from the start. Moreover, it is shared by their arch-enemy, Heidegger (see *Brief über den 'Humanismus'* in *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, Bern 1947).

¹³ Georg Lukács: *History and Class Consciousness*, London 1971, p. 16. English modified.

Horkheimer's programme for critical theory states that this theory 'constructs the unfolding picture of the whole, the existential judgement contained in history' (KT II, p. 187). It is 'a struggle inherent in reality that by itself calls for a specific mode of behaviour'.¹⁴ The basic conception of history which underlies this epistemology can be seen in a quotation from Marcuse: 'When historical content enters into the dialectical concept and determines methodologically its development and function, dialectical thought attains the concreteness which links the structure of thought to that of reality. Logical truth becomes historical truth. The ontological tension between essence and appearance, between "is" and "ought", becomes historical tension, and the inner negativity of the object-world is understood as the work of the historical subject – man in his struggle with nature and society' (ODM, p. 11).

History is viewed as one all-embracing process, in which an historical subject realizes itself. This subject is no longer Hegel's Idea, but Man. 'The goal of a rational society ... is really invested in every man' (KT II, p. 199). This goal cannot be realized in the present society which is characterized, on the contrary, by its negation – the reification of human relations and the alienation of Man. But in spite of this, human beings still maintain a will and a struggle for a 'rational' organization of society, and it is through this will and this struggle, inherent in Man and human existence, that Man can discover the fact that human goals are negated in the prevailing conditions. Thus a knowledge of society becomes at the same time a judgement or evaluation of it. In this way, Man and social reality (created by Man) reach self-knowledge.

The reader will have noted that it is this historicist speculation which has in recent years constituted a primary target of Althusser and his followers. What effects does it have on the social theory of the Frankfurt School? The following list does not claim to be exhaustive, but it provides a starting-point for analysis.

1. It means that for humanist historicism, the term 'social totality' is something other than a scientific concept. In social science, the expression is used in a structural sense. To be able to explain a social fact, one must take into account the network of relationships of which it is a part, the structure which determines

the place of that social fact and its mode of functioning. Marxism is a social science in this sense, and it was by this procedure, for instance, that Marx showed that it is not the consumers and their needs and wishes which direct the capitalist economy.¹⁵ In a historicist perspective, however, the totality becomes the totality of humanity's generically determined (*gattungsbestimmt*) history at a given moment. To grasp the totality then becomes to comprehend the existing reality from the standpoint of Man's goal, a rational society.

2. There is no room in the historicist conception of history for social totalities as structures of irreducible complexity, or for a discontinuous development of those complex structures. Society is always reducible to its creator-subject, and history is the continuous unfolding of this subject. At every given point in time, society is a unique manifestation of Man. This means that the concept of a mode of production, which in any classical reading of Marx is the central concept of historical materialism, plays at most a quite subordinate role. Capitalism is thus seen not as one mode of production among others, but as a completely unique moment in the history (or more strictly speaking, in the reified pre-history) of Man. Here the Frankfurt School appeals explicitly to the treatment of capitalism in classical German historicism, as expressed, for example, by Max Weber: 'Such an historical concept, however, since it refers to a phenomenon significant for its unique individuality, cannot be defined by the formula *genus proximum, differentia specifica*, but it must be *gradually put together out of the individual parts* which are taken from historical reality to make it up'.¹⁶ Etienne Balibar has convincingly proved that the Marxist conception of capitalism is, on the contrary, constructed precisely the way which Weber declares impossible.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Weber's conception has been hailed by Adorno as a third alternative between positivism and idealism.¹⁸ This historicist conception of the social totality has prevented the Frankfurt School from making the contribution to historical materialism

¹⁵ Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, London, Penguin/NLR library, 1973, p. 99ff.

¹⁶ Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London 1967)

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¹⁸ E. Balibar: 'The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism' in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London NLB, 1970.

¹⁹ *Negative Dialectic*, p. 164ff.

¹⁴ *The Eclipse of Reason*, op. cit., p. 11.

which would seem to be implied in its programme of 'social research'.

3. Critical theory sees itself as humanity's self-knowledge. Therefore it cannot and must not have a structure which is (formally) logical and systematic. Such a systematization would mean that men systematized themselves, divided themselves up among the boxes of abstract categories. 'The formalization of reason is only the intellectual expression of mechanized production' (De, p. 104). Formal logic is an expression of 'indifference to the individual' (De, p. 202).

4. In a historicist interpretation, the scientific specificity of Marx's critique of political economy disappears. That critique is either regarded as a philosophical critique (Horkheimer), or as an examination of political economy from the standpoint of the totality of social being (Marcuse), but not as a scientific operation. This is quite clearly different from Marx's own conception of his work and of epistemology in general. In this context, Marx distinguished between four levels of thought: the economic subjects' immediate view of themselves and of the economy, special ideologies or speculative systems based on these immediate views, past science (above all, Ricardo's work, which Marx regarded as a science, but one which his own critique had superseded), and lastly positive science (Marx's own theory).¹⁹

5. However, the main effect of this historicist conception of knowledge is its view of capitalism, which is, of course, the present whose self-knowledge critical theory claims to represent. 'In the course of history, men attain a knowledge of their action and thereby grasp the contradiction in their existence' (KT II, p. 161). In capitalism, this contradiction is absolute; capitalism is a negation of humanity. Hence, for critical theory, all the institutions of capitalist society become expressions of a contradictory inner essence. Several options are then open to the historicist. The critical theorists could have taken as their starting-point Marx's treatment of the concept of the commodity in *Capital* and interpreted *reification* as the essential meaning of capitalism. This, of course, was Lukács's option: 'It might be claimed that

¹⁹ Marx's most succinct formulation of this epistemology is perhaps to be found in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. III, especially the chapter on vulgar economics. Cf. Marx-Engels: *Werke* (Berlin 1965), Bd. 26: 3, esp. p. 445.

the chapter on the fetish character of commodities . . . contains within itself the whole of historical materialism, the whole of the proletariat's knowledge of itself as knowledge of capitalist society.'²⁰ Or they could have started from the concept of labour and human activity, seeing capitalism above all in terms of *alienation*. This option is characteristic of all those who base themselves on Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*.²¹ Horkheimer and Adorno have chosen a third path – to regard *exchange* as the 'fundamental relation' of capitalism. In this version, capitalism is the negation of just and equal exchange, producing increasing social injustice and the polarizations of power and oppression, wealth and poverty which go with it (KT II, pp. 173ff.). All these options say something true and important about capitalism, and they give an ideological judgement of it which can be used in the struggle to destroy it and replace it with a socialist society. But the tasks of Marxists are not confined to the ideological struggle, and from the point of view of science as a guide to political action, all these variants have to be refuted. They substitute for real history a construction derived from a philosophy of history, the 'history' of Man's alienation or reification or – in Frankfurt vocabulary – the dialectic of enlightenment. In the science of history, capitalism is a specific mode of production, characterized by a specific combination of forces and relations of production. This mode of production both sets the stage for the class struggle and is its object. Without a scientific analysis of the mode of production and social formation, no coherent class strategy can be developed by which to overthrow it. The Frankfurt School not only do not provide Marxism with any instruments to assist in the construction of this strategy, they denounce all such instruments *simply because they are instruments*.

Capitalism as the Truth of Liberalism

As we have seen, a typical feature of the Frankfurt School's historicist ideology is the reduction of the complexity of the capitalist social formation to an essence which is then both

²⁰ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 170.

²¹ Marcuse was among the first in the revolutionary camp to attach importance to alienation of labour. See his 'Über die philosophischen Grundlagen des wissenschaftlichen Arbeitsbegriffs' (1933) in KG 11.

expressed and masked by the different phenomenal forms which the essence takes in concrete historical existence. As history unfolds, the essence is more and more revealed. This ideological conception acquired great political importance when the Frankfurt School turned to the analysis of fascism.

Naturally enough, efforts to explain the roots of fascism were a major pre-occupation of all anti-fascist intellectuals in the 1930's and during the War. Many of these interpretations focused not on economic and political problems, but on ideological and cultural factors. It is remarkable that not only are these cultural explanations divided into two diametrically opposed camps where their interpretation of fascist culture is concerned, but also each of these camps contains both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ideologists. To one of these camps, fascism was essentially an irrationalist phenomenon, a revolt against reason. To the other, on the contrary, it was the triumph of manipulative rationality. To the first camp belong both Karl Popper, with his *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and the later Georg Lukács in his *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (The Destruction of Reason). The Frankfurt School emphatically belong to the second group, where they find their reactionary counterpart in figures like Friedrich von Hayek. But within this basic framework, the Frankfurt School's theory of fascism has not remained static. The year 1939 provides a convenient divide between two distinct phases in this development.

In the first period, the Frankfurt School view of the roots of fascism contains two main themes with sources in Marxism and psycho-analysis²² respectively. On the economic level, fascism is

²² Freudian psycho-analysis and meta-psychology have been of great importance for Frankfurt theory. A psycho-analytic criticism of civilization as a repression of basic human instincts was thereby added to the Marxist critique of capitalist civilization. The core members of the group have refused to attenuate 'the uneasiness (*Unbehagen*) in culture', the conflict between society and human instinct, by sociologizing the latter, and Adorno and Marcuse have directly attacked the neo-Freudian revisionists, including their former colleague, Erich Fromm, for doing so (see Adorno: 'Sociology and Psychology', *New Left Review* 46 & 47, 1967-68, and above all Marcuse: *Eros and Civilization*, op. cit.). But they give Freudian theory an historical character by distinguishing a reality principle specific to capitalist society, the performance principle. This approach both sharpens the indictment of capitalist society and radicalizes its negation, which is associated with a realm 'beyond the reality principle', i.e. beyond the performance principle. The precondition for this is such a high level of the productive forces that labour can be abolished. Unlike Reich, sexual liberation in the genital sense is not the psycho-analytical aim of Frankfurt theory so much as the investment of all human activity with libidinous energy.

explained as the replacement of competitive capitalism by monopoly capitalism and as the seizure of power by the monopoly capitalists in order to deal with the economic and political crisis of capitalism. In a vivid essay on 'The Struggle against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State', Marcuse shows that fascist attacks on liberalism notwithstanding, these two ideologies and political systems represent two different stages of the same type of society, to which both of them belong: respectively, monopoly capitalism, and competitive capitalism. Marcuse first points out that the attacks on the bourgeoisie, i.e. on the profit motive, in fascist ideology are directed against the capitalists of competitive capitalism. The 'merchant' (*Händler*) is reviled, while homage is paid to the 'gifted economic leader' (*Wirtschaftsführer*).²³ According to Marcuse, fascism finds its most important spring-boards in 'the naturalistic interpretation of society and the liberalist rationalism that ends in irrationalism. Both believe in "natural", eternal laws of society. The liberal rationalization of the economy and society is essentially private, relating to the rational practice of the single individual; it lacks any rational determination of social goals. It therefore comes to an end when an economic crisis breaks through its supposed harmony of interests. At this point, liberal theory has to turn to irrational justifications of the existing system' (KG I, p. 31; N, pp. 17-18).

The second theme in the first phase of the Frankfurt School's explanation of fascism is the precedent for fascist moralism provided by anti-sensual bourgeois morality in general, with its condemnation of hedonism and happiness in favour of 'virtue'.²⁴ This hostility to pleasure emerges paradoxically in what Marcuse called 'affirmative culture', in which happiness and the spirit are split away from the material world into a separate, purely spiritual realm called *Kultur*. 'By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable

²³ Marcuse: 'Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsaufbau', KG I, p. 25; *Negations*, pp. 11-12.

²⁴ See Marcuse, op. cit., and Horkheimer: 'Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung', JS, 1936, etc.

world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself "from within", without any transformation of the state of fact' (KG I, p. 63; N, p. 95). In the pre-fascist period, this culture could be characterized as an 'internalization' (*Verinnerlichung*), but 'during the most recent period of affirmative culture, this abstract internal community (abstract because it left the real antagonisms untouched) has turned into an equally abstract external community. The individual is inserted into a false collectivity (race, folk, blood, and soil)' (KG I, p. 93; N, p. 125).

Apart from culture in general, a crucial element in fascism, according to the Frankfurt School, was the psychology of the individual citizen which made fascist oppression possible, the so-called 'authoritarian personality'. The authoritarian personality, too, was for the Frankfurt School a creation of the classical bourgeois epoch. In the huge collective volume *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Studies in Authority and the Family), whose principal contributions were written by Fromm, Horkheimer and Marcuse, the Frankfurt School examined the way in which the family functions as a mechanism to preserve the existing society, and, more specifically, the way in which the bourgeois family functions as an inculcator of authoritarianism.

In 1939, the Spanish Republic was defeated, Molotov and Ribbentrop signed the Nazi-Soviet pact and the Second World War broke out. This was the decisive crisis for the intellectual left of the 1930's. However, its effect on the Frankfurt School, was at first registered only in a practical retreat from politics, not a modification of theory. Hence the content of its theory of fascism changed very little, but its themes are more sharply expressed. This is well represented by Horkheimer's essay *The Jews and Europe*, which was completed in the first days of September of that year.²⁵ Horkheimer argues that the present crisis, far from bringing Marxism into question, vindicates its analyses of the power relations, monopolistic tendencies and eruption of crises in

²⁵ Horkheimer: 'Die Juden und Europa', ZfS, 1939 (hereafter referred to as JE). Characteristically, this resolute affirmation of the author's commitment to Marxism has been omitted from KT. However wild this article may be theoretically, it should be remembered that at this very time, renegades like James Burnham were beginning to concoct the idea of the 'managerial revolution'.

capitalist society. 'He who does not want to speak about capitalism should also be silent about fascism' (JE, p. 115). 'The (Marxist) theory destroyed the myth of a harmony of interests; it presented the liberal economic process as the reproduction of relations of domination by means of free contracts which are enforced by the inequality of property. The mediation has now been removed. Fascism is the truth of modern society, which this theory had grasped from the beginning' (JE, p. 116).

Logic as Domination

But the retreat from politics, even of the abstract type available to the Frankfurt School in the 1930's, eventually directly affected the theory, too, and as part of the theory, the theory of fascism. This is seen at its clearest in Horkheimer and Adorno's book *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of Enlightenment), written during the War. Horkheimer and Adorno ask 'why instead of entering into a truly human condition, does humanity sink into a new kind of barbarism?' Here a comparison can be made with Popper's *Open Society and its Enemies* and Von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. These last two authors put the blame on socialism and the labour movement: Popper, because Marxism had allegedly substituted historicism and utopianism for 'piece-meal social engineering'; Hayek, because socialism had introduced the ideas of planning and State intervention into the paradise of competitive capitalism. Horkheimer and Adorno's answer to the question is, of course, quite different. For them, fascism is the self-destruction of the liberal Enlightenment. Fascism is not just the truth of liberalism in the sense that it nakedly reveals the real inequalities and oppression inherent in the apparently free exchange in the capitalist market. Fascism is the truth of the whole aim of the bourgeois Enlightenment from Bacon on to liberate man from the fetters of superstition. The main offender is not the market and the relations of production, but the natural sciences and their empiricist counterpart in epistemology. The whole meaning of science and logic is brought into question: 'Even though we had known for many years that the great discoveries of applied science are paid for with an increasing diminution of theoretical awareness, we still thought that in regard to scientific activity our contribution could be restricted to the criticism or

extension of specialist axioms. Thematically, at any rate, we were to keep to the traditional disciplines: to sociology, psychology, and epistemology. However, the fragments united in this volume show that we were forced to abandon this conviction. If the assiduous maintenance and verification of the scientific heritage are an essential part of knowledge (especially where zealous positivists have treated it as useless ballast and consigned it to oblivion), in the present collapse of bourgeois civilization not only the pursuit but the meaning of science has become problematical in that regard.' (DE, p. xi.)

Horkheimer's programme for a critical theory still maintained the Lukácsian position on science: it was contemplative, as opposed to a commitment to fundamental social change. In *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, however, the focus is wholly on science as an instrument of domination.²⁶ Now natural science and Bacon's empiricist theory of knowledge are the main targets. 'What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and men. Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator towards men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them' (DE, pp. 4 and 9). Logic as such is contaminated because of its indifference to the qualitative and to the individually unique. It is directly linked to the capitalist rationalisation of labour. 'The indifferent attitude to the individual expressed in logic draws the necessary conclusions from the economic process' (DE, p. 202). Fascism has granted science its full honours, freeing it from all moral considerations. 'The totalitarian order gives full rein to calculation and abides by science as such' (DE, p. 86).

Moreover, the form in which *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is written takes this critique of logic and science into account. It is a collection of philosophical fragments (Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, written at the same time, is similarly a collection of aphorisms). Its theme is the inner contradictions of the Enlightenment, defined as the 'disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world', and the self-destruction these contradictions bring about.²⁷ An allegory for

this dialectic can be found in the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*, where Ulysses' ship has to pass by the sirens, whose immensely beautiful song leads men to lose themselves in the past. Ulysses avoids this danger in two ways. He has one solution for his sailors: he blocks their ears with wax. 'The labourers must be fresh and concentrate as they look ahead, and must ignore whatever lies to one side.' The other solution is for himself, the landowner; he has himself bound to the mast. He can thus enjoy the sirens' song because he has made their temptation a merely contemplative object, an art, and the greater the temptation, the harder he makes his men bind him, like the later bourgeois who refuses himself happiness more and more obstinately, the nearer he comes to it through the growth in his power (DE, p. 54ff.). The theme is then pursued in Kant, de Sade and Nietzsche, in order to show that 'the submission of everything natural to the autocratic subject reaches its acme in the mastery of the blindly objective and natural' (DE, p. xvi). The authors also follow the development of the Enlightenment into commercial culture and mass communications: 'Enlightenment as mass deception'.

The most directly political analyses in the book are found in seven theses on anti-semitism. The seventh is the most remarkable. It was added after the War amidst the general democratic euphoria over the defeat of fascism. Precisely at this moment, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that fascism and anti-semitism have been preserved in the very structure of existing party politics. The tone of this thesis is set by the first sentences: 'But there are no more anti-semites. In their most recent form they were liberals who wanted to assert their anti-liberal opinions' (DE, p. 200). The preservation of anti-semitism is then illustrated by a reality of the us political system, the 'ticket' (e.g. the Nixon-Agnew ticket). 'Anti-semitic judgment has always born witness to stereotyped thought. Today this is all that remains. A choice is still made, but only between totalities. Anti-semitic psychology has been replaced by mere acceptance of the whole fascist ticket, the slogans of aggressive big business' (DE, p. 201). The ticket mentality is part of the all-pervasive process of the negation of individuality. Even progressive parties are directly attacked on these grounds. 'The basis of the development which leads to the acceptance of programmes and tickets is the universal reduction of all specific energy to a single, equal and abstract form of labour, from the

²⁶ Cf. ODM, especially Ch. VI.

²⁷ This concept closely corresponds to Max Weber's notion of rationalization, whose initial manifestation was the absence or progressive elimination of magic from Western religion, starting with Mosaic Judaism, and from Western culture generally.

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²⁷ This concept closely corresponds to Max Weber's notion of rationalization, whose initial manifestation was the absence or progressive elimination of magic from Western religion, starting with Mosaic Judaism, and from Western culture generally.

battle-field to the film-studio. But the transition from these conditions to a more human state cannot occur because the good suffer the same fate as the evil. Freedom on the progressive ticket is just as external to the structures of political power on which progressive decisions are necessarily based, as anti-semitism is to a chemical cartel' (DE, p. 207).²⁸

This treatment of fascism reveals very clearly the limits of historicism. An interpretation of fascism as the essence behind the phenomena, as the 'truth of' modern (capitalist) society, can never achieve the central aim of Marxist analysis, what Lenin called the 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation'. However deep its roots lay in the structure of monopoly capitalism, fascism was in fact a special type of monopoly capitalist State which arose in a specific historical conjuncture.²⁹ In failing to recognize this, the Frankfurt School in effect took up the positions adopted by the Comintern in the so-called Third Period, after the Sixth Congress of 1928: fascism was seen as an inevitable and culminating phase of capitalism. For all their virtuosity, the Frankfurt School explanations of fascism were thus ultimately an example of theoretical impotence. The theme of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the self-destruction of bourgeois reason: but this theory itself is a case of the self-destruction of intellectual radicalism. It is precisely the radicalism of the authors' rejection of bourgeois society and culture which wrests the weapons of socialist theory (science) from their hands, forcing them to retreat into speculative philosophical fragments.

The reduction of science to philosophy is thus revealed in this test case of Frankfurt School theory as doubly mystificatory. The direct condemnation of the logic of the sciences as responsible for fascism make it impossible to develop a conjunctural theory of fascism which would have helped to fight it more effectively. The retreat from Marxist scientific concepts into a philosophical (ideological) critique of capitalist society then covers up for the lack of a theory of it.

The Political Collapse of Horkheimer

The second reduction characteristic of the Frankfurt School, as we

²⁸ Hence it is possible to argue that all capitalist societies today are fascist still. This notion has pervaded much recent student thinking, especially in Germany, where it is embodied in the concept of '*Spätkapitalismus*' (late capitalism).

²⁹ See Quintin Hoare: 'What is Fascism?', *New Left Review* 20, Summer 1963.

have seen, is that of politics to philosophy. An examination of this entails an analysis of the attitude of the School to political practice. In this too there is an evolution, but it is further complicated by the political divergences of the School in the post-War years. As we have seen, their initial position, as represented in Horkheimer's programmatic text of 1937, was similar to that of Lukács. The proletariat was still regarded as the agent of revolution, and the aim of politics was the unity of philosophy and the proletariat in a realized proletarian class consciousness. However, in the late 1930's it was impossible to sustain the young Lukács's belief in the immediacy of this revolutionary unification.³⁰

After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939, this initial scepticism deepened. The bleak political situation induced a retreat from politics, but no immediate capitulation. 'Nothing is to be hoped for from the alliances of the great powers. No trust can be put in the collapse of the totalitarian economy.... It is completely naïve to call from the outside for the German workers to rise. He who can only play at politics should keep away from it. Confusion has become so general that truth has all the more practical value the less it meddles with any intended practice' (JE, p. 135). Horkheimer recalls the Jews' steadfast rejection of the worship of false gods: 'A lack of respect for an existing authority which extends even to God is the religion of those who, in the Europe of the Iron Heel, continue to devote their lives to the preparation for a better one' (JE, p. 136). Of anti-Communism, at this stage, there was not a word.

The post-War political position of Horkheimer and Adorno, by contrast, has had three aspects: the maintenance of critical theory as a pure theory; the retreat from politics into exclusive individualism; and academic integration. However, in none of their later works is either critical theory or its relationship to Marx and Engels repudiated.³¹ In his *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno even openly scorns the idealist exploitation of the 'Young Marx' on the grounds that to centre critical theory on the concept of reification only serves to make it idealistically acceptable to the ruling consciousness.³² They have also maintained a firm dividing line

³⁰ See above.

³¹ See for example Max Horkheimer: 'Theismus-Atheismus', in *Zeugnisse* (a *Festschrift* for Adorno, Frankfurt 1963), hereafter referred to as TA; his preface to KT; and Adorno's *Negative Dialectic*.

³² Op. cit., p. 190.

between their positions and those of conservative *Kulturkritik*.³³

In Horkheimer's programme, critical theory was defined as part of the political practice of the oppressed classes. From the middle 1940's, critical theory was located elsewhere, in the individual mind. The whole tenor of Horkheimer and Adorno's works in this period is characterized by the conviction that the only place where anything is still possible in the totalitarian world is the 'individual sphere', where the task is to resist the intruding cruelty of the 'administered world'. This is well expressed by Adorno in the preface to *Minima Moralia* (1951): 'In face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself, even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere. If critical theory lingers there, it is not only with bad conscience.'³⁴ Horkheimer added a decade later: 'Our hope rests in the work to ensure that in the beginning of a world period dominated by blocks of administered men, a few will be found who offer up some resistance, like the sacrifices of history, to whom belongs the founder of Christianity' (TA, p. 19). This religious solution has at times taken a Jewish form, too.³⁵

The academic integration of the West German wing of the Frankfurt School is best represented by *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950, with Adorno as its senior author and Horkheimer as director of the entire research project (entitled *Studies in Prejudice*). Here the stress on individual psychology becomes a complete capitulation to bourgeois social psychology in theory, method and political conclusions. Horkheimer says in his preface: 'It may strike the reader that we have placed undue stress upon the personal and the psychological rather than upon the social aspect of prejudice. That is not due to a personal preference for psychological analysis, nor to a failure to see that the cause of irrational hostility is in the last instance to be found in social frustration and injustice. Our aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help its eradication. . . . *Eradication means re-education*, scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at. And education in a

strict sense is by its nature personal and psychological.'³⁶ In the last thesis on anti-semitism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, anti-semitism was embedded in the very core of the modern political system, both East and West. Here it has suddenly become something which can be done away with by personal education, presumably by the Adenauer government or the Western occupation authorities in Germany. It is profoundly symbolic that Adorno calls the consciously anti-authoritarian personality-type 'the genuine liberal'.³⁷ This is a long way from the thesis that fascism is the truth of liberalism and the anti-semitic the liberal who wants to voice his anti-liberal opinion.

The effect of the combined factors of formal preservation of the theory, exclusive individualization and academic integration is a cumulative mystification. The formula here provides a legitimization for a purely ideological radicalism snugly installed in the cosy academic institution, without even an indirect relationship to politics as experienced by the masses, but still cultivating a critical theory going back to an interpretation of Marx.

This development has also been accompanied by a retreat from the resolute rejection of anti-communism in 1937 and even in 1939. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* already implies that the choice between the USSR and the USA is one between two equal evils, two totalitarian 'tickets', and in the Cold War period, Horkheimer and Adorno committed themselves further to the West against the East. Horkheimer has repeatedly declared his commitment to the 'most civilized' or 'European' States, against the threatening 'totalitarian world', in which are included not only the Communist States but the 'backward countries' with their 'exaggerated nationalisms' (TA, p. 23). According to the former director of *Studies in Prejudice*, not only should Kaiser Wilhelm II's warning of the 'menace of the yellow race . . . be taken very seriously today', but 'it is perhaps more urgent than it appears', though, 'it is

³³ See for instance Adorno's *Prisms* (London 1967).

³⁴ Theodor Adorno: *Minima Moralia*, London NLB, 1974, p. 18.

³⁵ See the interview with Horkheimer in *Der Spiegel*, January 5th, 1970.

³⁶ *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York 1950), p. VII. The reader may feel that, after criticizing the Frankfurt School for its rejection of science, I am ungrateful in rejecting this apparent appeal to a policy 'scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at'. But an appeal to science does not ensure scientificity. Here it is the bourgeois ideology of social psychology which is meant. This is another case of the paradox of Frankfurt hyper-radicalism: the categories denounced philosophically have slipped back into academic discourse unscathed.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 781.

indeed not the only threat' to Europe.³⁸ In a recent interview, Horkheimer has gone over to the bourgeois camp in even more positive and judicious terms, no longer as the lesser of two evils (note also the motivation given for his philosophical works!): 'In my view, sociology today has still insufficiently noted the fact that the development of man is bound up with competition, that is, with the most important element of the liberal economy.' 'You see, I am thinking of my father [an industrial tycoon]. . . . The competitive struggle enabled him to exert himself practically, in a way not unlike that in which I myself developed my original philosophical interest according to the demands of an academic career, so as to be able to maintain my late beloved wife.'³⁹

Marcuse: Integrity and Contradiction

Marcuse's political evolution has, of course, been a polar contrast. Not only did he survive the McCarthy period without compromising himself, like so many other left-wing intellectuals, but he has never rejected those students who have been inspired by his ideas to more practical forms of struggle, as Horkheimer and Adorno have done. Marcuse's political record is an exemplary one. But it does not necessarily imply a deep gulf between the theoretical structure of his thought and that of the other members of the school. An ideological problematic is characteristically labile and can be made to fit many political positions.⁴⁰ However, one important theoretical difference can be detected even in 1937. This concerned the relation between philosophy and Marxism as a theory of society. This difference is discernible in the discussion of Horkheimer's programme which followed its publication in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* under the title 'Philosophy and Critical Theory'. As we noted above, Horkheimer argued that 'the critical theory of society . . . remains philosophical even as a critique of economics'. This is because critical theory is something more than a specialized economic discipline, it is a theory and a judgement of the whole of human existence. For Marcuse, however, this transcendence of specialized economics is contained in a

³⁸ Max Horkheimer: 'On the Concept of Freedom', *Diogenes*, No. 53 (Paris 1966).

³⁹ *Der Spiegel*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Habermas's suggestion that his political stand is due to an activism inherent in his Heideggerian formation need not be taken very seriously. Cf. J. Habermas (ed.): *Antworten auf Marcuse* (Frankfurt 1968), p. 12.

critical theory of society as such, which is the successor to classical philosophy. 'Philosophy thus appears within the economic concepts of materialist theory, each of which is more than an economic concept of the sort employed by the academic discipline of economics. It is more due to the theory's claim to explain the totality of man and his world in terms of his social being. Yet it would be false on that account to reduce these concepts to philosophical ones. To the contrary, the philosophical contents relevant to the theory are to be educed from the economic structure' (KG I, p. 102; N, pp. 134-5). This conception of the relationship between critical theory and philosophy explains the sub-title of *Reason and Revolution* - 'Hegel and the rise of social theory'. 'If there was to be any progress beyond this philosophy, it had to be an advance beyond philosophy itself and, at the same time, beyond the social and political order to which philosophy had tied its fate.'⁴¹ In 1948, Marcuse re-affirmed this attachment to Marxism as a social theory which rejects philosophy in a critique of Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*. 'One step more (from Hegel's philosophy) toward concretization would have meant a transgression beyond philosophy itself. Such transgression occurred in the opposition to Hegel's philosophy. . . . But neither Kierkegaard nor Marx wrote existential philosophy. When they came to grips with concrete existence, they abandoned and repudiated philosophy. . . . For Marx, the conception of "réalité humaine" is the critique of political economy and the theory of socialist revolution' (KG II, p. 83; *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, VII, no. 3, March 1948, p. 335).

But these intellectual differences should not be taken too far. Marcuse's most famous work, *One-Dimensional Man*, is firmly in the Frankfurt tradition, and shares its theoretical faults, particularly the self-destructive intellectual hyper-radicalism which characterized *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As Marcuse explains in the preface to the republication in 1965 of his essays from the 1930's, 'Thought in contradiction must become more negative and more utopian in opposition to the status quo. This seems to me to be the imperative of the current situation in relation to my theoretical essays of the 1930's' (KG I, p. 16; N, p. xx). But, as realized in *One-Dimensional Man*, this project reveals at its centre

⁴¹ Herbert Marcuse: *Reason and Revolution* (Oxford 1941), p. 257.

a massive contradiction. The book is conceived as a picture of industrial society or 'the most highly developed contemporary societies', whereas in fact it is a highly conjunctural work, defined by the situation in the USA in the 1950's and early 1960's, before the internal effects of the Vietnamese War had made themselves felt, before the student movement and the rise of working-class resistance, and before the visible disintegration of US supremacy over Western Europe and Japan.⁴² Marcuse's weakness is not his failure to see these future tendencies, but the fact that his analysis provides no concepts by means of which he might have discovered them. As Marcuse himself says, 'the critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future' (ODM, p. 14). Moreover, instead of using a Marxist analysis of modern monopoly capitalism, Marcuse relies on such works as Berle and Means: *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, William H. Whyte: *The Organization Man*, and the writings of Vance Packard. The crucial argument about the integration of the working class is characteristically sustained by reference to academic American sociology. Once again, the radicalism of the critique has left its ideological object untouched.

In fact, *One-Dimensional Man* represents a step backwards for Marcuse vis-à-vis many of his attitudes to technology, to philosophy and to classical bourgeois culture. In *Soviet Marxism* he upheld the notion of the 'essentially neutral character' of technology and made it one of the corner-stones of his analysis of Soviet society; the change from a nationalized economy to a socialised one is a political revolution entailing the dismantling of the repressive State and the installation of control from below.⁴³ In *One-Dimensional Man*, the opposite view prevails: 'The traditional notion of the "neutrality" of technology can no longer be maintained. . . . The technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques' (ODM, p. 14). Secondly, the conception of philosophy and its role in *One-Dimensional Man* contains a repudiation, though more implicit, of Marcuse's earlier positions. Instead of

⁴² For the effects of the Vietnamese War, see my 'From Petrograd to Saigon', *New Left Review* 48, 1968; for the new tendencies of US capitalism, see Ernest Mandel: 'Where is America Going?', *New Left Review* 54, 1969, and 'The Laws of Uneven Development', *New Left Review* 59, 1970.

⁴³ *Soviet Marxism*, (New York 1958), pp. 160-191.

asserting the need to replace philosophy with a Marxist theory of society, *One-Dimensional Man* sets out to defend and maintain philosophy in the classical idealist sense, with concepts antagonistic to the prevailing discourse. This reversal is perhaps most clearly expressed in the following sentence, where instead of replacing philosophy with social theory and politics, he suggests that the problem is to replace politics with philosophy. 'In the totalitarian era, the therapeutic task of philosophy would be a political task. . . . Then politics would appear in philosophy, not as a special discipline or object of analysis, nor as a special political philosophy, but as the intent of its concepts to comprehend the un-mutilated reality' (ODM, p. 159). Thirdly, the concept of 'affirmative culture' discussed in the 1937 article mentioned above, the sublimated bourgeois culture in which the values denied by bourgeois society in everyday life are affirmed in the sphere of high culture, is replaced by the concept of 'repressive desublimation'. Here we are basically dealing with a change in the object of analysis, from one type of bourgeois society to another, and in this sense the concept of repressive desublimation is an important and fruitful tool of analysis. But in another paradox of intellectual hyper-radicalism, what was once condemned as 'affirmative culture' is now hailed as a culture of negation, denouncing the poverty of society (ODM, p. 58ff.). In *One-Dimensional Man*, a critique which sets out to refute the very structure of logic and science bases its social analyses on pseudo-liberal journalism and academic sociology, and a critique which does not even find Marxism negative enough turns the affirmative bourgeois culture into a negative one.⁴⁴

The Negation of the Negation

One-Dimensional Man is thus, of all Marcuse's works, the closest to the main-stream of the Frankfurt School. Yet it is also the book that has had the most political influence, more, probably, than anything else produced by the School in all its forty years of existence. Despite its pessimism, this book has become one of the standard texts of the student revolt of the late 1960's. But before

⁴⁴ These critical remarks should not, however, obliterate the differences between *One-Dimensional Man* and the post-War works of Horkheimer and Adorno. The former is still an attempt at a concrete social analysis with a direct bearing on politics.

examining the link between the views of the Frankfurt School and the recent student revolt, we must examine the concepts which underlie these political positions. The most important one arises directly from the hyper-radicalism of the School's critique of capitalist society. Critical theory rejects any positive presence in capitalist society (such as the proletariat) and seeks the purest negation, *the negation of the negation*, as the essence of revolution. This Hegelian notion of revolutionary change has played a central and disastrous role in Frankfurt thought. In their search for the absolute negation of the prevailing theoretical and ideological discourse, the thinkers of the Frankfurt School feel forced to go outside both science, concrete social analysis, and formal logic. Horkheimer's 1937 programme for a critical theory tried to find an Archimedean point outside society in order to uproot itself from the process of social reproduction. In the 1940's, Horkheimer and Adorno considered it necessary to go even further, formulating their social critique only in philosophical fragments, because any continuous discourse was bound to lapse into positivity. The search for an absolute negation of the negation is also the rationale for Marcuse's retreat from Marxism in *One-Dimensional Man*: 'An attempt to recapture the critical intent of these categories (society, class, individual, etc), and to understand how the intent was cancelled by the social reality appears from the outset to be regression from a theory joined with historical practice to abstract, speculative thought; from the critique of political economy to philosophy. This ideological character of the critique results from the fact that the analysis is forced to proceed from a position "outside" the positive as well as the negative, the productive as well as the destructive tendencies in society' (ODM, pp. 12ff.).

This attempt by the theory to pull itself up by the hair does not make it more revolutionary, but rather more philosophical. The same attitude can be detected in the denial that the economic class struggle can play a revolutionary role in the developed capitalist countries.⁴⁵ The historical experience of revolutions shows that they have not been sustained by the absolute negativity of the

⁴⁵ Marcuse: *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), Chs. 3 & 4. This is still asserted despite the fact that the economic class struggle has been crucial to the militant working-class struggles of Italy and France in the last few years, and has also played a not insignificant role in the Scandinavian countries, which certainly cannot be dismissed as 'more backward capitalist countries'.

revolutionaries' demands, but by the determination with which concrete immediate demands have been urged in particular historical situations. Practical revolutionaries – Rosa Luxemburg as well as Lenin – have therefore always stressed the dialectical link between the various types of class struggle. None of them bothered to look for the absolute negation. On the contrary, Lenin's theory of revolution has two key moments. One is the building up of an organized revolutionary force and leadership. The other is the emergence of a revolutionary situation. This is characterized by a fusion of different contradictions such that the question of State power is put on the immediate agenda. The revolutionary situation can be ushered in by the most diverse, and apparently banal causes, including even a parliamentary crisis. The conception of the revolutionary situation as a fusion of different contradictions is not an *ad hoc* explanation, but follows logically from the analysis of society as a complex social formation with mutually irreducible elements.⁴⁶ Now we have already seen that, far from conceiving society as a complex structure, historicist theories of society look for an inner essence revealed in all its parts. If this essence is oppressive, the source for a transformation cannot be found inside society, for all its manifestations share the oppressive nature of the essence. The agent of transformations can only be an external Negating Subject. The first historicist versions of Marxism thought that this external negating subject was the proletariat, thrust out of capitalist society as the object of all its oppressions, incarnating the capitalist negation of humanity. Both Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Horkheimer's *Traditional and Critical Theory* contain this conception of the working class. But the proletariat no longer seems 'absolutely' miserable and excluded in the so-called welfare state. The only groups who could still be so described are racial minorities and other outcasts. That is why, in his later works, Marcuse has tried to penetrate deeper into other human needs than economic ones, for he claims that the latter have now become means of integration and oppression. He has therefore turned his attention to the 'biological dimension', to vital instinctive drives, to 'erotic' needs in the broad sense of the

⁴⁶ Lenin's theory of revolution is most clearly elaborated in his *Letters from Afar* and *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. The incompatibility of his theory with any kind of historicism has been demonstrated by Louis Althusser in his essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', *For Marx* (London 1969).

term. In doing so he has found a new Negating Subject in the student movement and its refusal of the performance principle, its rejection of an economy based on exchange and competition, and its practice of sexual liberation.

But was the role of the proletariat in Marx's theory ever that of an absolute negation of capitalist society? On the one hand, Marx says explicitly that the social polarization resulting from the immiseration of the working class is crucial to the proletarian revolution (though this need not necessarily take the form of a strictly literal economic pauperization). On the other hand, Marx characterizes the epochal crisis of capitalism by a structural rather than a simply political contradiction, a contradiction between the social character of the productive forces and the private character of the relations of production. In this context, the term 'productive forces' refers to the organizational/technical conditions under which production proceeds – handicrafts, manufacture, machine industry, and automated process industry are different levels of the productive forces. These productive forces, which come into contradiction with the private mode of their appropriation, include the increasing use of science, developed communications, a high educational level and an internalized discipline in the work force. Their effects on the working class are not immiseration but rather the provision of greater facilities for organization and a greater capacity to replace the capitalist regimentation of production by social appropriation and working-class control from below. There is always a social polarization between the working class and the bourgeoisie which arises directly from the fact of exploitation: this is intensified by economic crises induced by the contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production: a revolutionary situation then makes it explosive. Hence Marxist theory does not need a conception of the proletariat as the incarnation of the negation of human existence. A revolutionary situation is a function of the complex development of the social formation, whose different contradictions suddenly fuse in a 'ruptural unity', not of the simple degree of wealth or poverty of the proletariat.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The line of reasoning very summarily outlined here suggests that a careful analysis of the place and implications of the concepts of productive forces and revolutionary situation in Marxist-Leninist theory is a more promising way to tackle the problem than to rely textually on the *Grundrisse* drafts, comparing them with *Capital*, as in Martin Nicolaus's otherwise important essay, 'The Unknown

The Marxist concept of the contradiction between the social character of the productive forces and the private character of the relations of production has never been incorporated into historicist interpretations of Marx in a way which preserves the objective character of both aspects of this contradiction as structures of the capitalist mode of production. For the young Lukács, the 'decisive weight' is attached to whether "'the greatest force of production" in the capitalist order of production, the proletariat, experiences the crisis as a mere object of the decision, or as its subject'.⁴⁸ Here the analysis of the structural pre-conditions for revolution has been spirited away, reducing the forces of production to the proletariat. In fact, this makes the concept itself superfluous: all that matters is the proletariat and its degree of insight into its historical mission, its relationship to class consciousness. The Frankfurt School, on the other hand, has used the concept of the productive forces in another way. They are seen as representing the objective possibility of a new and better society. 'This idea is distinguished from abstract utopia by the proof of its real possibility given by the present level of human productive forces' (KT II, p. 168). The productive forces are not part of a *structural* contradiction, a contradiction between social and private *systems*, which affects class relationships, but are seen as the stage of human evolution which now enables the Negating Subject to abolish poverty and misery from the human condition.⁴⁹ It is in this sense that the productive forces are 'neutral', a raw material of potentiality. This neutrality is later denied: from a raw material of potentiality, technology becomes a means of oppression. But in neither case are the forces of production seen in their Marxist structural context. Rather, the analysis slips away from any positive identification of the structures of the capitalist social formation, or of the forces within it capable of transforming that social formation; from Marxist science and politics to philosophy as *Erstatz* science and *Erstatz* politics. Even when apparently anchored in the social structure, the Negating Subject was a philosophical concept; as Révai long ago pointed out in a review of *History and Class Consciousness*, the 'assigned proletarian class consciousness' was

Marx', *New Left Review* 48, 1968.

⁴⁸ Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

⁴⁹ See Horkeimer's essay, 'Geschichte und Psychologie', where the structural condition is replaced by 'the opposition between the growing powers of men and the social structure' (KT I, p. 17).

merely substituted by Lukács for the Hegelian *Geist*.³⁰ In the Frankfurt School, this reduction of politics to philosophy has come directly out into the open.

Anti-Capitalist Revulsion and Socialist Revolution

Before attempting a general historical assessment of the Frankfurt School, let us summarize the argument of this article hitherto. The thought of the School has evolved, and marked divergences between its members have appeared in the years since the War. Nevertheless, there is a persistent underlying structure. This takes the form of a *double reduction of science and of politics* to philosophy. The specificity of Marxism as a theory of social formations and its autonomy as a guide to political action are thereby simultaneously abolished. This first reduction is clearly revealed by the Frankfurt School's theory of fascism, in which a philosophical critique of capitalism replaces a scientific conjunctural analysis of the nature of the Fascist State. The second reduction appears in the conception of the revolutionary agent as a 'Negating Subject', which cannot be located in social reality, and therefore eventually has to be confined to philosophy, conceived as social reality's opposite.

Since its inception, the Frankfurt School has probably produced more work and covered a wider variety of subjects (many of which could not be dealt with in this short article) than any other comparable group of theorists. Their influence today is probably greater than it has ever been. Yet, as we have seen, the problematic underlying their thought has central and fatal weaknesses. What general verdict can we make of their historical achievement?

The theorists of the Frankfurt School were members of an academic intelligentsia with a high bourgeois background. They came to intellectual maturity in a period of international defeat for the working class, and were cut off from the proletariat of their own country by the Nazi counter-revolution. Like all members of the bourgeoisie, their initiation into a revolutionary position came about through a *revulsion* against capitalist oppression and capitalist ideology's hypocritical denial of that oppression. This

revulsion took the form of a direct denunciation of all the nostrums of bourgeois ideology, particularly the economic ideology of free and equal exchange. But just as they adopted these positions, the capitalist system in their country suddenly took on a political form of unparalleled monstrosity with the Nazi seizure of power. This political machine was also a direct threat to themselves and their families. Understandably, fascism became a Medusa's head for the Frankfurt School. The result was that the initial attitude of revulsion was *frozen*, instead of developing into a scientific analysis and participation in revolutionary political practice. Sober political analysis seemed morally impossible; an objective scientific description of Nazism seemed to condone it because it did not condemn it violently in every sentence: in the dark ages, 'A smooth forehead betokens a hard heart' (Brecht).³¹ When, to the surprise of most of the School, the monster was destroyed and Nazism was defeated, this attitude had become too fixed for them to make the step from philosophical revulsion to science and politics.

Hence to this day, Frankfurt School thought has never moved from a reflection on its theorists' revulsion from capitalism to a theory of the object of that revulsion and a political practice to transform it. It has therefore been able to develop a powerful and well-articulated anti-capitalist ideology, and this must be numbered among its achievements. It has helped to recapture that dimension of Marx's thought which deals with the qualitative aspects of work and human relations in capitalist society. As one of the School's severest critics, Lucio Colletti, has emphasized, neither the Second International nor the Comintern preserved this dimension. The decisive innovator here was Lukács, but the Frankfurt School has played an almost equally pioneering role, along with Wilhelm Reich, in enriching these ideas by adding a psycho-analytic dimension to them. It has also achieved a series of often brilliant and incisive critiques of bourgeois culture – Adorno's greatest contribution.³²

Moreover, it is this function of Frankfurt theory as a developed reflection of anti-capitalist revulsion which explains the persistence

³⁰ *An die Nachgeborenen*.

³¹ This essay has been mainly focused on the work of Horkheimer, chronologically and substantively the 'founder' of the Frankfurt School, with some discussion of the separate itinerary of Marcuse. Comparatively little space has been devoted to

and substantively the 'founder' of the Frankfurt School, with some discussion of the separate itinerary of Marcuse. Comparatively little space has been devoted to

of the School. The combination of institutional continuity and the freezing of a common attitude by the Nazi trauma has preserved it and its basic ideas despite all the changes of the last forty years. Hence it could suddenly re-emerge as something like a magical *anticipation* of the contemporary student movement, which spontaneously rediscovered the same themes in the 'sixties. Just as the Frankfurt School was formed when the revolution was taking place in Russia, but seemed to be absent from Germany, so today it can be seen in Vietnam, Cuba and China, but 'seems' absent from the metropolitan imperialist countries. Students in the West could thus feel cut off from it much as the Frankfurt School did in the 1920's and 1930's. At the same time, the student revolutionary today is a young bourgeois or petty-bourgeois recruit who has discovered the oppressive and murderous nature of imperialism. He or she is revolted. Because of their peculiar historical experience, because of the shock of Nazism, the Frankfurt School have preserved this attitude of revulsion in crystalline fragments, aphorisms and images. Hence the enormous attraction their work still exercises on those going through the same process. But we must hope that they will not suffer the same fate as the Frankfurt theorists. It is essential to move on from the discovery of the horrors of capitalism to an attempt to understand it scientifically and to unite with the masses in order to overthrow it. If this is not achieved, the Frankfurt School, or a new Anglo-Saxon, Italian, French or Scandinavian branch of it, may have another forty years of paralysed virtuosity ahead of it.

A Note on Habermas

Jürgen Habermas is at present the most celebrated of the successors of the Frankfurt School and the only one as yet well-known outside the Federal German Republic. In the essay above, I have

Adorno. It should be said, however, that while Adorno's contribution to the main methodological and philosophical themes of the School seems to have been secondary, his specific applications of them are often the most dazzling exercises within the collective oeuvre – perhaps because his chosen fields of music and literature more properly permit a strictly 'critical' analysis – criticism – than social formations or political systems.

discussed the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, the original nucleus of the Frankfurt School. The younger successors of the School were referred to, but not discussed, for two reasons. First, that the older three were of the same generation and had much the same historical experience in common, and second that, until the last few years at least, despite fundamental political differences, the original members remained true to their Marxist origins philosophically. This note will attempt to analyse Habermas's thought, and its development away from the Marxist positions of the founders of the School. It is important to analyse Habermas's ideas, because they are particularly attractive to reformist sociologists attempting to erect a 'critical' sociology in opposition to the conservative orthodoxy in that discipline.

Appropriately enough, Habermas's inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy and Sociology in Frankfurt is the key text in establishing the origins of his position in Horkheimer's ideas, but also the divergences which have supervened in the interval since Horkheimer originally formulated them. Entitled *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Cognition and Interest),¹ this lecture invites comparison with the crucial statement of the classical Frankfurt School, Horkheimer's *Traditional and Critical Theory*,² for Habermas claims that the latter article 'underlies' his lecture (TW1, p. 147n.). However, classical critical theory is hardly discussed in the lecture, and it would be impossible to discern what the former was about from it. Horkheimer regarded critical theory as Marxism, albeit a very special interpretation of Marxism. In Habermas's text, Marx and Engels are not even hinted at (with the exception of a negative reference to Soviet Marxism). Instead, the points of reference are Greek philosophy, Schelling, Husserl and Adorno's critique of him, and contemporary hermeneutic philosophers such as Apel and Gadamer. With Horkheimer, critical theory was socially anchored in the revolutionary proletariat. In Habermas's

¹ This lecture should not be confused with the book *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt 1968). Hereafter the latter will be referred to as *Er*. The former is included in a collection of essays by Habermas entitled *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* ('Technique and Science as 'Ideology' – Frankfurt 1968), pp. 146–68. This volume is hereafter referred to as *TW1*. Three essays from *TW1* have been translated in Jürgen Habermas: *Towards a Rational Society* (London 1971), hereafter referred to as *TRS*.

² Max Horkheimer: 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie', in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Heft 2, 1937.

academic oration there is no room for any workers, still less for a revolutionary proletariat. The 'emancipatory interest' (to use a term of Habermas's) which guided Horkheimer and which he regarded as the 'only concern' of the critical theorist, was 'to accelerate a development which should lead to a society without exploitation'. It was clear from the context that this development was the proletarian socialist revolution. Habermas's interest in emancipation produces merely 'self-reflection' (TWI, p. 159).

Habermas's project is epistemology, *Erkenntnistheorie*, the theory of the conditions of possible knowledge. Habermas argues that since the middle of the 19th century, theories of knowledge have been replaced by theories of science. The frame of reference is no longer the knowing subject, but rather systems of scientific propositions and procedures. Habermas's aim is to bridge the gap between the traditions of *Erkenntnistheorie* and *Erkenntniskritik* (i.e. critique of knowledge).¹ He concludes that 'ultimately a radicalized critique of knowledge can only be carried out in the form of a reconstruction of the history of the species' (EI, pp. 84ff.). This argument is based on the Hegelian notion of the history of the species as a *Bildungsprozess*, a process of formation or education, in which the species constitutes itself. The link between the philosophy of history and the theory of knowledge is provided by the concept of 'interest', or to be exact 'knowledge-guiding interest' (*erkenntnisleitendes Interesse* – EI, p. 243). 'I call interests the basic orientations which are responsible for determinate fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species' (EI, p. 242). These interests determine the 'conditions of possible objectivity' for the various sciences (in the broad sense of the word *Wissenschaft* – TWI, p. 160). Habermas distinguishes between three of these 'knowledge-guiding interests': 1. technical – 'adaptation to technical dispositions'; 2. practical – 'adaptation to the arrangements of practical life'; and 3. emancipatory – orientated to 'emancipation from naturalistic constraint'. They correspond to or guide three types of sciences: the empirical-analytical, the historical-hermeneutic and the critical sciences, respectively. These interests, and the

sciences they guide, develop in the three 'media' in which the social life of the human species unfolds: work, language and domination (*Herrschaft* – TWI, pp. 155ff.). 'This viewpoint (i.e., one from which we necessarily conceive reality as transcendental) derives from the complex of interests of a species, which is bound up from the beginning with determinate media of socialization: with labour, language and domination. The human species ensures its survival in systems of social labour and coercive self-assertion; by a traditionally mediated common life in colloquial linguistic communication; and finally with the assistance of ego-identities which reinforce the consciousness of the individuals in relation to the norms of the group at every stage of individualization. Thus the knowledge-guiding interests are responsible for the functions of an ego which adapts itself to its external life conditions in learning processes; which is trained by formative processes in the communications complex of a social environment; and which constructs an identity in the conflict between instinctual demands and social constraints' (TWI, pp. 162ff.).

The critical sciences naturally have a special place in this triple trinity of interests, media and sciences. Its medium anchorage, i.e. 'domination', is at first sight rather unclear. The term *Herrschaft* (surprisingly, perhaps) includes socio-psychological processes of role-learning and personality formation. In Hegel's 'dialectic of morality' (*Sittlichkeit*), these functions are fulfilled by the family. In later formulations, Habermas himself has subsumed them – together with the symbolic sphere – under the concept of 'interaction'.⁴ He then conceptualizes Domination as 'distorted communication', deriving this concept from Freud.⁵ In other words, critical sciences and emancipatory interest are linked to social action in the sense of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, i.e. to conduct oriented to expectations of how *alter* will react to *ego's* action.⁶ We can now understand the task of Habermas's critique:

¹ See above all EI and his overview in 'Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften' (On the Logic of the Social Sciences), *Philosophische Rundschau* 1967, Beiheft 5. For a Marxist position on this issue in direct opposition to that of Habermas, see Louis Althusser: *For Marx*.

⁴ See the essay 'Arbeit und Interaktion: Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser "Philosophie des Geistes"' (Labour and Interaction: Notes on Hegel's Jena Philosophy of Mind) in TWI, pp. 9–47.

⁵ EI, pp. 341ff. and 'Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence', in Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., *Recent Sociology Number Two*, London 1970, pp. 144–148. The latter is referred to hereafter as TTC.

⁶ Cf. Max Weber: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen 1925), Vol. 1 pp. 1ff., and Talcott Parsons *et al.*: *Towards a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951).

'The systematic sciences of action, i.e. economics, sociology and political science, have the aim of producing nomological knowledge, like the empirical sciences. Of course, critical social science has no complaints about this. However, it is concerned to see beyond this whether theoretical statements express invariant regularities of social action, or whether they express ideologically frozen, but in principle transformable relations of dependence.' Its basic assumption can be summed up like this: 'In so far as this is true, the *critique of ideology*, just like *psycho-analysis*, reckons with the fact that information about the complexes of laws governing consciousness can itself initiate a process of reflection in them; for this reason it is possible to transform the stages of unreflected consciousness which are part of the initial conditions of such laws.... The methodological framework which established the validity of this category of critical statements lacks the concept of *self-reflection*. The latter disengages the subject from dependence on hypostasized forces. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory knowledge-interest. The critically orientated sciences share it with philosophy' (TWI, pp. 158ff.). Habermas's chosen method is then immanent critique: 'The power of critical sociology lies in its remembrance of the original intentions behind the current goals of today and what has actually been established. It takes the pretensions of the existing arrangements at their word, for even where these words are utopian, they determine, realistically conceived, what the existing is *not*.'⁷ Thus the psycho-analytic situation is supposed to exemplify the critical process (EI, chs. 10-12).

Horkheimer's ideas have clearly been drastically revised in this programme. Horkheimer saw the dividing line between traditional and critical theory essentially in sociological terms: his criterion was whether the theory assisted the reproduction of society or subverted it. Habermas's criterion is ontological, linked to a speculative conception of man derived from Hegel's Jena lectures (see TWI, pp. 9-47). Classical critical theory was sociologically determined in a second sense - however thin and fragile the actual bonds may have been, it was linked to a definite social force, the

⁷ J. Habermas: 'Kritische und konservative Aufgaben der Soziologie' (Critical and Conservative Tasks of Sociology) in his collection of articles *Theorie und Praxis* (Theory and Praxis - Newwied and Berlin, 2nd ed. 1967), pp. 215-30, especially p. 229. This book is hereafter referred to as TP.

working class. Habermas's theory is linked only to his own view of the 'functions' of the human ego. This is more clearly formulated in another article: 'Reflection must go further back than any historically determined class interest and lay bare the complex of interests of a self-constituting species as such' (TWI, p. 91; TRS, p. 113). However, despite these fundamental changes, whose effects I shall analyse in more detail below, much in Habermas's thought derives from or is held in common with the ideas of the classical Frankfurt School. The hermeneutic orientation and emphasis on intersubjectivity which he shares with Horkheimer, Adorno, and even Marcuse, obliterates the line of demarcation between scientific theory and everyday intersubjective understanding within a linguistic-cultural community. This obliteration is a precondition for the contention that the criticism and supersession of a scientific theory or an allegedly scientific discourse can be reduced to a process of *Ideologiekritik* or criticism of ideology. Much as with the older generation of Frankfurt School theorists, the errors this gives rise to emerge most clearly in the consequent interpretation of Marx and Freud, and attempt to reconcile the two.

Marx and Freud

Many readings and interpretations have been made of Freud. Two are found in Habermas's work. One of these is hermeneutic; it starts from the clinical situation, the dialogue between the analyst and the analysand, and sees the therapy as a process of self-reflection both for analyst and analysand. The second is critical; it focuses on Freud's meta-psychological works, his books on culture, and the idea of human cultural development as the repression of human instincts.⁸

Whatever value these interpretations may have in a general cultural debate, they have no place in a discussion of the theory of science, but that is the context in which Habermas introduces them. They obscure all that makes Freud more than a conversational therapist and cultural philosopher, indeed, they obscure all that gives 'hermeneutic' or 'cultural' philosophers reason to turn to Freud for epistemological arguments. These interpretations

⁸ Habermas's interpretation of Freud is keyed to the former interpretation, but contains both. See below and EI, chs. 10-12 and TTCC.

exemplify what the great French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard denounced as the parasitic utilization of science by philosophers for their own purposes.⁹

In Habermas's interpretation, the centre of psycho-analysis is a theory of linguistic failure, of systematically distorted communication – examples being dreams, everyday slips of the tongue, neurotic and psychotic symptoms, and also 'the hidden pathology of collective behaviour and entire social systems' (TTCC, pp. 117–18). As distorted communication, the neurotic symptom is characterized by the use of deviant linguistic rules, compulsive repetition, and discrepancy between levels of communication, all of which add up to the adoption of a private language on the part of the sufferer. This results from a childhood inability to resolve some conflict, the object of which the child and adult exclude from public communication by desymbolization and symptom formation. In the transference relationship between analyst and analysand, these primal scenes are recreated, and their re-enactment enables the analysand to reflect on the symptom, to understand its aetiology, and thus to restore the primal object of conflict to the status of a public utterance.

This might appear to be close to Lacan's reading of Freud, which shares its stress on the linguistic element of psycho-analysis, and sees the aim of the cure as the transformation of an 'empty speech' into a 'full speech'. But this apparent resemblance is only superficial. For Habermas, unconscious processes are only necessary to explain pathological pseudo-communication (significantly, he refers to Freud's later topography of id, ego and super-ego, rather than to the unconscious and conscious), whereas normal social communication is self-explanatory; inter-subjectivity is self-evident. Moreover, this normal and desirable transparency is extended to social systems as well, which are to be 'socio-analysed' by the critical social scientist. In Lacan's reading, on the contrary, the unconscious is precisely what the pathological and the normal have in common: it is omni-present (and omni-absent). Furthermore, the unconscious does not just underlie the notions of everyday experience, conveniently explaining them. It is a scientific concept, and its discovery therefore entails the transformation of

⁹ This theme is central to Bachelard's whole work. Cf. Dominique Lecourt: *L'épistémologie historique de Gaston Bachelard* (Paris 1969).

the notions of everyday life into concepts of the theory of psycho-analysis. Such is the case, for example, with one of the most central concepts of psycho-analysis, that of sexuality. A great step in the constitution of psycho-analysis as a science consisted precisely in the elaboration of a radically new definition of sexuality.¹⁰

Thus Habermas's recourse to Freud is an attempt to explain away phenomena like neurotic symptoms which do not fit into the schema of the transparency of inter-subjective communication, and then to use the notion of distorted communication to criticize and reform social systems so that their 'unconscious' aspects can be eradicated. Nothing could be further from a scientific reading of Freud.

The implications of Habermas's programme for the critical social sciences are perhaps even clearer when we turn to Marx. Habermas reduces Marx to a critic of ideology: 'According to Marx, the critique of political economy was simply a theory of bourgeois society as a critique of its ideology. But when the ideology of fair exchange collapses, the system of domination, too, can no longer be immediately criticized according to the relations of production' (TWI, p. 76; TRS, p. 101). Marx, however, did not content himself with 'criticizing' bourgeois ideology, i.e. with demonstrating the contrast between its assumptions and reality. *Capital* is not an immanent critique of liberalism – if it were it would be of little interest today. It is a work in which a new science is founded, a science of society and of history. In it Marx constructs a new concept of the economy, not as an effect of human 'propensities' – whether Smith's 'propensity to trade, truck and barter' or Keynes's propensity to consume – but as a 'region' in a complex social structure, defined by the concepts of forces and relations of production.¹¹

It is noteworthy that Marx in Habermas's interpretation, not to speak of Habermas's own brand of critical theory, represent basically the same type of critique of capitalism as those Marx and Engels found and attacked in the utopian socialists, Proudhon,

¹⁰ See Sigmund Freud: 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', *Standard Edition* Vol. VII (London 1953), and Etienne Balibar: 'On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism' in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar: *Reading Capital* (London 1970), pp. 243–7.

¹¹ See Louis Althusser: 'The Object of *Capital*', in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar: *Reading Capital*, op. cit., pp. 182–93.

Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen.¹² The latter had criticized bourgeois society from the point of view of its own ideals and had formed their utopias along the same lines. Marx and Engels showed that the bourgeois ideals – liberal conceptions of justice and freedom – were not fundamentally in contradiction with bourgeois society's real mode of functioning, but on the contrary were an expression of it. An immanent critique, like Fourier's, was capable of revealing the hypocrisy of most bourgeois ideologists. The scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, however, pointed to the necessity for another *goal* of socialism than that of the utopians – not Proudhon's society of fair exchange, but the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat and communism. It also showed other *preconditions* of socialism – structural conflicts between the forces and relations of production – in the capitalist economy. Thirdly, scientific socialism indicated new *means*: the class struggle, the revolutionary party, and the proletarian revolution.

Freud and Marx did not linger on the established terrains of psychological and economic discourse as 'critics'. They showed the sterility of those terrains, abandoned them and opened up new ones. So our task today is not to be the critical conscience of bourgeois social thought, but to *break* with it; it is not to construct 'critical social sciences' peacefully and parasitically co-existing with the traditional ideological output, but to reject the alleged scientificity of the latter and to set out upon the path of true science cleared by Marx.¹³

Labour and Interaction

Thus far my criticisms could be applied with equal force to the writings of Horkheimer or Adorno. But it is clear that Habermas's

¹² See Karl Marx: *The Poverty of Philosophy* and Friedrich Engels: *Anti-Dühring*.

¹³ For example, the aim of the attack on bourgeois ideology is not to point out 'ideologically frozen' but in principle transformable relations of dependence', but rather to reveal patterns of determinism beneath a voluntarist ideology. The bourgeois State is an objective structure of capitalist society which can be abolished only when class society is abolished, and it is neither a neutral tool in the hands of the parliamentary majority nor anything merely 'ideologically frozen'. The same is true of imperialism. It should perhaps be added that the necessary shift in terrain for Marxists concerns the basic theoretical problematic, not a simple disregard for what is produced by academic social research, much of which is valuable in one respect or another, and that the path of a scientific study of society will therefore be one of constant struggle with academic sociology.

departure from Marxism is far more radical than that of his forebears. The life-line to classical Marxism carefully maintained by the founders of the Frankfurt School, even in its wildest adventures, has been decisively cut by Habermas. I shall discuss the reasons for this break below. For the moment I shall concentrate on its result for his own position: Habermas has been forced to construct an alternative system of his own. I will now turn to this new system as such.

Habermas rejects the concepts of the productive forces and relations of production, substituting for them the notions of labour and interaction. The explicit motivation for this substitution is that the latter are more general, whereas the former are bound to assumptions about liberal capitalism which no longer hold (TWI, p. 92; TRS, p. 113). This explicit revision in fact stems from a more basic one which turns Marx's scientific innovation into a philosophy of history modelled on Hegel's dialectic of morality (*Stilleckheit* – see EI, chs. 2–3).

For Marxism, which is an historical and social science of modes of production, the productive forces and relations of production denote objective economic structures. The level of the former constitutes the technical-organizational pattern of production as exemplified in handicrafts, machine industry, process industry, different facilities of communication, and so on. The relations of production refer neither to juridical property nor to actual disposal (in neither of these senses could capital be said to constitute a relation of production). They refer to the mode – specific to every mode of production – in which surplus-labour is extracted from the immediate producers. They determine the relation between the latter and those who expropriate their surplus-labour – between the slave and the slave-owner or between the wage-earner and the capitalist, for instance. They determine the aim of production – for consumption, for sale on a market, for profit. They determine the context of the immediate work situation – whether independent, as in the tribute-duty village, or tightly controlled by the capitalist and his subordinates, and the relation between necessary and surplus-labour – separate or fused.¹⁴

¹⁴ Among the key references for these concepts are *Capital* Vol. I, chs. 7 and 12–15, and Vol. III, chs. 47, 48 and 51. Two starting-points are provided by the distinctions in Vol. I, ch. 7 between the labour process and the process of producing value, which

Such concepts are of little use to the philosopher of history bent on constructing a philosophy of the self-constitution of the human species.¹⁵ Habermas clings to the concepts of Marx's early manuscripts and develops the notion of the self-realization of the human species in labour, and of labour as a materialist synthesis of man and nature.¹⁶ In the language of modern sociology, the sub-system of labour covers all rational instrumental (*zweckrational*) action. It is within this general sub-system that factors of production (Habermas's notion of Marx's productive forces) have developed. But here a difficulty arises for such a philosophy of history. If, as Marx implies, the relations of production are also an economic concept, then all human activity is restricted to labour, i.e. to instrumental action. So Marx must be wrong. For while he included the relations of production within the mode of production, he also noted the existence of an *institutional framework* for the labour process, the role of one class over another, and a kind of 'communicative activity' in the class struggle. These concepts arose in his material investigations. The contradiction thus implied between Marx's concepts and his theoretical conclusions Habermas attributes to his epistemological misconception of historical materialism as a natural science rather than as a *critique*. Habermas replaces the concept of the relations of production with a new term designating the 'institutional framework of society' – the notion of *symbolically mediated interaction*.¹⁷

It is obvious that this double revision – of a scientific theory

is spelt out in chs. 12–15; and by the definition of the *differentia specifica* of a mode of production in Vol. III, ch. 47, on the genesis of ground rent. 'The crucial text of interpretation is Etienne Balibar: "On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism", op. cit. I have myself tried to elaborate this interpretation to some extent, but more particularly to apply it in a critique of various ideologies of economic systems: *Vetenskap och ideologi om ekonomiska system* (The Science and Ideology of Economic Systems – to be published). Marx's analysis showed that the industrial labour process, in contrast to handicraft production, entails an objective, technical subjugation of the labourer. Hence Marx did not believe in any 'neutrality' of technology. Neither Marcuse's recent existential judgement on the all-pervasive technological apparatus nor his prior belief in the neutrality of technology takes us very far as a social analysis.¹⁵ Hence Habermas's attack on Marx in *Er*. Habermas's philosophy of labour and interaction is developed in TWI, pp. 9–103.

¹⁶ As it derives its concept of the economy from anthropological assumptions, this view is, of course, fundamentally akin to the 'propensity' philosophy of bourgeois economists from Adam Smith via the Marginalists to the Keynesians.

¹⁷ Habermas has summarized his schema diagrammatically in TWI, p. 64; TRS, p. 93.

into a speculative 'species history', and of two key Marxist concepts – does considerable violence to the author of *Das Kapital*. What else can be said of it in a limited space?¹⁸ A first result of Habermas's operation is to rob any serious analysis of society of important tools. As far as social analysis is concerned, Habermas's substitution of 'interaction' for the 'relations of production' simply emphasizes the importance of norms, cultural tradition and symbolic communication. These correspond to the ideological system every society contains, of which Marx was well aware, though he never wrote a counterpart to *Capital* on it. Marx was also aware of another non-economic structure, to the analysis of which he made an important though fragmentary contribution – the political-legal structure of the State. In Habermas's schema, by contrast, the State is divided between the sub-systems of labour on the one hand and interaction and relations of communication on the other.

The disappearance of the concept of the relations of production also abolishes relationships which determine human behaviour without being norms (or technical rules), although they may function *via* normative sanctions. No norm in our capitalist society says that the population should be divided into two basic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but this is the most fundamental of all aspects of the institutional framework of life in capitalist society, patterning the 'free choice of occupation' and the mechanisms of distribution. Managerial ideologies ask us to believe that salaried managers are governed by other norms than the old entrepreneurs, and this may be true, but it naturally in no way proves that the capitalist economy has disappeared. The relations of production have not changed.¹⁹

Similarly, the concept of the productive forces highlights the complex material structure of the labour process – the relation between the labourer, the means and the object of labour – and its central importance for the variant forms of social domination.²⁰

¹⁸ See the more elaborate, but somewhat different criticism of Renate Darnus: 'Habermas und der "heimliche Positivismus" bei Marx', in *Sozialistische Politik* no. 4, December 1966.

¹⁹ There is a counterpart to this in ethnology where kinship is concerned. The norms of a society may say that A must marry B and C, D. But they do not present the network of kinship relations within a whole tribe or group of tribes which can be shown by ethnological analysis to govern those norms.

²⁰ Cf. *Capital* Vol. I, chs. 7, 14 and 15.

This is lost in the notion of labour as instrumental behaviour, as problem-solving. Whereas in a Marxist analysis the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production provides an important tool with which to reveal the functions of the State's economic intervention behind its screen of reformist ideology, Habermas gives us no tools of analysis – just two assertions: that State intervention is important and effective, and that science and technology help to legitimize domination.

In contrast to the relationship between the productive forces and the relations of production, the scheme of 'labour' and 'interaction' can circumscribe no structural contradictions. Habermas ignores the mode of extraction of surplus-labour as the *differentia specifica* of a mode of production and as what determines in the last instance the basic character and importance of the economic, political and ideological structures of society. In its place he puts... the type of legitimizing ideology! (TWT, pp. 65ff.; TRS, pp. 94ff.)

Hegel and Parsons

The schema Habermas has substituted for the Marxist theory of the social formation is a *mélange* derived essentially from two sources. The first of these is Hegel's Jena writings of 1803–1806 (see TWT, pp. 9–47). In these early writings, Hegel argued that the Spirit is an organization of three equally original means or instruments: languages, the tool and family property. Language refers not to linguistic communication, but to naming and memory, i.e. to the ego's distancing from its surrounding world. With the tool, the ego submits to the laws of nature the better to master it. In the family, the ego achieves recognition in the struggle and reconciliation with other men by a process of education or socialization. For Habermas the last two are essential, and he has renamed them labour and interaction.²¹ In labour, man confronts nature in instrumental action; in interaction, he confronts society in normative behaviour (*Sittlichkeit*). The later Hegel, according to Habermas, obscured this distinction by conceiving nature – the

Spirit's primary alienation – as another subject, thus assimilating the struggle of ego against nature with that of ego against alter. Marx, although as a young man he restored the distinction (in the 1844 *Manuscripts*), then later assimilated ego's struggle against alter with its struggle against nature by asserting that the relations of production were a part of the mode of production, i.e. part of the material process of production, rather than a non-material instance in the social whole. He thereby rejoined the late Hegel.

The second source is modern bourgeois sociology, in particular the work of Talcott Parsons. As I remarked in my earlier essay printed above, one of classical sociology's main concerns was the distinction between traditional and industrial society, conceived in terms of some form of *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* opposition. Habermas discusses this, and also Parsons' formalization of it into a general theory of social systems (the pairs of value-orientations: affectivity/affective neutrality, particularism/universalism, ascip-tion/achievement and diffuseness/specificity). He attacks Parsons for de-historicizing these concepts, treating the features of a particular transition as universally valid (TWT, pp. 61–62; TRS, p. 91). But Habermas himself is still very close to Parsons, in two respects. First, Habermas's critique of Marx *vis-à-vis* the relation between instrumental activity and the normative institutional framework in which it is embedded is very similar to Parsons' critique of utilitarianism and his theory of action.²² (Of course, Parsons was not simply concerned with instrumental activity, but with behaviour based on individual self-interest and the impossibility of deriving a satisfactory concept of society from such behaviour alone. Parsons pointed to the framework of social values and norms over and above individual self-interest and traced the emergence of a theory of action orientated towards these norms in the works of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber.) Secondly, the labour/interaction couple, or put more formally, the opposition between the system of instrumental-teleological action and the institutional framework of symbolically mediated interaction (TWT, p. 64; TRS, p. 93), has only to be reduplicated to become very close to the four-functional pattern of Parsons' later work – with adaptation and goal-attainment in the first of Habermas's subsystems, and pattern-maintenance and integration in the second.

²¹ Language provides a faculty for the other two, and in Habermas's later writings it seems to be included in interaction. In TRS, for instance, Chomsky is attacked for not acknowledging how much of language arises only in inter-subjective communication (TRS, pp. 130–138).

²² Talcott Parsons: *The Structure of Social Action* (Cambridge Mass. 1937).

Habermas even largely allocates the modern State and economy to the first sub-system and the family and culture to the second, exactly as does Parsons, and his scheme of social development from primitive through traditional to modern industrial societies is essentially a differentiation process, as it is for Parsons.

The Aetiology of Habermas

We are now faced with the obvious paradox – the problem of the aetiology of Habermas's ideas. How did the Frankfurt School, which could at the very least lay claim to intellectual rigour and seriousness, give rise to this extraordinary amalgam of the Young Hegel and Talcott Parsons? In fact, on closer inspection, this paradox can be seen to disappear. Habermas's ideas are indeed what someone of his generation formed in the German Federal Republic might be expected to make of some of the more extreme ideas of the elder members of the School.

As I showed in the essay above, the classical Frankfurt School preserved Marx's critique of the evils of capitalist society, but grew increasingly sceptical about the remedies he proposed for those evils: the proletarian revolution and the release of the productive forces it would bring about. But this scepticism did not lead them to a renunciation of Marxist theory or to a reconciliation with capitalism, but rather to a hyper-radicalization of their ideological and political stance and a retreat from any political practice into philosophy and aesthetics. The most striking example of this pessimism-cum-radicalism appears in Horkheimer's and Adorno's discussion of science and technology, which had generally been treated as progressive and revolutionary in the Marxist tradition, but which the Frankfurt School increasingly saw as the direct cause and justification for social oppression. This position is outlined in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, by Horkheimer and Adorno, and in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*.²⁵

It was this position of the older generation of the Frankfurt School that Habermas inherited. He ends his study of Marxism in the 1950's (1957) with a quotation from a lecture on Freud given by Marcuse in Frankfurt in 1956, a quotation which contains the germ of the thesis of *One-Dimensional Man* (TP, pp. 334ff.). A decade later, he was to formulate Marcuse's 'basic thesis' as

²⁵ See above for comments.

follows: 'In the advanced industrial countries, technology and science have not only become the primary productive force, laying the basis for a peaceful and satisfying existence, but also a new form of ideology, legitimizing an administrative coercion cut off from the masses'.²⁶ Marcuse's own political conclusion from these premises was quoted in the essay above: 'Thought in contradiction must become more negative and more utopian in opposition to the status quo. This seems to me to be the imperative of the current situation in relation to my theoretical essays of the 1930's'.²⁷ Habermas draws very different conclusions. Since technology and science have become the 'primary productive force' and 'scientific-technical progress has become an autonomous source of surplus-value' (Twi, pp. 79ff.; TRS, pp. 104ff.; TP pp. 190ff.), the labour theory of value must be revised.²⁸ Because a technocratic ideology linked to State economic intervention has replaced the ideology of equal exchange as the legitimation of bourgeois society, the critique of political economy is no longer a sufficient *ideologiekritische* theory of society (Twi, pp. 74ff.; TRS pp. 100ff.). The technocratic system of economic regulation and political manipulation has substituted any clearly definable class rule and, on the basis of institutionalized scientific-technical progress, has created loyalties which cross social boundaries so that class contradictions have become latent. Marx's theory of class struggle is thus no longer unconditionally applicable in advanced capitalist societies, and must also be revised (Twi, pp. 84ff.; TRS, pp. 107ff.).²⁹ In a comment directed explicitly at Ernst Bloch, but clearly extendable to the older members of the

²⁵ J. Habermas, ed.: *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse* (Frankfurt 1968), pp. 14ff.

²⁶ *Negations* (New York and London 1969), p. xx.

²⁷ Twi, pp. 79ff. and TP, pp. 190ff. Though related to a real problem – the importance of changes in productivity for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall – Habermas's critique merely echoes the Gotha programme. It is based on a naive, empiricist reading of the theory of value, allegedly calculated 'on the basis of the value of unskilled (simple) labour-power' (Twi, p. 80). See W. Müller: 'Habermas und die Anwendbarkeit der Arbeitswerttheorie' (Habermas and the Applicability of the Labour Theory of Value), *Sozialistische Politik* No. 1, April 1969. Cf. also Charles Bettelheim's critique of empiricist conceptions of the labour theory of value in the Eastern European price debate, *La transition vers l'économie socialiste* (Paris 1968) ch. 6.

²⁸ Cf. Habermas's arguments in his denunciation of the student movement in spring 1968: 'Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder' (The Pseudo-Revolution and its Children) in *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas* (The Left Replies to Jürgen Habermas) (Frankfurt 1968), pp. 5–15.

Frankfurt School, Habermas attacks their 'tacit orthodoxy' in which 'a kind of long repressed echo of a critique of political economy still remains in the esoteric ghost of aesthetic reflection' (TP, p. 170).²⁸ *Horkheimer's and Adorno's post-war individualistic retreat from concrete political and economic problems preserved critical theory as a pure theory retaining a kind of philosophico-aesthetic shadow-life. Habermas has turned this relationship on to its head: the theory now has to be revised to restore its relevance to concrete social problems.*

It is hardly surprising that Habermas has taken this step. Born in 1929, he belongs to that generation of intellectuals who were formed politically by the Cold-War debates of the 1950's about 'stabilized capitalism', Stalinism and Marx's Early Works. Habermas intervened in this situation by defining Marxism as a 'critique' somewhere between a philosophy and a science; 'Marxist theory is distinguished by its position "between" philosophy and positive science' (TP, p. 179). From this standpoint, he verbally defended Marxism against the eclectic rapaciousness of the academic sociology of Mannheim, Friedmann and Dahrendorf. On the other hand, he accepted that it was, like a science, subject to empirical falsification: 'We can expressly state that its structure is that of a philosophy of history conceived for political purposes, and therefore scientifically falsifiable, without shunning the opportunity afforded a later generation to understand Marx better than he understood himself' (TP, p. 179). As a result, he was vulnerable to the then fashionable 'refutations' of the labour theory of value, of the theory of class struggle, of the theory of base and superstructure. 'Four facts' here speak against Marx, according to Habermas, '1. State intervention in the economy means that the latter is no longer autonomous, State and society can no longer be regarded as base and superstructure. 2. The rise in the standard of living even of "broad strata of the population" means that an interest in social emancipation can no longer be articulated in immediate economic forms. 3. In these conditions, the proletariat has dissolved as a proletariat (in the sense of critical theory): exclusion from disposal of the means of production is no longer

²⁸ Cf. TP, pp. 40ff. Habermas's introduction to *Antwort auf Herbert Marcuse*, op. cit., p. 12, and his contribution to the memorial volume on Adorno: 'Ein philosophierender Intellektueller' (A Philosophizing Intellectual), *Über Theodor W. Adorno* (Frankfurt 1968), pp. 35-43.

linked to such a loss of income, security and education that it must lead to class consciousness. 4. Marxism has come to play a role as the State ideology of the authoritarian régime in the Soviet Union' (TP, pp. 162-65; for other 'refutations', see TP, pp. 188-200 and TW1). These 'facts' are all familiar from the revisionism of the 1950's. Suffice it to note that Habermas goes so far as to rely on Strachey's *Contemporary Capitalism* and his purely Social-Democratic notion of bourgeois State intervention in the economy as an 'economic consequence of democracy' - an idea that belongs to a different universe from that of the Frankfurt School (TP, p. 197).

The Politics of Communication

So far, I have outlined Habermas's basic problematic and discussed its aetiology. Two things remain to be considered; two things which are in fact one and the same - the political position that follows from that problematic, and the vogue for Habermas among young academics in the fields of sociology and social philosophy.

Habermas's stress on the moment of 'interaction' in the social totality, and its separation from the world of economic production, lead him to locate political problems in a world of ideas far from the class struggle and its brutal materiality (though the latter can be invoked as a warning against too militant positions and actions). Habermas reformulates the goal of social emancipation in terms of communication, as 'communication free of domination' and 'a general and unforced consensus' (TW1, pp. 64, 163; TRS, p. 93). The result is an extreme idealistic vagueness; Habermas's ideas are very different from those of the classical Frankfurt School, where emancipation was viewed in more substantial economic-political and erotic terms (later also in terms of a distinctive mystique of nature). But communicative relations are also the object of a large-scale historical study by Habermas of the changes in bourgeois *Öffentlichkeit* (an untranslatable German term meaning something between 'public opinion' and the 'public domain').²⁹ Characteristically, there is no discussion of a proletarian *Öffentlichkeit*, and even the Paris Commune and the councils movement are related

²⁹ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied and Berlin 1962).

only to a physioocratic insight into the natural order!³⁰ The study's conclusion is a conception of liberal pluralism emphasizing free communication within the dominant organizations as the solution to modern problems of public opinion. Thus the book is an excellent illustration of the political effects of an immanent critique of bourgeois ideology. In Habermas's conception, the State appears primarily as the effective stabilizer of the capitalist economy. As we have seen, this is a central feature of his view of advanced capitalism. He has no *political* concept of the State, however. In his theory of *Öffentlichkeit*, the State is thus subsumed under the concept of *Herrschaft* or domination, idealistically interpreted. Domination is reduced to the ideologies by which it is legitimized (TWI, p. 163). Habermas also discusses domination in terms of 'distorted communication' (EI, pp. 341ff. and TTCC). On the other hand, in a different context Habermas freely warns against the potential violence of the State – in order to advise student activists to refrain from violence of their own.³¹

The 'conflict zone' is no longer that of class antagonisms. It has become that of *Öffentlichkeit*, and turns on the masking or unmasking of the difference between progress or rationalization in the instrumental sphere and emancipation in the institutional framework. Protest in this sense originates from groups of students, and in the future Habermas sees a 'system problem' which, if sensitized, would make this protest into a political force: the quantity of social wealth produced under automated conditions will make it increasingly difficult to tie status assignment convincingly to individual prestation (TWI, pp. 100–103; TRS, pp. 120–22). This 'system problem' is, of course, a faint idealist and individualist echo of the contradiction between the social character of the productive forces and the private character of the relations of

production. But where for Marx this contradiction was to be overcome by a class struggle which transforms capitalist productive forces and relations of production into socialism by means of a revolutionary seizure of State power, Habermas's reduction of Marxism to the mere critique of ideology leads directly to the suggestion that it will be harmoniously settled through criticism of the structures of public opinion by the enlightened efforts of critical students and scholars.³²

Hence Habermas's popularity among young Anglo-Saxon reformist academics. He combines an apparently left-wing pedigree, conventional humanism and a notion that the basic political problems are problems of communication. The blandness of these ideas is evident. Since, however, it is a law of ideological gravitation that eclecticism attracts empiricism, British and Scandinavian sociology incipiently feels strongly drawn towards him. A vogue for Habermas is a predictable product of its own horizons.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 156. This shows how little Habermas has understood the Marxist theory of the State.

³¹ 'Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder', op. cit. Habermas has twice denounced the militancy of the student movement on crucial occasions. The one I have referred to was on June 1st 1968, after the violent anti-Springer demonstrations and the occupation of the University of Frankfurt. A year earlier, at the beginning of the massive wave of student struggles in connection with the anti-Shah demonstrations in West Berlin when the police killed an on-looking student, Habermas had warned of the dangers of a 'left fascism'. He has also been careful to distance himself from the views of Marcuse; see his introduction to *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse*, op. cit.

³² Habermas is now generally regarded as a conventional revisionist on the German left. Cf. the critiques of the 'Habermas School' in the West Berlin journal *Sozialistische Politik* No. 4, December 1969. These are a far cry from the confusion in several of the contributions to the volume defending the student movement against Habermas's attack of June 1968. The editor of this volume, the young Frankfurt philosopher Oskar Negt, even reproached Habermas with having Leninist views! *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas*, op. cit., p. 31.

